

CHAPTER 25

GANDHI AND HIS FAST

I. Poona Pact. II. Harijan Sevak Sangh. III. Temples and Untouchables. IV. The Gandhian Way.

I

The Communal question was the rock on which the Indian Round Table Conference suffered a shipwreck. The Conference broke up as there could be no agreement between the majority and minority communities. The minorities in India insisted that their position under Swaraj should be safeguarded by allowing them special representation in the Legislatures. Mr. Gandhi as representative of the Congress was not prepared to recognize such a claim except in the case of the Muslims and the Sikhs. Even in the case of the Muslims and Sikhs, no agreement was reached either on the question of the number of seats or the nature of the electorates.

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

When at the first Round Table Conference, the Indian delegates did not agree upon a solution of the Communal question, followers of Mr. Gandhi said that nothing better could be expected from them. It was said that they were unrepresentative and responsible to nobody and were deliberately creating disunity by playing into the hands of the British whose tools and nominees they were. The world was told to await the arrival of Mr. Gandhi, whose statesmanship it was promised would be quite adequate to settle the dispute. It was therefore a matter of great humiliation for the friends of Mr. Gandhi that he should have acknowledged his bankruptcy and joined in the request to the Prime Minister to arbitrate.

But if the Conference failed the fault is entirely of Mr. Gandhi. A more ignorant and more tactless representative could not have been

sent to a Conference which was convened to forge a constitution which was to reconcile the diverse interests of India. Mr. Gandhi was thoroughly ignorant of Constitutional Law or Finance. He does not believe in intellectual equipment. Indeed he has a supreme contempt for it and his contributions to the solutions of the many difficulties is therefore nil. He was tactless because he annoyed almost all the delegates by constantly telling them that they were nonentities and he was the only man who counted and who could deliver the goods. At the first Round Table Conference the delegates did not agree upon a solution of the communal problem. But it is equally true that they were very near agreeing to it and when they departed they had not given up hope of agreeing. But at the end of the second Round Table Conference, so much bad blood was created by Mr. Gandhi that there was no chance of reconciliation left and there was no way except arbitration.

The Prime Minister's decision on the communal question was announced on 17th August 1932. The terms of the decision in so far as they related to the Untouchables were as follows :¹

COMMUNAL DECISION BY HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT 1932

In the statement made by the Prime Minister on 1st December last on behalf of His Majesty's Government at the close of the second session of the Round Table Conference, which was immediately afterwards endorsed by both Houses of Parliament, it was made plain that if the communities in India were unable to reach a settlement acceptable to all parties on the communal questions which the Conference had failed to solve, His Majesty's Government were determined that India's constitutional advance should not on that account be frustrated, and that they would remove this obstacle by devising and applying themselves a provisional scheme.

2. On the 19th March last His Majesty's Government, having been informed that the continued failure of the communities to reach agreement was blocking the progress of the plans for the framing of a new Constitution, stated that they were engaged upon a careful re-examination of the difficult and controversial question

The following text of the Communal Award is not typed in the MS. This is reproduced from 'What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables' by the author. (Thacker and Co. Ltd. . 1st Ed. June 1945, pp. 80-82).—Ed.

which arise. They are now satisfied that without a decision of at least some aspects of the problems connected with the position of minorities under the new Constitution, no further progress can be made with the framing of the Constitution.

3. His Majesty's Government have accordingly decided that they will include provisions to give effect to the scheme set out below in the proposals relating to the Indian Constitution to be laid in due course before Parliament. The scope of this scheme is purposely confined to the arrangements to be made for the representation of the British Indian communities in the Provincial Legislatures, consideration of representation in the Legislature at the Centre being deferred for the reason given in paragraph 20 below. The decision to limit the scope of the scheme implies no failure to realize that the framing of the Constitution will necessitate the decision of a number of other problems of great importance to minorities, but has been taken in the hope that once a pronouncement has been made upon the basic questions of method and proportions of representation the communities themselves may find it possible to arrive at *modus vivendi* on other communal problems, which have not received the examination they require.

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

5.	*	*	*	*	*
6.	*	*	*	*	*
7.	*	*	*	*	*
8.	*	*	*	*	*

9. Members of the "depressed classes" qualified to vote will vote in a general constituency. In view of the fact that for a considerable period these classes would be unlikely, by this means alone, to secure any adequate representation in the Legislature, a number of

special seats will be assigned to them as shown in the table. These seats will be filled by election from special constituencies in which only members of the "depressed classes" electorally qualified will be entitled to vote. Any person voting in such a special constituency will, as stated above, be also entitled to vote in a general constituency. It is intended that these constituencies should be formed in selected areas where the depressed classes are most numerous, and that, except in Madras, they should not cover the whole area of the Province.

In Bengal it seems possible that in some general constituencies a majority of the voters will belong to the Depressed Classes. Accordingly, pending further investigation no number has been fixed for the members to be returned from the special Depressed Class constituencies in that Province. It is intended to secure that the Depressed Classes should obtain not less than 10 seats in the Bengal Legislature.

The precise definition in each Province of those who (if electorally qualified) will be entitled to vote in the special Depressed Class constituencies has not yet been finally determined. It will be based as a rule on the general principles advocated in the Franchise Committee's Report. Modification may, however, be found necessary in some Provinces in Northern India where the application of the general criteria of untouchability might result in a definition unsuitable in some respects to the special conditions of the Province.

His Majesty's Government do not consider that these special Depressed Classes constituencies will be required for more than limited time. They intend that the Constitution shall provide that they shall come to an end after 20 years if they have not previously been abolished under the general powers of electoral revision referred to in paragraph 6.

So far as the other minority communities were concerned the Communal Award was accepted and the sore of disunity and discord was closed. But so far as the Untouchables were concerned it remained open. Mr. Gandhi would not allow it to be healed. On his return to India from the Round Table Conference Mr. Gandhi was put behind the bars by the British Government. But though in the Yeravada gaol Mr. Gandhi had not forgotten that he had to prevent the Untouchables from getting their claim to special representation recognized by the British Government. He feared that the British Government might grant them this right notwithstanding the threat he had held out while at the Round Table Conference to resist it with his

own life. Consequently he took the earliest opportunity to be in communication with the very British Government which had incarcerated him.

On the 11th March 1932 Mr. Gandhi addressed the following letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India :

Dear Sir Samuel,

You will perhaps recollect that at the end of my speech at the Round Table Conference when the minorities' claim was presented, I had said that I should resist with my life the grant of separate electorates to the Depressed Classes. This was not said in the heat of the moment nor by way of rhetoric. It was meant to be a serious statement. In pursuance of that statement I had hoped on my return to India to mobilize public opinion against separate electorate, at any rate for the Depressed Classes. But it was not to be.

From the newspapers I am permitted to read, I observe that any moment His Majesty's Government may declare their decision. At first I had thought, if the decision was found to create separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, I should take such steps as I might then consider necessary to give effect to my vow. But I feel it would be unfair to the British Government for me to act without giving previous notice. Naturally, they could not attach the significance I give to my statement.

Separate Electorates harmful

I need hardly reiterate all the objections I have to the creation of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. I feel as if I was one of them. Their case stands on a wholly different footing from that of others. I am not against their representation in the legislatures. I should favour every one of their adults, male and female, being registered as voters irrespective of education or property qualification, even though the franchise test may be stricter for others. But I hold that separate electorates is harmful for them and for Hinduism, whatever it may be from the purely political standpoint. To appreciate the harm that separate electorates would do them one has to know how they are distributed amongst the so-called Caste Hindus and how dependent they are on the latter. So far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electorate would simply vivisect and disrupt it.

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

You will have to appreciate my feelings in this matter by remembering that I have been interested in the condition of these classes from my boyhood and have more than once staked my all for their sake. I say this not to pride myself in any way. For, I feel that no penance that the Hindus may do can in any way compensate for the calculated degradation to which they have consigned the Depressed Classes for centuries.

“Shall fast unto Death”

But I know that separate electorate is neither a penance nor any remedy for the crushing degradation they have groaned under. I, therefore, respectfully inform His Majesty's Government that in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, I must fast unto death.

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

.....

The following reply was sent to Mr. Gandhi by the Secretary of State :

India Office, Whitehall,
April 13, 1932.

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

I write this in answer to your letter of 11th March, and I say at once I realize fully the strength of your feeling upon the question of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. I can only say that we intend to give any decision that may be necessary solely and only upon the merits of the case. As you are aware, Lord Lothian's Committee has not yet completed its tour and it must be some weeks before we can receive any conclusions at which it may have arrived. When we receive that report we shall have to give most

careful consideration to its recommendations, and we shall not give a decision until we have taken into account, in addition to the view expressed by the Committee, the views that you and those who think with you have so forcibly expressed. I feel sure if you were in our position you would be taking exactly the same action we intend to take. You would await the Committee's report, you would then give it your fullest consideration, and before arriving at a final decision you would take into account the views that have been expressed on both sides of the controversy. More than this I cannot say. Indeed I do not imagine you would expect me to say more.

.....

After giving this warning Mr. Gandhi slept over the matter thinking that a repetition of his threat to fast unto death was sufficient to paralyse the British Government and prevent them from accepting the claim of the untouchables for special representation. When on the 17th August 1932 the terms of the Communal Award were announced Mr. Gandhi found that his threat had failed to have any effect. He first tried to get the terms of the Communal Award revised. Accordingly he addressed the following letter to the Prime Minister :

Yervada Central Prison,
August 18, 1932.

Dear friend,

There can be no doubt that Sir Samuel Hoare has showed you and the Cabinet my letter to him of 11th March on the question of the representation of the Depressed Classes. That letter should be treated as part of this letter and be read together with this.

Decision to fast

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

The proposed fast will come into operation in the ordinary course from the noon of 20th September next, unless the said decision is meanwhile revised in the manner suggested above.

I am asking the authorities here to cable the text of this letter to you so as to give you ample notice. But in any case, I am leaving sufficient time for this letter to reach you in time by the slowest route.

I also ask that this letter and my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare already referred to be published at the earliest possible moment. On my part, I have scrupulously observed the rule of the jail and have communicated my desire or the contents of the two letters to no one, save my two companions, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mr. Mahadev Desai. But I want, if you make it possible, public opinion to be affected by my letters. Hence my request for their early publication.

Not to compass Release

I regret the decision I have taken. But as a man of religion that I hold myself to be, I have no other course left open to me. As I have said in my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, even if His Majesty's Government decided to release me in order to save themselves from embarrassment, my fast will have to continue. For, I cannot now hope to resist the decision by any other means; And I have no desire whatsoever to compass my release by any means other than honourable.

It may be that my judgment is warped and that I am wholly in error in regarding separate electorates for the Depressed Classes as harmful to them or to Hinduism. If so, I am not likely to be in the right with reference to other parts of my philosophy of life. In that case my death by fasting will be at once a penance for my error and a lifting of a weight from off these numberless men and women who have childlike faith in my wisdom. Whereas if my judgment is right, as I have little doubt it is, the contemplated step is but due to the fulfilment of the scheme of life which I have tried for more than a quarter of a century, apparently not without considerable success.

I remain,
Your faithful friend,
M. K. Gandhi.

The Prime Minister replied as under :

10, Downing Street,
September 8th, 1932

Dear Mr. Gandhi,

I have received your letter with much surprise and, let me add, with very sincere regret. Moreover, I cannot help thinking that you

have written it under a misunderstanding as to what the decision of His Majesty's Government as regards the Depressed Classes really implies. We have always understood you were irrevocably opposed to the permanent segregation of the Depressed Classes from the Hindu community. You made your position very clear on the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference and you expressed it again in the letter you wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare on 11th March. We also knew your view was shared by the great body of Hindu opinion, and we, therefore, took it into most careful account when we were considering the question of representation of the Depressed Classes.

Government Decision Explained

Whilst, in view of the numerous appeals we have received from Depressed Class organisations and the generally admitted social disabilities under which they labour and which you have often recognized, we felt it our duty to safeguard what we believed to be the right of the Depressed Classes to a fair proportion of representation in the legislatures, we were equally careful to do nothing that would split off their community from the Hindu world. You yourself stated in your letter of March 11, that you were not against their representation in the legislatures.

Under the Government scheme the Depressed Classes will remain part of the Hindu community and will vote with the Hindu electorate on an equal footing, but for the first twenty years, while still remaining electorally part of the Hindu community, they will receive through a limited number of special constituencies, means of safeguarding their rights and interests that, we are convinced, is necessary under present conditions.

Where these constituencies are created, members of the Depressed Classes will not be deprived of their votes in the general Hindu constituencies, but will have two votes in order that their membership of the Hindu community should remain unimpaired.

We have deliberately decided against the creation of what you describe as a communal electorate for the Depressed Classes and included all Depressed Class voters in the general or Hindu constituencies so that the higher caste candidates should have to solicit their votes or Depressed Class candidates should have to solicit the votes of the higher castes at elections. Thus in every way was the unity of Hindu society preserved.

Safeguard Temporary

We felt, however, that during the early period of responsible government when power in the Provinces would pass to whoever

possessed a majority in the legislatures, it was essential that the Depressed Classes, whom you have yourself described in your letter to Sir Samuel Hoare as having consigned by Caste Hindus to calculated degradation for centuries, should return a certain number of members of their own choosing to legislatures of seven of the nine provinces to voice their grievances and their ideals and prevent decisions going against them without the legislature and the Government listening to their case — in a word, to place them in a position to speak for themselves which every fair-minded person must agree to be necessary. We did not consider the method of electing special representatives by reservation of seats in the existing conditions, under any system of franchise which is practicable, members who could genuinely represent them and be responsible for them, because in practically all cases, such members would be elected by a majority consisting of higher caste Hindus.

The special advantage initially given under our scheme to the Depressed Classes by means of a limited number of special constituencies in addition to their normal electoral rights in the general Hindu constituencies is wholly different in conception and effect from the method of representation adopted for a minority such as the Moslems by means of separate communal electorates. For example, a Moslem cannot vote or be a candidate in a general constituency, whereas any electorally qualified member of the Depressed Classes can vote in and stand for the general constituency.

Reservation Minimum

The number of territorial seats allotted to Moslems is naturally conditioned by the fact that it is impossible for them to gain any further territorial seats and in most provinces they enjoy weightage in excess of their population ratio; the number of special seats to be filled from special Depressed Classes constituencies will be seen to be small and has been fixed not to provide a quota numerically appropriate for the total representation of the whole of the Depressed Class population, but solely to secure a minimum number of spokesmen for the Depressed Classes in the legislature who are chosen exclusively by the Depressed Classes. The proportion of their special seats is everywhere much below the population percentage of the Depressed Classes.

As I understand your attitude, you propose to adopt the extreme course of starving yourself to death not in order to secure that the Depressed Classes should have joint electorates with other Hindus, because that it already provided, nor to maintain the unity of

Hindus, which is also provided, but solely to prevent the Depressed Classes, who admittedly suffer from terrible disabilities today, from being able to secure a limited number of representatives of their own choosing to speak on their behalf in the legislatures which will have a dominating influence over their future.

In the light of these very fair and cautious proposals, I am quite unable to understand the reason of the decision you have taken and can only think you have made it under a misapprehension of the actual facts.

Government Decision Stands

In response to a very general request from Indians after they had failed to produce a settlement themselves the Government much against its will, undertook to give a decision on the minorities question. They have now given it, and they cannot be expected to alter it except on the conditions they have stated. I am afraid, therefore, that my answer to you must be that the Government's decision stands and that only agreement of the communities themselves can substitute other electoral arrangements for those that Government have devised in a sincere endeavour to weigh the conflicting claims on their just merits.

You ask that this correspondence, including your letter to Sir Samuel Hoare of March 11th, should be published. As it would seem to me unfair if your present internment were to deprive you of the opportunity of explaining to the public the reason why you intend to fast, I readily accede to the request if on reconsideration you repeat it. Let me, however, once again urge you to consider the actual details of Government's decision and ask yourself seriously the question whether it really justifies you in taking the action you contemplate.

I am,
Yours very sincerely,
J. Ramsay MacDonald.

Finding that the Prime Minister would not yield he sent him the following letter informing him that he was determined to carry out his threat of fast unto death :

Yeravada Central Prison,
September 9th, 1932.

Dear friend,

I have to thank you for your frank and full letter telegraphed and received this day. I am sorry, however, that you put upon the

contemplated step an interpretation that never crossed my mind. I have claimed to speak on behalf of the very class, to sacrifice whose interests you impute to me a desire to fast myself to death. I had hoped that the extreme step itself would effectively prevent any such selfish interpretation without arguing, I affirm that for me this matter is one of pure religion. The mere fact of the Depressed Classes having double votes does not protect them or Hindu society in general from being disrupted. In the establishment of separate electorate at all for the Depressed Classes I sense the injection of poison that is calculated to destroy Hinduism and do no good whatever to the Depressed Classes. You will please permit me to say that no matter how sympathetic you may be, you cannot come to a correct decision on a matter of such vital and religious importance to the parties concerned.

I should not be against even over-representation of the Depressed Classes. What I am against is their statutory separation even in a limited form, from the Hindu fold, so long as they choose to belong to it. Do you realize that if your decision stands and the constitution comes into being, you arrest the marvellous growth of the work of Hindu reformers who have dedicated themselves to the uplift of their suppressed brethren in every walk of life ?

Decision Unchanged

I have, therefore, been compelled reluctantly to adhere to the decision conveyed to you.

As your letter may give rise to a misunderstanding, I wish to state that the fact of my having isolated for special treatment the Depressed Classes question from other parts of your decision does not in any way mean that I approve of or am reconciled to other parts of the decision. In my opinion, many other parts are open to very grave objection. Only I do not consider them to be any warrant for calling from me such self immolation as my conscience has prompted me to, in the matter of the Depressed Classes.

I remain,
Your faithful friend,
M. K. Gandhi.

Accordingly on the 20th September 1932 Mr. Gandhi commenced his "fast unto death" as a protest against the grant of separate electorates to the Untouchables.

The story of this fast has been told by Mr. Pyarelal in a volume which bears the picturesque and flamboyant title of "The Epic

Fast". In the pages of this *lours Boswelliana* the curious will find all he wants to know about the happenings in India during these mad days and I need say nothing about it here. Suffice it to say that although Mr. Gandhi went on fast unto death he did not want to die. He very much wanted to live.

The fast therefore created a problem and that problem was how to save Mr. Gandhi's life. The only way to save his life was to alter the Communal Award so as not to hurt Mr. Gandhi's conscience. The Prime Minister had made it quite clear that the British Cabinet would not withdraw it or alter it of its own but that they were ready to substitute for it a formula that may be agreed upon by the Caste Hindus and the Untouchables. As I had the privilege of representing the Untouchables at the Round Table Conference it was assumed that the assent of the Untouchables would not be valid unless I was a party to it. At the moment my position as the representative of the Untouchables of India was not only not questioned but was accepted as a fact. All eyes naturally turned to me as the man or rather as the villain of the piece. Mr. Gandhi's life as he himself said was in my hands.

It is no exaggeration to say that no man was placed in a greater and graver dilemma than I was then. It was a baffling situation. I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the duty which I owed as a part of common humanity to save Gandhi from sure death. There was before me the problem of saving for the Untouchables the political rights which the Prime Minister had given them. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Mr. Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Mr. Gandhi. This agreement is known as the Poona Pact.

The terms of the Poona Pact were as under :

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

Madras	..	30
Bombay with Sind	..	15
Punjab	..	8
Bihar and Orissa	..	18
Central Provinces	..	20
Assam	..	7
Bengal	..	30
United Provinces	..	20
Total	..	<u>148</u>

¹ This number of 148 seats was raised to 151 in making adjustments on seats for Bihar and Orissa.

These figures are based on the total strength of the Provincial Councils announced in the Prime Minister's decision.

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 electorates.

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 panel of candidates for election to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, as hereinbefore 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 clauses 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 Legislature 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 of 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 terms of the Pact were accepted by Mr. Gandhi and given effect to by Government by embodying them in the Government of India Act.

This fast unto death was a great gamble on the part of Mr. Gandhi. He perhaps felt that the mere threat to fast unto death would make me and other Depressed Classes who were with me just shiver and yield. But he soon found that he was mistaken and that the Untouchables were equally determined to fight to the last for their rights. No one except his own followers was convinced that Mr. Gandhi's fast had any moral basis and if Gandhi got a second lease of life, he owes it entirely to the generosity and goodwill shown towards him by the Untouchables.

Question however is what advantage the Untouchables have got by entering into the Poona Pact. To understand this one must examine the results of the elections to the Legislatures. The Government of India Act came into operation on 1st April 1937. In February 1937 the elections to the new legislatures as defined in the Act took place. So far as the Untouchables are concerned the elections which took place in February 1937 were elections in accordance with the Poona Pact. The following is the analysis of the results of that election to the seats reserved for the Untouchables in the different Provincial Assemblies.

TABLE¹

Province		Total Seats Reserved for the Untouchables	Total Seats Captured by the Congress
United Provinces	..	20	16
Madras	..	30	26
Bengal	..	30	6
Central Provinces	..	20	7
Bombay	..	15	4
Bihar	..	15	11
Punjab	..	8	Nil
Assam	..	7	4
Orissa	..	6	4
Total	..	151	78

¹ This Table is reprinted from Dr. Ambedkar's 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables' at page 94. This table was not typed in the M.S.—Ed.

This analysis reveals certain facts which make one ask whether the Untouchables have got anything of any value by entering into the Poona Pact and saving the life of Mr. Gandhi and whether the Poona Pact has not made the Untouchables the Bondsmen of the Caste Hindus.

This analysis shows that a large majority of them have been elected as Congressmen. It is my firm conviction that for the Untouchables to merge in the Congress or for the matter of that in any large political party cannot but be fatal for them.

The Untouchables need a movement if they are to remain conscious of their wrongs and if the spirit of revolt is kept alive amongst them. They need a movement because the Caste Hindus have to be told that what is tragedy of the Untouchables is their crime. The Congress may not be a red-blooded Hindu body so far as the Musalmans are concerned. But it is certainly a full-blooded and blue-blooded Hindu body inasmuch as it consists of Caste Hindus. A movement of the Untouchables must mean an open war upon the Caste Hindus. A movement of the Untouchables within the Congress is quite impossible. It must mean an *inter necine* within the party. The Congress for its own safety cannot allow it.

The Congress has strictly forbidden the Untouchables who have joined the Congress to carry on any independent movement of the Untouchables not approved of by the High Command. The result is that in those Provinces where the Untouchables have joined the Congress the movement of the Untouchables as such is dead.

The Untouchables must retain their right to freedom of speech and freedom of action on the floor of the Legislature if they are to ventilate their grievances and obtain redress of their wrongs by political action. But this freedom of speech and action has been lost by the representatives of the Untouchables who have joined the Congress. They cannot vote as they like, they cannot speak what they think. They cannot ask a question, they cannot move a resolution and they cannot bring in a Bill. They are completely under the control of the Congress Party Executive. They have only such freedom as the Congress Executive may choose to allow them. The result is that though the tale of woes of the Untouchables is ever-increasing, the untouchable members of the Legislature are unable even to ask a question about them. So pitiable has their condition become that the Congress Party sometimes requires them to vote against a measure that may in the opinion of the Untouchable members of the Legislature be beneficial to the Untouchables. A recent instance of this occurred in Madras. Rao Bahadur Raja a member of the Madras Legislature brought in

a Bill to secure the entry of the Untouchables into Hindu Temples in the Madras Presidency. The Congress Government had promised to support it at first. Subsequently the Congress Government in Madras changed its opinion and opposed the measure. It was a dilemma for the Untouchable members of the Madras Legislature. But they had no choice. The whip was applied and they in a body voted against the measure. The representatives of the Untouchables were supposed to be the watch-dogs of the Untouchables. But by reason of having joined the Congress they are muzzled dogs. Far from biting they are not even able to bark. This loss of freedom of speech and action by these Untouchable members is entirely due to their having joined the Congress and subjected themselves to the discipline of the Congress.

The third disadvantage arising from the Untouchables joining the Congress lies in their being unable to secure any real benefit to the Untouchables. This is due to two reasons. First of all the Congress is not a radical party. The Congress has the reputation of being a revolutionary organization. Its idea of complete independence, the movement of civil disobedience and non-payment of land revenue which the Congress once launched have undoubtedly given that reputation. But many people forget that a revolutionary party is not necessarily a radical party. Whether a revolutionary party is also a radical party must depend upon the social and emotional realities which bring on or induce the revolutionary activity. The Barons of England who under Simon de Mandfort rose against King John in 1215 and compelled him to sign the *Magna Charta* must be classed as revolutionaries along with the Peasants of England who in 1381 rose in rebellion under Wat Tyler against their masters and who were all hanged for their rebellious acts. But who can say that the Barons because they were revolutionaries were also radical? The Barons rebelled because they wanted the rights of their class against the King and the peasants established. The Barons revolt was fed by the social emotion of those who were frustrated of power. The emotions behind the peasants revolt were those who were oppressed and who were hungering for food and freedom and that is why the peasants were both revolutionary as well as radical. The revolt of the Congress is more like the revolt of the Peasants. The Congress under Gandhi is as radical as the Barons were under Simon de Mandfort. Just as the Barons revolt was fed by the social emotions of those who were frustrated of power and not by the emotions of those who were toiling and hungering so was the Congress revolt against the British. It is true that the Congress gathered a large following from the masses but that was by appealing to their anti-British feeling which is natural to all

Indians. It is also true that emotions of these were those who were frustrated of food and freedom. But their emotions were in conflict of those socially advanced and the propertied classes. And the latter had all along been the governing class in the Congress. The masses have been camp followers. It is their emotions which has all along determined the character of the Congress. Their emotions are of those who are frustrated of power. That is why the Congress has been only revolutionary body and has not been a radical party. The truth of this can be seen by any one who cares to examine the record of the Congress Governments. Their achievement since they have taken over are just a miscellaneous collection of trifling trinkets. They have shot down the workers more readily than the British and have released criminals sentenced by the High Courts on no other ground than that they have the authority to do it. It is a surprize to me—it is not me—that the Congress has so soon shown that it is just a counter-part of the Tories in England. The governing class in the Congress has lost all its fervour for revolution, for driving the British out. Having now got a field to exploit the masses they want to stick on the power and authority to do the job thoroughly and do not wish to be disturbed by any thought of anti-imperialism at all.

Not being radical party the Congress cannot be trusted to undertake a radical programme of social and economic reconstruction without which the Untouchables can never succeed in improving their lot. For the Untouchables to join such a party is a futile and senseless thing. The Congress will not do anything for them but will only use them as they have done.

The Congress might do something for the Untouchables if it was compelled to do by force of circumstances. There is only one circumstance in which the Congress would feel such a compulsion—that is when the Congress finds itself dependent upon the representatives of the Untouchables for its majority in the Legislature. Then the Untouchables would be in a position to dictate their terms to the Congress and the Congress would be bound to accept them. In such a contingency it would be worth the while of the Untouchables to join the Congress in a coalition. It would be real bargain. But today the Congress has everywhere such large majorities that in the legislatures it is its own master. It is not dependent on any outside support. The Untouchables who are in it are at the end of the tail and the tail so lengthened that it cannot wag. This is the second reason why joining the Congress can be of no benefit to the Untouchables.

Such are the disadvantages that have arisen from the Untouchables having joined the Congress. They are not merely disadvantages. I call

them dire consequences. All social movement has become dead. All political power has become migratory. It is understatement to say that under the new Constitution the Untouchables are marking time. The fact is that they have been put in chains.

But the question will undoubtedly be asked and it is this—If such are the consequences of joining the Congress why did these Untouchables join it? Why did they not fight their elections independently and in opposition to the Congress? Some of the Untouchables who stood on the Congress ticket were just careerists, men on the make who wanted to climb into the Legislature so as to be within call when the places of office of profit come for distribution. They did not care by whose ladder they climbed. The Congress being the biggest party and its pass the surest way of being admitted into the Legislature these careerists felt that to join the Congress was the easiest way of electoral success. They did not want to take any chance. This however explains their object. It does not explain the cause which forced them to join the Congress. I am sure even these careerists would not have joined the Congress if it was possible for them to have got themselves elected independently of the Congress. They joined the Congress only because they found that that course was impossible. Why were they compelled to join the Congress? The answer is that it was due to the system of joint electorates which caused the mischief which was introduced by the Poona Pact.

A joint electorate for a small minority and a vast majority is bound to result in a disaster to the minority. A candidate put up by the minority cannot be successful even if the whole of the minority were solidly behind him. The fact that a seat is reserved for a minority merely gives a security that the minority candidate will be declared elected. But it cannot guarantee that the minority candidate declared elected will be a person of its choice if the election is to be by a joint electorate. Even if a seat is reserved for a minority, a majority can always pick up a person belonging to the minority and put him up as a candidate for the reserved seat as against a candidate put up by the minority and get him elected by helping its nominee with the superfluous voting strength which is at its command. The result is that the representative of the minority elected to the reserved seat instead of being a champion of the minority is really the slave of the majority.

In the system of electorates now formed for election to the Legislature, the Untouchable voters as against the caste Hindu voters are placed in a hopeless minority. A few instances will show how great is the discrepancy in the relative voting strength of the Untouchables and the caste Hindus in the different constituencies.

The power to do mischief in elections which a joint electorate gives to a majority is increased immensely if the electoral system is based on the principle of a single member constituency.

In a system of joint electorates with reserved seats for a minority a constituency must always be a plural member constituency i.e. there must be one seat for the minority and at least one seat for the majority. In other words it must be what is called a plural member constituency. This plural member constituency must be small one i.e. the majority community may have just two seats as against the one assigned to the minority. It may be a large one i.e. the majority may have a larger number of seats assigned to it. This is an important consideration because the smaller the number of seats the greater the power of mischief which the majority gets. This will be clear if it is borne in mind that when a majority has fewer seats it can release a large portion of its voting strength to get its own nominee from the minority elected to the reserved seats and defeat the nominee of the minority. On the other hand if the majority is assigned a larger number of seats, there a competition among the candidates is greater, the voters of the majority community are for the most part (busy)* in fighting out the election to the seats assigned to the majority and very few at all can be released to help the nominee of the majority for the minority seat. In a joint electorate the safety of the minority lies in the majority having a larger number of seats to contest. Otherwise it is sure to be overwhelmed by the majority.

In the electoral system now framed for the caste Hindus the principle that is adopted is that of the single member constituency. It is true that on the face of it the constituency taken as a whole appear to be a plural member constituency. But, in fact, the constituency so far as the caste Hindus are concerned are single member constituencies. The consequence of this single member constituency system for Caste Hindus is that the Hindus are able to release an enormous lot of their superfluous votes and flood the election for the seats reserved for the Untouchables and keep their nominee for the reserved seat afloat.

The Hindus were anxious to forge further means for nullifying the benefit of the Poona Pact. The Poona Pact having been concluded in a hurry, it left many things undefined. Of the things that were left undefined and about which there arose subsequently a keen controversy were the following : (1) Does the 'panel of four' to be elected at the primary election imply four as a maximum or a minimum ? (2) What was to be the method of voting in the final joint electorate with the Hindus ? The Hammond Committee which had to decide upon these issues found that there were two diametrically

*Inserted by Editors.

opposite views in regard to these two questions, one view held by the Caste Hindus and the other held by the Untouchables. It was contended on behalf of the Caste Hindus that the panel of four was intended to be a minimum. If four candidates are not forthcoming there could be no primary election and therefore there can be no election for the reserved seat, which they said must remain vacant and the Untouchables should go without representation. The Untouchables contended that four was the maximum. Four in the Poona Pact meant "not more than four". It did not mean "not less than four". On the question of voting the caste Hindus contended that the compulsory distributive vote was the most appropriate. The Untouchables on the other hand insisted that the cumulative system of voting was the proper system to be introduced.

The Hammond Committee accepted the view propounded by the Untouchables and rejected those of the Caste Hindus. All the same it is interesting to know why the caste Hindus put forth their contentions.

The reason why the Hindus wanted four in the panel and not less was quite obvious. The object of the Hindus is to get elected in the final election such a representative of the Untouchables as would be most ready and willing to compromise with Hindus and Hinduism. To get him elected in the final election he must first come in the Panel. A most compromising Untouchable can come in the Panel only when the panel is a large panel.

If there is only one candidate in the Panel then he would be the staunchest representative of the Untouchable and worst from the standpoint of the Hindus. If there are two, the second will be less staunch than the first and therefore good from the standpoint of the Hindus. If there are three, the third will be less staunch than the second and therefore better from the standpoint of the Hindus. If there be four, the fourth will be less staunch than the third and therefore best from the point of view of the Hindus. The Panel of four gives the Hindus the best chance of getting into the Panel such representative of the Untouchables as is most compromising in his attitude towards Hindus and Hinduism and that is why they insisted that the Panel should be at least of four.

The object of insisting upon the system of compulsory distributive vote was just supplementary to the idea of having the Panel of not less than four. Under the cumulative vote the elector has as many votes as there are seats, but may plump them all for one candidate or distribute them over two or more candidates as he may desire. Under the distributive system of voting the elector has also as many votes as there are seats, but he can give only one vote to any one candidate.

Although the two look different yet in effect there may be no difference because even under the cumulative vote a voter is not prevented from distributing his votes. He is free to give one vote to one candidate. But the Hindus did not want to take any chance. Their main object was to flood the election to the seat reserved for the Untouchables in the joint electorate by using the surplus votes of the caste Hindus in favour of the Untouchable candidate who happens to be their nominee. The object was to outnumber the Untouchable voters and prevent them from electing their own nominee. This cannot be done unless the surplus votes of the caste Hindu voters were divested from the caste Hindu candidate towards the Untouchable candidates. There is a greater chance of the diversion of these surplus votes under the distributive system than there is under the cumulative system. Under the former the caste Hindu voter can give only one vote to the caste Hindu candidate. The other vote not being of use to the caste Hindu candidate is usable only for an Untouchable candidate. With the distributive system there was more chance of flooding the election to the seat reserved for the Untouchables and this is why they preferred it to the system of cumulative vote. But they want to take a chance. Even the distributive system from their point of view was not foolproof. Under the distributive system there was no compulsion upon the voter to use all his votes. He may use one vote for the caste Hindu candidate and not use the rest of his votes. If this happens the purpose of getting in their untouchable nominee would be defeated. Not to leave things to chance the Hindus wanted that the distributive system of voting should be made compulsory so that a caste Hindu voter whether he wants it or not can have no option but to vote for the untouchable candidate who may be the nominee of the Hindus.

The two proposals were thus a part of a deep conspiracy on the part of the Hindus. They were rejected by the Hammond Committee. But there are enough elements of mischief in the Poona Pact itself that the rejection of these two proposals has in no way weakened the power of the Hindus to render nugatory the right of special representation granted to the Untouchables.

Notwithstanding the political disaster which has overtaken the Untouchables and which is the result of the Poona Pact, there are not wanting friends of Mr. Gandhi who hold out the Poona Pact as a great boon to the Untouchables.

Firstly it is alleged that the Poona Pact gave the Untouchables larger number of seats than was given to them by the Communal Award. It is true that the Poona Pact gave the Untouchables 151 seats while the Award had only given them 78. But to conclude from this that the

Poona Pact gave them more than what was given by the Award is to ignore what the Award had in fact given to the Untouchables.

The Communal Award gave the Untouchables two benefits : (i) a fixed quota of seats to be elected by separate electorates for Untouchables and to be filled by persons belonging to the Untouchables, (ii) Double vote, one to be used through separate electorates and the other to be used in the general electorates.

Now if the Poona Pact increased the fixed quota of seats it also took away the right to the double vote. This increase in seats can never be deemed to be a compensation for the loss of the double vote. The second vote given by the Communal Award was a priceless privilege. Its value as a political weapon was beyond reckoning. The voting strength of the Untouchables in each constituency is one to ten. With this voting strength free to be used in the election of caste Hindu candidates, the Untouchables would have been in a position to determine, if not to dictate, the issue of the General Election. No Caste Hindu candidate could have dared to neglect the Untouchables in his constituency or be hostile to their interest if he was made dependent upon the votes of the Untouchables. Today the Untouchables have a few more seats than were given to them by the Communal Award. But this is all that they have. Every other member is indifferent if not hostile. If the Communal Award with its system of double voting had remained, the Untouchables would have had a few seats less but every other member would have been a member for the Untouchables. The increase in the number of seats for the Untouchables is no increase at all.

Admitting for the sake of argument that the Poona Pact did give to the Untouchables a few more seats, the question still remains of what use are these additional seats. Ordinarily a right to vote is deemed to be sufficient as a means of political protection. But it was felt that in the case of the Untouchables mere right to vote would not be enough. It was feared that a member elected on the votes of the Untouchables, if he is himself not an Untouchable, might play false and might take no interest in them. It was held that the grievances of the Untouchables must be ventilated in the Legislature and that the surest way of ensuring it would be to provide that a certain number of seats shall be reserved for them so that the Untouchables shall be represented by Untouchables in the Legislature. It is now evident that this hope has not been fulfilled. The Communal Award no doubt gave fewer seats. But they would have been all of them freemen. The Poona Pact gave more but they are all filled by bondsmen. If to have a platoon of bondsmen is an advantage then the Poona Pact may be said to be advantage.