

The second argument in favour of the Poona Pact is that in abolishing separate electorates it saved the Untouchables from being eternally branded as Untouchables. In one of his speeches delivered in London Mr. Gandhi said :

“Muslims and Sikhs are all well organized. The ‘untouchables’ are not. There is very little political consciousness among them and they are so horribly treated that I want to save them against themselves. If they had separate electorates their lives would be miserable in villages which are the strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy. It is the superior class of Hindus who have to do penance for having neglected the ‘untouchables’ for ages. That penance can be done by active social reform and by making the lot of the ‘untouchables’ more bearable by acts of service, but not by asking for separate electorates for them. By giving them separate electorates you will throw the apple of discord between the ‘untouchables’ and the orthodox. You must understand I can tolerate the proposal for special representation of the Musalmans and the Sikhs only as a necessary evil. It would be a positive danger for the ‘untouchables’. I am certain that the question of separate electorates for the ‘untouchables’ is modern manufacture of Government. The only thing needed is to put them on the voters’ list, and provide for fundamental rights for them in the constitution. In case they are unjustly treated and their representative is deliberately excluded, they would have the right to special election tribunal which would give them complete protection. It should be open to these tribunals to order the unseating of an elected candidate and the election of the excluded man.”

“Separate electorates to the ‘untouchables’ will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Musalmans will never cease to be Musalmans by having separate electorates. Do you want the ‘untouchables’ to remain ‘untouchables’ for ever ? Well, the separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma. What is needed is destruction of untouchability, and when you have done it, the bar sinister which has been imposed by an insolent ‘superior’ class upon an ‘inferior’ class will be destroyed. When you have destroyed the bar sinister, to whom will you give the separate electorates ? Look at the history of Europe. Have you got separate electorates for the working classes or women ? With adult franchise, you give the ‘untouchables’ complete security. Even the orthodox would have to approach them for votes.”

“How then, you ask, does Dr. Ambedkar, their representative, insist on separate electorates for them ? I have the highest regard for

Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter. That he does not break our heads is an act of self-restraint on his part. He is today so much saturated with suspicion that he cannot see anything else. He sees in every Hindu a determined opponent of the 'untouchables', and it is quite natural. The same thing happened to me in my early days in South Africa, where I was hounded out by the Europeans wherever I went. It is quite natural for him to vent his wrath. But the separate electorates that he seeks will not give him social reform. He may himself mount to power and position but nothing good will accrue to the 'untouchables'. I can say all this with authority, having lived with the 'untouchables' and having shared their joys and sorrows all these years."

His argument it is true derives some support from the Simon Commission which also observed :

(The following extracts are not quoted in the MS. They are reproduced here from Dr. Ambedkar's 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables', Appendix VI, p. 327.—Ed.)

(Extracts from the Report of the Simon Commission, Vol. II)

78. ... In no other province has it been possible to get an estimate of the number of the depressed classes who are qualified to vote. It is clear that even with a considerable lowering of the franchise—which would no doubt increase the proportion of the depressed class voters—there would be no hope of the depressed classes getting their own representatives elected in general constituencies without special provision being made to secure it. In the long run the progress of the depressed classes, so far as it can be secured by the exercise by them of political influence, will depend on their getting a position of sufficient importance for other elements to seek their support and to consider their needs.

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80. ... It will be seen, therefore, that we do not recommend allocating seats to the depressed classes on the basis of their full population ratio. The scale of reserved representation suggested will secure a substantial increase in the number of the M.L.C.s drawn from the depressed classes. The poverty and want of education which so widely prevail amongst them make it extremely doubtful whether a large number of adequately equipped members could be at once provided, and it is far better that they should be represented by qualified spokesmen rather than by a larger number of ineffectives who are only too likely to be subservient to higher castes. The re-distribution of seats which is now being attempted among different kinds of representatives cannot be permanent, and

provision must be made for its revision. But we think that our proposal is adequate for the present, especially as the representation of opinion by reservation of seats does not exclude the possibility of the capture of other seats not so reserved.

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But that this argument is silly there can be no doubt about it. To put a man in a separate category from others is not necessarily an evil. Whether the affixing of a label is good or bad depends upon the underlying purpose. If the object is to deprive him of rights then such a labelling would no doubt be a grievous wrong. But if the purpose is to mark off as a recipient of a privilege then far from being a wrong it would be a most beneficial measure. To enrol an untouchable in a separate electoral roll would be objectionable if the object was to deprive him of the right of franchise. To enrol him in a separate electoral roll for giving him the benefit of special representation would certainly be an advantage to him. Looked at from the point of view of ultimate purpose it is difficult to see how any person who claims to be the friend of the untouchables could object to separate electorates for them. Not only the argument of Gandhi against separate electorate was silly it was also insincere. Gandhi objected to separate electorates because it involved labelling of the Untouchables. But how is this labelling avoided in joint electorates it is difficult to understand. The reservation of a seat for the Untouchables in a joint electorate must and does involve such labelling for the candidate claiming the benefit of the reserved must in law declare that he is an untouchable. To that extent there is certainly a labelling involving in the Joint Electorate and Mr. Gandhi should have objected to joint electorates as violently as he did to separate electorates. Either Mr. Gandhi was insincere or that he did not know what he was talking about.

Friends of Mr. Gandhi do not stop to consider how far under the Poona Pact the Untouchables have been able to send independent men to represent them in the Legislature and whether these representatives have been putting up any fight and how well they are succeeding. If they stopped to do it they would be ashamed to sing the praises of the joint electorates and the Poona Pact. The Congress and the Hindus have shamefully abused their power and their resources as a majority community. Not only have they prevented the Untouchables from electing persons of their choice, not only have they got their own nominees elected by the use of their surplus votes, they have done something for which any decent party in any part of the world ashamed of itself. The selection of the candidates from the

untouchables made by the Congress to fill the seats reserved for the Untouchables was a most cowardly and a blackguardly act.

It was open to the Congress—which is simply a political surname for Hindus—to allow the Untouchables the benefits of more seats than those fixed for them by the Poona Pact. They could have done that by adopting untouchable candidates to contest general seats. There was nothing in law to prevent them from doing so. The Congress did nothing of the kind. This shows that if no seat had been reserved to the Untouchables, the Hindus would never have cared to see that an untouchable was returned to the legislature. On the other hand when seats were reserved, the Hindus came forward to spoil the effect of the reservation by seeing to it that the seats went to such untouchables as agreed to be their slaves.

Thus there has been a tragic end to this fight of the untouchables for political rights. I have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Gandhi is solely responsible for this tragedy.

Mr. Gandhi's cry against the Communal Award on the ground that it prescribed separate electorates was absolutely false and if the Hindus had not become maddened by his fast they would have seen that it was so. The Communal Award had also a provision for joint electorates in addition to separate electorates. The second vote given to the Untouchables was to be exercised in a general electorate in the election of a Caste Hindu candidate. This was undoubtedly a system of joint electorates. The difference between the Communal Award and the Poona Pact does lie in the nature of electorates. Both provide for joint electorates. The difference lies in this, joint electorate of the Communal Award was intended to enable the Untouchables to take part and influence the election of the Caste Hindu candidate while the joint electorate of the Poona Pact is intended to enable the caste Hindus to take part and influence the election of the Untouchable candidates. This is the real difference between the two.

What would a friend of the Untouchables wish? Would he support the joint electorates of the Communal Award or the joint electorates of the Poona Pact ? There can be no doubt that the real salvation of the Untouchables lies in making the Hindus dependent upon the suffrages of the Untouchables. This is what the Communal Award did. To make the Untouchables depend upon the suffrages of the Hindus is to make them the slaves of the Hindus which they already are. This is what the Poona Pact does. The Communal Award was intended to free the Untouchables from the thralldom of the Hindus. The Poona Pact is designed to place them under the domination of the Hindus.

This 'Fast unto Death' of Mr. Gandhi was described in glorious terms by his friends and admirers both in India and outside. It was described as 'second crucifixion', as 'martyrdom' and as 'Triumphal struggle'. An American friend of Mr. Gandhi assured the Americans that in laying down his life Mr. Gandhi was neither a 'trickster' nor a stick demagogue. Another American in his ecstasy went to the length of describing him as the incarnation of '*one against the world*'. Of course I was held out as the villain of the piece. I had of course my own view of Gandhi's fast. I described it as a political stunt. His utterances had to me always the ring of falsity and even of insincerity.

I had always the feeling that what actuated Mr. Gandhi to fast against the Communal Award was not any desire to liberate the Untouchables as to save the Hindus from disruption. He was prepared to do that at any cost, even at the cost of political enslavement of the Untouchables. His disapproval of the Poona Pact was very much like the disapproval of the enfranchisement of the Negro by the Southerners after the civil war. The 'Statesman' and 'Nation' came to the same conclusion. It said: (*Quotation not mentioned in the MS nor could it be traced elsewhere—Ed.*)

At the time there was this one solitary instance of a view agreeing with mine. Even some of the prominent untouchables backed Mr. Gandhi. A curious case was that of Mr. Raja whose grievance was that although he was a member of the Central Assembly nominated to represent the Depressed Classes he was not selected as a delegate for the Round Table Conference. He was fighting for separate electorates. Suddenly he changed sides and took up the cudgels on behalf of Mr. Gandhi and fulminated both against me for demanding and against the British Government for granting separate electorates. He developed such a strong love for Mr. Gandhi and such a strong faith in the Hindus that no one could suspect that he was doing the work of a mere hireling. This is what Mr. Raja said in the course of a speech delivered by him on an adjournment motion moved in the Central Legislature on September 13th, 1932 relating to Gandhi's fast.

"Never in the annals of the history of India has the issue of the Depressed Classes assumed importance as it has today, and for this we of the Depressed Classes must for ever be grateful to Mahatma Gandhi. He has told the world, in words which cannot be mistaken, that our regeneration is the fundamental aim of his life. If world conscience cannot be roused even now to the realization of the position of the Depressed Classes, then we can only conclude that all instincts of humanity are dead in the world today."

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"The question before the House is the situation created by Mahatma Gandhi opposing the grant of communal electorates to

the Depressed Classes. I am sure there is no honourable member in this House who will not regret that circumstances should have forced such a great personality to take a vow to play on his life, but sir, the correspondence shows that Government had enough warning. If they did not attach full importance to our considered views expressed in our conferences and in the Rajah-Moonje Pact I had signed with the President of Hindu Mahasabha, they should have taken at least the grave warning given by Mahatma Gandhi and desisted from the course of creating separate electorates."

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"Indeed this is my chief attack on the Premier's letter to Mahatma Gandhi. He tells us that he has given separate electorates for twenty years to enable us to get the minimum number of seats to place our views before the Government and legislature of the day. I contend that this privilege we have already enjoyed under the Montford reforms which have enabled us to get representation in numerous local bodies and in legislatures both provincial and central. We are sufficiently organized for that purpose and do not need either special pleading or special succour. In future what we do need as real remedy for our uplift is definite power to elect our representatives from the general constituencies and hold them responsible to us for their actions. I do not know why the Prime Minister calls the scheme of joint electorates with reservation of seats as impracticable. It is already in force in local bodies in Madras and some other provinces and has worked very satisfactorily. I contend, sir, that the scheme enunciated in the communal decision involves our segregation and makes us politically untouchables. I am surprised at the argument of the Prime Minister that there is no segregation because we can vote for Caste Hindus who will have to solicit our votes. But, sir, how can we bring about common ideal of citizenship when Depressed Class representatives are not to solicit votes of higher castes?"

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"The sufferings which my community has undergone at the hands of Caste Hindus have been acknowledged by Caste Hindus themselves, and I am prepared to admit that there are a large number of reformers among them who are doing everything possible to improve our status and position. I am convinced that there is a change of heart and a change in the angle of vision of Caste Hindus. We, Depressed Classes, feel ourselves as true Hindus as any Caste Hindu can be, and we feel that the moral conscience of the Hindus has been roused to the extent that our salvation lies in bringing

about a change from within the main body of Hindu society and not segregating ourselves from them. The course adopted by the Government would certainly arrest the progress of this most laudable movement. I must say, sir, that the Prime Minister's letter in its entire conception, and expression has disappointed me."

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"The crisis that faces us today is very grave. There hangs in the balance the life of the greatest Indian of our time, and there hangs in the balance the future of millions of the down-trodden people of this country. Is Government going to take the responsibility for killing the one and reducing the other to perpetual servitude? Let it make its choice well and wisely."

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Mr. Raja not only backed the Poona Pact and fought for distributive vote which as I pointed out was nothing but a part of the design of the Hindus to make the political enslavement of the Untouchables fool-proof and knave-proof. Mr. Raja was so much enamoured of his new faith in Gandhi and Hindus that he was not satisfied by the disposal of the matter by the Hammond Committee. He reopened the matter after election by moving a resolution in the Madras Assembly in favour of the distributive vote¹.

But today after seeing the results of the Poona Pact Mr. Raja seems to have been disillusioned. How long he will remain faithful to the truth he has discovered is more than I can say. But he has declared himself openly as a bitter opponent of the Poona Pact. In a letter to Mr. Gandhi, dated 25th August 1938, Mr. Raja says:

"You remember how, when most of my people were in favour of separate electorates so that they may express themselves faithfully and effectively in the legislatures, you staked your life on bringing them into the Hindu fold not only politically but socially and religiously. And I was in no small measure responsible for my people going in for a joint electorate with Caste Hindus on the express understanding that there was to be no interference with our choosing men who would faithfully represent our grievances and wishes. It was with this object that the panel election was instituted.

"All this you know as well as I do. But my object in recalling the fact is to show that while on our part we faithfully adhered to the Poona Pact, giving up agitating for a separate electorate, the Congress Party men in Madras representing the Caste Hindus deviated from the Pact, so much so, that our community in the Legislative Assembly have to follow the Caste Hindus blindly in

¹ Madras Legislative Assembly Debates.

every measure the Ministry may bring and vote with them even in matters which deeply affect the interests of the community.

“You perhaps remember that at the beginning of the elections I protested against the Congress Committee setting up candidates for the panel election among the Depressed Classes. You were good enough to say that I might allow my community joining the Congress on certain conditions placed before us by Mr. S. Satyamurti. One of these conditions was that in matters affecting their community, the Depressed Class members of the Congress Party need not vote with the Congress members but vote according to their judgment.

“The recent debate on the Temple Entry Bill in the Madras Legislative Assembly has exposed the ugly fact that all Depressed Class Members driven by the discipline of the Congress Party in the Assembly voted solidly against my motion for referring the Bill to a Select Committee. Could anything be more unnatural and more humiliating, proving as it did the subjugation of my community by the Caste Hindus represented by Mr. Rajagopalachariar ?

“You know the provisions of the Bill. It was only a piece of permissive legislation making it possible for a majority of worshippers of a temple to allow Harijans to worship in the temple. There was no element of compulsion or coercion in it. This Bill had your blessing. It was drafted by Mr. Rajagopalachariar himself and approved by you.

“At a previous session of the Assembly I introduced the Bill with the consent of Mr. Rajagopalachariar, who promised his full support to the measure. When I suggested that the Bill might be introduced by him as a Government measure, he wanted me to introduce it. When I met him last, on the 12th July 1938 and informed him that I was giving notice of a motion for referring the Bill to a Select Committee he did not object.

“I do not know what happened in the meantime but two days before my motion for referring the Bill to the Select Committee came up before the house, Mr. Rajagopalachariar sent for me and quietly asked me to withdraw the Bill, which I refused to do. When in due course, I moved for the consideration of the Bill, Mr. Rajagopalachariar stood up and opposed the Bill and requested me to withdraw it, saying that he would introduce a Temple Entry Bill on the same lines, only for Malabar and not for other Districts.

“The effect of Mr. Rajagopalachariar’s speech was to defeat my motion with my own community men registering their votes against the measure, introduced to secure their social and religious

elevation. One effect of Mr. Rajagopalachariar's opposition will be to strengthen the opposition in the country to temple entry as a whole.

"All this makes me uneasy about the wisdom of our having been parties to the Poona Pact in the full belief that the Congress would really help in our attempt to secure social and religious freedom. I am forced to think that our entering the joint electorate with the caste Hindus under the leadership of the Congress, far from helping us, has enabled the Congress, led by Caste Hindu leaders to destroy our independence and to use us to cut our own throats.

"In the course of the debate, I asked Mr. Rajagopalachariar whether he had obtained your approval of the attitude which he so suddenly and unexpectedly assumed and the Speaker said that Mr. Rajagopalachariar will be given an opportunity to answer the question after I had done. Though he was given the privilege of speaking after me, he avoided the question and did not answer it at all.

"I trust that you will give your most serious consideration to this question of the attitude of the Congress Ministry in Madras towards Harijan uplift, especially with regard to temple entry and let me have your view before I answer my community men who are very much exercised over this question and are contemplating a repudiation of the Poona Pact and an agitation for a separate electorate accompanied by direct action of some kind."

Mr. Rajah also wired to Mahatma Gandhi, Wardha on 12th September 1938 as follows:

"Agitation against Ministry rejection my bill growing difficult withstand pressure upon me—Anxiously awaiting reply."

Mr. Gandhi replied to Mr. Rajah on 14th September 1938:

"Dear friend,

I must apologise for the delay in replying to your letter, I have been overwhelmed with work. Now I have your wire.

I wish you would trust C. Rajagopalachariar to do his best. He should be allowed to do the thing in his own way. If you cannot trust, naturally you will take the course which commends itself to you. All I know is that Harijans have no better friend than him. Go to him, reason with him and if you cannot persuade him, bear with him. That is my advice."

Mr. Rajah wrote a letter dated 21st September 1938 to Mr. Gandhi stating:

"I should request you on the other hand to give more serious consideration to the pledges given to my community during the

Yeravada Fast and to the way in which they are carried out by your plenipotentiary in Madras. That fast was undertaken by you in order to change the Communal Award providing separate electorates for my people and to bring them into joint electorate with Caste Hindus by promising to spare no efforts to remove untouchability. And you have more than once said that temple entry is of the very essence of the removal of untouchability.

“So the question of our being in a joint electorate with Caste Hindus and the attitude of the Congress Ministry towards the raising of the social and religious status of the community are mutually and vitally connected.

“If we are not free to enter into Hindu Temples, we are no Hindus, and if we are not Hindus why should we be in a joint electorate with them? Is it for swelling their numbers as against Muslims and other communities?

“If you look at the situation in Madras from this point of view, you will realise that the rejection of the Temple Entry Bill is a gross betrayal of the Depressed Classes by the Congress Government in Madras.

“Any amount of money spent out of public funds or even from private resources for the amelioration of the economic condition of my community will be no substitute for the removal of untouchability through temple entry. As you yourself once said temple entry is the acid test of the sincerity of the caste Hindus in espousing the cause of the Depressed Classes.

“Mr. Rajagopalachariar’s Temple Entry Bill, besides involving the tactical choice of a difficult district makes our community subservient to the will of Caste Hindus, a policy which is given a further effect to, in the appointment of Advisory Boards to assist the Labour Commissioner in which Caste Hindus of the Harijan Sevak Sanghs in this Province are given Government facilities for guiding the destinies of my people. I do not expect you to agree with my views on the measures recently introduced by Mr. Rajagopalachariar after rejecting the Madras Temple Entry Bill; but I expect you to give more serious consideration to the situation in Madras as regards the Depressed Classes in the light of the pledges given to the Depressed Classes during your memorable fast.

“You are morally bound to make this a matter of conscience and not merely one of political strategy. I assure that if you should seek ‘inner light’ on this subject of untouchability and temple entry you will speak out more plainly and make the necessary sacrifice to educate your followers.

“I propose to send this correspondence to the press, but I shall wait for any further word from you till the end of this month.”

Mr. Gandhi replied to the above on 5th October 1938:

“Dear friend,

“I am working under great difficulty. Even this I am writing in the train taking me to Peshawar.

“Of course you will publish the correspondence between us whenever you think it necessary.

“Your last letter shows that you are in the wrong. I am not partial to Rajaji. But I know that he is as firm on untouchability as I am myself. I must, therefore, trust his judgment as to how to do the thing. From this distance, I can’t judge his action. Do you not see that the whole of the movement is one of conversion of the Sanatani heart ? You cannot force the pace except to the extent that reforms immolate themselves. This process is going on vigorously.

“This temple entry question is a mighty-religious reform. I would like you to apply your religious mind to it, If you will, you will give your whole hearted support to Rajaji and make his move a thorough success.”

The Untouchables of U.P. have also expressed their hostility to the Poona Pact. In a Memorandum submitted to Col. Muirhead the Under Secretary of State in India they said: (*Memorandum not typed in the MS.— Ed.*)

All over India the Untouchables have realized that the Poona Pact has been a trap and the change of the British Government’s Communal Award by Gandhi’s Poona Pact is a change which in reality a change from freedom to bondage.

The Poona Pact was signed on the 24th September 1932. On the 25th September 1932 a public meeting of the Hindus was held in Bombay to accord to it their support. At that meeting the following resolution was passed:

“This Conference confirms the Poona agreement arrived at between the leaders of the Caste Hindus and Depressed Classes on September 24, 1932, and trusts that the British Government will withdraw its decision creating separate electorates within the Hindu community and accept the agreement in full. The Conference urges that immediate action be taken by Government so as to enable Mahatma Gandhi to break his fast within the terms of his vow and before it becomes too late. The Conference appeals to the leaders of the communities concerned to realize the implications of the agreement and of this resolution and to make earnest endeavour to fulfil them.

This Conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no, one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth, and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads, and all other public institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest Acts of the Swaraj Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time.

It is further agreed that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called untouchable classes, including the bar in respect of admission to temples."

Mr. Gandhi felt that an organization which will devote itself exclusively to the problem of the Untouchables was necessary. Accordingly there was established on 28th September 1932 the All-India Anti-Untouchability League. The name, Gandhi thought, did not smell well. Therefore in December 1932 it was given a new name—The Servants of the Untouchables Society. That name again was not as sweet as Mr. Gandhi wished it to be. He changed and called it the Harijan Sevak Sangh.

The first change which Mr. Gandhi has brought about is this change in the name. Instead of being called Untouchables they are now called *Harijans*. To call, the Untouchables say that Mr. Gandhi is selfish and has given the name Harijan to the Untouchables to blaster up Vaishnavism. They want the Untouchables to be called Harjans the followers of Shiva. Mr. Gandhi replies that the term is used to mean God and not Vishnu and that Harijan simply means 'children of God'.

The Untouchables simply detest the name Harijan. Various grounds of objection are urged against the name. In the first place it has not bettered their position. It has not elevated them in the eyes of the Hindus. The new name has become completely identified with the subject matter of the old. Every body knows that Harijans are simply no other than the old Untouchables. The new name provides no escape to the Untouchables from the curse of untouchability. With the new name they are damned as much as they were with the old. Secondly the Untouchables say that they prefer to be called Untouchables. They argue that it is better that the wrong should be called by its known name. It is better for the patient to know what he is suffering from. It is better for the wrong doer that the wrong is there still to be redressed. Any concealment will give a false sense of both as to existing facts. The new name in so far as it is a concealment is fraud upon the

Untouchables and a false absolution to the Hindus. Thirdly there is also the feeling that the name Harijan is indicative of pity. If the name meant 'chosen people of God' as the Jews claimed themselves to be it would have been a different matter. But to call them 'children of God' is to invite pity from their tyrants by pointing out their helplessness and their dependent condition. The more manly among the Untouchables resent the degrading implications of this new name. How great is the resentment of the Untouchables against this new name can be seen from the fact that whole body of the representatives of the Untouchables in the Bombay Legislative Assembly walked out of the House in protest when the Congress Government introduced a measure giving to the name Harijan the sanction of law.

This new name Harijan will remain until the downfall of Mr. Gandhi and the overthrow of the Congress Governments which are his creatures. That it was forced upon the Untouchables and that it has done no good are however facts which cannot be disputed.

Having discussed the blessings of this new name I must now proceed to examine the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. The Sangh is spoken of as a memorial to Gandhi's labours in the cause of the Untouchables. What are the achievements of the Sangh.

The Sangh is an All-India Organization. It has a Central Board. Then there are Provincial Boards and under the Provincial Boards there are District and Local Committees. The number of Provincial Boards and Local Committees is given below:

	1932-33	1933-34	1934-35
Provincial Boards	26	26	29
District & Local Committees	213	313	372

The financial resources of the Sangh are mainly drawn from the collections made on an All-India tour specially undertaken for the purpose by Mr. Gandhi between November 1933 to July 1934. The total amount collected on this tour came to about 8 lacs of Rupees and is known as the Gandhi Purse Fund and forms the principal reserve for the Sangh to draw upon. The rest of the resources are made up of annual donations.

The total expenditure of the Sangh under all heads from year to year is as follows:

	1932-33	1933-34	1934-35	1935-36
Rs.	2,31,039.00	3,31,791.00	4,48,422.00	3,99,354.00

In his report for 1934-35 the General Secretary reported that “almost the whole of the Gandhi Purse Fund, which stood at over 8 lacs in July 1934, will be spent away by the end of the current year, i.e. by the end of September 1936.” In the fifth Annual Report the Secretary says, “As compared to the expenditure of the previous year, there has been a reduction of more than a lac in the total expenditure. This was partly owing to the gradual exhaustion of the Gandhi Purse Fund, dislocation in the realization of local collections owing to general elections and other contributory causes. The finances of the Central office were far from satisfactory. The total expenditure of the Central office (including grants made to branches) amounted to Rs. 86,610-14-8, as against an income of Rs. 42,485-4-9 thus leaving a deficit of Rs. 44,125-9-11 which was met from the general fund. Donations for general fund amounted to only Rs. 26,173-4.”

It is obvious that the Harijan Sevak Sangh is a small affair and but for the running advertisement it gets from the Press it would not even be heard off. India is a vast continent with something like 6,96,831* villages. The Untouchables are spread out all throughout these 6,96,831 villages. There is no village without its untouchables. How many Untouchables can be reached by 372 Committees. It is a tiny peck in a vast ocean. Not only its capacity to cope with the problem is limited but its resources are too meagre to permit any relief being granted to the Untouchables on an adequate scale. The Sangh has now no permanent fund. What it had it has spent. It has to depend upon annual subscriptions. That source is also drying up leaving the Sangh with heavy deficit. The Sangh is in an exhausted condition. Its affairs in fact would have been wound up on account of its bankruptcy. If the Sangh is still existing, it is not because its endeavours are sustained by Hindu charity directed to the uplift of the Untouchables. It exists because the Congress Governments which are now established in the different Provinces have come to the rescue of the Sangh. They have handed over to the Sangh certain social welfare work which former Governments carried out through Government Departments or Government Officials with the money grants. Thus the Sangh is now living on Government funds. As an institution maintained by the Hindus with the help of Hindu Charity for the Untouchables the Sangh simply does not exist.

The din and noise which was created by Mr. Gandhi's fast was simply deafening. The readiness to make sacrifices to save his life was great and the eagerness shown to befriend the Untouchables was surprizing and overwhelming. All this has vanished leaving the

*Census Report, 1931. (*Inserted, as the figures are not shown in the MS.—Ed.*)

Untouchables high and dry. If the desire to contribute towards the maintenance of the Sangh—which the Hindus founded as an earnest of their acceptance of their obligation towards the Untouchables—is any measure of the reality of the change of heart then it must be admitted that the change has died with the occasion which caused it. Gandhi broke his fast and the Hindu lost his new-born love for the Untouchables.

The premature decay of the Sangh should make it unnecessary for me to consider the work it did. But the Sangh is held out as a great monument to Mr. Gandhi. It is therefore proper that I should examine the work done by the Sangh and the policy underlying that work.

The work of the Sangh follows certain well defined lines.

In the field of education the Sangh has sought to encourage higher education among the Untouchables by instituting scholarships for the Arts, technical and professional courses. The Sangh also gives scholarships to High School students. The Sangh also maintained Hostels for Untouchable students attending colleges and High Schools. The great part of the educational activities of the Sangh is taken up in maintaining separate schools for primary stage children where there were no common schools in the vicinity or where common schools were closed to them.

Next comes the welfare activities of the Sangh. The medical aid which the Sangh undertakes to render to the Untouchables falls under this head. This is done by intendant workers of the Sangh who go in Harijan quarters to give medical aid to the sick and ailing among the Untouchables. The Sangh also maintains a few dispensaries for the use of the untouchables. This is a very small activity of the Sangh.

The more important part of the welfare activity of the Sangh relates to water supply. The Sangh does this by (1) sinking new wells or installing tube wells and pumps for the use of the untouchables, (2) repairing old ones and (3) persuading local Governments and bodies to sink and repair wells for the Untouchables.

The third line of activity undertaken by the Sangh is economic. The Sangh seems to run a few industrial schools and it is claimed that the industrial schools run by the Sangh produced a number of trained artisans who have taken to independent living. But according to the report, more successful and substantial work was done by way of organizing and supervising cooperative societies among the Untouchables.

Such is in brief the record of the work done by the Sangh. It is largely directed by the Caste Hindus. There are very few Untouchables who have any voice in directing the activities of the Sangh. I have had

no connection with the Sangh. But I might mention that when the Sangh was started I was invited to join. I had great desire to cooperate with the Hindus for the removal of untouchability. I had my own views regarding the policy and programme which the Sangh should adopt for accomplishing this task. Immediately after the Sangh was established I had to go to London to attend the Round Table Conference and had no opportunity to talk the matter over with the other members of the Sangh. But I posted a letter to the General Secretary of the Sangh Mr. Thakkar on the 14th November 1932 on Board the Ship *M. V. "Victoria"*. Excepting a short introductory para which I omit, the following is the full text of the letter:

"In my opinion there can be two distinct methods of approaching the task of uplifting the Depressed Classes. There is a school which proceeds on the assumption that the fate of the individual belonging to the Depressed Classes is bound up with his personal conduct. If he is suffering from want and misery it is because he must be vicious and sinful. Starting from this hypothesis, this school of social workers concentrates all its efforts and its resources on fostering personal virtue by adopting a programme which includes items such as temperance, gymnasium, co-operation, libraries, schools etc., which are calculated to make the individual a better and virtuous individual. In my opinion there is also another method of approach to this problem. It starts with the hypothesis that the fate of the individual is governed by his environment and the circumstances he is obliged to live under and if an individual is suffering from want and misery it is because his environment is not propitious.

"I have no doubt that of the two views the latter is the more correct. The former may raise a few stray individuals above the level of the class to which they belong. It cannot lift the class as a whole. My view of the aim of the Anti-Untouchability League is that it has come into existence not for helping a few individuals at random or a few selected boys belonging to the Depressed Classes but for raising the whole class to a higher level. Consequently I would not like the League to dissipate its energies on one programme calculated to foster private virtue. I would like the Board to concentrate all its energies on a programme that will effect a change in the social environment of the Depressed Classes. Having stated in general terms my views I venture to place some concrete proposals for work to be undertaken by the League.

"I think the first thing that the League should undertake is a campaign all over India to secure to the Depressed Classes the enjoyment of their civic rights such as taking water from the village

wells, entry in village schools, admission to village chawdi, use of public conveyance etc.

“Such a programme if carried into village will bring about the necessary social revolution in the Hindu society without which it will never be possible for the Depressed Classes to get equal social status. The Board must however know what difficulties it will have to face if this campaign of civic rights is to be carried through. Here I can speak from experience because I as President know what happened when the Depressed Classes Institute and the Social Equality League launched such a plan in the Kolaba and Nasik Districts of the Bombay Presidency.

“First of all there will be riots between the Depressed Classes and the Caste Hindus which will result in breaking heads and in criminal prosecutions of one side or the other. In this struggle the Depressed Classes will suffer badly. There has not been a single case in the course of the social struggle carried on in these two districts in which the Police and the Magistracy have come to the rescue of the Depressed Classes even when justice was on their side. Secondly the villages will proclaim a complete boycott of the Depressed Classes the moment they see that the latter are trying to reach a status of equality along with them.

“I have mentioned only two of the many obstacles which the League will have to overcome if this campaign of civic rights is to be successful and the League will have to have an army of workers in the rural parts who will encourage the Depressed Classes to fight for their rights and who will help them in any legal proceedings arising therefrom to a successful issue. It is true that this programme involves social disturbances and violent scuffle. But I do not think that it can be avoided. I know the alternative policy of adopting the line of least resistance. I am convinced that it will be ineffective in the matter of uprooting untouchability.

“The silent infiltration of rational ideas among the ignorant mass of Caste Hindus cannot, I am sure, work for the salvation of the Depressed Classes. First of all the Caste Hindu like all human beings follows his customary conduct in observing untouchability towards the Depressed Classes. Ordinarily, people do not give up their customary mode of behaviour because somebody is preaching against it.

“The salvation of the Depressed Classes will come only when the Caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. For that you must create a crisis by direct action against his customary code of conduct. The crisis will compel him to think

and once he begins to think he will be more ready to change than he is otherwise likely to be.

“The great defect in the policy of least resistance and silent infiltration of rational ideas lies in this that they do not ‘compel’ for they do not produce crisis. The direct action in respect of the Chowdar tank in Mahad, the Kalaram temple in Nasik and the Guruvayur temple in Malabar have done in a few days what million days of preaching by reformers would never have done.

“The second thing I would like the Anti-Untouchability League to work for is to bring about equality of opportunity for the Depressed Classes. Much of the misery and poverty of the Depressed Classes is due to the absence of equality of opportunity which in its turn is due to Untouchability. I am sure you are aware that the Depressed Classes in villages and even in towns cannot sell vegetables, milk or butter—ways of earning a living which are open to all and sundry. A Caste Hindu, will buy these things from a Non-Hindu, but he will not buy them from the Depressed Classes. In the matter of employment his condition is the worst.

“Like the Negro in America he is the last to be employed in days of prosperity and the first to be fired in days of adversity. And even when he gets a foothold what are his prospects ? In the Cotton Mills in Bombay and Ahmedabad he is confined to the lowest paid department where he can earn only Rs. 25 per month. More paying departments like the weaving department are permanently closed to them. The place of the boss is reserved for the caste Hindu while the Depressed Class worker must slave as his underdog no matter how senior or how efficient.

“Depressed Class women working in the winding or reeling departments have come to me in hundreds complaining that the Naikins, instead of distributing the raw material to all women employees equally or in fair proportion, give all of it to the caste Hindu women and leave them in the cold.”

“I think it would be fit and proper if the Anti-Untouchability League were to take up this question by creating public opinion in condemnation of it and establishing Bureaus to deal with urgent cases of inequality.

“Lastly I think the League should attempt to dissolve that nausea which the touchables feel towards the untouchables and which is the reason why the two sections have remained so much apart as to constitute separate and distinct entities. In my opinion the best way of achieving it is to establish closer contact between the two. Only a common cycle of participation can help people to overcome that

strangeness of feeling which one has when brought into contact with the other. Nothing can do this more effectively in my opinion than the admission of the Depressed Classes to the houses of the caste Hindus as guests or servants.

“The live contact thus established will familiarize both to a common and associated life and will pave the way for that unity which we are all striving after. I am sorry that many caste Hindus who have shown themselves responsive are not prepared for this.

“During those ten days of the Mahatma’s fast that shook the Indian world there were cases in Ville Parle and in Mahad where the caste Hindu servants had struck work because their masters had abrogated the rules of untouchability by fraternizing with the Untouchables. I expected that they would end the strike and teach a lesson to the erring masses by filling the vacancies by employing Depressed Classes in their places. Instead of doing that they capitulated with the forces of orthodoxy and strengthened them. I do not know how far such fair-weather friends of the Depressed Classes would be of help to them.

“People in distress can have very little consolation from the fact that they have sympathisers if those sympathisers will do nothing more than sympathise and I may as well tell the League that the Depressed Classes will never be satisfied of the bonafides of these caste Hindu sympathisers until it is proved that they are prepared to go to the same length of fighting against their own kith and kin in actual warfare if it came to that for the sake of the Depressed Classes as the Whites of the North did against their own kith and kin namely the Whites of the South for the sake of the emancipation of the Negro.

“The League will have to employ a very large army of workers to carry out its programme. The appointment of social workers might perhaps be looked upon as a minor question. Speaking for myself, I attach very great importance to the selection of a proper agency to be employed in this behalf. There can always be found workers to do a particular piece of work or any other for the matter of that if they are paid for it. I am sure such mercenary workers will not serve the purpose of the League. As Tolstoy said “Only those who love can serve”. In my opinion that test is more likely to be fulfilled by workers drawn from the Depressed Classes. I should therefore like the League to bear this aspect of the question in mind in deciding upon whom to appoint and whom not to appoint. I do not suggest that there are hot scoundrels among the Depressed Classes who have not made social service their last refuge. But largely speaking

you can be more sure that a worker drawn from the Depressed Classes will regard the work as love's labour a thing which is so essential to the success of the League.

"Secondly there are agencies which are already engaged in some sort of social service without any confines as to class or purpose and may be prepared to supplement their activity by taking up the work of the Anti-Untouchability League in consideration of a grant-in-aid. I am sure this hire-purchase system of work, if I may use that expression, can produce no lasting good. What is wanted in an agency is a single-minded devotion to one task only. We want bodies and organizations which have deliberately chosen to be narrow-minded in order to be enthusiastic about their cause. The work if it is to be assigned must be assigned to those who would undertake to devote themselves exclusively to the work of the Depressed Classes.

"Before closing this I wish to say just this. It was Balfour, I think, who said that what could hold the British Empire together was love and not law. I think that observation applies equally well to the Hindu society.

"The touchables and the untouchables cannot be held together by law, certainly not by any electoral law substituting joint electorates for separate electorates. The only thing that can hold them together is love.

"Outside the family, justice alone, in my opinion can open the possibility of love, and it should be the duty of the Anti-Untouchability League to see that the touchable does, or failing that, is made to do justice to the untouchable. Nothing else in my opinion can justify the project or the existence of the League."

This letter was not even acknowledged by the Secretary. That not a single suggestion of mine was accepted goes without saying. Even my suggestion that the workers of the Sangh should be drawn largely from the Untouchables themselves was not accepted. Indeed when the attention of Mr. Gandhi was drawn to the fact that the Harijan Sevak Sangh had become the hive of mercenary Hindus, he defended it on the ground which are clever if not honest.

¹ He said to the deputation of the Untouchables;

"The welfare work of the Untouchables is a penance which the Hindus have to do for the sin of Untouchability. The money that has been collected has been contributed by the Hindus. From both points of view the Hindus alone must run the Sangh. Neither ethics

¹ This quotation is taken from Dr. Ambedkar's book 'What Congress & Gandhi have done to the Untouchables', p. 142. (*This extract are not mentioned in the MS.—Ed.*)

nor right would justify Untouchables in claiming a seat on the Board of the Sangh.”

Not only were all my proposals rejected by Mr. Gandhi and his advisers but in framing the constitution of the Sangh, aims and objects were adopted which are quite opposed to those which I had suggested.¹ At the meeting held in Cowasjee Jehangir Hall in Bombay on the 30th September 1932 the aims of the organization were stated to be:

“Carrying propaganda against Untouchability and taking immediate steps ‘to secure as early as practicable that all public wells, dharmashalas, roads, schools, crematoriums, burning ghats and all public temples be declared open to the Depressed Classes, provided that no compulsion or force shall be used and that only peaceful persuasion shall be adopted towards this end’.”

But in the statement issued by Mr. G. D. Birla and Mr. A. V. Thakkar on the 3rd November, two months after its inauguration it was stated:

“The League believes that reasonable persons among the Sanatanists are not much against the removal of Untouchability as such, as they are against inter-caste dinners and marriages. Since it is not the ambition of the League to undertake reforms beyond its own scope, it is desirable to make it clear that while the League will work by persuasion among the caste Hindus to remove every vestige of Untouchability, the main line of work will be constructive, such as the uplift of Depressed Classes educationally, economically and socially, which itself will go a great way to remove untouchability. With such a work even a staunch Sanatanist can have nothing but sympathy. And it is for such work mainly that the League has been established. Social reforms like the abolition of the caste system and inter-dinning are kept outside the scope of the League.”

These aims and objects are described in one of the Annual Reports of the Sangh. It says:²

“According to its constitution the aim and object of the Society is the abolition of untouchability by reason of birth and the acquisition of equal rights of access of public temples, wells, schools and other public institutions for Harijans as enjoyed by other Hindus.

The achievement of this object has led the Society to undertake work of a two-fold kind. First, the Society has to bring about such a radical change in the sentiments and opinions of Caste Hindus that they may willingly, as a matter of course, allow the enjoyment of all civic rights to Harijans. Secondly, the society has to put forth its

¹ *Reprduced from ‘What Congress etc.’ pp. 140-41 as the page in the MS is left blank.—Ed.*

² Report for 1932-33, p. 1.

efforts and devote its funds for the educational, economic and social uplift of Harijans."

The work done and the aims formulated when put side by side raise two questions. Firstly is this record something of which the Sangh can be proud of? Secondly is its work consistent with the aims of the Sangh? The record is very poor. It is much cry and little wool. Certainly as compared with the record of work done by the Christian Missions with which the Sangh competes, it is not a record of which the Sangh can be proud of. But this is a mere matter for sorrow and nothing more. The second question is fundamental and therefore one for anxious consideration. It is well that the Sangh undertakes to labour in the interests of the Untouchables. But its labours must be so planned that out of it will come the destruction of untouchability.

Examined in the light of this consideration what is one to say of the work that is being done by the Sangh? The Sangh is openly and without abashment supporting *separate* schools, *separate* hostels, *separate* dispensaries, and *separate* wells for the Untouchables. I should have thought that that was the surest way of perpetuating untouchability. It is surprising that Mr. Gandhi who threatened to fast unto death against separate electorates on the ground that it involved segregation of the untouchables should himself sanction a line of activity which perpetuates this segregation. In undertaking to render this social service to the Untouchables, Mr. Gandhi and his Sangh should have forgotten what the Untouchables want. What the Untouchables want is not education, but the right to be admitted to common schools. The Untouchables do not want medical aid; what they want is the right to be admitted to the general dispensary on equal terms. The Untouchable does not want water. What he wants is the right to draw water from a common well. The Untouchables do not want their suffering to be relieved. They want their personality to be respected and their stigma removed. Once their stigma is removed their sufferings will go. This the Harijan Sevak Sangh does not seem to have realized. The Sangh is said to be the friend of the Untouchables and the orthodox Hindu the enemy of the Untouchables. One fails to understand what the friend has done which the enemy would not do. The orthodox Hindu insists that the Untouchables shall have *separate* schools, *separate* dispensaries and *separate* wells, the Sangh says—*Thy will shall be done*. Except the fact the orthodox Hindu believes in untouchability and Harijan Sevak Sangh does not, what is the difference in practice between the friend and the foe? Under both, the untouchable is condemned to *separate* schools, *separate* hostels and *separate* wells. If this is so, it is difficult to understand why

Mr. Gandhi and the Harijan Sevak Sangh should pick up a quarrel with the orthodox Hindu if he and his Sangh are not prepared to force the issue. Whether the Hindu Shastras recognize untouchability or not is only an academic quarrel between Mr. Gandhi and the orthodox Hindu. It can do no practical good. On the contrary I am prepared to say that it had done positive harm to the Untouchables. In the first place it has created enmity between the Untouchables and the orthodox Hindus. Before Gandhi picked up this needless quarrel the relations between the Untouchables and the Hindus were non-social. The quarrel has made them anti-social. Secondly if there was no such quarrel, if instead of untouchability being made the issue—which Mr. Gandhi does not intend to fight it out—an appeal was made to the orthodox Hindu to remove the suffering of the Untouchables, many an orthodox Hindu I know would have come forward to help to remove the suffering. Mr. Gandhi has reaped the glory for having established the Sangh. But the Sangh has neither sought to remove untouchability nor has it helped to alleviate the sufferings of the Untouchables.

Why has the Sangh failed ? My answer is quite definite. I say the Sangh has failed because of its wrong politics.

It has often been said that the Harijan Sevak Sangh is a political organization. Mr. Gandhi has always resented such an allegation and repudiated it as being false. The General Secretary of the Sangh has also protested against it. To use his own words “the Sangh, though a sequel of a Political Pact, has no politics”.

I do not see any reason for the resentment of Mr. Gandhi nor for the protests of his Secretary. I wish very much that the Sangh was a political organization. The untouchables have obtained a share of political power. But power which is not conscious of itself is no power. Again power which is not organized is no power. The Harijan Sevak Sangh would have been of great use if it had helped the Untouchables to organize independent political parties to fight the elections and make their political power effective. Nor can I accept the statement of Mr. Gandhi and his Secretary that the Sangh has no politics. On the contrary I insist that not only the Sangh has a definite line of politics and that that line of politics is wrong because it is prejudicial to the cause of the Untouchables.

Since Mr. Gandhi does not admit that the Sangh has politics, one must go to circumstances for proof. Circumstantial proof is always better than oral testimony because as is well said man may lie but circumstances cannot. In this connection I want to rely upon a clause in the constitution of the Sangh as a piece of evidence in support of my contention. The clause relates to the means to be adopted by the Sangh