CHAPTER VIII

THE REAL ISSUE

Aren't The Untouchables A Separate Element?

I

WHAT is the fundamental issue in the controversy between the Congress and the Untouchables ? As I understand the matter, the fundamental issue is: *Are the Untouchables a separate element in the national life of India or are they not ?*

This is the real issue in the controversy and it is on this issue that the Congress and the Untouchables have taken opposite sides. The answer of the Untouchables is yes. They say, they are distinct and separate from the Hindus. The Congress on the other hand says 'No' and asserts that the Untouchables are a chip of the Hindu block. This is the attitude of the parties to the issue. The attitude of the British Government was made clear by Lord Linlithgow[1] in his statements as Viceroy and Governor-General of India in which he declared in quite explicit terms that the Untouchables were a separate element in the national life of India. Many people who regard the issue of constitutional safeguards as the fundamental issue will feel surprised that I should regard as fundamental an issue so apparently different from what they regard as fundamental. Really speaking there is no difference. It all depends upon what one regards as the proximate and what as ultimate. Others regard the question of constitutional safeguards as ultimate. I regard as proximate. What I have stated as fundamental I regard as ultimate from which the proximate follows, as the conclusion does from the premise in a logical syllogism. It may be as well for me to state why I have thought it necessary to make this difference. The evolution of the Indian Constitution appears to me to have established a sort of a logical syllogism. The major premise in the syllogism is that where there exists an element in the national life of India, which is definable as a separate and distinct element it is entitled to constitutional safeguards. An element, making a claim for constitutional safeguards, must show that it is

1. See Appendix VI, Items 9 and 12.

definable as separate and distinct from the rest. If it shows that it is separate and distinct, its right to constitutional safeguards is held admissible.

That is how the provisions for constitutional safeguards for Muslims, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and Sikhs have come into being. It is true that the constitution of India has not been framed in the light of principles. It has grown in an haphazard manner, more in answer to exigencies than in accordance with principles. Nevertheless, this silent postulate, if not a principle to which I have referred, seems to be working throughout. The right of a group to constitutional safeguards has come to be treated as consequential. It is deemed to follow automatically when the fundamental condition is satisfied, namely that they do constitute a separate and a distinct element in the national life of India. In dealing with this controversy, one must deal with it as one is required to do with a syllogism. In a syllogism both are fundamental, the conclusion as well as the premise and to close the argument it is not enough to deal with the conclusion and omit to examine the premise. Looking at the question from this angle I think I ought not to close the case of the Untouchables with no more than a discussion of the constitutional safeguards. I feel that I ought to deal also with the premise, the ultimate, or the fundamental proposition, from which the constitutional safeguards seem to follow, if not as a matter of course at least as a matter of precedent.

It will thus be seen that the decision I have taken to give a separate treatment to the ultimate as distinguished from the proximate proposition is not without justification. It also seems to be necessary to deal with it separately and substantially, because the Congress seems to be fully aware of the fact that this is the fundamental issue and knows that once it concedes that the Untouchables are a separate element it cannot prevent them from succeeding in their claim for constitutional safeguards. If the Congress has come forward to contest this proposition it is because it thinks that it is the first trench and if it fails to maintain it, it cannot save the situation.

II

It must be a matter of considerable surprise to those who know the conditions in India that the Congress should come

forward to controvert what is incontrovertible, namely, that the Untouchables are separate from the Hindus. But since the Congress has chosen to do so, I must deal with the issue as best as I can.

The grounds advanced by the Untouchables that they are separate from the Hindus are not difficult to comprehend. Nor do they require a long and an elaborate statement. The statement of their case can be fully covered by a simple question. In what sense are they Hindus ? In the first place, the word 'Hindu' is used in various senses and one must know in what sense it is used before one can give a proper answer to the question. It is used in a territorial sense. Everyone who is an inhabitant of Hindustan is a Hindu. In that sense it can certainly be claimed that the Untouchables are Hindus. But so are the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jews, Parsis, etc. The second sense in which the word 'Hindu' is used is in a religious sense. Before one can draw any conclusion, it is necessary to separate the dogmas of Hinduism from the cults of Hinduism. Whether the Untouchables are Hindus in the religious sense of the word depends upon whether one adopts as his tests the dogmas or the cults. If the tests of Hinduism are the dogmas of Caste and Untouchability then every Untouchable would repudiate Hinduism and the assertion that he is a Hindu. If the test applied is the acceptance of a cult such as the worship of Rama, Krishna, Vishnu and Shiva and other Gods arid Goddesses recognized by Hinduism the Untouchables may be claimed to be Hindus. The Congress as usual maintains a body of agents from among the Untouchables to shout when need be that the Untouchables are Hindus and that they will die as Hindus. But even these paid agents will not agree to be counted as Hindus if they are asked to proclaim themselves as Hindus, if Hinduism means belief in caste and Untouchability.

One more point must be stressed. On the foregoing analysis the Untouchable may be classed as a Hindu if the word Hindu is used in the religious but in the limited sense of a follower of a recognized cult. Even here, there is a necessity for giving a warning against concluding that the Hindu and the Untouchable have a common religion. The fact is that even as followers of recognized cults they cannot be said to have a common religion. The exact and appropriate expression would be to say that they have a similar religion. A common religion means a common cycle of participation. Now, in the observances of

the cults there is no such common cycle of participation. The Hindus and the Untouchables practise their cults in segregation so that notwithstanding the similarity of their cults they remain as separate as two aliens do. Neither of these two senses of the word 'Hindu' can yield any result which can be of help in determining the political question, which alone can justify the discussion.

The only test which can be of use is its social sense as indicating a member of the Hindu Society. Can an Untouchable be held to be part of the Hindu Society ? Is there any human tie that binds them to the rest of the Hindus ? There is none. There is no *connubium*. There is no *commensalism*. There is not even the right to touch, much less to associate. Instead, the mere touch is enough to cause pollution to a Hindu. The whole tradition of the Hindus is to recognize the Untouchable as a separate element and insist upon it as a fact. The traditional terminology of the Hindus to distinguish Hindus and Untouchables furnishes the best evidence in favour of the contention of the Untouchables. According to this traditional terminology, Hindus are called *Savarnas* and the Untouchables are called *Avarnas*. It speaks of the Hindus as *Chaturvarnikas* and of the Untouchables as *Panchamas*. Such a terminology could not have come into existence if separation had not become so prominent and its observance so necessary as to require coining of special terms to give expression to the fact.

There is thus hardly any substance in the Congress argument that the Untouchables are Hindus and that they cannot therefore demand the same political rights as the Muslims and others can. While the argument from tradition is a good and valid argument to prove that the Untouchables are not Hindus, it may appear to some to be a weak one. I do not wish to leave the field without directly meeting the Congress argument. For this purpose, I will grant that the Untouchables are Hindus by religion. But the question is : Does it matter if they are Hindus ? Can it come in the way of their being recognized as a separate element in the national life of India ? It is difficult to understand how the mere fact that they might be called Hindus by religion in such a limited sense can be the basis of an argument that they are an integral part of the Hindu society.

Admitting for the sake of argument that they are Hindus by religion, can it mean anything more than what I have

said—namely that they worship the same Gods and Goddesses as the rest of the Hindus, they go to the same places of pilgrimage, hold the same supernatural beliefs and regard the same stones, trees, mountains as sacred as the rest of the Hindus do ? Is this enough to conclude that the Untouchables and the Hindus are parts of one single community ? If that be the logic behind the contention of the Congress then, what-about the Belgians, Dutch, Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, French, Italians, Slavs, etc.? Are they not all Christians ? Do they not all worship the same God ? Do they not all accept Jesus as their Saviour ? Have they not the same religious beliefs ? Obviously, there is a complete religious unity between all of them in thought, worship and beliefs. Yet, who can dispute that the French, Germans and Italians and the rest are not a single community ? Take another case, that of the Whites and the Negroes in the U.S.A. They too have a common religion. Both are Christians. Can any one say that the two on that account form a single community ? Take a third case, that of the Indian Christians, Europeans and Anglo-Indians. They profess and follow the same religion. Yet it is admitted that they do not form one single Christian community. Take the case of the Sikhs. There are Sikhs, Mazbi Sikhs and Ramdasia Sikhs. All profess Sikhism. But it is accepted that they do not form one community. In the light of these illustrations it is obvious that the argument of the Congress is full of fallacies.

The first fallacy of the Congress lies in its failure to realize that the fundamental issue for settling the question whether to grant or not to grant constitutional safeguards is union *versus* separation of a social group in the population. Religion is only a circumstance from which unity or separation may be inferred. The Congress does not seem to have understood that the Musalmans and the Indian Christians have been given separate political recognition not because they are Musalmans or Christians but fundamentally because they form in fact separate elements from the Hindus.

The second fallacy of the Congress lies in its attempt to prove that where there is a common religion social union must be presumed. It is on the basis of this reasoning that the Congress hopes to win. Unfortunately for the Congress, it cannot. For the facts are strongly against making a conclusive inference. If religion was a circumstance from which social union was made

the only permissible inference then the fact that the Italians, French, Germans and Slavs in Europe, the Negroes and the Whites in the U.S.A. and the Indian Christians, Europeans, Anglo-Indians in India do not form a single community although they all profess the same religion is enough to negative such a contention. The pity of the matter is that the Congress is so completely enamoured of its argument based on religion as an unifying factor, that it has failed to realize that there is no concomittance between the two and that there are cases where there is no separation although religions are separate, that there are cases where separation exists in spite of a common religion and what is worst, separation exists because religion prescribes it.

To give a quietus to the Congress argument, it may be desirable to give one illustration of each of these cases. Of the first case the best and the easiest illustration I can think of is that of the Sikhs and the Hindus. They differ in religion. But they are not socially separate. They dine together; they marry together; they live together. In a Hindu family one son may be a Sikh, another a Hindu. Religious difference does not break the social nexus. Of the second, the case of the Italians, French, Germans in Europe and Whites and Negroes in America are as good illustrations as one would want. This happens where religion is a binding force but is not powerful enough to withstand other forces tending to divide such as the sentiment of race. Hindus and Hinduism are the best and perhaps the only illustrations of the third case, where separation is the effect of religion itself. That there can be such a case, Hindus at any rate need not require to be told. For, it is well known that Hinduism preaches separation instead of union. To be a Hindu means not to mix, to be separate in everything. The language commonly used that Hinduism upholds Caste and Untouchability perhaps disguises and conceals its genius. The real genius of Hinduism is to divide. This is beyond dispute. For, what do Caste and Untouchability stand for ? Obviously for separation. For Caste is another name for separation and untouchability typifies the extremist form of separation of community from community. It is also beyond dispute that Caste and Untouchability are not innocuous dogmas to be compared with other dogmas relating to the condition of the soul after death. They are parts of the code of conduct which every Hindu is bound to

observe during his life on earth. Caste and Untouchability far from being mere dogmas are among the foremost observances prescribed by Hinduism. It is not enough for a Hindu to believe in the dogmas of Caste and Untouchability. He must also observe Caste, and Untouchability, in the conduct of his daily life.

The separation, which Hinduism has brought about, between the Hindus and the Untouchables by its dogma of Untouchability is not a mere imaginary line of separation, such as the one which the Pope once drew in a quarrel between the Portuguese and their rivals for Colonial possessions; it is not like the colour line which has length but no breadth and which one may observe or one may not observe ; it is not like the race line, which involves distinction but no discrimination. It has both depth and width. Factually the Hindus and the Untouchables are divided by a fence made of barbed wire. Notionally it is *cordon sanitaire* which the Untouchables have never been allowed to cross and can never hope to cross.

To put the matter in general terms, Hinduism and social union are incompatible. By its very genius Hinduism believes in social separation which is another name for social disunity and even creates social separation. If Hindus wish to be one they will have to discard Hinduism. They cannot be one without violating Hinduism. Hinduism is the greatest obstacle to Hindu Unity. Hinduism cannot create that longing to belong which is the basis of all social unity. On the contrary Hinduism creates an eagerness to separate.

The Congress does not seem to realize that the argument it is using goes against itself. Far from supporting the Congress contention, it is the best and the most effective argument that can be advanced to prove the contention of the Untouchables. For, if any conclusion is to be drawn from the hypothesis that the Untouchables are Hindus it is that Hinduism has always insisted both in principle and in practice that the Untouchables are not to be recognized a chip of the Hindu block but are to be treated as a separate element and segregated from the Hindus.

If therefore the Untouchables say that they are a separate element, nobody can accuse them of having invented a new theory for the sake of political advantages. They are merely pointing out what the facts are and how these facts are the heritage of Hinduism itself. The Congress cannot honestly

and convincingly use Hinduism as an argument for refusing to recognise the Untouchables as a separate element. If it does, it is only because it is actuated by selfish motives. It knows that the recognition of the Untouchables as an element in the national life of India, as distinct and separate from the Hindus, must result in the apportionment of places in the Executive, the Legislature, and in the Public Services between the Untouchables and the Hindus and thus limit the share of the Hindus. The Congress does not like that the Hindus should be deprived of the share of the Untouchables which the Hindus are in the habit of appropriating to themselves. That is the real reason why the Congress refuses to recognize that the Untouchables are a separate element in the national life of India.

The second argument of the Congress is that the political recognition of the Untouchables as a separate element in the national life of India should not be permitted on the ground that it will perpetuate the separation between the Untouchables and the Hindus.

This is hardly an argument worth consideration. It is the weakest of its kind and shows that the Congress has nothing better to advance. Besides contradicting its previous argument, it is entirely misconceived.

If there is a real separation between the Hindus and the Untouchables and if there is the danger of discrimination being practised by the Hindus against the Untouchables then the Untouchables must receive political recognition and must be given political safeguards to protect themselves against the tyranny of the Hindus. The possibility of a better future cannot be used as an argument to prevent the Untouchables from securing the means of protecting themselves against the tyranny of the present.

In the second place, this argument can be used only by those who believe in the social fusion of the Hindus and the Untouchables and are actively engaged in pursuing means and methods which will bring about such a fusion. Congressmen have often been heard to say that the problem of the Untouchables is social and political. But the point is, are Congressmen sincere when they say that it is a social question ? Or do they use it as an excuse with a view to avoid the consequences of having to share political power with the Untouchables ? And, if they are sincere in holding that it is a social

question, what proof is there of their sincerity in this matter ? Have Congressmen sponsored social Reform among Hindus ? Have they carried on a crusade in favour of inter-dining and intermarriages ? What is the record of Congressmen in the field of Social Reform ?

III

It might be well to state what view the Untouchables took of the problem of Untouchables. Until the advent of the British, the Untouchables were content to remain Untouchables. It was a destiny preordained by the Hindu God and enforced by the Hindu State. As such there was no escape from it. Fortunately or unfortunately, the East India Company needed soldiers for their army in India and it could find none but the Untouchables. The East India Company's army consisted, at any rate in the early part of its history, of the Untouchables and although the Untouchables are now included among the non-martial classes and are therefore excluded from the Army, it is with the help of an army composed of Untouchables that the British conquered India. In the army of the East India Company there prevailed the system of compulsory education for Indian soldiers and their children both male and female. The education received by the Untouchables in the army while it was open to them gave them one advantage which they never had before. It gave them a new vision and a new value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the priest. They felt the shame of it as they had never done before and were determined to get rid of it. They too in the beginning thought their problem was social and struggled along the social lines for its solution. This was quite natural. For they saw that the outward marks of their social inferiority were prohibition of interdining and intermarriage between the Untouchables and the Hindus. They naturally concluded that for the removal of their stigma what was necessary was to establish social intercourse with the Hindus on terms of equality which in its turn meant the abolition of rules against interdining and intermarriage. In other words, first programme of action which the Untouchables launched out for their salvation after they became aware of their servile position

was to bring about Social Equality among all those, who come within the fold of Hinduism by insisting upon the abolition of the Caste System.

In this, the Untouchables found an ally in a section of the Hindus. Like the Untouchables, the Hindus also by the contact with the British had come to realize that their social system was very defective and was the parent of many social evils. They too desired to launch forth a movement of social Reform. It began with Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal and from there had spread all over India and ultimately culminated in the formation of the Indian Social Reform Conference with its slogan of Social Reform before Political Reform. The Untouchables followed the Social Reform Conference and stood behind it as a body and gave it their full support. As every one knows the Social Reform Conference is dead and buried and forgotten. Who killed it ? The Congress. The Congress with its slogans "Politics First, Politics Last," "Politics by Each, Politics by All" regarded the Social Reform Conference as its rival. It denied the validity of the creed of the Conference that social reform was a necessary percursor of political reform. Under a constant and steady fire from the Congress platform and from individual Congress leaders, the Social Reform Conference was burnt down and reduced to ashes. When the Untouchables lost all hope of their salvation through social reform, they were forced to seek political means for protecting themselves. Now for Congressmen to turn round and say that the problem is social is nothing but hypocrisy.

It is wrong to say that the problem of the Untouchables is a social problem. For, it is quite unlike the problems of dowry, widow remarriage, age of consent, etc., which are illustrations of what are properly called social problems. Essentially, it is a problem of quite a different nature in as much as it is a problem of securing to a minority liberty and equality of opportunity at the hands of a hostile majority which believes in the denial of liberty and equal opportunity to the minority and conspires to enforce its policy on the minority. Viewed in this light, the problem of the Untouchables is fundamentally a political problem. Granting however for the sake of argument that it is a social problem, it is difficult to understand why political recognition of and political safeguards for the security of the Untouchables should retard their social unification with the Hindus if there is a genuine

desire to set in motion processes which will bring about such a result. Congressmen appear to be arguing with no definite conception in their mind. They don't seem to have a clear idea of the inter-relation between political and social factors. This is well illustrated by its opposition to separate electorates and its preference to joint electorates. The process of reasoning is worth attention. In a joint electorate the Hindu votes for an Untouchable and the Untouchable votes for the Hindu. This builds up social solidarity. In a separate electorate the Hindu votes for a Hindu and an Untouchable votes for an Untouchable. This prevents social solidarity. This is not the point of view from which the Untouchables look at the question of electorates. Their point of view is which of the two will enable the Untouchables to get an Untouchable of *their* choice elected. But I am interested in scrutinizing the Congress argument. I do not wish to enlarge upon and complicate the argument. The reasoning of the Congress appears to be correct. But it is only a superficial view of the matter. These elections take place once in five years. It may well be asked how can social solidarity between the Hindus and the Untouchables be advanced by one day devoted to joint voting if for the rest of the five years they are leading severely separate lives. Similarly, it may well be asked how can one day devoted to separate voting in the course of five years make greater separation than what already exists or contrary-wise how can one day in five years devoted to separate voting prevent those who wish to work for union from carrying out their purposes. To make it concrete how can separate electorate for the Untouchables prevent intermarriage or inter-dining being introduced between them and the Hindus ? Only a congenital idiot will say that they can. It is therefore puerile to say that the political recognition of the Untouchables as a separate element and granting them constitutional safeguards will perpetuate separation between them and the Hindus if the Hindus desire to put an end to it.

IV

There are other floating arguments against the claim of the Untouchables for political safeguards which must also be examined. One such argument is that there are social divisions everywhere, not merely in India but also in

Europe; but they are not taken into account by the people of Europe in framing their constitutions. Why should they be taken into account in India ? The thesis is general. But it may be extended to such a length that even the claim of the Untouchables may be enveloped by it. As such I prefer to state why I think it is unsound.

In making my comments I propose to make a distinction between the statement and the argument founded on it and deal with them separately. The statement is good up to a point. In so far as it alleges that every society consists of groups it cannot be challenged. For even in European or American society there are groups associated together in various ways and for various purposes. Some are like the kindred closely bound together by blood or language. Some are of the nature of social classes differentiated on the basis of rank and status. Others are religious associations upholding particular dogmas, not to mention, political parties and industrial corporations, criminal gangs and so on in an endless variety with differing aims and bound together some loosely some closely by differing degrees of affinity. But when the statement goes beyond and says that the castes in India are not different from group and classes in Europe and America it is nothing but an arrant nonsense. The groups and classes of Europe may be the same as the caste in India to look at. But fundamentally was are quite different. The chief distinguishing feature is the isolation and exclusiveness which are the hall-marks of the castes in India and which are maintained as matter not of routine but of faith none of which characteristics is to be found in the group or the class system of Europe or America.

Turning to the thesis the social organization of India being different from, what it is in Europe and America it follows that while Europe and America need not take into account the facts and circumstances of their social organization in framing their constitution, India cannot omit to take account of her Caste and Untouchability. For a fuller understanding of the matter I may explain why Europe need not and why India must. The danger to a society organized in groups is that each group develops what are called “is own interests” and the question of forging constitutional safeguards arises from the necessity of counteracting the mischief that such interest might cause to others outside it. Where there is a possibility of

counteracting the mischief by non-political means there is no necessity for forging constitutional safeguards. If, on the other hand, non-political means of counteracting it do not exist then constitutional means must be forged. In Europe the possibility of counteracting mischief arising from a group seeking to maintain "its own interest" does exist. It exists because of the absence of isolation and exclusiveness among the various groups which allows free scope for interaction with the result that the dominant purpose of a group to stand out for its own interests and always seek to protect them as something violate and sacred gives way to a broadening and socialization of its aims and purposes. This endosmosis between groups in Europe affects dispositions and produces a society which can be depended upon for community of thought, harmony of purposes and unity of action. But the case of India is, totally different. The caste in India is exclusive and isolated. There is no interaction and no modification of aims and objects. What a caste or a combination of castes regard "as their own interest" as against other castes remains as sacred and inviolate as ever. The fact that they mingle and co-operate does not alter their character. These acts of co-operation are mechanical and not social. Individuals use one another so as to get desired results, without reference to the emotional arid intellectual disposition. The fact that they give and take orders modify actions and results. But it does not affect their dispositions. That being the case, the Indian constitution must provide safeguards to prevent castes with "their own interests" from doing mischief to other helpless castes.

There is another distinguishing feature of the Indian caste system which justifies why the Indian Constitution must take account of it and provide against mischief arising from it. Every society consists of groups. But it must be recognized that the mutual relations of the groups are not the same everywhere. In one society groups may be only *non-social* in their attitude towards one another. But in another they may be *anti-social*. Where the spirit which actuates the various social groups is only non-social their existence may not be taken into account in framing a constitution. There is no cause for danger in a group which is only non-social. But where a group is actuated by an anti-social spirit towards another and to which alien is synonymous with enemy the fact must be taken into account in framing the constitution and the class which

has been the victim of anti-social spirit must be given protection by proper safeguards. In India the castes are not merely non-social. Often they are anti-social. This is particularly true of the Hindus towards the Untouchables. A few facts will suffice to show how anti-social the Hindus are towards the Untouchables. For instance, the Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to take water from a well. The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables entry in schools. The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to travel in buses. The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to travel in the same railway compartment. The Hindus will not allow Untouchables to wear clean clothes. The Hindus will not allow Untouchables to wear jewellery. The Hindus will not allow Untouchables to put tiles on the roofs of their houses. The Hindus will not tolerate Untouchables to own land. The Hindus will not allow Untouchables to keep cattle. The Hindus will not allow an Untouchable to sit when Hindu is standing. They are not isolated acts of a few bad men among the Hindus. They are the emanations of the permanent anti-social attitude of the Hindu community against the Untouchables.[1]

It is unnecessary to carry the matter further. It is enough to say that the thesis is full of fallacies and it would be a most shameful piece of chicanery if it was used as a ground for opposing the demand of the Untouchables for constitutional safeguards.

V

There is another floating argument one sometimes comes across. The basis of the argument is that Untouchability is a vanishing thing and therefore there is no use recognizing the Untouchables as a separate element in the national life of India. Everything is vanishing and there is nothing that is permanent in human history. The point may be considered when Untouchability has gone root and branch. Until that state arrives, it is unnecessary to pay any regard to it. We must all hope for the disappearance of Untouchability. But we must be careful not to be misled by people who boast of being incorrigible optimists. An optimist is a good companion

1. For details, see my forthcoming volume—'*What The Hindus Have Dons To Us*'

to cheer up when one is in a state of depression. But he is not always a truthful witness of facts.

This argument is no argument at all. But since some people may be allured by it I wish to expose it and to show how futile it is. Those who raise this point do not seem to make a distinction between Untouchability as a touch-me-not-ism and Untouchability as a mental attitude manifesting itself in social discrimination. The two are quite different. It may be that Untouchability as a touch-me-not-ism may be gradually vanishing in towns, although I am doubtful if this is happening in any appreciable degree. But I am quite certain Untouchability as a propensity on the part of the Hindus to discriminate against the Untouchables will not vanish either in towns or in villages within an imaginable distance of time. Not only Untouchability as a discriminating propensity will not disappear but Untouchability as touch-me-not-ism will not disappear within a measurable distance of time in the vast number of villages in which the vast number of Hindus live and will continue to live. You cannot untwist a two-thousand-year-twist of the human mind and turn it in the opposite direction.

I am quite aware that there are some protagonists of Hinduism who say that Hinduism is a very adaptable religion, that it can adjust itself to everything and absorb anything. I do not think many people would regard such a capacity in a religion as a virtue to be proud of just as no one would think highly of a child because it has developed the capacity to eat dung, and digest it. But that is another matter. It is quite true that Hinduism can adjust itself. The best example of its adjust ability is the literary production called *Allahupanishad* which the Brahmins of the time of Akbar produced to give a place to his *Dine-Ilahi* within Hinduism and to recognize it as the Seventh system of Hindu philosophy. It is true that Hinduism can absorb many things. The beef-eating Hinduism (or strictly speaking Brahmanism which is the proper name of Hinduism in its earlier stage) absorbed the non-violence theory of Buddhism and became a religion of vegetarianism. But there is one thing which Hinduism has never been able to do—namely to adjust itself to absorb the Untouchables or to remove the bar of Untouchability. There have been many reformers who, long before Mr. Gandhi came on the scene, tried to remove the stain of Untouchability. But they have all failed. The reason for their failure appears to me to be very simple. Hindus

have nothing to fear from the Untouchables, nor have they anything to gain by the abolition of Untouchability. Hindus gave up beef-eating because they were afraid that otherwise Buddhism would overpower Hinduism. Hindus wrote *Allah-upanishad* because they had everything to gain by helping Akbar to establish a new religion. The author gained money by pleasing the Emperor and by lending aid to establish a religion which promised less tyranny and oppression to the Hindus than Islam held out. Neither of these considerations exist for the most sanguine among the Untouchables to expect that the Hindus will readily put an end to this curse of Untouchability.

Not only have the Hindus nothing to fear and nothing to gain, they have in fact much to lose by the abolition of Untouchability. The system of Untouchability is a gold mine to the Hindus. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables to serve as their retinue to enable the Hindus to maintain pomp and ceremony and to cultivate a feeling of pride and dignity befitting a master class which cannot be fostered and sustained unless there is beneath it a servile class to look down upon. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables to be used as forced labour and because of their state of complete destitution and helplessness can be compelled to work on a mere pittance and sometimes on nothing at all. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables to do the dirty work of scavengers and sweepers which the Hindu is debarred by his religion to do and which must be done for the Hindus by non-Hindus who could be no others than Untouchables. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables who can be kept to lower jobs and prevented from entering into competition for higher jobs which are preserved for the Hindus. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables who can be used as shock-absorbers in slumps and deadweights in booms, for in slumps it is the Untouchable who is fired first and the Hindu is fired last and in booms the Hindu is employed first and the Untouchable is employed last.

Most people believe that Untouchability is a religious system. That is true. But it is a mistake to suppose that it is only a religious system. Untouchability is more than a religious system. It is also an economic system which is worse than

slavery. In slavery the master at any rate had the responsibility to feed, clothe and house the slave and keep him in good, condition lest the market value of the slave should decrease. But in the system of Untouchability the Hindu takes no responsibility for the maintenance of the Untouchable. As an economic system it permits exploitation without obligation. Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation, but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation. That is because there is no independent public opinion to condemn it and there is no impartial machinery of administration to restrain it. There is no appeal to public opinion, for whatever public opinion there is it is the opinion of the Hindus who belong to the exploiting class and as such favour exploitation. There is no check from the police or the judiciary for the simple reason that they are all drawn from the Hindus, and take the side of the Exploiters.

Those who believe that Untouchability will soon vanish do not seem to have paid attention to the economic advantages which it gives to the Hindus. Untouchable cannot do anything to get rid of his untouchability. It does not arise out of any personal fault on his part. Untouchability is an attitude of the Hindu. For Untouchability to vanish, it is the Hindu who must change. Will he change ?

Has a Hindu any conscience? Is he ever known to have been fired with a righteous indignation against a moral wrong ? Assuming he does change so much as to regard Untouchability a moral wrong, assuming he is awakened to the sense of putting himself right with God and Man, will he agree to give up the economic and social advantages which Untouchability gives ? History, I am afraid, will not justify the conclusion that a Hindu has a quick conscience or if he has it is, so active as to charge him with moral indignation and drive him to undertake a crusade to eradicate the wrong- History shows that where ethics and economics come in conflict victory is always with economics. Vested interests have never been known to have willingly divested themselves unless there was sufficient force to compel them. The Untouchables cannot hope to generate any compelling force. They are poor and they are scattered. They can be easily suppressed should they raise their head.

On this analysis, Swaraj would make Hindus more powerful and Untouchables more helpless and it is quite possible that having regard to the economic advantages which it gives to the Hindus, Swaraj, instead of putting an end to Untouchability, may extend its life. That Untouchability is vanishing is therefore only wishful thinking and a calculated untruth. It would be most stupid—if not criminal—to take it into account in considering the demands of the Untouchables for constitutional safeguards and ignore the hard facts of the present and their certainty to continue in the indefinite future.

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