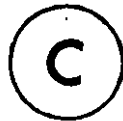


THE INTERPLAY OF IDEAS BEHIND THE
QUESTION OF UNTOUCHABILITY:
THE INTERACTION OF THE BRITISH, AMBEDKAR AND GANDHI

By



K. I. KOPPEDRAYER, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

April 1982

THE INTERPLAY OF IDEAS BEHIND
THE QUESTION OF UNTOUCHABILITY

MASTERS OF ARTS (1982)
(Religious Studies)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Interplay of Ideas Behind the Question of Untouchability:
The Interaction of the British, Ambedkar and Gandhi

AUTHOR: K. I. Koppedrayar, B.A. (McGill University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Paul Younger

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 266

Abstract

Article 17 of the Indian Constitution, abolishing Untouchability, is implicitly contravened by Articles 330-342 which guarantee political privileges to groups in the Indian population enumerated on the basis of Untouchability. These provisions were formulated during the Independence period as the result of a complex series of interactions primarily political in nature. From these interactions several different understandings of the status of the lowest stratum of the Hindu population emerged, of which three, the British, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's, and Mahatma Gandhi's, were crucial. These understandings, or paradigms, pertain to ideas about Untouchability and Hindu social organization, and are reflected in the Constitutional provisions.

The thesis examines this interplay of ideas behind the Constitutional clauses. Each of the three paradigms is abstracted and analyzed to determine the strategic assessment of the social situation of the lowest caste Hindus it presents. The analysis was done through an examination of the terminology used in reference to the lowest caste Hindus. A specific term is embodied in each paradigm: "Scheduled Caste" for the British, "Untouchable" for Ambedkar, and "Harijan" for Gandhi. Each term encodes a conceptual model of the reference group and a strategy to deal with that group. The study breaks down into discussions of the meaning and history of each term as used by its representative thinkers, or group of thinkers, in the context of the Independence struggle. These discus-

sions provide the means to decode and analyze the different ideas about Untouchability.

In addition, a fourth term, "Depressed Classes" is discussed, both as a part of the British paradigm, as it was the precursor to the term "Scheduled Castes", and as a part of the history of the Independence struggle. By examining the conversations about the "Depressed Classes", which took place during the negotiations for the transfer of power, the interactions of the British government officials, Ambedkar, and Gandhi become clearer and the logical complexity of the ensuing government policy is demonstrated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Paul Younger and Dr. Phyllis Granoff for their assistance and encouragement, and my husband Jaap for his tenacity. His support proved invaluable during this undertaking. I would also like to express my gratitude to Paule Maranda, who typed avec bonne humeur.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
I. THE BRITISH INITIATIVE	38
II. THE ROLE OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES IN THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE	94
III. AMBEDKAR'S POSITION: UNTOUCHABLE	153
IV. GANDHI'S RESPONSE: HARIJAN	216
CONCLUSION	250
BIBLIOGRAPHY	256

INTRODUCTION

Entrenched in the Constitution of India¹ are the privileges of a certain segment of the population. Articles 330-342, grouped under the heading, "Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes", outline a policy of political prerogative for members of "Scheduled Castes" and "Scheduled Tribes"². The political privileges accorded to this group include the guarantee of representation in the Central and State legislatures through the provision of reserved seats³, the promise of equal opportunity in government employment⁴, and the appointment of a special commissioner to oversee the implementation of this policy.⁵ These

-
1. Unless otherwise specified, the information about the Indian Constitution refers to the version which was ratified on January 26, 1950, and amended to date. A copy of this document is available in Constitutions of the World, vol. vii, edited by A.P. Blaustein and G.H. Hana (New York: 1979), pp. 20-169.
 2. The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes are viewed, classified and treated in the same way. In the Constitution, they are always referred to together. As well, in the discussion which took place in the Constituent Assembly, the conditions of the Scheduled Tribes was equated with that of the Scheduled Castes. Therefore, they will be referred to as a group, rather than as two groups. The recognition that the distinction between the two classifications was often blurred is important for later discussion.
 3. The Constitution of India, Part. XIV, Article 330 and 332.
 4. Article 335.
 5. Article 338.

preferential rights are called "safeguards"⁶. Elsewhere in the Constitution, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes are recommended for special care to promote their educational and economic interests, and are guaranteed protection from "social injustice and all form of exploitation"⁷.

It is obvious from a reading of the Constitution that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were singled out as a group needing both political protection and special social treatment. Such prerogative was granted to no other group, even though guaranteed representation of minority groups by provisional reservation had been a feature of Indian politics since the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909.⁸ In the Morley-Minto Reforms, the Muslim community was provided guaranteed representation in the legislature through separate franchise. Right up through Independence, communal representation continued to be an integral part of the power structure of India.

The consideration of minority rights was an important issue as the details of India's home rule were being worked out. In a report submitted to the Constituent Assembly by the Advisory Committee on Minorities, Fundamental Rights, Etc., dated 8 August, 1947,⁹ just seven

6. Ibid.

7. Part IV, Article 46.

8. Sitaramayya, Pattabhi, History of the Indian National Congress, vol. I (Bombay: 1946), p. 26.

9. The Government of India, The Constituent Assembly Debates (New Delhi: 1950), here cited as C.A.D., vol. 5, pp. 243-251. Vallabhbai Patel, Chairman of the Advisory Committee, drafted the report.

days prior to the final transfer of power¹⁰, seven minority communities¹¹ were recognized and it was recommended that they be guaranteed representation through a system of reservation.¹² In the Constituent Assembly, the Draft Constitution provided the Muslims, the Scheduled Castes, scheduled tribes¹³, and Indian Christians with guaranteed elected representation and allowed for nomination of members of the Anglo-Indian community.¹⁴ However, in 1949, the same committee recommended that all these reservations be dropped, except for those guaranteed to the Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes, citing the reason that¹⁵

conditions having vastly changed since ... the recommendations in 1947, it was no longer appropriate in the context of free India and of present conditions that there should be reservation of seats for Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, or any other religious minority... the reservation of seats for religious communities, it was felt, did lead to a certain degree of separatism and was to that extent contrary to the conception of a secular democratic State.

10. August 15, 1947, is celebrated as Independence Day in India. On this date, the Indian subcontinent, partitioned into India and Pakistan, was granted Dominion Status.
11. The minorities are the Anglo-Indians, Parsees, Plains' Tribesmen in Assam, Indian Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, and Scheduled Castes.
12. The recommendations were approved on August 25, 1947, just ten days after partition.
13. The phrase "scheduled tribes" appears in the Draft Constitution in non-capital letters, apparently because the scheduled tribes were not considered to be a well defined minority community. See C.A.D., vol. 9, p. 704. In the final draft of the Constitution, Scheduled Tribes is capitalized.
14. Constituent Assembly of India, The Draft Constitution of India, Prepared by the Drafting Committee (New Delhi: 1948), Part XIV, Articles 292-301.
15. C.A.D., op. cit., vol. 8, p. 311. The report, dated May 11, 1949, was drafted by Patel, and cites a resolution moved by Dr. H.C. Mookerjee, amended by Shri V.I. Muniswami Pillai, that the system of reservation for minorities other than the Scheduled Castes be abolished.

With respect to the Scheduled Castes, the report stated, "It was recognized, however, that the peculiar position of the Scheduled Castes would make it necessary to give them reservation for a period of ten years as originally defined"¹⁶. What the peculiar position of the Scheduled Castes was thought to be, though, was not specified. Despite such vagueness, the majority of members of the Constituent Assembly accepted the need for special provisions for the Scheduled Castes. In the final draft of the Constitution the system of reservation was retained and these rights and privileges have been renewed every ten years since 1950 with little substantial change.

The inclusion of these rights and privileges in the Indian Constitution is no political accident. The decision to retain the system of reservation for the Scheduled Castes ended a debate which had generated a great deal of controversy not only in the political arena, but also in Indian society as a whole. Despite the expression of concern about the "peculiar conditions of the Scheduled Castes"¹⁷, the incorporation of special benefits and privileges into the Constitution is not the result of a new dispensation extending benevolent grace to certain deprived members of Hindu society. To some degree, even a connection with a social reform movement is questionable. The rights, privileges, and status the Scheduled Castes were granted in the Constitution have a history going back to the political arena of the nineteenth century. The history of this policy is a history of dispute.

16. Ibid., p. 311.

17. C.A.D., op. cit., vol. 8, p. 311, Minority Report.

Hints of the controversy which surrounded the development of this policy can be found in the Constituent Assembly Debates. A Muslim member from the United Provinces, called the Scheduled Castes "a class of people who have been the victims of oppression... and so many difficulties" who should "now [1949] be given the freedom" to represent themselves.¹⁸ A member from Assam felt that the provisions would make amends for "the folly ... committed in the past and the treatment... accorded to them in the past"¹⁹. A member from Bombay argued that²⁰

The Harijans, generally known as Scheduled Castes, are neither a racial minority nor a linguistic minority, not certainly a religious minority... The Harijans are part and parcel of Hindu community.

The distinction between the Hindu community other than Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Castes is the barrier of Untouchability... By the fundamental Rights which we have accepted, untouchability is prohibited by law²¹... So far as Federation is concerned, we have removed the artificial barrier between one section of the Hindu community and the other.

... In view of those facts, any safeguard as a minority, as far as the Scheduled Castes are concerned, is illogical and will possibly prevent their complete absorption in the Hindu fold.

On the other hand, a representative from Bengal maintained that "on account of the extremely low educational and economical [sic] conditions of the Scheduled Castes and the grievous social disabilities from which

18. Ibid., p. 280. The speaker was Mr. Mohamad Ismail Sahib.

19. Ibid., p. 325. The speaker was Shri Rohini Kumar Chaudhari, representing a general constituency in Assam.

20. C.A.D., op. cit., vol. 5, pp. 227f. Shri K.M. Munshi, of Bombay, general constituency, was the speaker. He was speaking in reference to the Advisory Committee's Report on Minorities of August 8, 1947.

21. Article 17 of the Constitution reads, "'untouchability' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'Untouchability' is an offence punishable in accordance with law". Munshi, when referring to the "Fundamental Rights", is speaking about a series of articles found in the Constitution.

they suffer that the political safeguard of reservation of seats had been granted to them"²².

While these speakers agreed on the existence of a population segment labelled Scheduled Castes, but differed with each other on the type of treatment to be granted to this group, others questioned the logic behind the creation of a category of people known as "Scheduled Castes":²³

- The term 'Scheduled Caste' is a fiction. Factually there is no such thing as 'Scheduled Castes'...

There are thousands of Brahmins and Kshatriyas who are worse off than these friends belonging to the Scheduled Castes... By allowing caste representation, let us not re-inject the poisonous virus which the Britisher has introduced into our body politic. I would suggest... that instead of the so called Scheduled Caste [basis], minorities be protected... on class basis.

Obviously not everyone in the Constituent Assembly shared the same understanding of the "peculiar position of the Scheduled Castes". This raises a number of questions pertaining to the definition and classification of "Scheduled Castes". It is clear that this classification was utilized - and in fact created - for political purposes, but the arguments presented in the Constituent Assembly Debates throw into question the make-up of the reference group. In light of the fact that no other group was given such benefits, although minority rights were important considerations right up through the final process of transfer

22. C.A.D., op. cit., vol. 9, p. 683. Dr. Monomohon Das was the speaker.

23. Ibid., vol. 8, p. 344. The speaker was Shri Mahavir Tyagi of Bihar.

of power, questions concerning the classification of Scheduled Castes merit examination. This is especially so considering that these rights and privileges still exist, even though at the time the policy was implemented there seemed to be little agreement on what the classification of Scheduled Caste actually meant.

This study proposes to examine the logic behind the classification of the Scheduled Castes as a minority in need of safeguards in the form of special legal provisions. The first task is to clarify who the Scheduled Castes are. This would seem to be as straightforward as furnishing the definition for Scheduled Caste found in an official document. However, such a definition is not easy to find. The Constitution does not define the term, nor do any of the Minority Reports submitted to the Constituent Assembly. Article 341 of the Constitution simply refers to the President of India, who may specify "the castes, races or tribes... which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes"²⁴. This reference has prompted Ghurye to define Scheduled Castes as "Those groups which are named in the Scheduled Castes Order in force for the time being"²⁵.

In the Constituent Assembly Debates a number of terms were used synonymously with the expression "Scheduled Castes". In one of the speeches cited above, "Harijan" was used. As well, other references are found. For example:²⁶

24. See also Article 366 section 24 of the Constitution.
25. Ghurye, G.S., Caste and Race in India (Bombay: 1966), p. 306, also quoted in K.K. Wadhwa, Minority Safeguards in India (Delhi: 1979), p. 16.
26. C.A.D., op. cit., vol. 5, p. 202. Shri M. Pillai, representing Madras, general constituency, was speaking on August 27, 1947.

it was due to the third man residing in this country that brought out several minority communities... but... it was given to Mahatma Gandhi... to find the disabilities of a section of Hindus, namely the depressed classes known by various names, to come to their rescue and to take that great epoch-making fast which evoked all the Caste Hindus... to think what is 'Untouchables', what is 'Depressed Classes', what is 'Scheduled Castes', and what should be done for them.

The references to the "third man", to "minority communities", to Gandhi and his "epoch-making fast" are important, as will be seen in the later chapters of this study. What is of interest now is the series of terms: "Harijans", "Untouchables", "Depressed Classes", and "Scheduled Castes". Each term presumably refers to the same reference group, that is, the bottom stratum of the Hindu population comprised of the castes which are considered to have the lowest ritual, economic, and educational standing, but there are different nuances at play in the use of each of the terms. No clear consensual definition of the reference group emerges from the use of these terms in the Constituent Assembly.

The reasons which can be suggested to explain why so many terms are used to refer to the same population segment all point to the central issue: that the policy enshrined in the Constitution is the result of the interplay of a number of different ideas about the Scheduled Castes, the cumulative effect of which was incorporated in the Constitution as "Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes". This statement of the problem is based on the assumption that the use of different terminology is neither coincidental nor a matter of poetic licence. Rather, it is maintained that each term indicates a way in which the population group in question was perceived, and that this perception was conditioned by the understanding the politician or thinker who used the term had of

Indian culture. Hence, it will be argued that insight into much larger complexes of ideas about the organization of Indian society can be gained by examining the range of terms used in reference to this population group. In effect, "to think what is 'Untouchables', what is 'Depressed Classes', what is 'Scheduled Castes'" and what is "Harijans" is to think about what these terms meant for those who used them. To make any sense out of the special treatment accorded the Scheduled Castes by the Constitution, each of these complexes of ideas must be understood, not only separately, but also in relation to its historical context.

This study, thus, is an examination of the array of terms used during the Independence period to refer to the lowest stratum of the Hindu population.²⁷ Each of these terms has a history, and each was used

27. See Isaacs, H., India's Ex-Untouchables (Bombay: 1965), pp. 34-47, for a discussion on the problems of nomenclature and the difficulty any scholar faces in choosing a working label for this group. This brings up the question of how this population group will be labelled in this study. The method which has been adopted is contextual. In reference to a specific thinker or a specific period of time, the term used by that thinker, or in that circumstance is the label chosen. In that way, the conditional associations the labels have are more accurately portrayed. When the use of a general reference cannot be avoided, a phrase such as, "the lowest stratum of the Hindu population" is used to approximate a neutral statement. Where readability precludes such phrases, the term "Untouchable" has been chosen. "Scheduled Caste" was not chosen because it is meaningful only in reference to Articles 330-342 of the Constitution, and the Scheduled Caste quota system. "Untouchable" seems to be the term preferred by those so labelled. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the self-proclaimed leader of the Untouchables during the Independence period, and an Untouchable himself, used this term in all of his writings. The name "Harijan" widely promoted by Gandhi as an egalitarian term apparently has pejorative connotations for Untouchables. Most Untouchables find it patronizing. According to one reference, "Harijan" was the term used for a child of a devadāsī, the so-called temple prostitute. (Isaacs, op. cit., p. 42). Such a term obviously carries with it connotations of illegitimacy. Interestingly enough, the Dharmaśāstric description of the cāndālas, assumed by most scholars

in specific circumstances by specific thinkers or politicians for reasons which can be traced. The history and development of the Scheduled Caste policy is contained in the history of these terms. The material presented by this study will be organized around the use of these terms. A chapter will be devoted to each of the more important terms. These are the terms already cited, "Scheduled Castes", "Depressed Classes", "Untouchables", and "Harijans". The chapters, concentrating on the separate terms, will be more than mere descriptions of the use and history of these terms. Each chapter will focus on a thinker or group of thinkers, who in articulating a specific term, set forth a pattern of thinking about the status and condition of the population so labelled.

When the speeches, writings, and documents of the Independence period, are closely examined, the different categories of thinkers can be separated with relative ease. The choice of a label remains fairly constant throughout the records of each respective group. For example, "Depressed Classes" was introduced and favoured by the British officials from the late nineteenth century up to the Government of India Act of 1935. No official definition was given for "Depressed Classes" until just about the time it was replaced with the phrase, "Scheduled Castes". The documents pertaining to the 1935 Act mark this replacement. "Scheduled Castes" thus is also a term representative of the British approach.

"Untouchable" was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's term. Ambedkar, who spent his life campaigning for the political rights accorded to the Scheduled

to be prototypical of the Untouchables, establishes the cāndalas as the off-spring of the illegitimate union between a Brahman female and a Sūdra male. (Cf. Manu X: 47, 7, etc.). If what Isaacs records is correctly transcribed, the reciprocity between these two notions may not be entirely coincidental.

Castes in the Constitution, and who essentially wrote these rights into the Constitution in his capacity as chairman of the official drafting committee, always referred to this group, of which he was also a member, as "Untouchables". On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi, who is said to have written more on this subject than on any other, preferred "Harijan", the term he popularized after the 1932 fast, the "epoch-making fast" referred to above.

Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the British together represent the major streams of thought that fed into the creation of the system of reservation for the Scheduled Castes. Moreover, their thought is not only representative of the different approaches taken on the subject, but to a great extent is also responsible for the formulation of these approaches. These three essentially established the three major positions on the status and condition of the lowest-caste Hindus. The political interaction of Gandhi, Ambedkar, and certain British officials not only popularized, but also politicized the interest in the status of the lowest-caste Hindus. The politicization²⁸ of this status was tantamount to giving political recognition to a problem basically recognized as religious, but identified in terms of social relationships. Issues not usually the specific concern of government were, as the result of the British, Gandhi's, and Ambedkar's interactions, introduced into a political forum. As the ideas behind

28. S.F. Nadel, in The Theory of Social Structure (London: 1958), p. 88, offers probably the best definition of "politicization". He defines "politicization" as political authorities' interest in the role performance of certain statuses. As used here, the term pertains to the interest and concomitant controversy generated in the political arena by the question of the social status of the Untouchables during the Independence struggle.

the evolution of the official policy towards the Scheduled Castes are examined, the interplay of these different understandings of the Hindu cultural system, and their political implications will become clearer.

The chapters in this study are organized to outline each of the three patterns of thinking on the subject. As was stated earlier, each chapter will examine the logic underlying the use and meaning of one term. The first chapter will establish a working definition of "Scheduled Castes". This definition of "Scheduled Castes" will establish the British understanding of this group, and will introduce the role the British played in the politization of this issue. The reasons for beginning with the term "Scheduled Castes" are two. First, this chapter will clarify who the Scheduled Castes are and will establish the official identity of those at whom the Constitutional provisions are directed. "Scheduled Castes" pertains to the political definition of the lowest-caste Hindus. The process of establishing the official classification of the Scheduled Castes was an official procedure, done by the government for purposes of government (which was executed by the British in their official capacity), and relates directly to the system of reserved representation.

The second reason is derived from the first, and offers a justification for the deviation from a strictly historical approach. This study begins with the political definition of the group in order to establish the logic at play in the creation of a special category of low caste Hindus as a minority group. All indications point to the British understanding of the status of this group as the source of the present Scheduled Caste policy. The examination of the British role in defining the Scheduled

Castes as Scheduled Castes will clarify the logical framework of this policy. The discussion in the first chapter will also pertain to the term, "Depressed Classes", as it was the precursor of "Scheduled Castes" and was the term used in all official documentation prior to the Government of India Act of 1935. The discussion will refer to the way in which the British defined this term, and thus introduced the question of Depressed Class status into the political arena. Much of what is discussed in the first chapter involves the history of the policy, but the focus is on the history of ideas, and not on the history of events.

To put this policy in its historical context, the second chapter will outline the events which contributed to its development. In examining the use of the term "Depressed Classes" in the political arena, the Indian reactions to the British understanding of Depressed Classes will be established. By tracing the sequence of events which, from 1917 through Independence, led to the Constitutional stance on the status of the Depressed Classes, the roles played by the different thinkers will be defined. Although most of these events were controlled by the British interest in the bottom stratum of the Hindu population, Indian response to the British manoeuvres determined how the policy evolved. The second chapter is descriptive, as the logical underpinnings of the British approach are examined in the first chapter, but the outline of the history of the policy will define the arena in which the two main Indian politicians, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, interacted.

Following this description of the historical context of the interplay of ideas about the status of the lowest-caste Hindus in chapter two, the

third and fourth chapters will attempt to unravel the ideas of Ambedkar and Gandhi. The interaction of these two personalities is often cited as the basis of the Indian government's position on the Scheduled Castes. The active roles both Ambedkar and Gandhi played in the development of this policy are undisputed, and reference has been made above to the prominent roles each played in the exchange of ideas that fed into the politization of low-caste status. Both men were well-known to each other and to the British. The ideas of Ambedkar and of Gandhi each represent a different pattern of thinking about Hindu social organization; the two terms, "Untouchable" and "Harijan" respectively reflect these conceptual models. The deep structures of meaning encoded by these two terms will be the topics of chapters three and four. These meanings categorize distinct streams of thought current in the Independence movement. The pronouncements of Ambedkar and Gandhi provide some of the clearest statements on these complexes of ideas.²⁹

The order of chapters three and four may appear arbitrary, although there is some reason for placing the chapter on "Untouchables" immediately after the one on "Depressed Classes". Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who himself was an Untouchable, followed the British cues by entering the political arena to forward the Untouchables' involvement in the negotiations. Likewise, the Untouchables became Harijans only after Gandhi was forced by both the British and Ambedkar to take a strong stance on the political issues

29. Ambedkar and Gandhi are of course only two political thinkers. Both, however led political factions and had numerous followers who thought in accordance with their leaders. It is also recognized that there are certain discrepancies between the ways and means of the leader and of the led. Nonetheless, the thoughts of Ambedkar and Gandhi define the two major Hindu positions.

concerning the status of these peoples. Ambedkar's attempts to politicize the plight of the Untouchables led to the accusations that Ambedkar was playing into the hands of the British, that he was a British lackey or a stooge for the British.³⁰ Ambedkar often pointed out himself that the interest generated towards the Untouchables was only in response to the political conditions in India at that time. Such circumstances, he argued, were precipitated by the presence of the British.³¹

Ambedkar's political involvement was based on a postulation that once access to political power was realized, an elevation in the way of life would follow for the Untouchables.³² On the surface, it would appear that the reason behind Ambedkar's representation of the Untouchables' case in political debates involved a grab for power during the transfer of power. This may well be a correct appraisal of Ambedkar's politicking, but it was nonetheless defined by what "Untouchable" meant to him. Ambedkar's

30. For insight into the criticism Ambedkar faced, see his defense of his politics in What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables (Bombay: 1946), pp. 199-237. See also J. Nehru, Toward Freedom (New York: 1942), p. 232.

31. Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 16. See also S. Natarajan, A Century of Social Reform in India (Bombay: 1962), p. 119. Ambedkar did, though, speak against the British at the First Round Table Conference in London in 1930 when he pointed out the under one hundred and fifty years of British rule the conditions of the Depressed Classes had little improved, and had perhaps even worsened. (Indian Round Table Conference, 12th November, 1930-19th January, 1931 Proceedings, London: H.M.S.O. Cmd. 3997, p. 232).

32. For example, see Ambedkar's comments on the Report of the Statutory Commission, Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, vol. III. Reports of the Committees appointed by the Provincial Legislative Councils to Co-operate with the Indian Statutory Commission (London: H.M.S.O. Cmd. 3572), p. 125f. See also his comments made before the Backward Classes Commission in 1955, recorded in M. Verma, The History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh 1932-1968 (Delhi: 1971), p. 218.

politicking was rationalized by the conceptual framework of his understanding of Hindu social structure. An analysis of the meaning "Untouchable" had for Ambedkar will lead into a consideration of the arrangement of ideas which structured Ambedkar's politics to demonstrate that even the political guise of Ambedkar's leadership was bound by a set of meanings not so far estranged from traditional ideas about Hindu social organization.

Much of Ambedkar's ideas about "Untouchables" can be contrasted with Gandhi's ideas about "Harijans". To provide the ground for comparison, the fourth chapter will examine the logic of Gandhi's ideas on "Harijans". Gandhi's ideas on Harijans are properly his ideas from the 1930's on, as it was only after Gandhi "retired" from active politics to lead a national campaign to eradicate practice of Untouchability that he popularized the name "Harijans". But, Gandhi's thinking on the problem can be traced back to the 1920's when he was at the helm of the Indian National Congress.

Although Gandhi's ideas appear to have changed when he began his Harijan campaign, there is a great deal of continuity between his earlier ideas and his Harijan work. While focussing on Gandhi's later phase, that is, on the logic behind the use of the term "Harijan", this continuity, will be highlighted. Gandhi's approach and methods were avowedly religious, but were unsystematic at best. For Gandhi, the invocation of certain themes at certain times fit his criterion of religion. Once his thinking is studied systematically, it is possible to see patterns of meaning emerge which underscore orthodox thinking. In the discussion detailing Gandhi's response to the politization of the Untouchables (which was, in effect, "Harijans"), it will be demonstrated that at a deep level, Gandhi's

understanding of the status and conditions of the Untouchables mirrored his view of the structural patterns of the formal organization of caste society.

It is recognized that the terms, "Scheduled Castes", "Depressed Classes", "Untouchables", and "Harijans", all refer to the same set of people (theoretically at least). Nonetheless, in this thesis, these terms are treated as having different meanings because the models these terms encode differ considerably. There is a great deal of difference in the understanding of what was being addressed by those who used these terms. Apart from acknowledging that these thinkers and politicians all addressed the same set of empirical circumstances while in the political arena, there is little else that can be generalized about the politization of the Untouchables' status. Each thinker viewed the problem differently and devised different means to deal with it and the circumstances understood as its cause. The statement that a consensual agreement existed on the nature of the classification of the lowest-caste Hindus simply cannot be made. Even the goals or ends envisaged, although sharing features, differed from politician to politician. To argue that all the participants all agreed on a vision of modern India is folly: they all contributed to the creation of an idea of post-Independent India, but the logical constraints each thinker brought to the political arena became part of a composite vision.

Realizing that this interplay of ideas was an integral part of what took place during the Independence period makes it no easier to write about the political attention the Untouchables received. Little can be

said about this attention as a whole; everything must be described in conditional terms, with respect to the source of an idea, a gesture, a statement, or an act. To call what happened a coherent political movement is contrived: what happened was the result of a combination of factors working simultaneously. The Untouchables' status became a topic of political debate because different politicians found it useful for different reasons. Out of this interaction a government policy evolved.

The historical circumstance is far too important to overlook. Notwithstanding the abundance of rhetoric about the depressed social conditions of the Untouchables which permeated the discussions about preferential political rights, these debates concerned political power above all else. The issue of power was topical as transfer of power loomed ahead, and subjects which were not normally the topic of political discussions were manipulated by those involved in the struggle for power. In this way the issue of the status of the lowest-caste Hindus came into the forum of political discussion.

Although it is generally thought that political means were applied to a social issue to affect a change in the depressed status of the lowest-caste Hindus, it must ^{be} remembered that the ideas about the lowest-caste Hindus were manipulated for political purposes as well. The setting for this was the political arena of a country in the process of changing its power structure. In this arena a number of ideas were thought out and acted upon. Each thinker marshaled theories about certain aspects of Hindu social organization and what this organization meant. It is this set of meanings, locked in the terminology and ideas outlined above, that this study addresses.

This study does not pretend to present an accurate portrayal of the workings of Hindu society. Rather, it is an attempt to unravel the streams of thought which in interaction combined to produce the Constitutional clauses relating to the Scheduled Castes. The extent to which these ideas correctly reflect social facts is moot. Those whose thought provided this interplay of ideas were restrained by their own conceptual boundaries; whether these boundaries accurately outline the problems of the bottom stratum of Hindus is another question altogether, and no satisfactory answers are given here. What is clear, though, is that the social facts, the members of the Scheduled Castes and the lives they live were mere features of the conceptual models in the minds of those who manipulated the issues politically. The degree of the actual involvement of members of the Scheduled Castes and the effect the legal provisions have had on their lives, both during the Independence period and now is debatable.³³ Nonetheless, the directive principles of State policy have made certain assumptions about the condition of the Scheduled Castes and

33. A number of studies have been done to evaluate the effectiveness of this legislation. The results are often contradictory. For example, P. Aggarwal in Equality Through Privilege (New Delhi: 1976), makes the claim based on fieldwork conducted through interviews and questionnaires in Haryana that a very high percentage of the Untouchables are aware of the provision of guaranteed political representation and could name their representatives (100% in local assemblies, 78.8% in state assemblies, and 64.2% in Parliament). However, Agarwala also recognizes that the Untouchables are still separated from the rest of society (p. 1) and that the general depressed conditions of the Untouchables (with respect to other Indians) has not changed greatly (p. 8). S.A. Anant, in The Changing Conception of Caste in India (Delhi: 1972), based on questionnaires and interviews in Uttar Pradesh in 1971, challenges the idea that the Untouchables are even aware of their representatives. Anant provides figures to demonstrate that while most Untouchables are vaguely aware of the policy of guaranteed representation, very small percentage knew who their representatives were. Another study done by M.L. Jha, Untouchability and Education (Meerut: 1973) provides evidence to

these assumptions are rooted in the ideas about the lowest castes which were common during the Independence period.

One further observation must be made. The distinctiveness of each of the three major attitudes towards the lowest-caste Hindus has been emphasized at the risk of conveying the impression that the British, Ambedkar's, and Gandhi's understanding of the problems relating to low-caste existence have little in common. The reasons that this study has chosen to emphasize the differences in approach have already been specified. However, it should be noted that these different approaches did share features. The manipulation of ideas for political goals already mentioned is one such shared feature. The other major shared element has already been hinted at, and is known to anyone who is familiar with the workings of the caste system. This is the agreement that much of the problem relating to the existence of members of the lowest castes is derived from the concept of Untouchability. The definitions of "Scheduled Castes", "Depressed Classes", "Untouchables", and "Harijans" all reflect an understanding of the status of the lowest castes, or their "Untouchability". The "barrier of untouchability"³⁴ pertains to the "peculiar position of the Scheduled Castes"³⁵, the position which has guaranteed the Scheduled Castes political prerogatives long after all other minority rights have been dropped.

support a position that the attitudes of caste Hindus towards the Untouchables are still quite unfavourable, and that Untouchability is still practiced. There are other studies which cite figures to show that the quotas for job placement in the public service are rarely filled. See also M. Dass, A National Penitence: Removal of Untouchability (Government of India: 1976).

34. See p. 6, Shri K.M. Munshi's speech in the C.A.D.

35. See p. 3, The Minority Report of May 11, 1949.

"Untouchability", though, is no easier to define than "Scheduled Castes". This term, like "Scheduled Castes" appears in the Indian Constitution without clarification or definition. "Untouchability" in fact is banned, outlawed, made an offence punishable by law in the Constitution;³⁶ this has compounded the difficulty of clarification, both legal and otherwise. In the Constituent Assembly Debates some clues are given as to how "Untouchability" pertains to the Scheduled Castes. The most accurate statement about the relationship between "Untouchability" and the Scheduled Castes is given by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, when he observed that "Untouchable"³⁷

has no specific legal de jure connotation... It is a general term. Anyone may include anybody in the term 'untouchable'. It has no definite legal connotation. That is why in the Government of India Act of 1935, it was felt necessary to give the word 'untouchable' some legal connotation and the only way it was found feasible to do it was to enumerate the communities which in different parts and in different areas were regarded by the local people as satisfying the test of untouchability.

Although Ambedkar is giving a definition for his term, "Untouchable", in a rather circular fashion, what he states is entirely accurate: those castes "satisfying the test of untouchability" fall under the classification of Scheduled Castes in the British mind, of Harijans in Gandhi's mind, and of Untouchables in Ambedkar's mind. What the criterion of Untouchability meant for each, though, is another set of questions altogether.

Nonetheless, what Untouchability means is to a great extent the crux of the problem at which the Constitutional provisions are directed.

36. See p. 5, note 21, quoting Article 17 of the Constitution.

37. C.A.D., op. cit., vol. 7, p. 782.

Untouchability as associated with certain castes is the key concept which delineates classification of Scheduled Castes. This association with Untouchability is what determines eligibility for the benefits incorporated in the Constitution and expanded in later government.³⁸

For those involved in the formulation of this policy, Untouchability summarized the relationship the Scheduled Castes have with the rest of the Indian population. The substandard quality of life of the Scheduled Castes was attributed to the idea of Untouchability. Untouchability made the Scheduled Castes a minority.

All political discussions about the status and conditions of the lowest Hindu castes revolved around this issue. Untouchability was treated as a political crisis during the Independence period. The logic of deciding to deal with Untouchability as a political crisis has never been adequately explored, nor have the causes which precipitated this political attention been carefully examined.³⁹ How and why Untouchability became a political issue can only be understood when the ideas that fed into this process are separated. To do this, the major positions on the

38. In 1950 the Indian government set quotas for the Scheduled Castes in the public sector: 12½% of the vacancies by direct recruitment through open competition, and 16 2/3% of the vacancies by direct recruitment on all-India basis, otherwise than open competition. In 1970 the quota of 12½% for vacancies through open competition was increased to 15%. (Wadha, op. cit., pp. 201f.).

39. One recent Indian scholar laments that "it therefore seems very strange that no one should have attempted to write a comprehensive and particular (study) of the depressed classes' awakening till now". D.R. Kamble, Rise and Awakening of the Depressed Classes in India (Delhi: 1979), p. xix, makes the claim to a complete analysis; he does not succeed. Others have summarized the history of the period. Lelah Dushkin, in particular, has done an excellent study of the policy of the Indian National Congress, and later the Indian

issue must be understood: the British, Ambedkar's, and Gandhi's participation was determined by their respective definitions of the bottom stratum of Hindu society, or how they understood Untouchability. Hence the definitions of "Scheduled Castes", "Depressed Classes", "Untouchable" and "Harijans" are definitions of Untouchability according to the main streams of thought⁴⁰ in the Independence period.

Before turning the discussion to the issues raised by the politization of Untouchability, one further point must be made: Untouchability must be defined. So far, no clear statements on the meaning Untouchability have been made because Untouchability as a concept pertains to patterns of thinking and patterns of behaviour operating in the network of Hindu social relations. It is possible to discuss the meaning of Untouchability for Ambedkar, Gandhi, or a British politician with a relative degree of accuracy if the pattern of thinking of each is closely observed. But, to define what Untouchability means in the abstract, or in absolute terms is impossible. There is no abstract meaning of Untouchability, there are only different conceptualizations of this

government towards the Untouchables. Her works include: The Policy of the Indian National Congress Toward the Depressed Classes: An Historical Study, unpublished M.A. Thesis, 1957, University of Pennsylvania, Department of South Asian Studies; "The Backward Classes: Special Treatment Policy", Economic Weekly, XIII, 1961, pp. 1665-68, 1695-1705, 1729-38; "Scheduled Caste Policy in India: History, Problems, Prospects" in Asian Survey VII, 1967, pp. 626-636; "Scheduled Caste Politics" in M. Mahar, ed., Untouchability in Contemporary India (Tucson, Arizona: 1972), pp. 165-226. Dushkin's work has proved invaluable in this study.

40. There were other major ideological view-points, such as the Communist position, but these ideologies had little direct effect on the politization of Untouchability and will not be discussed.

feature of the Hindu belief system and its concomitant behavioural practices. Yet, to discuss the politization of this concept, some definition must be given.

For that reason, this introduction will close with a description of Untouchability. The discussion on the politicking which surrounded Untouchables and their Untouchability will resume in the next chapter. This brief description of Untouchability has been injected here to make it somewhat easier to refer to Untouchability in the following chapters. The intent of this description is to let the reader know what is meant by Untouchability in this study, and to highlight some of the nuances at play in the understanding of Untouchability. This description is not meant to make a definitive statement on the nature of Untouchability.

"Untouchability" is a term of relatively recent coinage. It is the substantive of the term "Untouchable" which first appeared in print in English in 1909⁴¹, in reference to members of the lowest Hindu castes. The term "Untouchable" itself is a literal translation of the Sanskrit term asprśya, which appears in the Mahābharata and the Bhāgavata Purāna.⁴² In the context of the epic and puranic literature, asprśya is used not

41. Apparently the Maharaja of Baroda first used the term on October 18, 1909, while addressing the Depressed Classes Mission in Bombay. Marc Galanter, in "Untouchability and the Law" in M. Mahar, ed., The Untouchables in Contemporary India (Tucson, Arizona: 1972), p. 298 points this out. Although the term "Untouchable" gained widespread usage, it has never been systematically defined. Now that Untouchability has been outlawed, although not defined by Article 17 of the Indian Constitution, the problems of definition, legal and otherwise, have been compounded.

42. Monier-Williams, M., A Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Delhi: 1976), p. 123. See also P.V. Kane, A History of the Dharmasāstra (Delhi: 1936), vol. ii, part 1, p. 172.

only in reference to low caste Hindus, but in reference to anyone who is in a state of ritual impurity, such as a menstruating woman. Contact with anyone in such a state brings about a similar state of pollution as ritual pollution is contagious, hence the "untouchable" status. In its broadest sense, "Untouchable" could be used to characterize any interaction which brings one in association with a potential source of defilement.⁴³ However, "Untouchable" as used in this study, is restricted to references to members of the lowest Hindu castes, and "Untouchability" pertains to the relationship these Hindus have with Hindus of higher castes.⁴⁴

In reference to the Untouchables, "Untouchability" has two meanings.⁴⁵

One sense of the term pertains to the status ascribed to members of

43. To avoid confusion, the term "Untouchable" with a capital 'U' will be used to refer to Hindus whose caste status qualifies them as such, whereas "untouchable" with a small 'u' will be used to refer to anything else which pollutes on contact.

44. It is recognized that "Untouchability" also pertains to the treatment members of the lowest Christian and Muslim castes receive from others. However, "Untouchability", both as a practice and a belief, is a derivative of Hindu social organization. What is practiced by the Muslim and Christian communities in India reflects the pervading influence of Hindu culture. It should also be noted that legal use of the term "Untouchability" usually only pertains to Hindu Untouchables. For further reference, see Galanter, M., "The Religious Aspects of Caste: a Legal View" in D. Smith, ed., South Asian Religion and Politics (Princeton: 1966); Galanter, M., "Changing Legal Conceptions of Caste" in M. Singer and B. Cohn, eds., Structure and Change in Indian Society (Chicago: 1968); and Galanter, 1972, op. cit.

45. Lelah Dushkin first points this out in her article "Scheduled Caste Policy in India: History, Problems, Prospects" in Asian Survey, vii, p. 628. This application of two meanings corresponds to what McKim Marriott describes as theories of caste ranking, attributional and interactional ranking. See Marriott, "Attributional and Interactional Theories and Caste Ranking" in Man in India, vol. xxxix, no 2, 1959, pp. 92-107.

"Untouchable" castes by other Hindus, or by those outside the caste system. The "Untouchable" Hindus are differentiated from other Hindus on the grounds of their "Untouchability". The stigma of "Untouchability" refers to their group ritual status. The other sense of "Untouchability" pertains to certain behaviour practiced by other Hindus with respect to Untouchables. The set of practices engaged in by other Hindus to protect themselves from the defilement of proscribed contact with Untouchables is the practice of Untouchability, as opposed to the status of Untouchability.

Article 17 of the Indian Constitution applies to both of these meanings. Where the article states, "'Untouchability' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden", the practice of Untouchability is implied. In the clause which follows, stating:

The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'Untouchability' shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law

"Untouchability" refers to the ritual status of the Untouchables. The treatment derived from that status is the "disability arising out of 'Untouchability'".

The practice of Untouchability is easier to describe than the status of Untouchability as the practice can be observed. However, the treatment Untouchables receive at the hand (or rather not at the hand) of other Hindus varies from region to region in India, making it difficult to provide a comprehensive description. Although the ancient law codes of India, the Dharmaśāstras, declare that the touch of an Untouchable renders the ritual state of a Brahman impure⁴⁶, the practice of literal

46. For example, in the Code of Manu (v: 85 and 183), the touch of a cāndala, a menstruating woman, a corpse, etc., requires ablution or

"untouchability" varies considerably regionally, and has also changed in time.

For example, Mahatma Gandhi spoke of contact with an Untouchable servant as a child in the late nineteenth century: "If I accidentally touched him, I was asked to perform ablutions"⁴⁷. In 1931, the census commissioner of the Central Provinces observed, "The pollution resulting from the touch of the impure castes is taken off by a mere bath or sprinkling of water on the head of the person polluted"⁴⁸. On quite the other hand, Michael Mahar, on the basis of fieldwork done in Uttar Pradesh in 1954-1956 and 1968-1969, claims that "physical contact with the Untouchables appears not to have inhibited many aspects of daily life, although the Untouchable's touch was held to defile such things as cooked food, water, and sacred places..."⁴⁹.

In the south of India the treatment of Untouchables has traditionally been said to be more severe. There, not only the touch of an

a purification ceremony on the part of a Brahman (Law of Manu, translated by G. Buhler in the series Sacred Books of the East, vol. xxv, edited by Max Muller, p. 183f). A cāndala is identified as the offspring of a pratilomic union between a Brahman woman and a Sūdra man. Interpreters of the Dharmaśāstras have taken cāndala to infer a generic category of Untouchables.

47. Gandhi, M.K., The Removal of Untouchability, edited and compiled by B. Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: 1954), p. 7. The article was taken from Young India, 27 April 1921.
48. Census of India Report, Appendix III, vol. xx, Central India Agency, part 1, Report (Calcutta: 1933), p. 280.
49. Mahar, M., "Agents of Dharma" in M. Mahar, ed., 1972, op. cit., p. 18.

Untouchable, but also his approach was considered polluting.⁵⁰ This was apparently standard enough for appearance of expressions of spatial measurement such as Tīyapad, Chērumapad, etc., which pertained to the allowable distance a Tīyan or a Chērumān, respectively, could approach a Brahman.⁵¹ John H. Hutton, in the Census Report of 1931⁵², cites a report from The Hindu (December 24, 1932) about a caste of washermen in the district of Tinnevely in Madras State. The caste, known as the Purada Vannan, traditionally wash the clothes of other Untouchable castes. By reason of the extreme pollution attached to this occupation, members of the caste, according to the report, had to work between midnight and dawn as the sight of them was polluting. The accuracy of the report has not been verified, but the extravagance of the claim demonstrates the extremes, conceptual if not actual, to which the practice of Untouchability could be taken.

Other examples of the kinds of restrictions placed on Untouchables by other Hindus are found in the list of prohibitions compiled in 1930 by the council of a dominant caste in an area of Madras State. In the list, an Untouchable group, referred to as Adi-Dravidas, were forbidden to 1) wear gold or silver ornaments, 2) wear clothes below the knees or above the hips

50. A number of works cite the personal distance allowed between different castes in the Malabar Coastal area. The restrictions apparently applied between high and low "touchable" castes as well as to Untouchable castes. See Hutton, J.H., Caste in India: Its Nature, Function, and Origins (Oxford: 1963), pp. 79-80, for a list of the early references to "unapproachability". Most of the works which refer to "unapproachability" refer to these earlier references.

51. Hutton, J.H., op. cit., p. 79.

52. Ibid., p. 81. Also in the Report of the Census of India, 1931, vol. 1, p. 483.

on the part of the males, 3) wear shirts, 4) have their hair cropped, 5) use vessels made of any material other than earthenware, 6) let their women cover the upper part of the body, 7) wear flowers or saffron paste, 8) use umbrellas for protection against sun and rain, or wear sandals.⁵³ To these original eight, more restrictions were added in June 1931, including a ban on education, on ownership of land, cultivation of land, and on the imitation of the wedding practices of high-caste Hindus.⁵⁴

The extremity of these prohibitions by no means indicates their serious enforcement; what it does indicate is an attitude⁵⁵ of high caste Hindus. The dates these prohibitions were compiled are noteworthy. By the 1930's the issue of Untouchability was part of the political power play taking place in India. These lists are plainly a reaction to a shifting of power, both real and imagined, and demonstrate conservative response to the shifting patterns of power more than status quo. More will be said about the shifting patterns of power in the chapters which follow. What is important to note here are the behavioural restrictions placed on members of an Untouchable caste to prevent any change in their behaviour - and thus status - as change in the existing order seemed imminent.

53. Hutton, 1963, op. cit., p. 207.

54. Ibid., p. 208.

55. Since this citation appears in Hutton's Census Report, it can be said that it reflects the attitudes of the British about higher caste Hindus attitudes to the Untouchables. When dealing with the issue of Untouchability, the British sought the most abhorrant examples of the practice of Untouchability to justify their self-righteousness. The next chapter will return to this point.

The restriction most commonly known and probably the most publically discussed was that of temple entry. It especially became a focus of attention during the Independence period. The restriction on temple entry has been challenged effectively under Article 17 of the Constitution, and under the Untouchability (Offenses) Act of 1955. However, the prohibition of temple entry was not always an offense punishable by law. In 1924, for example, Untouchable Mahars of Maharashtra were charged and successfully prosecuted on the grounds of giving offence to the religious sensibility of high caste Hindus after the Mahars had entered the enclosure of a village idol. The Mahars were convicted in accordance with Section 295 of the Indian Penal Code which protected the sanctity of places of worship, the procession of religious ceremonies, and the feelings of religious groups. Court opinion maintained that "where custom... ordains... an Untouchable, whose very touch is in the opinion of devout Hindus pollution, should not enter the enclosure surrounding the shrine of any Hindu god"⁵⁶. The Mahars were required to pay the costs of the temple's purification ceremony.

During the 1920's and 1930's, temple entry became an important issue and a focal point for a number of mass agitations. For the Untouchables, temple entry was a symbol of challenge to an existing social order. As well, the court cases on the trespass in temples by Untouchables provided arguments against the British legislative system, which condoned, if not implicitly sanctioned status quo through the British enforcement of Hindu law.

56. Galanter, M., 1972, op. cit., p. 230, quoting Atmaram v. King Emperor, A.I.R., 1924, Nagpur 121.

In addition to temple entry, the other common restrictions placed on Untouchables were the restrictions on entering public houses, such as restaurants and hotels, and on taking water from tanks or wells which served non-Untouchable castes. All of this has been prohibited by Article 15 of the Constitution which forbids "discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth". Forbidden or not, these customary restrictions are still practiced throughout India. The reason for this treatment is the notion that contact with, or the presence of, Untouchables results in pollution, or threat to the ritual purity of the person or place involved. The restrictions placed on Untouchables are because of this stigma of pollution, a "barrier" which distinguishes Untouchables from non-Untouchables and regulates their interaction. This stigma amounts to the Untouchables' Untouchability, their group ritual status acknowledged by everyone concerned.

The status of Untouchability is much more difficult to describe than the practice of Untouchability because it is a "state of mind", or a reflection of attitudes members of higher castes have towards Untouchables and which Untouchables often have towards themselves.⁵⁷ A number of theories have been offered to explain the concept of Untouchability. Dumont reduces the hierarchy of the caste system to an opposition between purity and impurity, citing the Brahmans as the pole of purity and the Untouchables

57. See Michael Moffatt, An Untouchable Caste in South India (Chicago: 1979) for an excellent discussion on the values both Untouchables and high caste Hindu share. This includes the consensual understanding of status.

as the pole of impurity.⁵⁸ Likewise, Blunt speaks of the inherent impurity of the Untouchables⁵⁹, while Stevenson argues that impurity is absorbed through the Untouchables' traditional work.⁶⁰

The traditional occupations of the Untouchables include removing human and animal excreta, cleaning the public streets, removing the carcasses of dead cows, working with leather, washing clothes stained with menstrual blood, all of which clearly involve contact with matter traditionally considered impure. But other occupations such as being a potter, oilman, drummer, village watchman, and so forth do not on the surface entail impurity, or at least immediately recognizable impurity. Moreover, some castes officially considered Untouchable in some areas are not officially recognized as Untouchable in other regions. The official recognition is needed for the official benefits mentioned above and for each state, a list, or schedule, of the Untouchable castes is compiled. The difference between the regional lists reflects the fluid nature of the category of Untouchable. The official enumeration of Untouchables and its concomitant issues are discussed at length in the next chapter. What is salient to note now is that a clear statement on what constitutes the status of Untouchability has proved extremely difficult to make. Ambedkar's circular definition, cited in the opening of this discussion

-
58. Dumont, L., Homo Hierarchicus. The Caste System and its Workings (Chicago: 1974).
59. Blunt, E.A.H., The Caste System of Northern India with Special Reference to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (London: 1931).
60. Stevenson, H., "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System", in Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 84, pp. 45-65.

is probably the most accurate statement which can be made. Other definitions, such as Dumont's idea of an "attribution of a massive and permanent impurity to some categories of people"⁶¹, are so often general as to be meaningless.

The one precise statement which can be made about the Untouchables' status is that this status is the lowest in the hierarchical index of caste. Based on the fieldwork that McKim Marriott has done in Northern India, the inference can be made that although the people in any given area have a general if not consensual understanding of which caste ranks where in the hierarchy, the ranking or indexing depends on the type of interactions that take place between the castes.⁶² Srinivas also recognized this when he pointed out that effective control of the land (wealth) and large numbers (power in the local panchayat or local assembly) are, along with ritual status, determinants of rank.⁶³ The indexing of castes thus

61. Dumont, op. cit., p. 47.

62. Marriott, M., "Caste Ranking and Food Transactions: A Matrix Analysis" in Singer and Cohn, 1968, op. cit., pp. 133-171.

63. The process Srinivas calls Sanskritization demonstrates that there is a tendency to avoid any incongruencies between the acknowledged status of a caste and its economic relations with other castes. A caste "Sanskritizes" by adopting the habits and attributes of higher castes (usually, but not always Brahmans), through imitating higher caste rituals; fabricating a genealogy of high caste ancestors, etc. (Srinivas, S., Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India (Oxford: 1952), p. 30, and Srinivas, S., Caste in Modern India and other Essays (Delhi: 1962), p. 42). In the studies done on mobility in the caste system, it is indicated that Sanskritization has been effective only after the caste's economic or political position had risen. For examples of successful Sanskritization, see W.C. Rowe, "The New Cauhans: A Caste Mobility Movement in North India", in J. Silverberg, ed., Social Mobility and the Caste System in India: an Interdisciplinary Symposium (Den Hague: 1968), pp. 66-67, and R. Hardgrave, "The Nadars of Tamil Nadu", in Essays in the Political

varies in different localities, depending upon how much wealth, power, or respect each of the different castes can command. The castes that command the least of any of these, but specifically the least of respect, are the Untouchables. What all of the different Untouchable castes really have in common then, is their existence at the bottom of the social scale: they are the least respected and most deprived of all Hindus. Their ritual status indicates this. Whether it causes deprivation, or only indicates it, is another question altogether.

Untouchability pertains only to the ritual status of the lowest castes in Hindu society. In ritual interactions or transactions, such as the giving of cooked food to Untouchables at the end of a funeral ceremony⁶⁴, the Untouchables' rôle is subordinate, as the Untouchables, through their prescribed behaviour, reinforce or enhance the status of others. Many of their traditional duties, such as removing excreta, are also actions which symbolically maintain the status of others.⁶⁵

Sociology of South India (New Delhi: 1976), pp. 125-188. For an example of an Untouchable caste giving up unsuccessful Sanskritization in favour of political agitation see E. Zelliott, "Learning the Use of Political Means" in R. Kothari, ed., Caste and Indian Politics (New Delhi: 1969), pp. 29-69.

64. Moffatt, M., op. cit., p. 197: "By this last transaction [of accepting] food from a family under the extreme pollution of death [the Untouchables who participated in the funeral procession] are particularly lowered". Moffatt observes that the Untouchables, by accepting the cooked food, are symbolically accepting the death pollution from the family.
65. Harper, E.B., "Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion" from Journal of Asian Studies, vol. 23, 1964, pp. 194f. Harper presents a convincing argument that in performing their assigned tasks, the Untouchables protect the status of higher castes by diverting the flow of pollution from impure matter such as excreta onto themselves and away from the higher castes. H. Orenstein, "Structure of Hindu Caste Values", in Ethnology, vol. 4, 1965, pp. 1-11, also establishes this.

Proscribed contact likewise refers to status maintenance. Totally free or uninhibited contact between Untouchable and non-Untouchable castes is prohibited in order to maintain the differentiation of status. Moreover, restricted interaction is demonstrated in all intercaste relations⁶⁶, and not only in the relations between Untouchable and non-Untouchable castes. Free interaction is shunned on the grounds of pollution. The ritual code of behaviour which is derived from this principle of pollution asserts status and maintains the differentiation of rank between groups.

Untouchable pertains to the rank, or social identity of the lowest-status group. This rank, or caste status, is unique to the Untouchables, but the principle of pollution which differentiates this rank is not unique to the Untouchables. All groups pose a threat of pollution in some degree or another to other groups. This threat, appraised in terms of caste status, increases as the position on the hierarchical scale decreases. Ideas associated with the social identity of the Untouchables, such as:

Untouchables eat beef;
 Untouchables engage in unclean occupations;
 Untouchables are filthy;

refer to how the status of an Untouchable is evaluated. These statements reflect the values used to evaluate status. In the proper sense of the term Untouchable refers only to status evaluation; it does not mean starved or illiterate.

Ritual status is an indicator of social standing. The occupational coding is related to the caste's position on the hierarchical scale, but

66. Marriott, M., 1968, op. cit., pp. 135ff.

occupational coding and standard of living are two different matters. Ritual status alone does not preclude a caste from adequate means to live. The hierarchical gradation of status only refers to the amount of respect the different caste groupings are accorded, it does not refer to the material returns each caste gets. According to the network of jajmani relationships which provides a network for exchange of goods and services, each caste group theoretically receives adequate life support. Why in actual situations this is not always the case entails factors other than the ritual evaluation of a caste group. To be certain, the status of one's caste does play a role in determining what social and occupational opportunities are available, but other factors, such as the overall economy of the area, the population, the distribution of land, and so forth are also important. To argue that ritual status alone would determine whether one lived at a level of affluence, subsistence, or below subsistence - given India's economy of scarcity - is to place too much emphasis on the function of the meaning system of the society.

Returning to the discussion of how Untouchability became a political topic, a number of points must be highlighted. The concept of Untouchability refers to an understanding about ritual status. Untouchability pertains to this ritual status and to the treatment accorded to the Untouchables because of standard patterns of behaviour followed in transactions with Untouchables. Untouchability thus pertains to what can loosely be called "quality of life"; "standard of life" involves another set of criteria. These two sets of criteria are related, but are not the same. To move from the idea of Untouchable to an idea of economically deprived requires an adjustment of criteria.

However, as the Untouchables became a topic of political discussions during the Independence period, the tendency was to treat all problems of poverty, illiteracy, and so forth, as derived from the pattern of ritual interaction, or as problems of ritual interaction alone, and not as related issues.

Although the concern about the Untouchables was couched in rhetoric about depressed living conditions, Untouchability was the main issue under discussion. The political definition of the problem centered only on the ritual patterns of interaction. The low ritual status of the Untouchables was the main concern of the politicians who made Untouchability a political issue: poverty, illiteracy, poor living conditions, and so forth, were virtually ignored. The following chapter, tracing how the Untouchables came to be Scheduled Castes, demonstrates this.

The legacy of the politization of Untouchability, the policies of guaranteed political representation, guaranteed employment in the public sector, and preferred educational financing, follows the same pattern: the criterion of ritual status alone is important. The eligibility for preferential treatment is determined by the nature of the ritual relationship the status group (of which one is a member) has with other status groups. This is a restatement of the notion that ritual status alone determines the eligibility for such social benefits as adequate income, education and political representation.

CHAPTER I

THE BRITISH INITIATIVE

The rights and privileges granted to the Scheduled Castes are clearly spelled out in the Indian Constitution¹, but the precise nature of the classification "Scheduled Caste" is not. Nowhere does the Constitution specify what a "Scheduled Caste" is. Article 341 refers to a list enumerating the castes classified as Scheduled Castes; however, the specifications for inclusion on the list are neither detailed nor explained in the Constitution. According to Article 341, the consignment of castes to this list falls under the jurisdiction of the President, but the list as it stands today essentially was compiled during the 1931 Census. The adoption of the 1931 listing was due to hard bargaining by several Scheduled Caste members in the Constituent Assembly of 1947-1949. These members, led by Dr. Ambedkar, sought to preserve the numerical strength of their electoral base by relying on figures used in the 1930's, as later enumerations reduced the listing. After the special provisions relating to the Scheduled Castes had been approved in the Constituent Assembly in 1949, the decision was taken to utilize the schedules prepared for the Government of India Act of 1935 as the basis of the President's list. In turn the Schedules prepared for the 1935 Act can be traced back to sections of

1. See Introduction, p. 1f., and Articles 330-341 of the Constitution.

the 1931 Census Reports in which the names of the Hindu castes deemed to be the lowest ranking in terms of the caste hierarchy had been compiled.² Although the list utilized by the president today is not a direct transcription of the 1931 schedules, it corresponds to those schedules with little substantial modification.³

Listing or enumerating caste membership in the Census Reports on a hierarchical scale was first undertaken by the British in conjunction with the 1901 Census. Herbert Risley, who implemented this method, argued

-
2. Indian Franchise Committee, The Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, 1932, Vol. 1, Report (London, H.M.S.O., Cmd. 4086), cites three sources which were consulted as the lists of Scheduled Castes were being compiled. These sources are the Census Commissioners of 1931, the Provincial Governments, and Provincial Committees. The two latter sources tended to rely heavily on the Census Reports, which were of course, compiled by the first source. There are some notable differences in a few of the figures returned, as in the case of the figures provided for the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. The Census Commissioner returned a figure of 12.6 millions, the Provincial Government returned 6.8 millions, while the Provincial Committee returned 0.6 million as the total population of the Scheduled Castes. The final figure decided upon was 6.8 millions. (See Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, 1932, cmd. 4086, op. cit., pp. 119-123). In the majority of cases the final figure was based on the Census returns.
 3. The lists were slightly modified between 1947 and 1949, with the decision to include several Untouchable Sikh castes. (See the Minority Report of May, 1949, C.A.D., op. cit., Vol. 8, p. 315. Hitherto, only Hindu castes were scheduled. Again the reason for the inclusion of the four Sikh castes was political, but was justified with the argument that the Sikh religion was a sectarian outgrowth of the Hindu tradition.) Again in 1956, the lists were revised, but the extent of the revision was to add more names. In 1965, a complete revision was undertaken, in a "rational and scientific manner" (Report of the Advisory Committee on the Revision of the Lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1965, p. 29, quoted in Dushkin, 1972, op. cit., p. 220). Of the approximately 800 castes reviewed nine new ones were included and 171 were deleted: 120 which did not exist in the state for which they were returned, 12 which were not caste names, one which was Muslim, and 38 of small population which did not suffer from Untouchability. In 1976, the lists were again reviewed by the Committee, however, the recommendations made by the committee were ignored in light of the political situation in India at that time.

that such listing followed "social precedence as recognized by the native public of the present [1901] day"⁴. The subsequent "scheduling" or listing of castes with the lowest ascriptive social rank on a separate schedule followed this initial procedure. The 1921 Census Reports discussed the issue of Depressed Classes, but it was the 1931 Census that focussed attention on the Depressed/Untouchable castes. The 1931 Census included lists of Scheduled Castes which had been compiled with the understanding that they would be used in conjunction with a system of statutory benefits. The Constitution presents the final version of this system, of which Section 309 of the Government of India Act, 1935, was the precursor.⁵ The term, "Scheduled Castes", thus was coined in reference to a deliberate policy-making decision, and to the procedure which led up to this decision.

The term "Scheduled Caste", like the term "Untouchable", is an artificial term.⁶ Both terms are contrived; neither refers to a clearly defined section of the Indian population. Rather these terms, and the others, "Depressed Classes", "Exterior Castes", "Outcastes", "Harijans", introduced above, are all part of political vocabularies designating a series of castes. In the proper sense of the term, "Scheduled Caste" means little more than a caste whose members are eligible for the benefits listed above. Apart from qualifying for these benefits by reason of inclusion⁷

4. Census of India, 1901, vol. 1, Report, p. 36.

5. Ghurye, G.S., Caste and Race in India (Bombay: 1969), p. 119.

6. See p. 24.

7. It is interesting to note that the principle behind "Scheduled Caste" is inclusion, while the principle behind the idea of "Untouchable" is exclusion.

on a schedule, these castes form a disparate group, having a number of dissimilar characteristics. Each of the castes listed under the heading "Scheduled Castes" has its own set of attributes, own ritual function, own caste mythology, and own traditional occupation, all of which make it distinct from the other Scheduled Castes. The list of Scheduled Castes is comprised of a series of closed status groups, sharing little more than a generic label applied by politicians, public servants, and scholars.⁸ These castes, however, also share one other feature: the stigma of Untouchability is attributed to them. In general thinking "Scheduled Caste" is considered to be coterminous with "Untouchable", but both terms convey sets of associated ideas, rather than a clear definition.

Members of the Scheduled Castes themselves were acutely aware of the difficulty of forcing one label onto a diverse grouping of castes. At a hearing before members of the Indian statutory Commission in 1932, a spokesman for the Untouchables of the United Provinces testified:⁹

The depressed classes are not a homogenous body. They consist of a large number of heterogenous clans which are socially distinct and are kept apart from one another by a spirit of rigid exclusiveness and separation. They entirely lack cohesion and are scattered all over the province... The depressed classes have been divided into separate classes by very sharply defined boundaries over which it is impossible for one to pass to another ethnologically.

The implications of such a statement are that a great deal of uncertainty surrounded the very identification of the people at whom the

8. Lelah Dushkin, 1972, op. cit., p. 106 first points this out.

9. This speech was made during the debate at the United Provinces Adi-Hindu (Depressed Classes) Leaders' Conference, and was incorporated into the resolution passed on 23 July 1932 in Allahabad. J. Kamble, op. cit., p. 99 cites the proceedings of the conference.

legal provisions were - and still are - directed. The difficulty of definition is perhaps the most important point this study makes. It throws into question the assumption implicit in the Constitutional clauses that the Scheduled Castes can be considered a distinct and immediately recognizable minority group. The logic behind the benefits granted to the Scheduled Castes in the Constitution rests on the supposition that a cross-section of different castes make up a clearly defined population unit. This notion is somewhat questionable, and as evidence has indicated it was questioned by both Untouchable and non-Untouchable Indians. Nonetheless, the basis of the official policy which developed into the special provisions for the Scheduled Castes in the Constitution rests on this assumption.

The British, who administered the Indian government during the Independence struggle, associated the position of the Untouchable castes in Hindu society with marginality. This association led to the conclusion that the Scheduled Castes comprised a separate and defined minority group, sharing characteristics with other minority groups. During the long process of negotiations for the transfer of power, the issue of minority groups received inordinate attention. Minority groups, as isolated by the British for purposes of government, were largely religious minorities, although no "official" definition was ever given for the term "minority"¹⁰. The British related the idea of ethnic distinctiveness to that of religious minority. Their government policy treated religious minorities as separate

10. See K.K. Wadhwa, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-21 for a discussion on the elusiveness of a definition of minority in Indian political history.

ethnic groups. With the looming of the transfer of power to a political leadership comprised mainly of high-caste Hindus, these minorities were deemed to need the safeguards of guaranteed representation through a system of reservation to protect their self-determination.

Although the Scheduled Castes, or Depressed Classes, as they were called during the early years of the minority policy, were treated like the other minority groups and given the same benefits, the category of Scheduled Castes is in fact anomalous. According to the British understanding of religious communities, the Depressed Classes did not comprise a distinct religious group. All of the references to the Depressed Classes in the government reports tacitly recognized them as part of the Hindu community. By the time an official definition of Depressed Classes was being formulated in the late 1920's, only the lowest Hindu castes were considered Depressed Classes. No other socially disfranchised, but non-Hindu group was allowed under the category of Depressed Classes. The Depressed Classes were first and foremost Hindus.

They were, however, considered to be a special category of Hindus, and as such they formed a special subset in the category of religious minorities. The ritual status of the Untouchables, or rather how that ritual status was understood by the British, qualified them as a religious minority. This status, and the causes and effects attributed to it, formed the basis of the policy of safeguards, rights, and privileges for the Scheduled Castes. The way in which Untouchability was transformed into a political issue rests on the common understanding of the ritual status of the Depressed Classes that was found in British circles in the early decades of the twentieth century.

As references to the Constitutional clauses have already indicated, the policy of special provisions was set up on the understanding that there exists in Indian society a general consensus on the status of the Scheduled Castes. On one level, outward signs of a consensus seem to exist; general ideas about Untouchables and Untouchability are held by most people. These notions, however, have never been worked through in relation to the system of preferential electoral rights. Rather, an equation relating the ritual status of the Untouchables to a political policy has been accepted by the Indian government without careful reflection on the principles behind the system of rights and privileges. These principles at their deepest level reflect the assumption rooted in the British view of Untouchability as represented in the documents and papers of the period leading up to Independence. Although this understanding of Untouchability was not shared by the other thinkers in the political arena, the Scheduled Castes have kept the political status given to them by the British.

It will be argued in this thesis that the official (i.e. the British government's) understanding of Untouchability which first became popular around the turn of the century led to the incorporation of provisions to safeguard the political rights of the Untouchable castes in government policy. An examination of the history of this policy reveals that the concept of Untouchability was the focal point of attention as British interest developed in the social stratification in India. The understanding of Untouchability developed at that time provided the theoretical basis of official decisions. The significance the British attached to the practice of Untouchability was isolated from the larger

context of the caste system, and became the justification for the creation of a category of Scheduled Castes. Through the British initiative, ritual status was transformed into political status.

The British Approach

Official concern about the Untouchables as an interest group was manifested by the British in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1918, Mr. Montagu made the first recommendation that representatives of Untouchable castes be nominated to the legislative body. Following that initial recommendation, the reports of the various committees and commissions which discussed the transfer of power, constitutional reform, franchise, and so forth in India included some provision for special representation of the Depressed Classes. It is clear from this documentation that the Depressed Classes were considered to be a minority group in need of special representation. No attempt was made to provide an official definition of the Depressed Classes until the late 1920's, however.

Underlying the lack of a precise definition was the assumption that the Depressed Classes were clearly recognizable to anyone who observed the Hindu social structure. The differentiation between the Depressed Classes and other Hindus was understood by the British to be the result of a social division inherent in the structural make-up of Hindu society. This division, which to the British was apparent in the practice of Untouchability, was thought to keep the Depressed Classes apart from the rest of society, and to be responsible for their depressed lifestyle.

Following this logic, the government papers of the day treated the Untouchables as a marginal group outside the normal workings of Hindu society. No attempt was made to delineate the criteria used to isolate the Depressed Classes as a special interest group because it was felt that Hindu society had already isolated the Untouchables, and the government was merely taking notice of this fact.

The conceptualization of a clear social boundary between the Untouchables, or the Depressed Classes, and the rest of Hindu society resulted from the vision the British had of Hindu India. The attention the Depressed Classes received as a political unit was rooted in the then-held theoretical model of the caste system. As the Indian Statutory Commission of 1928, which succinctly summarized the position of the British government on the Depressed Classes, stated, "some appreciation of the nature and results of the caste system of the Hindus is essential to an understanding of certain aspects of the Indian constitutional problem... The whole subject of the representation of the Depressed Classes... which has come to the front in recent years as a question of urgent and widespread concern, is bound up with the operation of the caste system"¹¹. The importance the British attached to the ritual status of the Depressed Classes, as opposed to other criteria such as poverty or illiteracy, was directly related to the view of caste presented in the official documents. Much of the problem in understanding the logic behind the emphasis on a

10. Indian Statutory Commission, Report of the Indian Statutory Commission (Chairman Lord Simon), 1928, Vol. 1. Report (London: H.M.S.O., Cmd. 3568), p. 34.

communal label of Untouchable as the basis of classification stems from the problem of recognizing this theoretical model.

There is much difficulty in reconstructing the conceptual model of caste underlying the arguments pertaining to the "representation and protection of the Depressed Classes"¹². Few of the ideas about the caste system are documented. The influence contemporary ethnographic theorizing had on the decisions of British administration is apparent but no specific reference is made to any of the sources. To compound the problem even more, as questions of political self-determination were being raised in India, two types of policy emerged: a policy designed to maintain the administration of British authority and a policy designed to implement a transfer of power. It is possible though to infer the theoretical basis of the official position on Untouchability by reviewing four sources: decisions made with respect to administrative policy, British explanations of the caste system, assumptions in policy statements pertaining to the transfer of power, and finally the criteria that were used to identify the Scheduled Castes. This review will establish the stream of thought that constitutes the British contribution to the political definition of Untouchability.

Administration of status quo as conceived by the British

During the British tenure in India, a policy of non-intervention in religious matters was adopted. Caste was clearly associated with

12. Indian Statutory Commission, here cited as I.S.C., Cmd. 3568, p. 34.

religious matters, although it is unclear whether the British attributed the development of caste differentiation directly to the workings of the Hindu religious system, or whether they merely understood status differentiation to be justified and sustained by a religious system. Both viewpoints are found¹³, with the emphasis placed on the Hindu character of social stratification. Because of this correlation between caste and Hinduism, the policy of non-interference in religious matters was extended to most issues which specifically concerned caste. As early as 1827, a Bombay regulation withdrew from the civil courts any jurisdiction over cases involving questions of caste status.¹⁴ The Civil Procedure Code extended this policy throughout India in 1859.¹⁵ The division of Hindu society into numerous castes and the maintenance of autonomy by these groups was not challenged by this policy of non-intervention.

There are, as well, many examples of the British condoning, if not implicitly supporting the divisions of caste. According to J.D.M. Derrett, the belief that caste was some sort of primitive association within the state prevailed among administrators and led to the policy of

-
13. In the Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, 1928, Vol. I, Cmd. 3568, op. cit., pp. 34-37, both positions emerge, although the strongest statement correlates the institution with Hinduism: "Thus the caste system... has in the course of ages developed into an institution which assigns to each individual his duty and his position in orthodox Hinduism" (p. 34).
 14. Bombay Regulation II of 1827, section 21, quoted in Galanter, M., "Law and Caste in Modern India", in Asian Survey, III, 1963, p. 546.
 15. Civil Procedure Code, 1859, Section 9, quoted in Galanter, 1963, op. cit., p. 546.

non-intervention.¹⁶ The application of the understanding of caste groups as distinct social units is apparent in the pronouncement of a Madras court in 1909:¹⁷

a caste is a combination of a number of persons governed by a body of usages which differentiate it from others. The usages may refer to social or religious observances, to drink, food, ceremonies, pollution, occupation, or marriage.

Each caste grouping was understood to be socially autonomous; this autonomy, as far as it was understood, was underwritten by a system of law which attempted to maintain a status quo. However, each caste unit was not understood to maintain its own religious order; the inter-relationship of caste groups in a sacral whole was recognized. A decision of the Bombay court reflects this idea:¹⁸

The caste is not a religious body, though its usages, like all other Hindu usages, are based upon religious feelings. In religious matters, strictly so-called, the members of the caste are governed by their religious preceptors. In social matters they lay down their own laws.

The caste groupings were viewed as part of an over-arching sacral order.

The model of Hindu society which conditioned the approach of British administration was a model based on varna theory.¹⁹ According to

16. Derrett, J.D.M., op. cit., p. 291.

17. Muthuswami v. Masilamani, Indian Law Review, 33 Madras 352 (1909), quoted in Galanter, M., 1968, "Changing Legal Conceptions of Caste", in M. Singer and B. Cohn, eds, op. cit., p. 309.

18. Raghunath v. Javardhan, 15 Bombay, 599 (1891), quoted in Galanter, 1968, op. cit., p. 309.

19. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the theoretical caturvarna divisions of Indian society. "Varna" refers to an abstract social category of which there are four grades: Brāhman, Ksatriya,

this understanding, Hindu society was seen to break down into four functional divisions in which the customs and practices differed from one division or varna to the other. The Untouchables were sometimes included in this four-fold division as Śūdras.¹ Although after the turn of the century, the Untouchables were usually considered outside this four-fold structure. Much of British interaction with Hindu society was conditioned by their understanding of the character of the varna divisions under one or the other of which all castes were subsumed. The exclusion from the Indian Army of any caste not recognized as a "martial" caste after 1891²⁰ is a reflection of this thinking. This regulation removed members of the low castes from the ranks of the army, thus eliminating a means of upward mobility for many of these people through a tacit acknowledgement of the structural restraints of caste divisions.

The source of the use of varna categories can be traced with some precision to the Administration of Justice Regulation of April 1, 1780,

Vaiśya, Śūdra, listed in descending rank. The varna system or catur-varna system, pertains to a theoretical summary of Hindu society based on a projected ideological formulation of how social structure ought to be organized according to the authors and interpreters of the Dharmaśāstras. Unlike "varna", "caste" as it is used here, refers to an actual status group, whose membership is defined at birth, whose characteristics, and relations with other status groups, or castes, can be perceived, recorded, and summarized. "Caste system" like "varna system", however, does not correspond to empirical reality. It is, as well, a theoretical statement about the relations which make up social structure, although the model it presents is (theoretically) based on perceptions of actual social relations. The difference is that statements about varna are based on codified reflections recorded in the Dharmaśāstras, whereas those about caste (theoretically) are derived from observed relations.

20. Zelliott, "Learning the Use of Political Means: the Mahars of Maharashtra" in Caste in Indian Politics, edited by Rajni Kothari, (Delhi: 1967), p. 27.

in which Warren Hastings decreed that concerns of "inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious usages, or institutions were to be administrated to the Hindus according to the laws of the 'Shaster'"²¹. Prior to this decision, Hastings had commissioned eleven pundits of the Dharmaśāstras to compile a digest to śāstric injunctions to standardize the administration of śāstric law. The resulting work was called Vivādārṇava-Setu (Bridge across the Ocean of Litigation), or alternately Vivādārṇa-Bhañjana (Break-water to the Ocean of Litigation).²² This work had the effect of standardizing for the parts of the subcontinent under British jurisdiction what had hitherto been an eclectic and empirical method of interpreting and applying the Dharmaśāstras locally. Secondly, this work, commissioned by British authority for the purpose of legal administration, sanctioned the application of different laws to different groups.

The intent of British administration with respect to Hindu custom is best summed up by a High Court judgement:²³

In administering Hindu Law the [District Court] has only to see what is Hindu law as received and practiced by the Hindu community in general with the conviction that it is law, and to declare and enforce it when it is ascertained. It is not for him to go beyond, to resolve the Hindu law as received by the people into its historical factors, to see how far its historical development has diverged from the logical or philosophical development in the light of modern civilization.

Thus, Hindu law, or law which fell roughly in the same classification as "family law", contained numerous instances where different rules were

21. Derrett, J.D.M., op. cit., p. 233.

22. Ibid., p. 339.

23. Ibid., p. 302, quoting a ruling by a Madras High Court Judge, Muttuswami Ayyar, 1916.

applied to members of different castes in the courts under British jurisdiction. In most cases the courts applied one rule for the three twice-born varnas, and a different rule for the Śūdras.²⁴ These laws differentiating between the different groups were applied with such strictness that, for example, marriages between members of different varnas were not considered legally valid.²⁵

The courts also devised several kinds of tests to determine the varna of a particular caste. The tests included the evaluation of customs such as widow remarriage, commensal practices, etc., according to a scale ascribing certain customs to each of the varnas.²⁶ The courts administered these evaluations of customs and practices to determine varna standing because the law recognized varna, and not caste, although the term "caste" was used interchangeably with the term "varna".²⁷ With the implementation of these tests to determine the rank of a caste, the courts sometimes became an arena for upward mobility through status identification²⁸, even though questions of varna status were entertained only in reference to specific legal matters. Although the policy was one of non-interference, the British standardization and administration of śāstric law through the court system set up a structure which reified a typology of four exclusive varna divisions.

24. Galanter, M., 1963, op. cit., p. 544.

25. Ibid., and 1968, op. cit., p. 302.

26. Galanter, M., 1968, op. cit., p. 302f.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

The courts, recognizing the autonomy of the caste group in social matters, gave support to the principle of exclusion between caste groupings. While the power of the caste organization was limited in the area of criminal, civil, and commercial matters, the internal governing body of the caste, the caste tribunal, had jurisdiction over internal autonomy and over matters of social relations of the caste.²⁹ Where conflict arose in the area of social relations, having an effect on the "religious sensibilities"³⁰ of the caste members, which usually pertained to the issue of ritual pollution, the courts were willing to intervene. The courts granted injunctions which supported claims to restrict members of particular castes from entering temples if the exclusion proved to be customary. Damages were also awarded for purification ceremonies necessitated by the presence of members of lower castes in places ritually proscribed for them.³¹ The awarding of such damages upheld the nature and function of a principle of pollution, and implicitly sanctioned a theory of inherent attributes of purity and pollution in accordance with ritual rank.

Such claims of damage to religious sensibilities, however, were not considered when the groups involved were not Hindu. In 1917 in

29. Ibid.

30. Under the Indian Penal Code 295-298 (Act XLV of 1860) and 295a (Act XXV of 1927), defilement of religious places, disruption of religious ceremonies, and outrage of religious feelings were serious offenses punishable by law. Galanter, 1972, op. cit., p. 233.

31. Ibid., p. 229, quoting *Anadrav Bhikiji Phadke v. Sankar Daji Charya* I.L.R. 7, Bombay 323 (1883); *Sankaralona Nadan v. Raja Rajeswara Dorai*, 35 I.A.C.

Trichinopoly, a group of Roman Catholic Pillais and Mudalis petitioned for an injunction requiring the bishop to re-erect the barrier protecting their part of the church from the trespass of "low-caste" Christians. This petition was refused by the court. Characterizing the claim to refer to religious sensibilities on the ground of pollution, the court declared that the plaintiffs, not being Hindu "cannot... invoke the authority of accepted sacerdotal texts for perpetuating the distinction between touchables and untouchables during a particular life solely by reason of birth"³². In the view of the court, the divisions of caste were operative only as part of the Hindu social system. For groups, who by reason of conversion or other reasons, had removed themselves from the Hindu social organization, the ritual division of groupings was not tenable.

The general British policy toward caste, then, was of discrete non-involvement. The policy, however, was administered in accordance with the British conceptual model of caste. This model associated caste with the Hindu religion, and coalesced the network of social relations observed in Hindu society into an overarching sacral organizational pattern of varnās. In effect, the legal system administered by the British gave sanction of the divisive nature of caste, even though the divisions acknowledged by the British administration were varna divisions. Caste claims considered by the courts involved "enforceable civil or property rights, which included rights in caste property, the right to offices

32. Galanter, M., 1972, op. cit., p. 230, quoting Michael Pillai v. Barthe, A.I.R., 1917, Madras, 431 at 433.

with pecuniary emoluments, and the right to reputation"³³, all of which supported a functional view of caste, ascribing certain identities to certain groups.

In recognizing certain claims that resulted from questions of social interaction, the legal system acknowledged a principle of exclusion to run throughout the system, and at times actively supported the pollution constraints. The concept of pollution was accepted as part of the Hindu social organization, a part which had the sanction of the "authority of accepted sacerdotal texts". As a concomitant to the caste system, the pollution barrier between castes was not challenged, nor was it, per se, questioned. As part of the religious system, the pollution barrier was condoned, if not discretely enforced. Later, though, when the pollution barrier became a political issue, an attack on it was marshalled. This was when the issue of self-government arose and the pollution barrier was seen to amount to a civil disability.

The question of civil disability revolved around the extent to which certain groups could participate in self-government. Out of the four-fold divisions of varna recognized by the British, a fifth, "exterior" group, was "emerging". British attention in the early twentieth century turned to the idea of an Untouchable stratum of the population. The early documents on self-government by Indians concur on the argument that the Untouchable castes as a group would not be able to participate in the political process due to their social status. As depressed and

33. Galanter, M., 1972, op. cit., p. 308.

oppressed peoples participation of any sort was precluded. The reasons given for this assumption in the official statements are blurred. As nearly as it is possible to reconstruct the reasoning for this judgement, it seems that the political isolation of the lowest stratum resulted from two key features in the understanding of the status of the lowest castes: the distinctiveness of this segment of the population, and the nature of the relationship it had with the rest of Hindu society.

On the surface, it was reasoned that the Untouchables needed special political protection because only a small percentage of their population could be enfranchised. However, the Report of the Franchise Committee³⁴ in 1932 noted that only a small proportion of the whole Indian population would meet the minimum requirements for voting rights.³⁵ Thus limited access to the political process cross-cut all groups in the Hindu population, and not only the Depressed Classes, as most groups were disfranchised. Special provisions, however, were set in motion only for the Depressed Classes. No steps were taken to ensure adequate representation for any other Hindu grouping. The opinion expressed in the statements which prepared the way for the transfer of power maintained that the Untouchables as Depressed Classes formed a minority of a special kind, suffering from special disabilities.

34. Indian Franchise Committee, Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, 1932, Vol. II (London: H.M.S.O.), pp. 32, 251-257, 278-280.

35. Indian Franchise Commission, Cmd. 4086, op. cit., pp. 281-282 gives a list of the requirements for voting rights. These requirements vary slightly from province to province. The requirements include the ownership of land, payment of municipal taxes. On pages 40-42, educational qualifications based on literacy is discussed as an alternate requirement.

Exactly what kind of minority the Depressed Classes were considered to be can be ascertained by examining theories about the caste system current at the time the political attention turned to the Depressed Classes. A review of the ethnographic literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reveals that speculation about the origins of the caste system was topical. A number of monographs speculating on the institution of caste are available from that period, including some valuable reflections by the Census Commissioners who laid claim to ethnology. The works of these would-be anthropologists are valuable because they not only reflect trends of thinking of that time, but because they also influenced the official thinking. From the theories which were current around the turn of the century, two main trends can be abstracted. These two theories will be summarized, and not analyzed here, as the interest is not with the correctness of the theories, but with the type of thinking that went into the official view of Untouchability.

British theories of caste

One of the main theoretical models of caste of the late nineteenth century can be labelled a functional theory. This model postulated the basis of the caste system to be the division of labour. The model was developed using a comparison with trade guilds in Europe. The model was well known, and it found support among a number of civil servants in India. Nesfield, writing in 1885,³⁶ regarded occupation as the exclusive basis

36. Nesfield, J.C., Brief View of the Caste System of the Northwest Provinces and Oudh (Allahabad: 1885).

of caste differentiation, rejecting any idea of primitive religious concepts as the foundation of group differentiation. Nesfield had assumed an essential racial unity of the India people³⁷, arguing that caste had developed after the assimilation of the Indo-Europeans. The identification with a guild, occupational and hereditary, was isolated as the prime factor in the development of caste, accounting for both endogamy and the occupational coding of a caste group. Rules of commensality and the pollution taboo were attributed to class prejudice, evolved out of an interest in self-preservation, or to an idea of exclusive domain generated by occupational differentiation. J.H. Hutton, the 1931 Census Commissioner, commenting on Nesfield's theory of caste, associated the pollution taboo with occupational integrity; "... it may be offered as one hypothesis that the presence of strange craftsmen practicing their craft is condoned, or rather rendered less dangerous by the prohibition of intimate relations with them"³⁸.

According to Nesfield's model, the existing differences in social rank were due to the character of occupation. Occupations were evaluated on a hierarchical scale inversely corresponding to the order of the emergence of specialization.³⁹ However, in order to rationalize the ritual supremacy of the Brahmans in accordance with his functional model; Nesfield argued that the priest introduced endogamy to protect his position, and

37. Nesfield, op. cit., p. 126.

38. Hutton, op. cit., p. 185.

39. Nesfield, op. cit., p. 141. For a critique of Nesfield's work, see Louis Dumont, op. cit., pp. 26f.

that this practice was assimilated by other groups. Nesfield, in attempting to explain hierarchy as well as group differentiation referred to the two factors of occupational and ritual identity: "Among all castes there prevailed a twofold test of precedence, the industrial and the Brahmanic"⁴⁰.

Ibbetson, who documented his views two years prior to Nesfield, in the Census Report for the Punjab in 1883, similarly saw profession as the primary basis of the caste system, with the dominance of the priest as the decisive factor: "The dominance of one special occupation gave abnormal importance to all distinctions of occupation"⁴¹ and the priests "degraded all occupations except their own and that of patrons of the ruling class"⁴². Ibbetson had expanded on the theory which correlated caste divisions with specialization of labour to account for factors of political dominance, through the distinction of dominants and subjects⁴³, and "Levitical" differentiation, through the enforcement of "artificial" ideas of purity. Ibbetson's views, like those of Nesfield, attributed the caste hierarchy to the religious system, but treated the religious system as a system of exploitation of which the function was to maintain or establish the supremacy of the priestly order.

In effect, in order to harmonize an essentially materialist approach based on the idea of a functional division of labour, with the ideal

40. Nesfield, op. cit., p. 116, quoted in Dumont, op. cit., p. 27.

41. Ibbetson, Census Report, Panjab, 1883, pp. 334ff, quoted in Hutton, 1962, op. cit., p. 225, and in Dumont, op. cit., p. 269.

42. Quoted in Hutton, 1962, op. cit., p. 176.

43. Dumont, 1975, op. cit., p. 269.

typology of the four varnas presented by the internal model of the Hindu cultural tradition⁴⁴, the supremacy of the Brahmans had to be separately explained. By postulating a series of manipulations on the part of the priestly class to secure the dominant position, hierarchical stratification in accordance with the Dharmaśāstric model was incorporated into the functional model. However, the dominance of the Brahmans was only an epiphenomenon of occupational specialization which accounted for the hierarchical aspect of the system. Later writers on the caste system like E.A.H. Blunt who were influenced by the functional approach, typified the hierarchical stratification of caste as an "artificial product of the Brahmanic priestly order"⁴⁵.

The functional model of caste gave way around the turn of the present century to another line of thinking which had as its basic premise the dominance of the Brahmans. In fact, Louis Dumont maintains that the "latest systematic theory" of professional specialization or caste as a special development of the guild "is Nesfield's (1885), which had the merit of offering an explanation of hierarchy"⁴⁶. The theory which became dominant in British intellectual circles in the first quarter of the twentieth century was based on the concept of the diffusion of Aryan culture through "the impact of the Rigvedic invaders" on the indigenous peoples of the subcontinent. The widespread acceptance of this theory is evident in the remarks of Hutton, who was publishing as late as 1962

44. Hutton, 1962, op. cit., p. 176.

45. Dumont, op. cit., p. 269.

46. Dumont, op. cit., p. 26.

statements such as:⁴⁷

It seems likely, however, that it was largely the social and political impact of the Rigvedic invaders with their definitely graded social classes that was responsible for introducing the principle of social precedence into a society already divided into groups isolated by taboos.

The theory of the diffusion of the Aryan culture creating the hierarchical structure of the caste system was strongly influenced by linguistic theories of the late nineteenth century. Philologists, such as Bishop Caldwell, identified language with race. Maintaining a view similar to those of contemporary German comparative philologists that the speakers of Indo-European languages were descendants of the Aryan tribes which entered the subcontinent after 2000 b.c.e. to "conquer and colonize"⁴⁸, Caldwell identified the Brahmans of south India with the Aryans. With the observation that Sanskrit was cultivated by the southern Brahmans, Caldwell inferred that they were of the Aryan race and Sanskrit was their mother tongue.⁴⁹

These views were taken by Sir Herbert Risley, although he recognized the danger of correlating language with race.⁵⁰ Instead, Risley correlated race with caste rank, in accordance with the theory of the diffusion of the Aryan population in the Indian subcontinent. It was mainly through the work of Risley that the functional theory of caste was

47. Hutton, 1962, op. cit., p. 189.

48. Caldwell, A comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages (Madras: 1961, first published in 1856), p. xi, 67.

49. Ibid.

50. Risley, H., The People of India (London: 1911.), pp. 7f.

displaced by a theory which accounted for the dominance of the Brahmans through their identification with the Aryan group. Risley contended on the basis of anthropometric measurements that caste ranking could be equated with the racial make-up of the group. According to Risley social rank corresponded in inverse ratio to the average calibration of the nasal index, which was the prime indicator of the racial background of the group.⁵¹

In very simple terms, Risley's theory locates the basis of the caste system in the confrontation of two races, the fair Aryans and the dark Dravidians. The conquest and subjugation of the Dravidians by the Aryans led to racial differentials in the resulting social structure. The key components of the caste system were attributed to a desire to maintain racial purity on the part of the Aryan invaders: endogamy to the maintenance of purity of succession; the pollution taboo to a primitive notion of consubstantiality of purity endangered by contact with contagious impurity; and a division of labour to the fear of pollution. The concepts of mānā and taboo, just discovered in Polynesia were utilized in proof of this explanation of the pollution taboo. The ensuing breakdown into numerous endogamous groups was accounted for through hypergamy and kinship fission.

The racial theory of caste is well known, and it has been suggested that the racial tensions and prejudices of the western world led Risley and other European scholars to exaggerate the role of race in the formation

51. Ibid., p. 76.

of caste.⁵² What is important about Risley's theory is the influence it had on the politicians of his period. The conquest of the Dravidians in the past, as it was described by Risley, was equated with the oppression perceived by the British in the present state of the Depressed Classes. A comparison of a passage from Risley's book with the statement made by a high British official before the Franchise Committee points to this influence. Risley claimed that⁵³

[The Aryans] behaved, in fact, towards the Dravidians whom they conquered in exactly the same way as some planters in America behaved to the African slaves whom they imported. This is a rough statement of what may be taken to be the ultimate basis, a basis common to India and to certain stages of society all over the world. The principle upon which the system rests is the sense of distinctions which, while too weak to preclude the men of the dominant race from intercourse with the women whom they have captured, is still strong enough to make it out of the question that they should admit the men they have conquered to equal rights.

In testimony given to the Franchise Committee, the Madras official equates the theory of Dravidian conquest with the present state of the lowest castes: "Below the Brahmin and non-Brahmin caste come the low caste Panchama ('the fifth') or Pariah community... The position of the low castes prior to British occupation was avowedly one of slavery... The Pariah is effectively kept in a servile position though no longer nominally a slave"⁵⁴.

The racial theory is no doubt simplistic, but the facile equation of the Depressed Classes with a conquered, indigenous civilization, led

52. Philips, P., ed., Histories of India, Pakistan and Ceylon (Oxford: 1962), p. 105.

53. Risley, 1911, op. cit., p. 275f.

54. Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, 1932, vol. I, Cmd. 4068, op. cit., p. 124f.

to a certain sentimental approach to the lowest castes. For example, the remarks of Sir Henry Lawrence at a discussion of Indian and British politicians underscore an increasing tendency to mythologize the origins of the Depressed Classes by tracing them to the builders of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, the ruins of which had just been discovered in 1923:⁵⁵

... I differ where it is said that it is not worthwhile to enquire into the origin of the Depressed Classes... It would greatly assist the rise of these people to equality of modern citizenship if after the degradation to which they have been subjected for thousands of years, they could establish their claim to the civilization and artistic culture which are now being revealed by the researches of archaeological explorers.

With Risley's speculations on race as the prime factor in the development of the caste system, the idea of a racial determinant of caste membership became well established in the early twentieth century and was, moreover, accepted as a viable explanation of caste. Much of this theory permeated the official documents of the period. Risley, as Census Commissioner of 1901 made the definitive statement on the status of the lowest castes:⁵⁶

The Doms, among whom we find scavengers, vermin-eaters, executioners, basket-makers, musicians, and professional burglars, probably represent the remnants of a Dravidian tribe crushed out of recognition by the invading Aryans and condemned to menial and degrading occupations.

It has been supposed that the Sudras of Indo-Aryan tradition were originally a Dravidian tribe which was thus incorporated into the social system of the conquering race. Considerations of space preclude me from attempting an exhaustive enumeration of the castes which plausibly can be described as tribes absorbed

55. Coatman, J., "Reform in India and the Depressed Classes", in Asiatic Review, Vol. XXIX, 1933, p. 66.

56. Risley, op. cit., p. 76.

into Hinduism, but I may mention as illustrations of the transformation that has taken place, the Ahir, Dom, and Dosadh of the United Provinces and Bihar; the Gujar, Jat, Meo, and Rajput of Rajputana and the Punjab; the Kol, Mahar, and Maratha of Bombay; the Bagdi, Bauri, Chandal (Namasudra), Kaiartta, Pod, and Rajbansikochh of Bengal; and in Madras the Mal, Nayar, Vellala and Paraiyan or Pariah...

Most of the castes in this reference were later classified as Depressed Classes - neither the term Untouchable nor Depressed Class was in use when Risley was writing - and were returned in the list of Scheduled Castes in the 1931 Census.⁵⁷ The statements cited above portray succinctly Risley's conditional understanding of the status of the lowest castes. These castes shared one important common feature: they were remnants of a vanquished people and according to Risley their present (1901) lifestyle was representative of this feature. Labelled as remnants of the vanquished indigenous population, these autochtones formed a distinct category among the people of India, and thus comprised a clear segment of the population. Their status resulted from political oppression as they were "crushed" by the occupation of an invading race.

This understanding of the status of the lowest castes filtered through the government documentation on caste in the early part of this century. The subsequent ethnographic reports filed in the Census Reports indicate that the later Census Commissioners subscribed to Risley's postulations. F.A. Gait, a collaborator with Risley in the 1901 Census and the Commissioner of the 1911 Census discussed both the functional and racial explanations of caste but opted for the racial theory. His conclusions

57. Census of India, 1931, Vol. 1, Report, pp. 474-482.

followed those of Risley:⁵⁸

There was a regular gradation of social rank, the communities of pure Aryan and pure aboriginal stock being respectively at the top and bottom, and those with varying degrees of racial mixture in the middle... Even now caste largely corresponds to race in Northern India at least, the social status of a caste is indicated by its physical type, those at the top having an Aryan, and those at the bottom an aboriginal physiognomy.

Gait as well, regarded the correlation of occupation with caste a result of conquest, where the "conquerers would naturally have reserved for themselves the higher occupations, leaving the more primitive ones to the aborigines"⁵⁹. Gait had also directed the provincial superintendents "to enumerate castes and tribes returned as Hindus who did not conform to certain standards or were subject to certain disabilities". A list of ten questions was provided to help compile a list of castes which⁶⁰

1. deny the supremacy of the Brahmans;
2. do not receive the mantra from a Brahman or other recognized Hindu guru;
3. deny the authority of the Vedas;
4. do not worship the great Hindu gods;
5. are not served by good Brahmans as family priests;
6. have no Brahman priests at all;
7. are denied access to the interior of Hindu temples;
8. cause pollution (a) by touch; (b) within certain distance;
9. bury their dead;
10. eat beef and do not do reverence to cow.

These questions, listed under the heading "Who is a Hindu?", were included in the Census to provide cultural evidence to separate the aboriginal

58. Census of India (here cited as C.I.R.), 1911, Vol. I, part 1, pp. 28f.

59. Ibid., p. 381.

60. Ibid., p. 387, the list of ten questions is also cited in C.I.R., 1931, Bengal and Sikkim, p. 494, Porter, the Census Superintendent in 1931, quotes Gait's list.

stratum from the rest of the population. Gait also discussed a phenomenon of "Hinduization": "a tribe, on becoming 'Hinduized' assumes a new name which often has a functional connotation, in order to conceal the origins of the group and to improve its social status"⁶¹. Given the predilection to associate the racial make-up of a caste with Risley's theory of Aryan conquest, the listing of the castes "subject to certain disabilities" is clearly an attempt to associate them with the aboriginal peoples of the subcontinent.

In the 1931 Census the topic of the racial theory of caste was discussed as well. Part III of Volume 1, entitled Ethnographic Report, written by B.S. Guha, took up the discussion of racial affinity of caste groupings, for the purpose of disclosing racial types among the upper and lower castes and to determine the extent of mixture between the Brahmans and upper stratum, and the lower and aboriginal tribes.⁶² This report outlined a rigorous method to classify anthropometric measurements taken as examples of the distribution of physical characteristics in the caste system. Of the representative castes catalogued, however, only the Brahman and the lowest castes, the "aboriginal" castes were considered; the intermediate castes' measurements were either not taken or were not included in the report in light of its objectives. Many of the conclusions drawn from the report highlight the acceptance of the theory of Aryan subjugation of the indigenous inhabitants. The identification of the Untouchables

61. C.I.R., 1911, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 374.

62. C.I.R., Part III, Vol. 1 Ethnographic Report, 1931, p. iv. Of the objectives cited in the report, one was to examine the correlation of Brahman castes with Aryan blood.

with these indigenous inhabitants is apparent. For example, a report of Dr. Havelock Charles, a British anthropologist, was included in the discussion of castes of the Punjab. In the evaluation of physical statistics of members of Chudra and Chamar castes, two castes enumerated as Scheduled Castes, Dr. Charles concluded, that found in these two "out-castes" is the "blood from the indigenous inhabitants which does not appear to have been absorbed in any appreciable degree in the rest of the people of the Punjab"⁶³.

From this survey of statements speculating on the nature of caste, it is apparent that the theory correlating race with caste was well-accepted in British circles in the first quarter of this century. This theoretical model influenced all research on the caste system, and was the basis of most of the official ethnographic material compiled on the caste system. The Census Commissioners of 1901, and 1911⁶⁴ accepted this theory, and J.H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner of 1931, whose views were more synthetic, at least condoned it.⁶⁵ The inclusion in the 1931 Census Report of a monograph detailing the racial affiliations of caste indicates that the topic still commanded a great deal of attention, while the

63. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

64. The 1921 Census Report was unavailable at the time of writing.

65. Hutton, in this discussion on caste in the 1931 Census Report avoids any simplistic explanations of caste. In his later work on caste, first written in 1951, Hutton offers a series of atomistic explanation for the system, but as pointed out above, was influenced by the concept of the diffusion of Aryan culture. In the Report on the "Exterior" Castes, included in the Census Report as an appendix (*C.I.R.* 1931, Vol. I, Part 1, Report, pp. 471-501), Hutton again avoids theorizing, and merely describes the enumeration process prefaced by a few examples of Untouchability offered by internal cultural evidence.

objectives of this report, to type the upper stratum and the aboriginal stratum, reflect an uncritical acceptance of the theory. The concern in the 1931 Ethnographic Report was with Risley's methodology, not with his theory. Risley's understanding of the origin of the lowest castes in the hierarchy was not overtly challenged in the official documents.

This identification of the lowest stratum of the Hindu population with the subjugated Dravidians would seem to be the force behind the isolation of the Depressed Classes as a special interest group. As Risley's racial theory became more and more popular in the early part of this century, the British came to think that the relationship of the Depressed Classes to the rest of the Hindu population was different in kind, different from other intercaste relationships. The questions used by the Census Commissioner of 1911 to isolate the castes which "did not conform to certain standards or are subject to certain disabilities"⁶⁶ - the group of castes which later came to be called the Depressed Classes⁶⁷ - all revolved around the issue of ritual status. Questions seven and eight especially pertain to the issue of ritual pollution. As the preceding chapter outlined, the idea of pollution is an inhibitor in all intercaste relationships in the caste system; the constraints based on the fear of pollution operate on a sliding scale throughout the system, and not only with respect to the lowest, Untouchable castes. However, it appears that in the minds of the British, the administration of pollution

66. See p. 67.

67. Porter in C.I.R., Bengal and Sikkim, 1931, p. 494, observes "Up to 1915 in Bengal at least the expression 'depressed classes' was unknown".

constraints against the lowest castes by high caste Hindus was understood to be unique, and indicative of an unique status on the part of the lowest castes; the pollution barrier was treated as a survival of the ancient subjugation of the race.

When, as in the nineteenth century, the enforcement of the pollution barrier was seen to be part of a functional division of castes, the practice was not questioned by the British administration. The legal approach which treated caste divisions with the same sympathy as was accorded the religious tradition accepted group differentiation as normative. Social interaction which was controlled by a principle of pollution was not questioned by the British administration; exclusion of the lowest castes from places traditionally restricted to them was even supported by court rulings, as long as this practice operated within the Hindu superstructure. The pollution barrier was buttressed by the British court rulings. Practices pertaining to the pollution barrier were not questioned by British authority. The pollution restraints, which were found throughout the caste system, were accepted as part of the social organization of the Hindus.

When, however, new speculations on the origins of the caste system had permeated government documentation, political attention turned to the stratum of the population readily identifiable with the "subjugated indigenous peoples". In this framework, the constraints of pollution were seen as a means of subjugating the original inhabitants of the subcontinent. From this point of view, the pollution barrier, as it pertained to the separation between the lowest castes and the rest of the society, was not condoned. As interest in the lowest castes increased, this separation was transformed

into a political crisis, one which carried with it the undertones of a past conflict reconstructed in Risley's racial theory of caste. The nature of the relationship between the members of the lowest castes and members of other Hindu castes had not changed; the model of understanding had. Between the shift of models there emerged the idea that the enforcement of a pollution barrier against the lowest castes was very different from the conceptual restraints (i.e., the fear of pollution) which operated in other intercaste interaction. That which differentiated the Untouchables, according to the model of understanding popularized by Risley's work, was treated as unique to the Untouchables.

Statements made by spokesmen of the Untouchable castes to the effect that they preferred British bureaucracy to Brahman oligarchy added to the political concern. M.C. Rajah, appointed as representative of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislative Assembly in the 1920's testified before the Simon Commission, which was reporting on the problems of franchise in India:⁶⁸

we would fight to the last drop of our blood-any attempt to transfer the seat of authority in this country from British hands to the so-called high caste Hindus who had been oppressing us in the past.

This point of view was endorsed by the British officials, if not deliberately fostered by them. Dispatches sent by British officials stationed in India expressed doubt about the viability of democratic institutions if central authority was to be transferred to native administrators:⁶⁹

68. Indian Statutory Commission, Reports of the Committees to Cooperate with the Indian Statutory Commission, Vol. III, Report of the Indian Statutory Commission (London: H.M.S.O., 1929), p. 346.

69. First Dispatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms, Appendix I (London: H.M.S.O.: 1919), p. 15, citing a letter from Mr. McPherson, I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the government of Bihar and Orissa.

The overwhelming majority of the Hindu members of our Legislative Councils are members of the twice-born caste... even if their knowledge of the masses be greater than that of the European officials, it is to be remembered that their interests are frequently diametrically opposed and where this is the case the masses will go to the wall.

The question of representation and of protection of the lowest castes had become "a question of urgent and widespread concern"⁷⁰ in the early twentieth century. The Depressed Classes, rather than being defined by economic criteria, were defined by the British theory of untouchability. The usual connotation of "Depressed Classes", referring to the economic condition of an indigent portion of the population was replaced with an Indian variant: the Depressed Classes were unconditionally and solely identified with the practice of Untouchability.⁷¹ This practice, which was seen to derive from the historical position of the Untouchables as vanquished peoples, was treated as the survival of political oppression on the one hand, and the perpetuation of social oppression on the other. Moreover, this practice, sustained by a barrier of pollution, readily identified peoples thus oppressed, and hence became the criterion which qualified these peoples for political favouritism. With this development the understanding of "the problems of caste had become for the first time a serious

70. I.S.C., Vol. I, cmd. 3568, op. cit., p. 34.

71. The I.S.C. clearly identifies the Depressed Classes as Untouchables. The Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, 1932, cmd. 4086, op. cit., p. 113, states that only the "unclean castes whose touch or shadow causes pollution" be considered as Depressed Classes. This meaning is contrasted with the meaning of "Depressed Classes" in Europe. Porter, in the Census of India Report, 1931, Bengal and Sikkim, op. cit., p. 494, also contrasts the meaning of "Depressed Classes" in European countries, i.e. economic, with the meaning of the term in India, "inferior, degraded, outcaste, or not fit in any way for social and religious intercourse on reasonably equal terms with members of the clean or higher castes".

political issue"⁷²; this understanding led to the creation of a special political category. The practice of Untouchability was politicized because it was thought to be in essence different from other interactional restraints at work in the caste system. Untouchability was isolated from the conceptual framework in which ritual status is a key component, and set up as an indicator of a political division. In the end the British perpetuated their own understanding of caste through their constitutional reforms.

The Administration of Safeguards for the Depressed Classes

With the introduction of the recommendations in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, the Depressed Classes were initiated as a minority group into Indian politics. The discussion above has suggested the theoretical basis upon which this initiation rests, and why a disparate grouping of castes was merged into one category.⁷³ By the 1920's the British political opinion was that the Untouchables were in need of political protection by virtue of their past treatment in Hindu society, hence the category of Depressed Classes was never questioned, at least not in British statements. However, as has been stressed above, just as

72. I.S.C., cmd. 3568, op. cit., p. 27.

73. It should be noted that Montagu's recommendations were that representatives of different castes be nominated to represent the different Depressed Castes. The separate nomination of representatives of different Untouchable castes was later replaced with a blanket reservation for Depressed Classes, in the 1920's. By the Simon Commission, 1928, representation was guaranteed for the Depressed Classes as a specific category, rather than for specific Depressed Classes.

the category of "Depressed Classes" was not questioned, so it was not defined. Only when precise population percentages were needed to implement guaranteed representation through the reservation of seats in the legislature was an official definition process established.

The discussion above has already given a number of citations from a number of the committees and commissions which dealt with the issue of the Depressed Classes, so the official line of thinking about Untouchability is already apparent. Rather than repeating the argument which has been distilled above, the model of caste which is outlined in the Report of the Indian Statutory Commission⁷⁴ will be highlighted. This report, also known as the report of the Simon Commission, provides a succinct statement on the thought that went into the make-up of the category of Depressed Classes. In addition, the report was prepared just before the Round Table Conferences, held in 1929-1931. At these conferences, representatives of all the politicians involved in the issue of reservations for the Depressed Classes met, and out of the conferences the MacDonald Award was made. No agreement was reached among the Indian representatives, so Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald exercised the prerogative of the British government in awarding the Depressed Classes guaranteed political representation through separate elections. The policy of the British government had changed from nomination to separate election, to finally a compromise of joint elections (Hindu and Untouchable) for the reserved seats. Despite these administrative changes, the British view of the Depressed Classes changed little. How these events unfolded will be explained in the next chapter.

74. I.S.C., Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, 1929, Vols I-VII,
op. cit.

The Simon Commission devoted a small chapter to caste and the Depressed Classes. This chapter in general reiterated the theory of Risley. The report stated that the caste system "may have originated in the preservation of ceremonial purity in social relations, and in the rules designed to limit the admixture of blood"⁷⁵. The theory of the Aryan invasion is noted, and caste is explained:⁷⁶

the system owes its origin to the desire of the fairer Aryan people who migrated into India to preserve their own racial characteristics by the imposition of social barriers between themselves and the dark-skinned races whom they found already established in the Indian peninsula.

The report also mentioned the process of Hinduization. In describing the four-fold division of varna, with which a tenuous connection is made to the organization of Aryan society, the report offered an explanation of the origin of the Sūdras: "The permeating power of Hinduism has absorbed into this lowest order masses of men who were originally outside its pale and may be descendants of an earlier and conquered race"⁷⁷. The Depressed Classes were differentiated from the Sūdras in the report, as not being fully "Hinduized" castes. According to the report, the non-twice-born, but intermediate castes, have been fully absorbed, while the "lowest stratum" is still distinguished.⁷⁸ The report also defined

75. I.S.C., Vol. I, cmd. 3568, op. cit., p. 36, quotes only a figure from the 1901 census, which was "the first time a systematic classification was drawn attempted". The landmark of Risley's census report supercedes the figures of the later reports.

76. Ibid., p. 35.

77. Ibid., p. 36.

78. Ibid.

the caste system as a product of Brahmanism, and made the observation that the "power and influence" of the Brahmans is "out of all proportion with their numbers"⁷⁹.

The Depressed Classes are defined in the report as "the lowest castes recognised as being within the Hindu religious and social system", the defining characteristic of which is their untouchability.⁸⁰ These were to be the castes eligible for the benefits which were looming in the political horizon. The "actual disabilities other than religious" which necessitated the political interest were left vague. In addition to pollution, by touch and the restriction on temple entry, two difficulties were cited, the denial of access to wells or tanks used by other castes and the restriction from entry to schools.⁸¹ The second point was followed with a reference to the Auxiliary Committee on Education which was working with the problem of education.

The recommendations of the report are clear; a system of reservation through separate election is necessary. The reasons for these recommendations are never clearly spelled out. It was assumed that the identification with the issue of Untouchability was adequate reason, although the report also includes a number of examples to illustrate where the practice of Untouchability was on the decline.⁸² Apparently these examples were not

79. Ibid., p. 35.

80. Ibid., p. 37f.

81. Ibid., p. 38.

82. Ibid., p. 39.

adequate evidence to challenge the assumption of the need of the Depressed Classes for statutory privileges. The report stated:⁸³

We are not, of course, presuming to do more than record our impressions of the present conditions as these affect the constitutional problem, and for this purpose criticism and prophecy are equally out of place.

When it became apparent that some sort of statutory benefits were to be given to the Depressed Classes, a procedure to identify and determine the population distribution of the Depressed Classes was set in motion. Accurate returns of the number of Untouchables were needed to finalize the provisions the British government was setting up to guarantee the political status of the Depressed Classes. The enumeration of the Depressed Classes is an illustration of how the official model of Untouchability was actualized. The procedure to list the Depressed Castes became part of the 1931 Census, and the methodology outlined by the Census Superintendents became, in essence, a final statement on the logic that went into the British government's thinking on the status of the lowest stratum of the Hindu population.

The enumeration of the Depressed Classes

All the Census Superintendents in 1931 were required to detail the names and numbers of Depressed Classes in the reports for their areas. These schedules, which were attached as appendices became the basis for the list included in Government of India Act, 1935, cited above. The castes listed thus became the Scheduled Castes, and the discussions in

83. Ibid., p. 37.

the Census Reports pertaining to the criteria used for the enumeration and subsequent listing are crucial for the understanding of the attitudes at play.

Instructions for the 1931 Census concluded with the enjoinder from the Government of India that "attention should be paid to the collection of information conducive to a better knowledge of the backward and depressed classes and of the problem in their present and future welfare"⁸⁴. In connection with this order, the area superintendents were required to list the castes which were to be included in a schedule. This was to be done from region to region, as "insuperable difficulties in framing a list of depressed classes which will be applicable to India as a whole"⁸⁵ were recognized. Presumably, the difficulties involved the wide latitude of practices the idea of Untouchability evoked from the inhabitants of the different regions of India.

Nonetheless, the assumption was made in the instructions that "the castes which belong to this class are generally known and can in the most parts of India be listed for a definite area"⁸⁶. This assumption, in part, explains the striking variations in enumeration procedure, and the contrasts between the lists returned, as the interpretation of the nature and meaning of the practice of Untouchability was left to the discretion of each Census Superintendent. No specific criteria were given

84. Census of India Report, 1931, Appendix I, quoted verbatim in Hutton, 1963, op. cit., p. 193.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

other than the instruction to enumerate the "depressed classes as castes, contact with whom entails purification on the part of high-caste Hindus".⁸⁷ At a meeting of Census Superintendents in January, 1931, the question of listing of the Depressed Classes was raised. There it was agreed that each province was responsible for the listing to determine which castes suffered "disability on account of their low social position"; however, no additional information was provided, nor were more precise specifications given.⁸⁸ Hutton's report cited the variability of conditions at play in each province as the reason that the definition of the enumeration process was essentially left to each superintendent.

In addition, statements about the purpose of the enumeration were purposely vague, as no statutory rights for the Depressed Classes had yet been legalized. Had the British government stated that the purpose of the "information-gathering" was to set up a system of statutory benefits, it would have usurped the power of the Congress Party and other groups which were carrying on negotiations to determine the political structure of a home-ruled India. In the end, the British did just that. The MacDonald Award of 1932 which set up a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes set the British understanding of Untouchability into law. Although the award was modified in a crisis situation following Gandhi's protest fast in September of 1932, it is effectively the British model that is preserved in the Constitution of India, in Articles 330-342.

87. Ibid., Hutton stated, "for the purposes of the Census of India, I propose to retain the term depressed classes to indicate untouchables, whether of the milder or of the more severe degree of untouchability.

88. Ibid., pp. 193-194.

The Indian politicians were cognizant of this. Ambedkar used the authority of British justice to ensure the retention of safeguards for the Scheduled Castes even after all other questions of minority rights had been resolved. Gandhi, as well, in his opposition to the politization of Untouchability was aware of the role the British played in the making of the phenomenon of Scheduled Castes. More will be said about both Ambedkar and Gandhi in later chapters, but one observation is pertinent now. When Gandhi reviewed the 1931 Census Reports in his journal, The Harijan, he entitled the series of articles, "Of Human Manufacture". This is a play on words. It either refers to the status of Untouchability as dependent on a state of mind, conditioned by cultural tradition, or it refers to the idea that the British through their Census tabulations created an interest group out of their assumptions about Hindu society.⁸⁹ If the second reading of Gandhi's title is correct, than, at least in Gandhi's mind, the relationship of the Untouchables to the British was a more important factor in their making than was their relationship to the rest of Hindu society.

Untouchability was the focus of the procedure to quantify the eventual Scheduled Castes. This followed the pattern set by the Census Commission. In the directives set up by Hutton, the Census Commissioner

89. The Harijan, May 6, 1933, p. 6:

"There are 48 castes in the Census Report of 1931 (of Bengal) as against only 19 in 1921... the untouchables are a human manufacture ... by census enumerators, who have nothing to do with religious untouchability... in accordance with instructions, which were received from their superiors and which varied from time to time, so that an untouchable of yesterday ceases to be an untouchable of to-day and he who was not an untouchable yesterday through these Census Reports turns untouchable today".

of 1931 occupation, ignorance, illiteracy or poverty were not explicitly part of the criteria to be used to enumerate those in need of special franchise concessions, only ritual status was important: the Depressed Classes were "castes, contact with whom entails purification on the part of high-caste Hindus"⁹⁰.

An examination of Hutton's appendix to the 1931 Census points to the basis of his thinking. Hutton adopted the term "exterior" as the most satisfactory label to be given to these castes. By choosing this term, Hutton opted for the idea of isolation, rather than civil disability. According to Hutton's interpretation, the meaning of exterior caste refers to "one who is outside the caste system and is therefore not admitted to Hindu society", connoting "exclusion but not extrusion"⁹¹. Hutton's directives entailed the conceptualization of categorical differences between the "exterior" castes and the rest of Hindu society by calling attention to the notion that contact between those excluded and those included would require ritual purification. He went on to point out that the definition of the Depressed Classes does not have an empirical basis in "occupation as such but refers to those castes which by reason of their traditional position in Hindu society are denied access to temples, for instance, or have to use separate wells, or are not allowed to sit inside a school house but have to remain outside..."⁹², all of which can be reduced to a pollution barrier.

90. Hutton, 1963, op. cit., p. 193.

91. Ibid., pp. 192f.

92. Ibid., p. 193.

That this set of practices was thought to be in essence different from other interactional restraints higher up in the caste system is reflected in Hutton's theoretical work on caste. In the preface to the third edition Hutton wrote⁹³

Most writers on caste do seem to regard untouchability as inseparably bound up with the caste system, and some as a necessary condition to the survival of Hinduism, but I cannot see it in either of these aspects myself... the untouchability of certain groups as groups does not apply to the majority of graded castes and cannot therefore be essential to the system.

In this statement Hutton saw Untouchability only as an attribute, a stigma, attached to certain differentiated people; he did not see the idea of pollution in operation in other social interaction, nor did he take into account the importance attached to ritual status among all groups. For Hutton, as for most of the other administrators of British India, the practice of Untouchability was indicative of blatant oppression. Although Hutton wrote the above opinion in 1960, his thinking was still bound up with the premises of the ethnographic theories of the early twentieth century.⁹⁴ By 1960, most other theoreticians of caste had moved to a more holistic approach that no longer emphasized the uniqueness of the Untouchables.

In the 1931 Census, the thrust of the identification of the Depressed Classes centered on the principle of exclusion, in accordance with the contorted logic that enumeration of exclusion would provide a means of inclusion - inclusion in the political process. The very vagueness

93. Ibid., p. x.

94. The opinion is shared by A.M. Hocart, see the introduction to the English translation of C. Bougle, Essay on the Caste system (Cambridge: 1971), p. iv.

of Hutton's directives, however, allowed a great deal of leeway for the Census superintendents to develop their own meanings of the term "Depressed Classes". A review of the returns indicates that the Census Superintendents did not share the understanding that Untouchability should be the source of political concern. Nor was the rationale that giving substance to a principle of exclusion would lead to later inclusion accepted. In a number of cases the superintendents devised their own criteria, or shifted Hutton's to suit their understanding of the problem being addressed.⁹⁵

In Madras, for example, the Census Superintendent took Hutton's directives literally and returned in the schedule only those castes which fit the criterion of "polluting". In citing the figures given for the Depressed Classes the Superintendent writes:⁹⁶

this figure cannot be taken as an absolute tale of those to whom the particular disabilities summed up under the broad term 'depressed' attach... there are other bodies the difficulties of whose life are hardly less than those of any Adi-Dravida, but to whom the theoretical stigma of untouchability does not apply... If the figure is viewed primarily as the existence of heavy social disabilities, it is a minimum, if it considers strict personal polluting power, it is a maximum.

In the Prince's State of Travancore, however, the enumeration was based on whether the caste was restricted from entry past the outer wall of the temple compound.⁹⁷ In the report of the Central India Agency, the

95. Dushkin, op. cit., 1972, speaks of the list of nine points set forth by Hutton as criteria "to be employed by the provincial superintendents" p. 72. This is incorrect. These points referred to in C.I.R., 1931, Appendix I, p. 472, were redacted after the provincial reports were returned. Hutton summed up the disparate criteria used by the provincial superintendents in an effort to establish uniformity, and to clarify the criteria used.

96. C.I.R., 1931, Madras, pp. 430-431.

97. C.I.R., 1931, Travancore, pp. 430-431.

superintendent, C.S. Venkatachar, dismissed the question of depressed classes with the comment that "no one in the area of Central India was concerned with "who is depressed and who is not"⁹⁸. His comments point out that the term has "nowhere been satisfactorily and accurately defined" and was often applied in a manner more to invoke sympathy than to convey precision. While recognizing that the use of the term "depressed" was dependent upon the purposes for which it was intended, Venkatachar returned a list in which⁹⁹

literacy forms almost no criterion, for we will have to classify almost the entire population as depressed... [the list] is restricted to cover only those castes which are considered untouchable, i.e. whose contact with the higher castes causes pollution and who are denied access to places of worship and to the use of wells.

In Venkatachar's mind, the question of Untouchability was important only in reference to ceremonial or personal purity. The impression Venkatachar's report leaves is that he considered the whole issue spurious, but nevertheless complied with his orders. His list, along with the lists from the south, however, are examples of a more strict adherence to Hutton's directives. A number of superintendents in the north added other criteria to Hutton's minimum. Mr. C.S. Mullan, in his report for Assam accepted the definition of depressed classes as castes "beyond the pale of Hindu society... on the other side of a barrier which prevents them from moving upward"¹⁰⁰. The test of pollution devised by Mullan was whether members

98. C.I.R., 1931, Central Indian Agency, p. 280.

99. Ibid., p. 281.

100. C.I.R., 1931, Assam, pp. 209-210.

of upper castes would accept water from the members of the caste. If not, that caste was considered depressed, or exterior, as Mullan preferred to label the castes of his schedule. Mullan, however, qualified that criterion in a number of cases. Wealth, for example, was considered to preclude inclusion on the schedule. In certain districts, Mullan adopted other criteria such as occupation. In effect, he took what he perceived to be the lowest castes and found reasons for their inclusion on the list.

Mullan also cited the opinion of an informant, a Professor Nalini Shastri, who questioned the existence of "exterior" castes, with an argument that Hindu society is an organic whole featuring different grades and ranks, each with distinctive characteristics and customs. Shastri pointed out that each of these component parts has a definite relationship to the whole¹⁰¹, and none, by virtue of this part in the organization could be considered "exterior": "there is no justification of the assumption of a distinct class, called 'depressed', as separate from the others".¹⁰² Mullan, however, rejected this view, calling it a view from the top down, countering with the argument that "an organization imposed from above" like the caste system was oppressive; one at the bottom "cannot climb to the top because the organization will not let him. It is small comfort for him to realize that he is part of an organic whole"¹⁰³.

101. C.I.R., 1931, Appendix to Chapter xii, Vol. III, Assam, p. 224. This is strikingly like Dumont's thesis in Homo Hierarchicus, op. cit.

102. Ibid., p. 225.

103. Ibid.

The superintendents of the areas of the United Provinces and of Bihar and Orissa, A.C. Turner and E. Lacey both chose to differentiate between "depressed" and "untouchable". Turner, recognizing that the equation of "depressed" with "untouchable" was complicated by the fact that different castes and even the same caste in different localities have varying standards of untouchability" ordered the consultation with "local pandits and other influential Brahmans"¹⁰⁴. Eventually deciding that "there are untouchables who are in no sense depressed and conversely there are depressed classes who are not untouchable" Turner returned the schedule in two lists, "untouchable and depressed", and "touchable but depressed"¹⁰⁵. In compiling these lists he considered illiteracy and poverty to be qualifications for inclusion in the schedule. Along with Bengal, which will be discussed shortly, the United Provinces returned the largest Scheduled Caste population.

Lacey, the superintendent of Bihar and Orissa, likewise differentiated between Untouchable and depressed. He, however, took the opposite approach to that of Turner. Instead of including castes either illiterate and impoverished or Untouchable, Lacey opted for castes both depressed and untouchable. He rejected the inclusion of extremely poor, but non-Untouchable castes "although backward and poor and... held in low estimation, because the same stigma did not attack to them as to the other castes which have been included in the [1931] list"¹⁰⁶.

104. C.I.R., 1931, Appendix 2, Vol. XVIII, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, p. 628.

105. Ibid., p. 638.

106. C.I.R., 1931, Appendix III, Vol. VII, Bihar and Orissa, p. 286.

In Bengal, A.E. Porter questioned the usefulness of setting up such a political category, "as a social question... the problem of the depressed classes is primarily one for Hindu society to tackle for itself. As an administrative problem demanding the cognizance of government, social and religious disabilities are unsatisfactory as a test of the classes to be included, whilst the extent to which the depressed classes are denied participation in the advantages and conveniences maintained by the government is small as to be negligible"¹⁰⁷. Porter argued that the term "depressed classes" was alien, as "it does not translate to any actual vernacular term in common use in Bengal, nor does it describe any class the members of which can be defined with accuracy"¹⁰⁸.

Eventually, Porter adopted Blunt's more functional definition:¹⁰⁹

A depressed class is one whose social, economic, and other circumstance are such that it will be unable to secure adequate representation of its political views or adequate protection of its interest without some form of special franchise concession.

By using criteria abstracted from Blunt's definition, Porter included some two million "touchable, but depressed" peoples, in addition to approximately six million Untouchables.¹¹⁰

When the final list of Scheduled Castes was compiled by the Indian Franchise Committee, sixty-five percent of the Scheduled Caste population

107. C.I.R., 1931, Appendix I, vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, pp. 494-495.

108. Ibid., p. 498.

109. Ibid., see also Gandhi's discussion of the Bengal report in the Harijan, May 6, 1933, pp. 6-7, and May 13, 1933, pp. 4-5.

110. C.I.R., Bengal and Sikkim, p. 514, see also Dushkin, 1957, op. cit., p. 95.

was located in the provinces of Punjab, United Provinces, Bihar, and Bengal.¹¹¹ It is apparent that the shifting criteria used for the enumeration in the north account for the larger percentages in these areas. Although the official line of thinking as late as the Simon Commission of 1928 followed the racial model of caste and treated the Untouchables as a distinct group in opposition to the rest of society, the returns from the Census Superintendents demonstrate that this model was no longer applied in the field. These superintendents, armed by their district ethnographers and native informers, were already questioning the usefulness of the distinction of Untouchables from other Hindus. Many of the Census documents referred to the varna divisions as general group divisions, but were unable to establish with any degree of precision how the category of Depressed Classes fit into this schematic outline of Hindu society. When the problem was to determine who the Untouchable castes were, local pandits were sometimes consulted. This consultation often in effect reverted back to a Dharmasastric model, but this model, as in the case of Turner's Report on the United Provinces, was often modified to suit the superintendent's idea of "depressed". It also seems that at times the superintendents were genuinely at a loss to distinguish Untouchable castes from other low castes.

In the case of Porter's report, there was a certain reluctance to mix political prerogative with social categories. At the same time there was starting to be an awareness among the lowest castes of the usefulness of the classification of Depressed Castes. The Rajbhanshis, who were enumerated in 1921 as Untouchable castes, were excluded from

111. Dushkin, 1957, op. cit., p. 95.

the list in 1931. When the benefits of inclusion on the list became apparent after the MacDonald Award of 1932, the Rajbhanshis petitioned and were included in the final list compiled by the Indian Franchise Committee.

The Census lists had provided the basic data used by the Franchise Committee to "schedule" the Depressed Classes, which was supposed to have been based on the two criteria of temple entry and pollution by touch. The end result of the enumeration had departed from the original basis, and the variation among the returns was considerable. Although the terms "Depressed Classes", "Untouchables" and "Scheduled Castes" are used interchangeably and were intended to refer to the same set of criteria, or the same status identification, in actual fact the referents vary.

Conclusion

The conceptualization of the Depressed Classes as a clearly demarcated minority group, representative of a distinct stratum of culture was based extensively on a theoretical framework that went virtually unquestioned in official British circles. Much of the early British understanding of the workings of Hindu society came from textual sources which portrayed a clear pattern of four varnas plus an oblique fifth grouping of outcasts.

The British officials tended to view the social structure of caste in accordance with the model based on varna information, ignoring whatever disparate evidence came to the fore. In the application of this varna model, the lowest castes were sometimes considered to be Sūdras, and at

other times considered to be completely out of this four-fold division.¹¹² The ambiguity of the position of the Untouchables in the varna model brought out contradictory reactions on the part of British administration. At times the pollution restraints were actively supported, and at other times challenged as immoral when directed at the Untouchable castes.

As questions of self-determination were being raised in India around the turn of the century, the tendency was increasingly to view the lowest castes as comprising a fifth grouping of castes beyond the "pale of Hindu society". Risley first associated the lowest castes with an indigenous substratum of the population and his views were repeated in the official documentation. Risley based his views on the theory of the subjugation of the Dravidian population upon the Aryan invasion of India. The model was modified to account for a substratum of the population whose "Hinduization", or "Aryanization" (and in the later terms of Srinivas, "Sanskritization") was blocked by the erection of pollution barriers between groups. Exactly where the Untouchables fit into the proper schema of order in Hindu culture was no longer a puzzle when the solution was found in evidence of a political conquest in ancient Indian history. The conquered group, who were identified by Risley through his scale of anthropometric measurements, were assumed to be readily identifiable by the definable characteristic of inherent pollution. The stigma of pollution, even though it often proved to be elusive, was then established as the differentiating characteristic of the Depressed Classes, rather than poverty or low social standing.

112. Galanter, M., 1963, op. cit., p. 546. See also J.M.D. Derrett, op. cit., pp. 232f.

There are also indications that the British tended to associate the Hindu religious system with all the social ills in India. The series of assumptions which set the Depressed Classes apart as a fifth grouping in sharp contrast to the other four led to an interpretation of the role of ritual status among the Hindus. This was identified as a survival of racial conflict resulting from the diffusion of the Aryan culture in the subcontinent. The function of ritual rank, guarded by the Brahmanical treatises was treated as the cultural legacy of the displacement of the indigenous culture. The social disability of the Depressed Classes was their status as the inheritors of a vanquished civilization; the pollution barrier guaranteed against any later usurpation of power. As a survival of an original political oppression, this concept of pollution, with its corresponding behavioural restraints, was causally connected to the economic depression of the lowest castes. Poverty was treated as the direct result of the caste system. The relationship between ritual status and economic standing was treated as one of cause and effect, rather than as component parts in a social system. As economic standing was seen to derive from ritual status, any distinction or discrepancy between the two was blurred in official policy statements.

Due to this obfuscation, a certain degree of confusion was apparent in the process of definition. This was quite apparent as the Depressed Classes were being enumerated. As well, by the 1931 census, parts of Risley's theory were being questioned by the Census officials in the field, although the Report of the Simon Commission indicates that the general understanding of the Depressed Classes still largely corresponded to Risley's in documents from a higher level of government. In the reports

returned in 1931, there is a certain chaos. The confusion results from the uncertainty as to which problem, economic status or pollution, was actually being addressed. In some reports both issues were coalesced; poverty and the stigma of Untouchability were treated as coterminous. In others, some attempt was made to separate religious criteria from economic criteria. However, in the majority of statements, the root of the problem was treated as the result of religious conditioning. The destitution of the Untouchables, both social and economic, was traced to the restraints resulting from the ideas of purity and pollution at play in the social system. In the British view, it was because of the sacralization of ritual purity that poverty and oppression resulted for those members of the population who were forced into a categorical complement of impurity. Thus religious criteria were chosen as the most viable means of identifying the Depressed Classes. The constraints of pollution were associated with the cause of a depressed lifestyle as the stigma attached to the Depressed Classes was derived from an opposition of purity and impurity, symbolically representing two groups. According to British thinking, the original political conflict between the Aryan invaders and the indigenous peoples became the cause of oppression, which in turn was rationalized through the abstraction of ideas of purity and impurity. The practice of Untouchability, in turn, circumscribed all social interaction and led to social disability on the part of the Untouchables. In this sense, religious criteria defined the entire problem.

There are as well, other levels of explanation for the British interest in Untouchables. One which has been referred to is the idea

that the British sought to stunt the growth of nationalism by cultivating communal issues. Most of the members of the Constituent Assembly from 1947-1950 made reference to the "divide and rule" policy of the British. While this explanation is plausible, it does not account for all the factors which were at play as Untouchability was politicized. To reconstruct the making of the Scheduled Castes, a deeper level of meaning has to be sought. In this study answers were found as ethnographic theories were compared with ideas presented in the government documentation.

It is also possible to probe the psyche of the British as colonial masters, and argue that they projected their guilt onto their potential Hindu successors to justify their tenure as rulers. Notwithstanding the espousal of equalitarianism and utilitarianism, the British maintained sharp distinction between themselves and those whom they ruled. To counter the accusations being made by the Indians who were demanding home-rule, the British raised the issue of fundamental injustice in the caste system, the presumed legacy of the earlier confrontation of cultures. The heightened interest in the state of the Depressed Classes was evidence of the just and dispassionate approach of the British, in the face of the questions raised by the Indians as to the right of the British to rule India. The British justified their presence in India by producing examples of the unjust Indian social system. The classification of the lowest castes as a minority group whose rights had to be safeguarded is one example which surfaced during the Independence struggle; its legacy is the Scheduled Castes.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES IN THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

The special political status the Depressed Classes received during the Independence struggle has been traced back to a series of assumptions made by the British administration around the turn of the present century. The influence of ethnographic theory on the British policy has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter. Due to this influence and for other reasons suggested in the preceding chapter, a system of preferential political representation was set up by the British for the Depressed Classes. This system still survives as Articles 330-342 in the Indian Constitution. If it could be argued that British policy was solely responsible for the preferential treatment the Scheduled Castes receive in the Constitution, then little more in theory need be said. This system of special rights and privileges could be considered as nothing more than an odd footnote to the final chapter on British rule in Indian history.

This view is untenable, though, as the system of rights and privileges has demonstrated a vitality of greater depth than would be expected of a system arbitrarily imposed by foreign rule. The system has lasted thirty years beyond the original projection of ten, and there is little indication that the guarantees given to the Scheduled Castes will be allowed to lapse. Out of all the interest groups once officially

acknowledged, only the group of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has continued to be given political sanctions. The resistance to any change in the system by those who benefit from the network of rights and privileges has led a number of political and social commentators to speak of a restructuring of the caste system along broader horizontal lines.¹ Others have maintained that the system has done more to perpetuate the barriers between caste groups than to break them down, or to "integrate through separation"². Three broadly based reasons can be given for the tenacity of Scheduled Castes' rights.

First, the British did not create a special interest group out of a vacuum. As has already been pointed out in the introduction, the underlying definition of the classification, "Depressed Classes" does touch on a facet of Hindu social reality: Untouchability is a part of Hindu culture, both as a concept and as a social fact. That the British perception of Untouchability was, by the late nineteenth century, filtered through cultural and political ideologies which unduly magnified, if not falsified, the political dimensions of Untouchability, does not negate the existence of the issue itself.

-
1. For comments on this, see Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition, Part One, "Traditional Structures and Modern Politics: Caste". (Chicago and London: 1967), pp. 15-154; Owen Lynch, The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India (New York: 1969); Andre Beteille and M.N. Srinivas, "The Harijans of India" in Castes Old and New (Bombay: 1969), etc.
 2. M.N. Srinivas, in Caste in Modern India and Other Essays (Bombay: 1962) argues that the policy of protective discrimination perpetuates caste identity.

Secondly, the British had a history of social reform through legislature in India. The utilitarian philosophy of Lord William Bentinck, governor-general of British India from 1828-1835 initiated the process of establishing "social justice" through the legislature. With the appointment of Thomas Macaulay to the Calcutta Council in 1835, the philosophy of one nation ruling another in "the best interests" of the latter on the basis of its administration of "the greatest good for the greatest number" was firmly entrenched.³ The British claimed to subscribe to a policy of non-interference in social matters, but this policy was followed only as long as their perception of Indian social practices did not conflict with their understanding of social justice. The British did in fact interfere in a number of instances.⁴ With respect to Untouchability, the political arena became a forum for discussion on the status of the Untouchables because of the questions raised by the British about the power structure in an Independent India. The earlier established pattern of utilitarian government provided the justification of the political arena as a testing ground for change. But the full implications of the government's interest transformed a social issue into a political issue, replete with the incongruities such a transformation entails.

Third, although the political discussion of Untouchability was instigated by the British, it was quickly taken up by Indian spokesmen, both of Untouchable and higher caste. With the creation of an interest

3. Wolpert, A., A New History of India (New York: 1979), p. 214f.

4. The legal abolition of sati, or the self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre in 1823 is one example.

group labelled the Depressed Classes, the British first defined the issue politically, but the Hindu politicians were quick to respond with counter definitions equally political. In earlier confrontations with the British over issues of social justice, Hindu spokesmen had refused to participate in the legislation of social change. For example, Ram Mohan Roy, while agreeing in principle with Bentinck that the practice of satī was uncivilized, was opposed to its abolition by British law.⁵ Likewise, Bal Gangadhar Tilak organized mass protest against British interference in domestic issues. Tilak wrote, "We would not like that the Government should have anything to do with regulating our social customs or our ways of living... even supposing that the act of Government will be a very beneficial and suitable measure"⁶.

In the case of Untouchability, though, the Indian politicians were forced to respond. By making the treatment of the Untouchables in Hindu society a focus of attention both in India and abroad, the British had raised a challenge to the Indians' claim to the right of self-government. Any arguments put forth by the Indians claiming the right to self-determination had to counter the documentation produced by the British that one seventh of the Indian population was subjugated by Hindu custom. The attention generated by the British in the condition of the Depressed Classes could not be dismissed, because it directly pertained to the larger issue of self-government. The implications of the issue of the

5. Wolpert, op. cit., p. 212.

6. Wolpert, S., Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform on the Making of Modern India (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1962), p. 47, quoting Mahratta, I:22 (May 29, 1881), p. 1.

status of the Depressed Classes forced the Indian politicians to deal with the problem. All resulting interest in the Depressed Classes must be seen as the product of two forces, one, the British introduction of the issue of "Depressed Classes", and two, the Indians' response to that issue from within the framework of political reform. No analysis of the attention given to Depressed Classes can make any sense without referring to the power struggle at play.

The emergence of the Depressed Classes as a factor in the struggle for power in the Independence movement is reflected in the amount of political interest generated towards them from 1917 through Independence. Prior to 1917, the problem of caste status and the issue of Untouchability were considered to be questions of social reform. As such, these issues were of little importance in the Indian political arena. The platform of the Indian National Congress under the extremists such as B.G. Tilak and Annie Besant, eschewed questions of social reform with the argument that the expediency of political self-determination superceded all other considerations.

The argument was made to the effect that political self-determination took precedence over social reform because political reform was a necessary condition to social reform.⁷ An adjunct to this view was the opinion voiced by certain members of the Congress that any reform of social inequities could only be effected within the class or community facing

7. See Natarajan, S., A Century of Social Reform in India (Bombay: 1959), Bose, S.B., The Indian Struggle (Calcutta: 1945), Wolpert, S., Tilak and Gokhale (L.A.: 1961), etc.

such a problem.⁸ Nationalism was taking hold politically, but had not yet cross-cut social differentiation. Although there were organizations like the Social Conference which did take up matters like the Civil Marriage Act⁹, the policy of the national political organization was to ignore issues which were not of immediate political concern. In 1895, at the Congress meeting in Poona, the Anti-Social Reform Party led by Tilak, through a threat of party schism, removed any social issues from the Congress platform.¹⁰

-
8. For example, Dadabhai Naoroji, presiding over the second session of the Congress in 1886 said, It has been asserted that this Congress ought to take up questions of social reform and our failure to do this has been urged as a reproach against us... for everything there are proper times, proper circumstances, proper parties, and proper places; we are met together as a political body to represent to our rulers our political aspirations, not to discuss social reforms... How can this gathering of all classes discuss the social reforms needed in each individual class?... Only the members of that class can effectively deal with the reforms therein needed. The same view was echoed in the following year by the president of the third Session, Budruddin Tyaji, who said, "Any question of social reform must of necessity affect some particular part or some particular community of India only, and therefore... these questions can be best dealt with by the leaders of the particular communities to which they relate". Quoted in Ambedkar, B.R., What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables (Bombay: 1946), pp. 7-8.
9. The Civil Marriage Act was introduced by the British in 1872 and was supported by the Brahma Samaj. This act abolished early marriage, outlawed polygamy, sanctioned widow remarriage and intercaste marriages. See Sitaramayya, P., The History of the Indian National Congress (Delhi: 1969), p. 13.
10. Wolpert, 1961, op. cit., pp. 71f.

The Role of the Depressed Classes after 1917

After 1917, the situation changed. Caste, and specifically the status of the Untouchables became a political¹¹ issue, and issue which was be manipulated by those involved in the struggle for power. The British brought political recognition to the Untouchables, when Montagu interviewed representatives of Untouchable organizations during his fact-finding mission in India in November, 1917. Communiques sent to Montagu included declarations such as the one sent by a Depressed Classes Conference held in November, 1917, in Bombay. Of the seven points of the resolution passed at the conference, the third read:¹²

That it is the sense of this meeting that the administration of India should be largely under control of the British till all classes and specifically the Depressed Classes, rise up to a condition to effectually participate in the administration of the country.

The other points of the resolution included the request for political representation and aid for educational facilities for Depressed Classes.

It was in the later Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that reservation of seats for members of the lowest castes was recommended. The idea that the Depressed Classes formed a distinct political entity, in contradistinction to the rest of Hindu society, was given the first official

-
11. As the Simon Commission reads, "The problems of caste have for the first time in recent Indian history become a serious political issue". ISC, cmd. 3568, op. cit., p. 36.
12. Address Presented in India to His Excellency the Viceroy and the Right Honourable, the Secretary of State for India (London: H.M.S.O., 1917), Cmd. 9178, p. 75. Also quoted in Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 15.

sanction in the Government of India Act of 1919.¹³ The British, implementing a policy of nomination of representatives in the face of limited franchise, reserved one position out the fourteen non-official, or Indian, members to be nominated by the Governor-General to the Central Legislative Assembly for a representative of the Depressed Classes. In the Provincial Legislatures, the reservations included four nominations in the Central Provinces, two in Bombay, two in Bihar, and one each in Bengal and the United Provinces. In Madras, ten nominations were to represent nine castes.¹⁴ The reasoning for reserving nominations for the Depressed Classes is given in the report of the Franchise Committee:¹⁵

In assigning the number of seats in each council in which non-official representative may be appointed by nomination, we have been guided by the existence of important classes or interests which could not be expected to obtain representation by any practical system of election.

The interest the British had in the Depressed Classes has been viewed with a considerable degree of skepticism¹⁶, both then and now. Historians of the period treat the loyalty of the Depressed Classes organizations to the British government as a result of careful nurturing the attention of which was to weaken further the Congress movement already undermined by the Muslim challenge. Proponents of this view argue that the British employed a "divide and rule" policy to split India into

13. Cf. Keer, D., Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission (Bombay: 1971, first printed in 1954), p. 48, and Dushkin, 1957, op. cit., p. 19.

14. Ibid.

15. Kamble, J.R., op. cit., p. 67.

16. "The question of reservation for the Scheduled Castes was raised in this land during the British regime in pursuit of a policy... 'Divide and rule' was the policy of the alien rulers in India in those days". C.A.D., op. cit., vol. 9, p. 670.

competing communal groups to facilitate the British retention of power.¹⁷ This view has never been carefully examined, nor has the logic of the presumed "divide and rule" policy been satisfactorily analyzed. An alternative interpretation has been proposed in the preceding chapter; this chapter will only make passing reference to the possible intentions of the British. The motives behind the British actions have already been suggested. The British actions added to the stress in the Indian cultural system caused by the changing political make-up, but the discussion in this chapter will focus on the Indian response to the changing patterns of power.

The Reactions of the Congress Movement

About the same time that the British began courting the Untouchables, the Indian politicians moved the issue of Untouchability into the political arena. This was presumably due to "fears of diminished Hindu majorities and proposals for special legislative representation for 'Untouchables'"¹⁸. In order to gain support from the Untouchable groups who had become estranged from the Congress movement, the Congress was obliged to demonstrate an interest in upgrading the status of the Untouchables. In 1917, the Indian National Congress, with Tilak in control, recognized the issue of Untouchability. The resolution, which was passed by the Congress, introduced a note of concern with the "disabilities" of

17. See A. Appadori and Sir Maurice Gwyer, Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution, 1921-1947, Vol. I (Bombay: 1957), p. vi.

18. Galanter, M., 1972, op. cit., p. 237.

the Depressed Classes:¹⁹

The Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice, and righteousness of removing all disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience.

This resolution was based upon a manifesto issued by a Depressed Classes Conference held about the same time. The manifesto urged Congress to respond to the Depressed Classes, which were prohibited "from admission to public schools, hospitals, courts of justice, and public offices, and the use of public wells, etc.", with the enjoinder that the "disabilities, social in origin, amount in law and practice to political disabilities and as such fall legitimately within the political mission and propaganda of the Indian National Congress"²⁰.

The sudden interest of the Congress Movement in the status of the Depressed Classes appears to have been stimulated by the prospect of a split in their power base because of the questionable loyalty of the lowest castes. Dr. Ambedkar, the key Untouchable player to emerge during this power struggle, argued in a polemic written in 1945 that the Congress' resolution of 1917 was a trade-off for the Depressed Classes' support of the Congress-League scheme.²¹ The scheme, devised in 1915-1916, proposed a division, or sharing, of political power by the Hindu and Muslim communities

19. Ibid.

20. Address Presented in India to His Excellency, Cmd. 9178, op. cit., p. 75. Also cited in Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 15, and in Natarajan, S., op. cit., p. 148.

21. Ambedkar, B.R., What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables, op. cit., pp. 17f.

through separate electorates.²² According to Ambedkar, the sudden patronizing of the lowest castes was to avoid a further division of power. Nonetheless, the question of the status of the Depressed Classes had come to the attention of the politicians.

With the advent of a prospect of change in the distribution of power within India, the lowest castes had found a forum within which a change in their social standing was possible. Dr. Ambedkar, in a letter to the Times of India in 1919²³, argued that the concept of Home Rule put forth by the Congress Movement required a re-evaluation of the social inequalities within Indian society. He pointed out that the aspiration of liberty was as much the birth-right of an Untouchable as of a Brahman.

Under the leadership of Ambedkar²⁴, members of the lowest castes began an organized campaign for various concessions. Amid the various slogans and demands, one main issue emerged, that of communal representation. The campaign for separate representation was quite a departure from traditional ways in which the low-caste groups usually attempted to upgrade themselves. One such way was the process of Sanskritization, or the imitation of high-caste behaviour mentioned above. Ambedkar urged the Untouchables to drop these attempts and to fight for political rights. This method was not only non-traditional, but it also appealed to an external force, the British government to redistribute political power.

22. Sitaramayya, P., op. cit., p. 21, and Appendix, pp. 623-626.

23. 16 January 1919, quoted in Keer, op. cit., p. 40.

24. Ambedkar founded an Untouchable organization, the Bahishkrit Hita Karina Sabha, or Organization for the Welfare of the Excluded, in 1924, to consolidate their campaign. See Jatava, Dr. Ambedkar's Rule in the National Movement (New Delhi: 1979), pp. 49f.

By campaigning for political status as a distinct group, the Untouchables publically rejected the traditional, holistic model of Hindu society.

The approach taken by the British government was to stress the disparity between different groups in Indian society, basing much of their policy on their understanding of how the social rank of differentiated groups amounted to political oppression. Evidence was marshalled to substantiate a challenge to the traditional pattern of social organization. Included in the First Dispatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms (1919) were quotes such as this taken from a news paper article reporting opposition to compulsory education:²⁵

It may result in (the various low castes') objectionable rise to a higher sphere of society; it may strike at the root of the Varnashrama Dharma, on which the social fabric of the Hindus was based... The idea of one law for high and low alike is entirely alien to the high caste Hindus.

The selection of material from native sources such as this confirmed the British model of Hindu society; it also supported the campaign of the Depressed Classes' organizations.

The Congress had no choice but to respond to the internal and external attack on their social system, and in addition, to quiet the expression of orthodox opinions which were fueling such attack. The recognition of the Depressed Classes as a political entity by the Government of India Act of 1919, had forced response from the Congress movement; the Congress responded by incorporating removal of Untouchability into the politics of the movement. At the height of the non-cooperation

25. Kamble, op. cit., p. 67, First Dispatch on Indian Constitutional Reform (1919), Appendix, pp. 306-307.

movement in 1921, a pledge was drafted by the Indian National Congress summarizing the obligations of the Volunteer Corps. The eight points outlined the platform of the Congress movement. The fifth point reads:²⁶

As a Hindu I believe in the justice and necessity of removing the evil of untouchability and shall on all possible occasions seek personal contact with, and endeavor to render service to the submerged classes.

Between 1917 and 1921, Gandhi had entered Indian politics and had taken over the leadership of the Indian National Congress. With Gandhi at the head of the Congress, three main changes took place, making the Congress a mass movement. Membership to the Congress was opened to anyone paying four annas a year, an active policy of civil disobedience and non-cooperation was implemented to challenge British authority, and a programme of social uplift was begun, financed by the Tilak Swaraj Memorial Fund created for that purpose. These changes were to activate a political awareness within the Hindu masses. The inclusion of the removal of Untouchability as a plank in the Congress platform, was part of the campaign for social uplift, called the Constructive Programme for Social Amelioration.²⁷

All Congress organizations were advised to incorporate the details of this programme in their activities. The details included the organization of temperance campaigns, organization of national schools, the manufacture of khadi, the settlement of disputes through panchayats, the organization of the Depressed Classes for a better life, and so forth.

26. Sitaramayya, op. cit., p. 227.

27. Ibid., p. 231.

The purpose of this programme is quite obvious: apart from engendering co-operation and solidarity among the Hindus, the programme fostered judicial, economic, and social non-cooperation with the British. As for the organization of the "Depressed Classes... to improve their social, mental, and moral condition..."²⁸, the Congress was demonstrating that the Hindus were capable of solving their own social problems while at the same time courting support from among the Depressed Classes to avoid any further breakdown in political unity. One-seventh of the Hindu power base was made up of Untouchable castes.

However, the logic of facing the British political challenge on the issue of Untouchability with a counter-challenge of internal social integration was not accepted by all Congress members. For example, Dr. B.S. Moonje introduced a resolution "permitting reservation on untouchability and Swadeshi"²⁹ at a Working Committee meeting in 1922. This resolution was presented, according to Dushkin's view, on the grounds that "Congress should not risk the loss of political support by offending the sensibilities of many people for the sake of a religious side-issue..."³⁰ The question of status of the Depressed Classes was not a side-issue, though. The removal of Untouchability was proof that the Congress could provide in British terms, "a responsible government". But the inclusion of the removal of Untouchability created some tension among Congress Members, which Gandhi, as leader of the Congress movement had to overcome.

28. Ibid.

29. Dushkin, 1957, op. cit., p. 38.

30. Ibid.

Gandhi's method of overcoming internal tension within the Congress movement was characteristic of all of his political campaigns: he attempted to garner mass support with arguments that manipulated the religious sentiments of the Hindu population. Through a series of articles published in his weekly, Young India³¹, Gandhi sought to rouse sentiments against the practice of Untouchability. Gandhi's appeal did not question the validity of caste structure³², nor the restraints against interdining, intermarriage, etc.³³, which he recognized as having deep roots in a

31. Selections from Young India (Y.I.) reflecting Gandhi's views on caste and the practice of Untouchability have been compiled and published in several works: The Bleeding Wound, edited by Shri Ramnath Suman (Benares: 1932); The Removal of Untouchability, edited by Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: 1954); All Are Equal in the Eyes of God, Government of India Publications (Delhi: 1964); Caste Must Go and the Sin of Untouchability, compiled by R.K. Prabhu (Ahmedabad: 1964); My Varnashrama Dharma, edited by Anand T. Hingorani (Bombay: 1965a) and None High: None Low, edited by Anand T. Hingorani (Bombay: 1965b)
32. "I believe in Varnāśrama because I imagine that it defines the duties of men belonging to different vocations. And Brāhman is he who is the servant of all, even of the Sūdras and the 'untouchables'... He is no Ksatriya who puts forth pretensions to rank, power and privileges. He alone is a Ksatriya who uses the whole of himself for the defense and honour of society. And a Vaiśya, who earns for himself only and believes in merely amassing wealth is a thief. A Sūdra, because he labours for hire on behalf of society, is in no way inferior to the other three classes. According to my conception of Hinduism, there is no such thing as a fifth or 'untouchable' class. The so-called untouchables are as much privileged labourers of society as Sūdras. Y.I., 5-11-1925 (Hingorani: 1965b, p. 4).
33. "Inter-drinking, inter-dining, inter-marrying, I hold, are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy... We shall have to seek unity in diversity, and I decline to consider it a sin for a man not to drink or eat with any and everybody..." Y.I., 8-12-1920, p. 4 (Prabhu, op. cit., p. 71). "Interdining and intermarriage are not essential, the only thing essential is the desire to remove Untouchability" Y.I., 21-8-24; 19-3-25; 22-1-25; (Kumarappa, op. cit., pp. 64f). Gandhi argued that the removal of Untouchability was a moral and religious question, while interdining and intermarriage were social questions, Y.I., 22-1-1925, (Kumarappa, p. 67). Gandhi ruled out interdining and intermarriage as means of promoting goodwill;

Hindu's consciousness.³⁴ Instead, Gandhi argued that the practice of Untouchability against certain groups was an aberration of the ideal varnāśrama system depicted in the Dharmaśāstras.³⁵

I have often shown the distinction between Varnāśrama and Untouchability. I have defended the one as a rational, scientific fact and condemned the other as an excrescence, an unmitigated evil... I do regard Varnāśrama as a healthy division of work based on birth... There is no question with me of superiority or inferiority. It is purely a question of duty. I have indeed stated that Varna is based on birth... a translation from one Varna to another in the present incarnation must result in a great deal of fraud. The natural consequence must be the obliteration of Varna. I have seen no reason to justify its destruction. It may be a hindrance to material ambition. I must be excused from applying material considerations to an institution that is based on religious considerations.

I have asked that a Panchama [Untouchable] should be regarded as a Sūdra because I hold that there is no warrant for belief in a fifth caste. A Panchama does the work of a Sūdra and he is therefore naturally classified as such when he ceases to be regarded as a Panchama. I do believe that this constant confusion between Untouchability and Varnāśrama and attack on the latter in the same breath as the former retards the progress regarding Untouchability.

... There is no fundamental difference between a Brahmana and a Pariah, but he who runs may see that, class considered, there is a marked and noticeable difference between Brahmanas and Pariahs or for that matter all the four castes.

The core of Gandhi's argument was that "in recognizing the law of heredity and transmission of qualities from generation to generation" then

he maintained that the idea of pollution was to be removed, Y.I., 30-4-25 (Kumarappa, op. cit., p. 70).

34. Gandhi argued that "self-imposed rules of interdining have a sanitary and also a spiritual value". Y.I., 30-4-1925 (Kumarappa, op. cit., p. 70). In 1921 Gandhi argued that the "prohibition against inter-marriage and interdining is essential for the rapid evolution of the soul" (Kumarappa, op. cit., p. 71).
35. Y.I., 23-4-1925 (Kumarappa, op. cit., pp. 30f.)

"the scavenger's children may remain scavengers without being or feeling degraded and they will be no more considered Untouchables than Brahmanas"³⁶. With such arguments, Gandhi attempted to avoid total alienation of the more orthodox members of the Congress movement as the removal of Untouchability was incorporated into the Congress programme. At the same time, Gandhi was consolidating the support of the lowest caste Hindus for the Congress movement with speeches to Depressed Classes Conferences guaranteeing that there would be no Svaraj, or self-rule, unless the practice of Untouchability was purged from Hindu culture. Gandhi proclaimed at a conference of Depressed Classes in Ahmedabad:³⁷

So long as the Hindus wilfully regard untouchability as part of their religion, so long as the mass of Hindus consider it a sin to touch a section of their brethren, Swaraj is impossible of attainment. Yudhishtira would not enter heaven without his dog. How can, then, the descendents of Yudhishtira expect to obtain Swaraj without the 'Untouchables'.

In arguing both for clear caste divisions and for the elimination of the status of Untouchable, Gandhi was presenting a model of Hindu society amenable to challenges both domestic and foreign. However, neither the British nor able spokesmen accepted this model as a valid representation of Hindu society. Nor, for that matter did all that many orthodox Hindus on the grounds that the Hindu scriptures gave injunctions to follow the practice of Untouchability.³⁸ Gandhi's position on the issue of Untouchability

36. Y.I. (Kumarappa, op. cit., p. 41).

37. Y.I., 4-5-21 (Kumarappa, op. cit., p. 9). Gandhi's main point was that swaraj was not possible without the removal of Untouchability, but his oblique comparison of Untouchables and dogs is striking, especially considering that he was addressing an Untouchable audience. The discussion will return to this point in the fourth chapter.

38. The articles in Y.I. frequently cite letters written by correspondents whom Gandhi calls Sanatanists, who are sharply critical of Gandhi's statements. See Kumarappa, op. cit., passim.

formulated the response the mainstream nationalist movement made to the British challenge that political discrimination existed within Indian society, but his position was unsatisfactory for most members of the lowest castes, because his ideal model offered no escape from their caste status.

From 1921 on, though, the removal of Untouchability was officially part of the Congress movement, although no policy was devised to bring about the eradication of Untouchability, apart from the "propaganda campaign" carried out by Gandhi in the Young India and other publications. In 1923, the Congress turned the question of Untouchability over to the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, a militant Hindu organization, the aim of which was, in Ambedkar's words, "to conserve in every way everything that is Hindu, religious and cultural"³⁹. Although the Hindu Mahasabha was, at that time much less reactionary than would be expected by Ambedkar's statement, the relegation of the problem of Untouchability to an organization which would sponsor very little modification of the traditional order was not well received by representatives of the Depressed Classes.⁴⁰

The Organization of the Depressed Classes

The mid-1920's saw the rise of a number of Untouchable organizations that started an active campaign for rights. The Bahishkrit Hitakarni

39. Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 22.

40. Majumdar, R.C., The History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol. 9, Struggle for Freedom (Bombay: 1975), p. 1003.

Sabha or Organization for the Welfare of the Excluded, was founded in 1924 to promote the spread of education and culture among the Depressed Classes, to improve the economic conditions, and to represent the grievances of the Depressed Classes.⁴¹ On another front the tactics of the non-cooperation movement were taken up by members of the lowest castes, but were directed against some of the traditional restrictions of Hindu order. The first major use of satyāgraha, or organized resistance, occurred in 1924 in Vaikam in Travancore State. The satyāgraha was sponsored by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, a non-Brahman leader⁴² and was organized to remove the prohibition on Untouchables' use of the roadway passing the temple at Vaikam.

Gandhi joined the satyāgraha and attempted to arbitrate on behalf of the Untouchables. Gandhi's discussions with the sāstris residing within the temple precincts followed the same pattern as his campaign in Young India: he attempted to "purify" the attitudes of the temple trustees with arguments supporting the traditional framework of ideas, but questioning the severity of prohibitions directed only at Untouchables.⁴³ This was

41. Keer, op. cit., p. 55, quoting the Constitution of Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha.

42. E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker was one of the main leaders in the non-Brahman movement in Tamil Nad. He had spent some time in his early twenties as a sanyasi, or religious mendicant, but had abandoned that role because of what he saw as the exploitation of the masses by the Brahman priest. He spent the rest of his life in the political arena organizing against "Brahman tyranny and the deceptive methods by which they controlled all spheres of Hindu life". In 1944 Naiker reorganized the Justice Party, a non-Brahman party, and major rival of the Congress Party in Tamil Nad, calling it the Dravida Kazhakam (DK). See R. Hardgrave, "The Dravidian Movement and Tamil Politics" in Essays in the Political Sociology of South India (New Delhi: 1979),

the only time that Gandhi supported the use of satyāgraha by the Depressed Classes; he was later openly opposed to any organized use of satyāgraha within Hindu society.⁴⁴ Ambedkar spoke of the Vaikam satyāgraha as "the most important event in the country". Ambedkar was recognizing the use of satyāgraha on the part of the Untouchables as a means of gaining political recognition both by the British and by the Indian National Congress.⁴⁵ As Ambedkar became involved in negotiations for political privileges for the Depressed Classes, he frequently organized or urged participation in satyāgrahas to illustrate the separate status of the Untouchables.⁴⁶ Reports of the satyāgrahas were picked up by the world press and major satyāgrahas were organized as the British commissions were coming to India to study the question of transfer of power in the late twenties.

The main focus of attention of the satyāgrahas was the restricted access to temples and "public" water supplies. In the case of a satyāgraha in Mahad, Maharashtra, participants from a Depressed Classes Conference

pp. 24-31. The confrontation Naiker organized at Vaikam is an example of his anti-Brahman campaign. The campaign was to challenge the authority of the Brahmans in regulating the behaviour of the lower caste Hindus.

43. See Kumarappa, op. cit., pp. 37-39, pp. 94ff.; Desai, M., The Diary of Mahadeo Desai (Ahmedabad: 1953), pp. 17-21; Zelliott, E., "Gandhi and Ambedkar - A Study in Leadership" in Mahar, M., op. cit., pp. 7-83.
44. In the journal The Harijan, Gandhi frequently responds to correspondents the use of satyāgraha was not to be part of the Harijans' struggle for rights. See The Harijan: A Journal of Applied Gandhism, 1933-1956. (Reprint. New York and London: 1973).
45. Zelliott, op. cit., p. 81.
46. See Keer, op. cit., pp. 69-144.

moved en masse to take water from a tank located in the Brahman section of town. Although the tank had officially been open to all castes through legislation in 1926, it was still restricted to the Untouchables. The event at the tank went peacefully, but violence broke out in the city afterwards. Lawsuits later held the organizers of the Conference responsible for the costs of purification of the tank.⁴⁷ A second conference and satyāgraha, organized and publicized well in advance, took place at the end of 1927. Prior to the second conference, a series of legal suits were filed to prevent the organizers of the conference, or anyone on their behalf from going to the tank.⁴⁸ During the conference a copy of Manusmṛti was burned, but when the delegates moved to the tank no resistance was met.

Other major satyāgrahas included a four-month siege at the Parvati temple in Poona which ended without securing the right of Untouchables to enter the temple⁴⁹, and a satyāgraha at the Kalaram temple in Nasik, an important pilgrimage centre. The Nasik satyāgraha lasted from 1930-1935, with intermittent attempts to gain access to the temple complex and to participate in temple processions.⁵⁰ Both the Poona and Nasik satyāgrahas involved violent confrontations between Untouchables and higher-caste Hindus, and were disavowed by the Congress movement. The Poona satyāgraha was investigated by the Anti-Untouchability Sub-Committee created by

47. Ibid., p. 79.

48. Ibid., p. 106.

49. Ibid., pp. 134-135.

50. Ibid., pp. 136-141.

Congress in 1929. The report observed that the satyāgraha had disrupted negotiations going on with temple trustees "with an atmosphere of bitterness and distrust"⁵¹. That the satyāgrahas were fostering a militant attitude among the Depressed Classes was the underlying concern of the report.

Ambedkar's statement in response to an ultimatum made by the Indian National Congress that Dominion Status be granted by 31 December 1921 points to the political use that was made of the satyāgraha movement. Ambedkar stated, "Is there any sense in asking the Depressed Classes to wait any longer in establishing an ordinary human right to enter a place of worship?"⁵² This statement was made as the Poona satyāgraha was taking place fueling Ambedkar's arguments for a special status for the Depressed Classes. At the height of the satyāgraha movement, the Simon Commission had made recommendations that the Depressed Classes be given special electoral privileges through reservation and separate elections. As has been stressed in the last chapter, no clear definition of the Depressed Classes was to be made until the mid-nineteen-thirties. However, when this definition was provisionally outlined in the Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, it had stressed two aspects of the Untouchables' status, the prohibition against temple entry and the pollution contagion, as proof that the

51. Zelliott, op. cit., p. 83.

52. Keer, op. cit., p. 135. In 1933, at a Conference of Depressed Classes, Ambedkar took a position against the need for the right to enter temples, with the argument that the satyāgraha campaign was useful for political status. "Do not forget that your fight at Mahad and Nasik won you what political status you are going to get. The news about Nasik satyāgraha which appeared in The Times, London, every day had interested and instructed the Britishers", quoted in Keer, op. cit., p. 233.

the Depressed Classes were excluded from Hindu society. These two factors figured prominently in the satyāgraha movement of the Depressed Classes. The temple confrontations were organized by Ambedkar and other Depressed Class leaders to demonstrate to the British Commissions in India that the Depressed Classes were "beyond the pale of Hindu society".

Eighteen Depressed Classes Associations gave evidence before the Simon Commission. Ambedkar, representing the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha maintained that "if the Untouchables failed to secure representation in proportion to their population, they would be doomed"⁵³. Sixteen of the eighteen associations submitting testimony before the Simon Commission demanded separate elections.⁵⁴ Although the Depressed Classes Associations cooperated with the Simon Commission, the Congress Party had issued a manifesto to boycott the Commission.⁵⁵ This resulted in the label of traitor being given to Ambedkar.⁵⁶

The Round Table Conferences

Between 1923 and 1929, the Congress movement did little more for the status of the Depressed Classes than periodically renew the resolution

53. Keer, op. cit., p. 86.

54. Ambedkar's organization was originally not opposed to a joint electorate of Hindu and Depressed Class voters to determine the special Depressed Class representatives. However, by the time of the Round Table Conferences, Ambedkar was strongly opposed to any kind of cooperation between the Hindu and Depressed Class voters.

55. Keer, op. cit., p. 114. See also Majumdar, op. cit., p. 456.

56. Keer, op. cit., pp. 115f.

to abolish Untouchability. When the results of the Simon Commission were announced the British government convened a Round Table Conference in London to discuss the structure of a new constitution for India. The First Round Table Conference was boycotted by the Congress Party. Most of the members attending the Conferences represented minority groups as the communal question was one of the major issues which was to be resolved at the Conference. Because of this make-up of the Conference, Nehru made the observation that the representatives chosen by the British represented little more than themselves and were so chosen to preclude any final agreements on the transfer of power.⁵⁷ Two Depressed Classes representatives, Dr. Ambedkar and Bahadur Rao Srinivasan attended.

The terms presented by the Depressed Classes included the conditions to be met in the Constitution before the Depressed Classes would consent to majority (i.e. Hindu) rule in a self-governing India. These conditions were: equal status through the displacement of ritual status or caste identity, with individual status, or citizenship; the enforcement of equal status through legislation against the enforcement of any conditions of Untouchability, including social boycott; the guarantee that protection against discrimination could not be withdrawn in the future; guaranteed representation in the legislatures through universal franchise, and separate electorates for the first ten years and joint electorate with reservation thereafter; adequate representation in the services through special recruitment; the guarantee of redress against prejudicial action or neglect of interests; the creation of a government

57. Nehru, J., Mahatma Gandhi (Bombay: 1966), p. 97.

department to oversee the welfare of the Depressed Classes; and representation in the Cabinet.⁵⁸

Although the Conference closed with little specific agreement on the structure of a new constitution for India, due largely to the absence of the Congress Party, two important points emerged. First, the inclusion of the Depressed Classes representatives tacitly acknowledged the status of the Depressed Classes as a distinct entity for political and constitutional purposes. The existence of the Depressed Classes as a minority had been implied before in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and by the Simon Commission, but their inclusion as negotiating members in the discussion guaranteed the Depressed Classes a status apart from a Hindu status. Second, the position of Ambedkar had moved further away from any cooperation with the Congress Party. Between 1929 and 1931, Ambedkar moved from the endorsement of joint electorate to separate electorate for the Depressed Classes.⁵⁹

A second Round Table Conference was convened after a compromise was reached between the Government and the Congress Party. Gandhi represented the Congress Party at the Conference, with the claim that the Congress was a national, not merely a party, organization and therefore represented all the communal minorities.⁶⁰ Gandhi even went as far as to

58. Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., pp. 42-52, quoting the Memorandum submitted to the Minorities Committee of the First Round Table Conference.

59. See footnote 54, above.

60. The Indian Round Table Conference, Second Session, 7 September 1931 to 1 December 1931, Proceedings of the Federal Structure and Minorities Committee (London, H.M.S.O.: 1932), pp. 389-393. Round Table Conference abbreviated as RTC for further citations.

question the integrity of Ambedkar as representative of the Depressed Classes⁶¹, although a number of Depressed Classes organizations sent their support for Ambedkar in the form of telegrams to London.⁶² The main work of the Conference was done by the two large committees on Federal Structure and Minorities. The discussion of the communal problem was the focus of the Conference. Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald defined the concern of the Conference :⁶³

how can the various majorities, how can the various communities, how can the various peoples with a past, with traditions, how can those who have been outside the pale and those who have been inside the pale, now that we are considering a new constitution for India, a constitution that will be based upon democracy, a trust of the people, how can we all together devise means by which we will share in the power of that Government and use the power not in the interests of a section or a community or a class, but in the interests of the whole of the masses of the people which compose the Indian population? That is our problem, that is your problem...

Most of the discussion centred on the Muslim-Hindu split, but the issue of other minority groups was taken up, and the question of special status for the Depressed Classes became a major point of controversy. This controversy within the Conference was complemented with the reports picked up by the London press about the violence surrounding the Nasik satyāgraha. As Ambedkar was later to observe at a Depressed Classes Conference in 1933:⁶⁴

61. Ibid., p. 391.

62. Keer, op. cit., p. 179.

63. RTC, Second Session, Proceedings of the Federal Structure and Minorities Committee, op. cit., p. 526.

64. Keer, op. cit., p. 233.

Do not forget that your fight at Mahad and Nasik won you what political status you are going to get. The news about Nasik satyāgraha which appeared in The Times, London, everyday had interested and instructed the Britishers.

Ambedkar and Srinivasan reiterated the terms proposed of the first Round Table Conference⁶⁵ as absolutely necessary for the settlement of the communal question to the satisfaction of the Depressed Classes. These terms were forwarded in a joint memorandum issued by the Muslims, Depressed Classes, Indian-Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans, which generally set forth the same conditions for all groups.⁶⁶ Gandhi stated his opposition to any communal settlement beyond the recognition of the Muslim and Sikh communities: "Congress will always accept any agreement solution that may be acceptable to the Hindus, the Muhammadans, and the Sikhs; Congress will not be party to any special reservation or special electorate for any other minority"⁶⁷.

Most of the controversy surrounding the issue of the Depressed Classes centred on the interaction of Gandhi and Ambedkar. Dushkin comments

65. RTC, Second Session, Federal Structure Committee (London, H.M.S.O.: 1932), Cmd. 3997, Appendix III, pp. 69-77; Appendix VII, pp. 85-87.
66. Ibid. The conditions were: equal status as citizens; statutory safeguards incorporated in the Constitution; separate electorate; the guarantee of civil rights; and the guarantee of adequate recruitment in the services.
67. RTC, Second Session, Proceedings of the Federal Structure and Minorities Committee, p. 538. This statement of Gandhi was consistent with the Lahore Resolution passed by Congress earlier that year, that any communal questions in an independent India must be settled on national grounds, and that the Congress guaranteed the fundamental rights of members of minority communities were to be protected in the Constitution, and franchise was to be extended to all adult men and women. (RTC, cmd. 3997, p. 64).

that the discussions at the Conference "soon degenerated into a verbal battle over who represented the most the Depressed Classes... Gandhi... their 'guardian' and Ambedkar their 'spokesman'... thus all discussions of the subject center on the two personalities"⁶⁸. The issue was more than the conflict of two personalities, though. It revolved around two - or three, if the British position is also taken into consideration - very different perceptions of the Depressed Classes. The question of special reservation or special electorate implied a separate status of the Depressed Classes, and this is where all discussions broke down. Gandhi and Ambedkar each had very different understandings of what "Depressed Classes" meant.

The following two chapters will discuss each point of view in depth, but a description of the confrontation which took place at the Second Round Table Conference will outline these two positions. In part Gandhi's position shared a common basis with earlier spokesmen of the Hindu culture who had opposed any legislative interference with their social system. Gandhi maintained that⁶⁹

There is very little political consciousness among [the Untouchables] 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 the 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

68. Dushkin, 1957, op. cit., p. 64.

69. RTC, Second Session, Proceedings of the Federal Structure and Minorities Committee, p. 584, also quoted in Pyrelal, The Epic Fast (Delhi: 1939), p. 170. In his journal, The Harijan, Gandhi repeated referred to political problem of Depressed Classes as a "human manufacture".

'Untouchables' more bearable by arts of service... I am certain that the question of separate electorates for the 'Untouchables' is a modern manufacture of Government.

On October 8, 1931, Gandhi announced that after a week of informal negotiations with representatives of the different groups, no solution to the question of communal representation had been reached. He went on to argue that the issue of communal rights was not the issue to be resolved:⁷⁰

The solution [of the question of communal representation] can be the crown of the Swaraj constitution, not its foundation + if only because our differences have hardened, if they have not arisen, by reason of the foreign domination. I have not a shadow of a doubt that the iceberg of communal differences will melt under the warm sun of freedom. I, therefore, venture to suggest that the Minorities Committee be adjourned sine die and that the fundamentals of a constitution be hammered into shape as quickly as may be. Meanwhile the informal work of discovering a true solution of the communal problem will and must continue.

Gandhi was attempting to take the question of Depressed Classes out of the political arena, with the argument that Hindu society alone could solve its social problems. This position was in sharp contrast to that of Ambedkar. Ambedkar stated:⁷¹

The Depressed Classes are not anxious, they are not clamorous, they have not started any movement for claiming that there shall be an immediate transfer of power from the British to the Indian people... but if the British Government is unable to resist the forces that have been set up in the country which do clamour for transference of political power - and we know that the Depressed Classes in their present circumstances are not in a position to resist that - then our submission is that if you make that transfer, that transfer will be accompanied

70. RTC, Second Session, Proceedings, op. cit., p. 584.

71. Ibid., p. 621, also recorded in Ambedkar, What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables, op. cit., p. 66.

by such conditions and by such provisions that the power shall not fall into the hands of a clique, into the hands of an oligarchy, or into the hands of a group of people...

Ambedkar had maintained throughout his political discussions on the issue of Untouchability that the Depressed Classes were "entitled to recognition as a separate entity for political and constitutional purposes"⁷².

Gandhi had, on the other hand, understood any special status of the Depressed Classes as a "bar sinister"⁷³, or a perpetual reminder of an issue not properly of the Depressed Classes, "but of orthodox Hinduism"⁷⁴. Gandhi rejected any idea that the Depressed Classes had historically been separated from Hindu society. He spoke of the proposed system of reservation as one which would⁷⁵

create a division in Hinduism... I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire being converted to Islam or Christianity... but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political rights of Untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life.

Although most of the other representatives at the Conference recognized the demands forwarded by Ambedkar as legitimate, if perhaps

72. Ibid., p. 54.

73. Bar sinister literally means "bend sinister", or a sign of bastardy in the family represented by a stripe across the coat of arms. With Risley's racial theory in the background of the discussions on the Depressed Classes, this image is interesting.

74. RTC, Second Session, Proceedings, op. cit., p. 1385; quoted in A. Appadorai and M. Gwyer, Speeches and Documents of the Indian Constitution, 1924-1947, Vol. II (Oxford: 1957), p. 259.

75. Ibid.

only out of vested interests, there was other opposition to special representation being given to the Depressed Classes. Most of this opposition focussed on the identification of the Depressed Classes.⁷⁶ The question of minorities was also raised, with the objection that no clear definition of minority emerged from the conference, whether religious, racial, or as a result of "social tyranny: "The Depressed Classes have their own basis of classification; they profess the Hindu religion but assert that they are the victims of its social tyranny. Hence, while professing the same religion, they ask for protection against the majority of their co-religionists"⁷⁷.

The Conference ended on December first with no final solution to the communal question. Prime Minister MacDonald concluded with the offer to arbitrate, pointing out that the first principle of government is to decide who are to be represented and how it is to be done:⁷⁸

A decision of the communal problem which provides only for representation of the communities in the legislature is not enough to secure what I may call 'natural rights'. When such provisions have been made, minorities will still remain minorities, and the Constitution must therefore contain provisions which will give all creeds and classes a due sense of security that the principle of majority government is not to be employed to their moral or material disadvantage in the body politic.

-
76. For example, Raja Narendra Natha in a Memorandum submitted on the Memorandum submitted by the Muslims, Depressed Classes, etc., recorded in RTC, cmd. 3997, as Appendix III (see p.117), argued that "the problem of the Depressed Classes is not rightly understood by British politicians...", p. 586 of RTC, Second Session, Proceedings of the Federal Structure and Minorities Committee, op. cit.
77. Ibid., "Memorandum on the 'Provisions for the Settlement of the Communal Problem'" by Dr. S.K. Datta, p. 584?
78. RTC, Second Session, Proceedings, op. cit., p. 421.

On August 16, 1932, Prime Minister MacDonald announced his decision on the communal award.⁷⁹ All the communal groups in question were guaranteed reserved seats. With respect to the Depressed Classes, a double system of franchise was endorsed. Members of the Depressed Classes qualified to vote would vote in general constituencies, i.e. Hindu constituencies, in addition to voting by separate electorate for reserved seats in special constituencies. These constituencies were to be formed in selected areas. No precise definitions were given of who would be qualified to vote in the Depressed Class constituencies as the Depressed Classes had not yet been clearly defined. The Franchise Committee was in India at that time to determine the voter distribution. The process of providing a political definition for the Depressed Classes has been discussed at length in the preceding chapter and will not be repeated here.

Gandhi's "Epic Fast"

Gandhi had threatened to resist any award of special status to the Depressed Classes with his life. He had reiterated his threat in a letter to Sir Samuel Hoare sent from Yervada Prison in March, 1932. In this letter Gandhi informed the Government that if a separate electorate was created for the Depressed Classes he would fast unto death on the grounds that "separate electorate is neither a penance nor any remedy for the crushing degradation 'the Depressed Classes' have groaned

79. Appadorai and Gwyer, Vol. II, op. cit., pp. 261-265, The Communal Award of His Majesty's Government, 16 August, 1932, cmd. 4147.

under"⁸⁰. Gandhi's threat did not work, though, and on August he wrote the Prime Minister informing him that a fast unto death would be undertaken in protest to the award to the Depressed Classes. In Gandhi's words the matter was one "of pure religion... In the establishment of separate electorate" Gandhi sensed "the injection of poison that is calculated to destroy Hinduism and do no good whatever to the Depressed Classes"⁸¹. The justification that Gandhi gives for the fast is rather unique, as he claimed that⁸²

the impending fast is against those who have faith in me, whether Indians or foreigners, and not for those who have it not. Therefore, it is not against the English world, but it is against those Englishmen and women who, in spite of the contrary teaching of the official world, believe in me and the justice of the cause I represent. Nor is it against those of my countrymen who have no faith in me whether they be Hindus or others, but it is against those countless Indians... who believe that I represent a just cause. Above all it is intended to sting Hindu conscience into right religious action.

The argument that Gandhi made in support of his decision to fast was one of duty, to purify the situation. Apparently the merit of such a fast would be transferred to those who "had faith" in Gandhi, to purify their intent. The British did not capitulate to Gandhi's attempt at extorting a settlement. The Government agreed to amend the award if agreement could be reached among the Hindu and Depressed Classes leaders. This set off a rapid series of negotiations, which took only five days to complete.

80. Pyarelal, The Epic Fast (Delhi: 1939), p. 100. Pyarelal has reproduced all the correspondence that took place in 1932 when Gandhi fasted to protest the inclusion of the Depressed Classes in the Communal Award.

81. Pyarelal, *op. cit.*, p. 111. This was Gandhi's reply to Prime Minister MacDonald on September 9, 1932.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 113. Gandhi offered this justification for his fast in a letter sent to the Bombay government, dated September 15, 1932.

Although Gandhi was personally opposed to the principle of reservation for the Depressed Classes, he was fasting only against the award of representation through separate electorate.⁸³ Agreement between Gandhi and Ambedkar came quickly because of the threat of Gandhi's death.⁸⁴ In the end the compromise entailed three changes.⁸⁵ The guarantee of representation for the Depressed Classes was retained through the reservation of seats in the Provincial and Central legislatures, but the votes determining the representatives were to be from a joint Hindu and Depressed Classes electorate and not from the Depressed Classes alone. To placate Ambedkar's demand that the Depressed Classes alone had the right to determine who would represent them, Gandhi agreed to what was similar to a primary election, in which only the Depressed Classes would be eligible to vote to determine a panel of candidates to stand for the reserved seats. The only other change was that the number of seats reserved in the Provincial legislatures was nearly doubled and⁸⁶ eighteen percent of the seats in the Central legislature was to be reserved for representatives of the Depressed Classes.

-
83. Gandhi stated in an interview on September 20, 1932, five hours after the fast began: "My fast is only against separate electorates, and not against statutory reservation of seats... Opposed I was, and am even now, but there was never put before me for my acceptance or rejection a scheme of statutory reservation of seats. Therefore there is no question of my having to decide upon that point." (Pyarelal, op. cit., p. 119):
84. How close Gandhi actually was to death is difficult to say, but the press reports portrayed him on the verge of death. See Pyarelal, op. cit.
85. The Poona Pact is reproduced in A. Appadorai and M. Gwyer, Vol. II, op. cit., pp. 265-266.
86. The number of seats went from seventy-six to one hundred and forty-eight.

Dissatisfaction was expressed by both the Congress and the Depressed Classes after the agreement, called alternately the Poona Pact or the Yervada Pact, was signed. Ambedkar regretted being forced to negotiate under the threat of Gandhi's blood and repeatedly tried to reinstate a separate electorate. The primary system proved to be awkward and was eliminated shortly after Independence. Caste Hindus, particularly in Bengal, where large numbers of a large percentage of the population had been returned as Depressed Class in the Census, felt that the system of reservation for the Depressed Classes cut into their rights to representation⁸⁷, while a number of Depressed Classes' leaders felt that the candidates Congress was sponsoring were subordinate to Congress dictates.⁸⁸ The system agreed upon in the Poona Pact has, though, become in principle the basis of Scheduled Caste reservation in the legislature.⁸⁹

At first appearance, the "epic fast", as it came to be called by Gandhi's devotees, seems to be another odd episode in Gandhi's career of threats and coercion⁹⁰, as Poona Pact seems to have made only minor changes in the MacDonald Award. When the figures given in the MacDonald Award

87. Zelliott, 1972, op. cit., p. 86.

88. Ambedkar wrote in 1946, op. cit., p. 102: "They were completely under the control of the Congress Party Executive. They could not ask a question which it did not like. They could not move a resolution which it did not permit. They could not bring in legislation to which it objected. They could not vote as they chose and could not speak what they felt. They were as dumb as driven cattle.

89. See Dushkin, 1972, op. cit., for an analysis of how the system of reservation for the Scheduled Castes presently works.

90. Nehru wrote, op. cit., p. 103: "I felt angry with [Gandhi] at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent reference to God in connection with it".

are examined, though, it is seen that three groups emerged with some substantial strength, the Muslims, the Hindus and the Depressed Classes.⁹¹ Had the Depressed Classes retained their right to separate elections, the Hindu majority would have been diminished. As well, the Congress Party's claim to national support which cross-cut both caste and sectarian divisions would have potentially been undermined. Through the MacDonald Award, the Depressed Classes had emerged as an important political faction in the struggle among the groups in India which were claiming to represent the population.

Although a threat of starving oneself to death is not usually considered a political move, Gandhi's fast had political implications. The compromise he forced avoided a further weakening of the Congress movement already threatened with schism by Subhas Chandra Bose and other extremists who had begun to question the validity of the satyāgraha campaign. As well, it prevented a political split among the Hindu community. The Harijan campaign Gandhi began after his fast further demonstrated that a broad, popular base was behind the Congress movement.

Due to the attention the press gave Gandhi's "epic fast", the week of the signing of the Pact became "Untouchability Abolition Week"⁹². According to the news releases, the activities of the week were to include the opening of temples and wells to the Depressed Classes, joint prayer meetings (for the health and strength of Gandhi), etc.⁹³ Many temples

91. Appadorai and Gwyer, Vol. II, op. cit., pp. 261-265, The Communal Award of His Majesty's Government, 16 August 1932.

92. Pyarelal, op. cit., p. 297, quoting a statement C. Rajagopalachari and Babu Rajendra Prasad issued to the press on September 26, 1932.

93. Ibid., pp. 207-209.

were "symbolically" opened to Untouchables, but after the excitement surrounding the fast had dissipated, most practices returned to what they had been prior to the fast. At a conference of Hindu leaders in Bombay on September 25, 1932, the Poona Pact was ratified, and a pledge was passed, stating that Untouchability by birth was no longer recognized among the Hindus; that the removal of all civil disabilities imposed on the grounds of Untouchability "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"; and that the "early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called untouchable classes, including the bar in respect of the admission to temples" is the duty of all Hindus.⁹⁴

Gandhi's Harijan Campaign

On September 30, an All-India Anti-Untouchability League was founded. This was later to become Gandhi's Harijan Sevak Sangh, or Servants of the Untouchables Society, an organization closed to Depressed Classes' leadership. Gandhi defended the make-up of the organization by arguing that the welfare work the Sangh was engaged in was a penance the Hindus had to do to alleviate their collective guilt of Untouchability, and that it was unethical and unjust for an Untouchable to serve in the Sangh.⁹⁵ At the time the All-India Anti-Untouchability League was founded,

94. Dushkin, 1957, op. cit., p. 75. This pledge appears on the back cover of the annual reports of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1932-1933, 1934-1935, and under the banner of most issues of The Harijan. Also quoted in Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 102.

95. The Harijan, 2-3-33, p. 5, etc.

Gandhi was still in Yeravda Prison, but his ban on communication was lifted so he could engage in anti-Untouchability propaganda. He began what he called the Harijan movement "to purify Hinduism, and raise the whole Hindu society and with it the whole of India"⁹⁶.

"Harijan" is the term Gandhi chose to refer to the lowest caste Hindus⁹⁷, in place of the terms "Untouchables" or "Depressed Classes". Its meaning, "born of god", was used by Gandhi as a means of generating the proper attitude in higher caste Hindus. This attitude was to be one of service, which in his terms, would purify Hinduism. Gandhi's Harijan movement was structured around this concept.

Gandhi was released from prison in May, 1933, after he declared that he would begin a twenty-one day self-purificatory fast for the Harijan movement.⁹⁸ At this time he urged that the Civil Disobedience movement be suspended for six weeks; in July, mass Civil Disobedience was indefinitely suspended to be replaced with individual Civil Disobedience. After his arrest in August, and subsequent release after undertaking another fast⁹⁹, Gandhi declared that he would confine his activities only to the Harijan movement until the expiry of his sentence. In September, 1934, Gandhi

96. Pyarelal, op. cit., p. 320, quoting a statement issued by Gandhi on November 5, 1932.

97. Pyarelal, op. cit., p. 305, quoting a speech Gandhi gave in Ahmedabad on August 2, 1931. The term originally was used by Narasimha Metha.

98. Gandhi's journal, The Harijan, records the events surrounding Gandhi's decision. See also Majumdar, op. cit., pp. 523-528.

99. Ibid. See also The Harijan, 6-5-33 to 10-6-33.

publically declared that he was retiring from politics to devote himself to the Harijan movement. In the year between the Round Table Conferences and Gandhi's release from prison in May, 1933, the violence in India had increased;¹⁰⁰ Gandhi's suspension of Civil Disobedience in favour of the Harijan campaign served to moderate an extremism nurtured by the more radical members of the Independence struggle.

The Harijan movement was also a reaction to the Untouchables' satyāgraha campaigns organized by Ambedkar and other Depressed Class Leaders.¹⁰¹ Access to temples and wells was a key concern of the campaign. Gandhi's argument behind the focus on temple entry was that "when Harijans are freely admitted to temples, all avenues to economic betterment must be automatically opened to Harijans as to others"¹⁰². Unlike the confrontations which occurred during the satyāgrahas organized by the Untouchables, little violence took place. The publicity which surrounded Gandhi's commitment to the issue helped, as did the suggestion that a stance against Untouchability was somehow anti-British.¹⁰³ The association with Civil Disobedience along with the three fasts Gandhi undertook in British prisons in conjunction with the question of a separate political status for the Depressed Classes associated the British Government with the issue of

100. Ibid., Subhas Bhowe wrote that nearly 120,000 persons were arrested during that period. The Indian Struggle, op. cit., p. 264.

101. See pp. 111-116.

102. The Harijan: A Journal of Applied Gandhism, reprinted by Garland Publishing Company. (New York: 1973), 2-3-34, vol. II, p. 19.

103. This is perhaps why the Madras passed a law banning civil servants from participating in the Harijan movement in 1933 (The Harijan, 1-7-33, p. 4).

Untouchability. Statements made in The Harijan referring to the British manufacture of an issue also made an anti-Untouchability stance more popular:¹⁰⁴

Modern Untouchability derives support from the census reports of the government, and never from... Shastras. Even the census reports made some touchables, untouchables and vice versa.

Gandhi also employed the technique of persuasion. He declared his opposition to the legislation of temple entry: "If court decisions had not hardened a doubtful custom into law, no legislation would be required"¹⁰⁵. In 1933, he declared his opposition to "any interference by... legislature... in any of our... religious matters"¹⁰⁶. Instead, Gandhi felt that the problem should be "solved by the way of religion... through a vote of the majority to determine whether the temple should be thrown open"¹⁰⁷. In other words, it was not the role of the government, but the role of the trustees of the temple or regular visitors, which, needless to say, excluded the Untouchables. The key difference between Gandhi's campaign and the satyāgraha campaign led by the Untouchables lay in the composition of those involved in the campaigns: the satyāgraha campaign was led, for the most part by Untouchables, whereas the Harijan movement was led by caste Hindus "to purge Hinduism of the sin of untouchability"¹⁰⁸. This is perhaps why Gandhi observed that¹⁰⁹

104. The Harijan, 20-7-34, vol. II, p. 181.

105. Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 118, quoting a statement made by Gandhi with respect to the temple entry bill introduced by Ranga Iyer.

106. The Harijan, 18-2-33, vol. I., p.5.

107. Ibid., p. 6.

108. Ibid., 22-3-34, vol. II, p. 15.

109. Ibid., 20-6-36, vol. IV, p. 149.

It is absolutely of no consequence that a vast majority of Harijans are uninterested in our campaign. Only this morning Mr. DeSouza, leading a deputation of Harijans, told me that the Harijans were not interested in temple entry as in their political and economic amelioration and perhaps a rise in their social status. Naturally they cannot think otherwise. For, we are responsible for deadening their sense of unity with us and their desire to worship in common with us in our temples.

For Ambedkar, the issue of temple entry was a moot point after the MacDonald Award and subsequent Poona Pact. He had secured the political rights he had wanted, and such satyāgrahas as he had organized in the late nineteen-twenties were no longer necessary. Once the Depressed Classes were given a political status, they no longer had to demonstrate a separate-ness from the rest of the Hindus. Ambedkar scorned temple entry:¹¹⁰

The appearance of Tulsi leaves around your neck will not relieve you from the clutch of money-lenders. Because you sing songs of Rama, you will not get a concession in rent from the landlords. You will not get salaries at the end of the month because you make pilgrimages every year to Pandharpur. Because the major part of your life is absorbed in these worthless mysteries of life, superstitions and mysticism, the intelligent and self-centred people get ample scope and opportunities to carry out their anti-social designs. I, therefore, appeal to you to act and utilize what little political power is coming into your hands. If you are indifferent and do not try to use it properly... that slavery which we are fighting out may overtake us again.

The issue of temple entry was a meaningless issue in light of the political status the Depressed Classes had acquired. The attacks Ambedkar raised on the question of temple entry were in response to Gandhi's Harijan movement: "Do not disregard the political rights the new epoch has bestowed upon you. Your whole class was trampled down till now because you were filled with ideas of helplessness. I may add that these ideas of hero-

110. Keer, op. cit., p. 218.

worship, deification and neglect of duty have ruined Hindu society and are responsible for the degradation of our country"¹¹¹.

Ambedkar suspended the Nasik satyāgraha in 1935. At the same conference, which was attended by about 10,000 Untouchables¹¹², Ambedkar "exhorted [the Untouchables] to conduct themselves in such a way... as would leave no doubt to the outside world of their decision to be and to remain a separate community outside the Hindu fold, carving out for themselves a future worthy of free citizens"¹¹³.

The statements Ambedkar made at this conference have been widely publicized. Most analyses have read the idea of religious conversion as a means of social mobility into these and later statements Ambedkar made about leaving Hinduism.¹¹⁴ However, the timing of this statement indicates another interpretation. A power base had just been awarded to the Depressed Classes in the form of a special political status and guaranteed political representation. The recognition had come from the British government who had isolated the Depressed Classes from the Hindus through a process of political definition (and census taking). Elections were imminent as the British had released the White Paper, outlining a provisional plan to establish provincial autonomy under a federal system still in British control. The MacDonald Award, as amended by the Poona Pact, was

111. Ibid., p. 234.

112. Keer, *ibid.*, p. 252, gives this figure. When he speaks of 10,000 Untouchables, most likely he is referring to Untouchable Mahars.

113. Ibid., p. 253.

114. In 1956 Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in a public ceremony attended by several million Mahars.

included in the White Paper, which in essence became the Government of India Act of 1935.

At the same time Gandhi was leading a campaign to demonstrate that the Harijans were "part and parcel of the Hindu community". This campaign revolved around one of the primary definitions of the Depressed Classes according to the Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, completed by the British in 1932:¹¹⁵ the prohibition of a Depressed Class member to access within a Hindu temple. Gandhi's opposition to the legislation of temple entry rights and his desire to demonstrate the willingness on the part of higher caste Hindus to admit the Depressed Classes into temples indicate an attempt to gather evidence contrary to that provided by the Franchise Committee.

No clear definition of what constituted a "minority" entitled to special safeguards had emerged from the discussions on minorities' rights. Apart from the Depressed Classes, the minority groups guaranteed separate electorate in the MacDonalld award could be construed in one way or another as religious minorities. The Depressed Classes were the only exception; their separate status was ambiguous. When Ambedkar spoke of leaving the Hindu fold, he was speaking with reference to guaranteeing a status for the Depressed Classes as distinct from a status as the lowest castes of the Hindu social system.

With the Poona Pact, the clear distinction between the Depressed Classes and the rest of Hindu society was called into question. The Poona

115. This event has been discussed in the preceding chapter.

Pact allowed for reservation within the Hindu community: through a joint electorate the system of reservation represented a type of quota system within the group as a whole, rather than a separate political status. The compromise Gandhi had forced had shifted the emphasis of the political prerogatives for which Ambedkar had been campaigning. This, coupled with the heightened interest caste Hindus were demonstrating in the status of the Depressed Classes through Gandhi's Harijan campaign, threatened to undermine the power base Ambedkar had envisioned. Ambedkar thus turned to the idea of religious conversion as a way of reinstating a separate electorate, or reinstating the political status Ambedkar felt would serve as a means of obtaining a better standard of living.¹¹⁶ Religious conversion would guarantee that the Depressed Classes fell into the category of religious minorities, and guarantee their power base in the political system that seemed to be developing in the subcontinent at that time.

Ambedkar made a number of overtures to the Sikh community in 1936:¹¹⁷

What the consequences of conversion will be to the country as a whole is well worth bearing in mind. Conversion to Islam or Christianity will denationalize the Depressed Classes. If they go over to Islam, the number of Muslims would become doubled; and the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real. If they go over to Christianity, the numerical strength increases the hold of Britain on the country. On the other hand, if they

116. In a speech Ambedkar stated: "The mission of our movement is to fight out tyranny, injustice, and false traditions, and to undo all privileges and release the harassed people from bondage. Our cause has recognition... All things are now possible because of your being able to participate in the politics and legislatures of this country". Quoted in Jatav, D.R., Dr. Ambedkar's Role in National Movement (1917-1947) (New Delhi: 1979), p. 119.

117. Keer, op. cit., p. 280, quoting an interview with The Times of India, 24-7-36.

embrace Sikhism they will not only not harm the destiny of the country, but they will help the destiny of the country. They will not be denationalized. On the contrary, they will help in the political advancement of the country.

In September, 1936, Ambedkar dispatched a group of his followers to the Sikh Mission in Amritsar, in the Punjab, to conduct negotiations with respect to the conversion of the Depressed Classes to Sikhism.¹¹⁸ Later that year he returned to Europe. The reasons for this trip are not clear; his biographer notes that Ambedkar claimed the trip was "purely for reasons of Health"¹¹⁹, but he apparently held discussions with "German and other European jurists of world fame"¹²⁰ on the question of minority status for the Depressed Classes if they would convert to Sikhism. When Ambedkar returned to India in January, 1937, he disclaimed any interest in conversion to Sikhism, maintaining that the upcoming elections were more important than religious matters.¹²¹ The reason for this shift in attention is apparent: his attempts at reopening the issue of minority rights with neo-Sikh Depressed Classes had failed.

The elections were called in 1937 to institute Provincial Autonomy as provided for in the Government of India Act of 1935. In an attempt to weaken the hold Congress had on the political loyalties of the Hindu population, Ambedkar had founded the Independent Labour Party, prior to his departure for Europe. This party was intended to cross-cut caste lines

118. Ibid., p. 284.

119. Ibid., p. 288.

120. Ibid., p. 289.

121. Ibid., p. 288.

among the bottom strata of the population to mobilize a broad-based opposition to the Congress Party among the low castes. The platform of the party focussed on the protection of the agricultural labourer and the industrial worker through legislation.¹²² Seventeen candidates were fielded in the Bombay Presidency, contesting for the fifteen seats reserved for the Depressed Classes and two general seats; fifteen of these candidates were elected, including Ambedkar in Bombay.¹²³ This was the only time that Ambedkar was successful at the polls in his home state of Maharashtra. Despite its relative success in the elections, Ambedkar's party wielded little influence in the legislature. Most of the bills introduced by the party were postponed or dropped. The party¹²⁴ did, however, take part in an important labour strike against the provincial government in 1938¹²⁵, which was the first successful strike organized against a popular government.

At the same time the Congress Party ran Harijan candidates in the nine provinces where elections were called, and won just over half of the 151 seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes.¹²⁶ In Bihar, Jagjivan Ram had entered the political arena and was quickly becoming the Harijan

122. Ibid., p. 285.

123. Ibid., p. 292, thirteen of those seats were reserved seats.

124. Ibid., p. 296. The bills introduced included a bill to abolish the Khoti system of land tenure, a bill to abolish Vatan, a system of compulsory village service, and an amendment not to give statutory recognition to the word "Harijan" in a bill to amend the Local Boards Act.

125. Ibid., p. 312. The strike was in protest of the Industrial Disputes Bill, a bill restricting the rights of the worker to strike.

126. Dushkin, 1957, op. cit., p. 120. Dushkin reproduces a chart from D. Spencer, "The Record of the Congress Ministries" (ms. dated December 15, 1943), showing the Congress' wins to be 79 reserved seats out of 151.

spokesman for the Congress Party. Ambedkar had repeatedly insisted that Gandhi was not a leader who could represent the Depressed Classes, and that the Congress Party represented the hegemony of high caste Hindus.¹²⁷ As Gandhi's grass-roots Harijan movement had not effected the political status of the Depressed Classes, nor the system of reserved seats in legislation subsequent to the Poona Pact, the Congress Party had to incorporate the politics of the Depressed Classes into the Congress movement.

Ambedkar's success in the elections in the Bombay Presidency in 1937 was matched by the success of the Congress in claiming to represent the Depressed Classes. With the ascendancy of Jagjivam Ram as the Harijan spokesman within the Congress Party, Ambedkar's claim of being the leader of the Depressed Classes on the national level was undermined. Ambedkar's subsequent defeats at the polls, and his later return to the idea of religious conversion as a means of bringing the Depressed Classes away from Congress influence are indications of the momentum gained by the Congress Party, most likely through Gandhi's Harijan movement and his patronage of Jagjivam Ram.¹²⁸

Ambedkar's repeated polemic against the dangers of bhakti in politics indicates that he attributed the success of the Congress Party

127. Ambedkar, What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables, 1946, op. cit.

128. Jatav, 1979, op. cit., p. 208.

to the charismatic appeal of Gandhi's image as a Mahatma.¹²⁹ Ambedkar himself was attacked at Depressed Classes' meetings held under the auspices of the Congress Party:¹³⁰

Your best friend is Mahatma Gandhi who even resorted to a fast for your sake and brought about the Poona Pact under which you have been enfranchised and given representation on local bodies and legislatures. Some of you, I know, have been running after Dr. Ambedkar, who is just a creation of the British imperialists and who uses you to strengthen the hands of the British government in order that India may be divided and the Britishers continue to retain power. I appeal to you, in your interests, to distinguish between self-styled leaders and your real friends.

As has been pointed out above, Gandhi was not personally opposed to special representation for the Depressed Classes, yet the publicity of the "epic fast" and the Poona Pact made his association with the interest in the Depressed Classes take on mythic proportions. On the other hand, the failure of Ambedkar to create or sustain any separate political identity among the Depressed Classes throws some question on the feasibility of his assumptions about the role political organizations could play in the changing the conditions of the Untouchables. The next chapter will examine these assumptions and Ambedkar's understanding of the politics of Untouchability.

1939 Through Independence

From the time the Congress ministries submitted their resignations at the end of October, 1939, to the final transfer of power in 1947, the

129. Ambedkar titled one chapter of his book, What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables, "Beware of Mr. Gandhi". He often denigrated the concept of a Mahatma saving the Untouchables: "Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone. But the Untouchables have remained Untouchables". (Quoted in Keer, op. cit., p. 208). In the C.A.D., he cautioned against bhakti in politics as leading to degradation and eventual dictatorship. (Vol. II, p. 979).

question of the political loyalties of the Depressed Classes was relatively unimportant. Congress was split by an internal struggle between Subas Chandra Bose's radical wing and Gandhi's old guard. Bose was elected Congress president in 1938 in Congress' first contested presidential election, but was quickly replaced with Rajendra Prasad, Bihar's party "boss". As well, the spectre of a separate Muslim state within the subcontinent was looming, and the Depressed Classes lost their importance as a strategic power block. Congress had demonstrated its hold over the Depressed Classes to such an extent that any threat of an internal schism in Hindu society along broad caste lines was mitigated. For all intents and purposes, the danger of a three-way split of Hindu, Muslim, and Depressed Class was removed. The Hindu-Muslim split was more threatening.

Ambedkar attempted to continue to play a role in these negotiations, but his contributions were minor. In his work, Thoughts on Pakistan¹³¹, and later statements, he supported Jinnah's demand for the creation of a Muslim nation.¹³²

A people, who, notwithstanding their differences accept a common destiny for themselves as well as for their opponents, are a community. A people who are not only different from the rest, but who refuse to accept for themselves the same destiny which others do are a nation. It is this acceptance or non-acceptance of a common destiny which alone explains why the Untouchables, the Christians, and the Parsis are in relation to the Hindus only communities and why the Muslims are a nation... The dynamic character of this difference is undeniable. If it persists, it cannot but have the effect of rending the State in fragments... as far as safeguards are concerned, there cannot be any difference

130. The Free Press Journal, 14-4-45, quoted in Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 239.

131. This work was later published under the title, Pakistan or the Partition of India (Bombay: 1946).

132. *Ibid.*, pp. 330f.

between a nation and a community. A community is entitled to claim the same rights and safeguards as a nation can.

Even in this support a political motive was suspected, because the Untouchables, "totalling nearly twenty per cent of the population would be at an advantage vis-a-vis the caste Hindus when the larger part of the Muslim population left for Pakistan"¹³³.

The Cripps Mission was sent to India in 1942 in an attempt to break the deadlock in the country with the proposal of full dominion status for an Indian union "immediately upon cessation of hostilities"¹³⁴. Ambedkar secured an interview with Sir Stafford Cripps to press the issue of the Depressed Classes. During this interview Ambedkar was asked whether he represented labour or the Depressed Classes, and was asked to demonstrate the strength of his party. This led to a remake of the Independent Labour Party into an All-India Scheduled Caste Federation at an All-India Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur. The resolutions passed at the Conference included a demand for the "establishment of separate village settlements" for the Depressed Classes¹³⁵, a demand not taken as seriously as Jinnah's resolutions.

When the Scheduled Castes Federation fielded candidates in the elections to the Central and Provincial legislatures, as called by the British in 1945, the mood of the country was quite different from that of

133. Jatav, 1979, op. cit., p. 157, quoting Frank Moraes, Witness to an Era (New York: 1973), p. 46.

134. Jatav, op. cit., p. 162.

135. Ibid., pp. 165f.

1937. None of the candidates put up by the Scheduled Castes Federation was elected, including Ambedkar. In the interim between the foundation of the Scheduled Castes Federation and its complete defeat in the 1945 elections, Ambedkar had been appointed to the Executive Council as labour minister, but whatever "prestige" was attached to that appointment had not prevented his defeat.

After the elections, the Cabinet Mission arrived in India to complete the transfer of power announced by Prime Minister Atlee, to avoid a complete breakdown of British order on the subcontinent.¹³⁶ With respect to the Depressed Classes, the Cabinet Mission recognized Congress as the representatives of that group:¹³⁷

at the last provincial election, Congress made practically a clean sweep of the whole of the Depressed Classes Constituencies. That is the fact and as it was almost universally agreed that the members of the Provincial Legislative Assembly formed the only possible electorate for the Constituent Assembly, it was not possible, even had we desired to do so, to arrange for Dr. Ambedkar's organization to have any special rights of election in the Constituent Assembly. It had failed in the elections, and we could not artificially restore its position. The Depressed Classes will, of course, have full representation through the Congress affiliated organization. We interviewed the leaders of that organization and were convinced of their very genuine and strong desire to support the case of the Depressed Classes.

136. A number of events most probably hurried the British efforts at transferring power to the Indians. These events included the Indian National Army's revolt led by Bose, the refusal of several members of the Royal Indian Air Force to follow orders, and a mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay harbour.

137. Appadorai and Gwyer, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 628, quoting Sir Stafford Cripps on the history of the Cabinet Mission to India, 18 July, 1946, recorded in Parliamentary Debates: Commons, 5th Series, vol. 425, pp. 1394-1416.

The Congress affiliated organization mentioned by Cripps was the All India Depressed Classes League led by Jagjivan Ram who in 1946 had taken over Ambedkar's portfolio as Labour Minister. The report made by Cripps noted that the Congress Party's support was "spread widely over the whole country"¹³⁸, while Ambedkar's was localized in Bombay and the Central Provinces. Ambedkar's attempts at mobilizing a Depressed Classes' consciousness had failed.

With this defeat, Ambedkar resorted to the techniques of mass demonstration which he had used in the late 1920's to guarantee political recognition of the Depressed Classes. A caretaker government had been announced, against which the demonstrations were said to be organized, although they took place outside the Assemblies in Poona, Kanpur, and Lucknow, where the Congress-dominated legislatures were meeting. Unlike the earlier satyāgrahas, these demonstrations had little effect within the political arena. Already the issue of the Depressed Classes was becoming a dead issue. As Premier Keer observed, the reason for the Scheduled Castes Federation's offering of satyāgraha was unclear:¹³⁹

One does not know whether their grievance is against the Cabinet Mission's failure to give them what they want or against the defeat of Dr. Ambedkar and his party in the recent election, or whether it is due to a general sense of frustration.

Due to the defeat of his party, Ambedkar was ineligible to sit in the Constituent Assembly, convened by the Cabinet Mission to draft the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar had been unsuccessful in the elections in Bombay,

138. Sitarmayya, op. cit., Vol. II, Appendix IV, pp. cxlviii-ccxxxii.

139. Keer, op. cit., p. 382.

but Scheduled Castes representatives supported his candidacy in Bengal, and with the support of the Muslim League, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly.¹⁴⁰ After the Assembly convened, Ambedkar was named as Law Minister in the interim government, and was subsequently appointed as chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution.

The Depressed Classes' Rights in the Constitution

The events which took place in the Constituent Assembly relating to the status of the Depressed Classes as a minority have already been described in the introduction. With the spectre of violence following the partition after midnight August 14, 1947, between the Hindus and Muslims, and Gandhi's assassination by a Hindu fanatic in 1948, safeguards for a Muslim community in India were rejected as measures which undercut the force of the definition of the country as a united whole. When the safeguards for the Muslim community were dropped from the Draft Constitution, the recognition of statutory needs of the other religious minorities was also dropped. However, the Scheduled Castes' rights were retained.

Three reasons account for the retention of the Scheduled Castes' rights. First, the plight of the Depressed Classes had been well publicized both in India and in Britain. From the 1920's on, the Congress Party had publicized their concern for the conditions of the Depressed Classes. The guarantee to help uplift the Untouchables had become an integral part of the Congress propaganda which could not be dropped once independence from

140. Ibid.

Britain was secured. Second, it had never been clear whether the Depressed Classes constituted a minority like the other religious minorities. Because the Depressed Classes were simply considered a group in need of special safeguards due to their ambiguous position in Hindu society the status of religious minority did not hold, and when the other minority rights were dropped, the Scheduled Caste rights could be retained. Had Ambedkar been successful in the mid 1930's in aligning the separate status of the Depressed Classes with the other religious minorities through mass conversion, the situation in the Constituent Assembly might have been different. As it was, the disjunction between the Depressed Classes and the other minorities allowed an exception to be made for the Depressed Classes, or Scheduled Castes. Third, Ambedkar's position as Chairman of the Drafting Committee allowed him to exert his influence to maintain the Scheduled Castes' right of guaranteed political representation.

In addition to the clauses which specified that the system of reservation for the Scheduled Castes continue in Independent India, another type of legislature pertaining to the Scheduled Castes was incorporated in the Constitution. On April 29, 1947, prior to Partition and prior to the Draft version of the Constitution, a motion was passed that "untouchability in any form is abolished and the imposition of any disability on that account shall be an offence"¹⁴¹. This, with a slight change of wording became Article 17 in the final version of the Constitution. In comparison, the two types of legislation seem to be in contradiction with each other.

141. C.A.D., vol. II, p. 475.

Article 17 makes the practice of Untouchability an offense punishable by law, while Articles 330-342 implicitly sanction the concept of Untouchability as a means of classification. The benefits the Scheduled Castes are entitled to are contingent upon the acknowledgement of their stigma of Untouchability. The Scheduled Castes are enumerated and entitled to special benefits on the basis of a disability arising out of Untouchability. Yet, the "enforcement of a disability arising out of untouchability" is an offense punishable by law under Article 17 of the Constitution.

The two sets of clauses, when juxtaposed with each other, have the appearance of being contrary measures. What is abolished in one set is implicitly reinstated in the other. The history of the politization of Untouchability in some ways bears this out, as each set of clauses is indicative of a different pattern of thinking on the status and condition of the Untouchables. Behind Article 17, and its related Articles 14, 15, 16, 19, which guarantee equality before the law, and protect against discrimination on any ground, Article 23, which abolishes the practice of begar, or enforced labour, and to some extent the provisions made for the State to promote the interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Backward Classes, lies the pattern of thinking established by the Congress Party in the early 1920's. The key feature of this pattern is the idea of the integration of the Untouchables within a holistic social structure. These articles are most consistent with Gandhi's approach to the question of Untouchability, which treated the practice as an odd appendage to an organic stratification within an ideal social system, and devised means to compensate for an over emphasis on stratification.

The second set of clauses, Articles 330-342 deals with another set of ideas altogether. The logic behind these clauses is not a logic of eventual integration through initial separation, or protective discrimination. Rather, the logic is based on the definition of the Scheduled Castes as a separate group, apart from the rest of the society. This definition was initially formulated by the British, and was seized by Ambedkar who saw a chance for change in the distribution of power in the fragmentation of power. Ambedkar's line of thinking which centred around the idea of a separate political status for the Depressed Classes to guarantee them access to power was consistent with the pattern of government along communal lines that seemed to be evolving in the 1930's. The radical shift of Jinnah's Muslim League, coupled with the apparent ability of the Congress Party to absorb the Depressed Classes into the Congress movement, and finally the Partition of the sub-continent in 1947 changed all that, though. To some extent, the artificiality of the definition of the Depressed Classes as a separate political group made the logic of a separate political status suspect from the beginning. Notwithstanding his effort to forge a solid movement, Ambedkar's inability to mobilize the Depressed Classes inter-provincially and across caste barriers demonstrated the weakness of this assumption. In the end result, the system of reservation became an anomaly, which in some ways was outdated even before it was implemented in an Independent India. The strategic position the Depressed Classes had enjoyed in the late 1920's and early 1930's was displaced with other concerns as government increasingly shifted from a communal to a national basis.

Conclusion

The question of the status of the Depressed Classes became an important issue in the political arena during the Independence struggle. The issue was introduced by the British who gave tacit recognition to the Depressed Classes as an interest group in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. The interest demonstrated by the British in the Depressed Classes, coupled with the imminent changes in the political structure resulting from the Independence movement, prompted representatives of the Depressed Classes like Dr. Ambedkar to campaign for a share of the power the British were redistributing in India. The point raised by the British and emphasized by the Ambedkar and other Depressed Classes leaders that the Depressed Classes were in need of safeguards to protect them from the "tyranny" of the high caste Hindus was a direct challenge to the idea of an Indian government headed by Hindus. This challenge was taken up by Mr. Gandhi who integrated the removal of Untouchability into the Congress movement's campaign for Independence.

The interaction of Gandhi, Ambedkar and the British government centered on the question of the status of the Depressed Classes in Indian society. The British, through their control of the political arena, provided the forum for debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi. At times, such as the Round Table Conferences, and the negotiations leading up to the Poona Pact, this debate took place face to face. At other times, such as the campaign of temple confrontations organized by Ambedkar, or the Harijan movement led by Gandhi, the debate took the form of mass mobilization to substantiate an argument.

These arguments concerned the definition of the Depressed Classes in Hindu society. Whether or not the Depressed Classes could be considered a minority group distinct from the rest of Hindu society had profound implications in the negotiations going on to determine what type of government would replace the British government. The British, fueled by the evidence marshalled by Ambedkar, were inclined to treat the Depressed Classes as a minority group, and safeguard their rights accordingly. This treatment, though, produced a potentially crucial split in the power base of the Congress movement, which Gandhi, as leader of the Indian National Congress, had to overcome. His approach was to reconcile the Depressed Classes with the Congress movement through an intensive campaign directed at the reintegration of the Depressed Classes in Hindu society. The intent of Gandhi's Harijan was to undermine the logic of providing the Depressed Classes with minority rights.

Ambedkar, on the other hand, campaigned fully for minority status on the grounds that it would give the Depressed Classes access to power otherwise denied in a Hindu society. His campaign was to produce as much evidence as possible to prove that the Depressed Classes were not only excluded from the Hindu social system, but also oppressed by it. Ambedkar's commitment to the political process was a result of the potential he saw in political power as a means of strengthening the position of the Depressed Classes.

Although the height of the controversy about the status of the Depressed Classes was in the 1930's, the period when the British government was setting up a provisional power structure for an independent India,

the force of this controversy continued right up into the Constituent Assembly Debates. Because of the ambiguous status the Depressed Classes had as a result of the interactions of Gandhi and Ambedkar, and because the removal of Untouchability - the underlying issue of this status - had become a warrant of commitment to an independent India, the Depressed Classes retained their special rights after the privileges of the other minority groups were dropped. The interplay of ideas behind this controversy, though, resulted in the somewhat contradictory nature of Untouchability being abolished and yet implicitly sanctioned by the measures adopted in the Constitution. This history of the system of reservation for the Depressed Classes made it an anomaly, even before its implementation in modern India.

CHAPTER III

AMBEDKAR'S POSITION: UNTOUCHABLE

The preceding chapter has described the role played by the Depressed Classes in the Independence period. Due to the political issues involved in the struggle for Independence, the question of Depressed Class status had become important and certain benefits were granted to the Depressed Classes in the Indian Constitution as a result of the combination of factors already described. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the actual degree of participation by members of the Depressed Classes in the contention for these benefits was negligible.¹ Although in certain areas and among certain caste groups, notably among the Mahars of Maharashtra, a level of political consciousness and activity seemed to exist², this apparent involvement stemmed from the strategies of a few Depressed Class spokesmen. Of these, Dr. Ambedkar was undoubtedly the best known.³

1. The suggestion that there was "a struggle and awakening of the downtrodden" (Kamble, J.R., Rise and Awakening of the Depressed Classes, op. cit., p. ix) is questioned by this observation.
2. See Eleanor Zelliot, Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1969.
3. The opinion expressed by A. Beteille, "Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamilnad" in R. Kothari, ed., Caste in Indian Politics (New Delhi: 1970), p. 285, supports this point:

Ambedkar kept the issue of the Depressed Classes in the political arena, in contrast to Gandhi who, by "retiring" from active politics to conduct a campaign against Untouchability, symbolically withdrew the issue. Without the British initiatives, however, Ambedkar alone could not have made Untouchability a political issue. Because the British saw fit to include the issue of Untouchability in the negotiations for transfer of power and because they appointed a few Depressed Class representatives to take part in the discussions, Ambedkar played primarily a role of politician rather than of social reformer. Through his campaign, the different participants of the nationalist movement were required to take a stand on the issue of Untouchability.⁴ The inclusion of the eradication of Untouchability in the Congress Party's platform resulted from this interplay of initiative and response. Had it not been for Ambedkar's drive to maintain the political status the British had given the Depressed

In Maharashtra the Harijans had found in Ambedkar a leader who within a short time could inculcate in them a degree of political consciousness. In Tamilnad this was on the whole absent. Though the British gave some protection to Harijan interests for a variety of reasons, and in Madras there were also a few Western-educated Harijan leaders, the group had to await the extension of the franchise after Independence before their impact as a significant political force in Tamilnad could be felt.

In Tamilnad, non-Brahmin leadership in politics dates back to the formation of the Justice Party in 1917, but there was little participation by the Depressed Classes in this movement. Even with leaders such as M.C. Rajah and D.B. Srinivasan, who along with Ambedkar represented the Depressed Classes at the Round Table Conferences, the issue of political rights appears to have made little impact on the members of the Depressed Classes of Tamilnad.

4. Not all groups favoured the legal abolition of Untouchability. According to The Hindu, June 13, 1923, the Justice Party did not protect the interests of the Depressed Classes, and refused to support anti-Untouchability legislation in 1922. See S. Saraswati, Minorities in Madras State (Delhi: 1974), p. 118.

Classes, it is conceivable that the issue of Untouchability would not have attracted so much attention during the Independence struggle. After Independence most of this attention dissipated. The guarantee of political representation and public service positions have continued in force and the Untouchability (Offences) Act was passed in 1955⁵, but the concern with the problems surrounding the status of the Untouchables has been displaced by other interests.

This loss of interest in the problem of Untouchability was recognized as early as 1951. In the Annual Report of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1951-1952, it was observed "that the sense of dedication in evidence during

5. This act came into force on June 1, 1955, and defines "untouchability" as "enforcing social disabilities" with respect to "access to any shop, public restaurant, hotel, or place of public entertainment... the use of any utensils... kept in public restaurants, etc. ... the practice of any profession or the carrying on of any occupation, trade or business... the use of, or access to any river, stream, spring, well, tank, cistern, water tap, or other watering place, any bathing ghat, burial, or cremation ground, any sanitary convenience, any road, or passage, or any other place of public resort... the use of, or access to, any place used for a charitable purpose or a public purpose maintained wholly or partially out of State funds... the enjoyment of any benefits under a charitable trust created for the benefit of the general public... the use of, or access to any public convenience... the construction, acquisition or occupation of any residential premises in any locality whatsoever... the use of any dharmashala, sarai or masafirkhana which is open to the general public... the observance of any social or religious custom, usage or ceremony or the taking part in any religious procession... the use of jewelry and finery", "enforcing religious disabilities" with respect to "entering any place of public worship... worshipping or offering prayers or performing any religious service in any place of public worship...". The act also makes reference to the refusal of admission "to any hospital, dispensary, educational institution or any hostel attached thereto...", the refusal "to sell goods or render services"; the prevention of "any person from exercising any right accruing to him by reason of the abolition of 'untouchability' under Article 17 of the Constitution" through injury, obstruction, boycott, excommunication, etc. (Untouchability (Offences) Act, Government of India Publications: 1955).

This Act is more comprehensive than the earlier provisions passed in the separate provinces of India, most of which were passed after 1947.

the freedom struggle was now wanting and the question of eradicating untouchability might degenerate into a mere political slogan to be exploited when necessary and forgotten once the need was over"⁶. Notwithstanding its abolition by law, Untouchability is still practiced⁷; the small number of convictions under the Untouchability (Offences) Act⁸,

6. Verma, Mukut Behari, The History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1932-1968 (Delhi: 1971).

7. Santokh Anant, in The Changing Concept of Caste in India (Delhi: 1972), p. 134, concludes from a study of questionnaires carried out in Northern India in 1968 that "the findings confirm [the] hypothesis that many caste Indians tend to reduce cognitive imbalance created by conflicting legal and caste dharmas by differentiation, conforming to the Constitutional and legal rules in areas where the interaction with Harijans is of a superficial nature, but sticking to the caste rules in areas of intimate interaction." His conclusions, recognizing "cognitive imbalance" tend to undermine the validity of relying upon questionnaires to gauge the degree of actual adherence to the Constitutional and legal rules.

Other studies have questioned that the theoretical abolition of Untouchability is endorsed. S.R. Mitra, in the Foreward to M.L. Jha, Untouchability and Education (A Socio-Psychological Study of Attitudes (Mecryt: 1973) observes, "It is a matter of shame to find in Dr. Kha's careful study that our educated people are not unanimous in decrying the nefarious practice of Untouchability. They could have at least said that they do not like this, even if they do practice it. But a certain percentage does not even feel ashamed with openly supporting untouchability" (Italics in the original).

8. M.M. Dass, A National Penitence: Removal of Untouchability (Delhi: 1976), p. 56, gives the following figures:

Year	Number of cases registered with police	Number of cases challenged	Number of convictions
1955	180	180	80
1956	693	599	149
1957	492	415	87
1958	550	477	127
1959	481	401	105
1960	509	438	89
1961	489	438	187
1962	389	338	77
1963	397	316	78
1964	484	425	196
1965	366	321	136

indicates that the legal provisions have made little impact. The conditions which had raised questions about the status of Untouchables were no longer present after 1947.

Because of the continuation of the system of reservation, there are still reminders of the political importance of Untouchable status. The observation had been made that, the only time the Untouchables are welcome to interact freely with others Hindus is when an election campaign is going on.⁹ At all other times they are treated as pariahs. Such symbolic gestures only serve to parody the emphasis placed on the eradication of Untouchability during the Independence struggle. Even those who represent the Untouchables in the seats reserved for the members of the Scheduled Castes are often considered retainers patronized by the Congress Party,

Year	Number of cases registered with police	Number of cases challenged	Number of convictions
1966	488	447	199
1967	353	313	136
1968	214	184	35
1969	329	272	48
1970	364	291	50
1971	526	n.a.	55
1972	1394	1318	663
1973	2438	2162	1192
1974	1166	1097	637

In a population of approximately 90 million Untouchables, this number of convictions is rather small.

9. Mencher, J., "Continuity and Change in an Ex-Untouchable Community of South India" in M. Mahar, 1972, op. cit., pp. 37-56, notes that the Untouchables (Paraiyans) do not enter the temples, except during the election campaigns. In 1967, they were allowed to enter to hear the speech of a Congress candidate. One informant observed, "Well, we won't get in there again until the next election". Mencher also notes that no interdining takes place unless it is during an election campaign.

rather than men who represent the true interests of the lowest castes.¹⁰
 At the same time the quota of positions in the public service are rarely filled.¹¹

This evidence would indicate that the campaign to eradicate Untouchability has not been a total success. Part of the problem lies in the contrary nature of the provisions directed at the issue of Untouchability. As was noted in the last chapter, Article 17 of the Constitution, which abolishes Untouchability is implicitly contravened by Articles 330-342, which underwrite the status of Untouchability as the basis of access to political power. The contradiction of values is quite apparent in the studies done on the lowest caste groups. Attempts to integrate into a higher level in the caste hierarchy through a manipulation of economic and social situations have been supplanted by an identification with the Untouchable status. As Owen Lynch, in a study of an Untouchable caste in the city of Agra observed, after the benefits of being a Scheduled Caste became apparent, the Jatavs discontinued attempts to legitimize higher status claims.¹²

10. Owen Lynch in The Politics of Untouchability, op. cit., p. 107, cites the views of the "radical members of the Republican Party. He also cites a report on the Congress Party of Uttar Pradesh: "The Scheduled Caste leaders who have been given Congress tickets in the reserved constituencies are non-militant and have no power in the local or state Congress organizations. The numerous organizations in Uttar Pradesh for the advancement of the Scheduled Castes and 'depressed classes' have been content to serve as agencies for the distribution of Congress patronage. J. Brass, The Congress Party of Uttar Pradesh (Delhi: 1965), p. 105.
11. Kamble, op. cit., cites the figures for 1966. On an all-India basis, 4,179 positions were filled out of a possible 9,605 vacancies (p. 296).
12. Lynch, O., "The Politics of Untouchability: Case from Agra, India" in M. Singer and B. Cohen, op. cit., p. 223 (italics in original). Eleanor Zellfott's study of the Mahars of Maharashtra, op. cit., supports Lynch's conclusion.

The Jatav's reference group of identification now became the scheduled castes, which considered themselves the oppressed, unlightened, and deprived section of the country. These status attributes were the basis of Jatav identification. Such an identification, however, was an about-face, in that the Jatavs now identified with those groups considered Untouchable by the other, that is, upper castes.

This raises the question whether Untouchability can be abolished when it is a necessary, legal status identification.

The source of much of this contradiction can be found in the approach taken by Dr. Ambedkar. An examination of Ambedkar's thinking on the politization of Untouchability will demonstrate that it is unlikely that he envisaged integration of the Untouchables into mainstream Hindu society as the outcome of his efforts. Instead, it appears that he sought to create a new meaning for the term "Untouchable", which would guarantee a place for them in the new order to emerge out of the freedom struggle. In Ambedkar's thinking, any change in the Untouchables' traditional position in Hindu society presupposed a change in that tradition-bound society.

Of all the terms used to refer to the lowest stratum of Hindu society, "Untouchable" was the label favoured by Ambedkar. He found the term "Depressed Classes" pejorative and suggestive of helplessness.¹³ Gandhi's

13. In the Supplementary Memorandum on the claims of the Depressed Classes for Special Representation, submitted to the Round Table Conference by Ambedkar and Srinivasan on November 4, 1931, it was noted "that the existing nomenclature of Depressed Classes is objected to by members of the Depressed Classes... It is degrading and contemptuous, and advantage may be taken of this occasion for drafting the new constitution to alter for official purposes the existing nomenclature. We think that they should be called "Non-Caste Hindus", "Protestant Hindu", or "Non-Conformist Hindu", or some such designation, instead of "Depressed Classes". Cited in Ambedkar, 1946, op. cit., p. 306.

term, "Harijan", was equally contemptible. To Ambedkar, the term represented the patronage of the higher castes, and emphasized the dependence nurtured in the Untouchable castes. While a member of the Bombay legislature, Ambedkar led a walk-out by members of his Labour Party over the statutory recognition given to the label "Harijan" through its use in a bill before the legislature. Ambedkar had protested that the adoption of a label was "a matter which the wishes of the group ought to have prevailed upon the government"¹⁴. Although Ambedkar used "Scheduled Castes" in briefs and memoranda presented to the government, in his own writings he used the term "Untouchable"¹⁵.

His observation on the legal status of the term in the Constituent Assembly reflects his position:¹⁶

Untouchable has no definite legal connotation. That is why in the Government of India Act of 1935, it was felt necessary to give the word 'untouchable' some legal connotation and the only way it was found feasible to do it was to enumerate the communities which in different parts and in different areas were regarded by the local people as satisfying the test of untouchability.

Ambedkar sought recognition of "Untouchable" and the key to his thinking lies in his definition of the term. For Ambedkar, its importance was not what "Untouchable" meant in a traditional context, but what it could mean in a changed context.

14. Keer, op. cit., p. 302.

15. For example, in the brochure, States and Minorities: What are Their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of India (Hyderabad: 1970), Ambedkar used the term "Scheduled Caste" in his proposed constitution, pp. 1-28, but shifted to "Untouchable" in his explanatory notes, pp. 29-60.

16. C.A.D., vol. VII, op. cit., p. 782.

This term is not a neutral term. By emphasizing the concept of ritual pollution, "Untouchable" focuses on the ritual status of the reference group. Unlike "Harijan" in the sense intended by Gandhi, "Depressed Classes", or "Scheduled Castes" - none of which denote a pollution barrier - "Untouchable" draws attention to the sanctions enforcing the separateness of the group. The use of the term forces recognition of that separateness, and by extension, acknowledgement of a special status. This status was, in Ambedkar's campaign, to become the means of change; it was to become a political weapon. Through the identification of the means of change with the central issue of separate status, Ambedkar sought to locate the solution of the problem of Untouchability in the status of Untouchable itself. His campaign was thus a campaign of self-affirmation through which the Untouchables would be readied to take part in a new Indian society brought about by Independence.

The way in which the term "Untouchable" was used by Ambedkar challenged both the British understanding of the position of the lowest caste Hindus, and Gandhi's views on the issue. For the British, "Depressed Classes" was an euphemism, referring to vanquished peoples without hope or self-respect, whose position in Hindu society was akin to that of slavery. Their solution to this problem was the application of externally imposed measures to redress the political imbalance. Their initial policy of nomination of representatives of the Depressed Classes is indicative of this thinking. In Gandhi's point of view, the Harijan's status was merely misunderstood by others. Gandhi's term, "Harijan", meaning "born of Hari", or God, connotes a relationship with God, and thus implies a

divine order. As excerpts from Young India and The Harijan, cited in the previous chapter, have already illustrated, his conception of an ideal society modified only the attitudes of high caste Hindus towards the Harijans; the Harijan was still dependent upon high caste Hindus for respect. Where Gandhi spoke of the need to protect the helpless, down-trodden Harijan, Ambedkar spoke of self-help and self-respect.

Both the British and Gandhi had, in their different ways, ignored the role the Untouchable was to play in the solution to his problems. Ambedkar, however, defined the solution in terms of the role of the Untouchable. In Ambedkar's thinking, the Untouchable would be able to control the conditions of his well-being through gaining political power which had previously been denied to him. This solution in effect called for change in the distribution of rights and privileges to enable participation of the Untouchable in all aspects of social activity. Such change required a modification of the existing network of social relations and Ambedkar claimed that he had entered the political arena for that purpose. His goal was to replace the traditional and restricted activities of Untouchables with new economic and social opportunities.

The associations the term "Untouchable" had for Ambedkar suggest the type of change he envisaged. Unlike terms such as antyaaja (last-born), pancama (fifth, implying a fifth, varna-like category), or other more traditional terms, Untouchable was coined in the backdrop of the Independence period. As was noted in the Introduction¹⁷, the term was apparently first used by the Maharaja of Baroda, in an address to the

17. See p. 24.

Depressed Classes Mission of Bombay in 1909. The same Maharaja¹⁸ financed Ambedkar's education and eventually sent him to Columbia University in New York. This opportunity was given to Ambedkar not only because of scholastic promise. An important criterion was his status as an Untouchable; the Maharaja had publically pledged to give financial assistance to Untouchables. Ambedkar's campaign focussed on implementing and institutionalizing such opportunities, by making them de jure opportunities.

Yet, in other ways, the association of the term "Untouchable" with the Maharaja's extension of educational opportunity and with the general political climate of the early decades of this century also suggests privilege. Ambedkar's education resulted from the financial patronage of the Maharaja who was not directly involved with a reform movement. Later, Ambedkar's fight for guaranteed political representation and guaranteed employment opportunities was dependent upon the political schema set up by the British. This schema, as it applied to the role of the Depressed Classes effectively set up a system of special privilege. The guarantee of rights and privileges on the grounds of caste status alone resembles the principle of the jajmāni system.¹⁹

This interplay of ideas of self-determination on one hand and of special privilege on the other is the key to Ambedkar's thinking. The

18. This same Maharaja also participated in the Round Table Conferences in London in the early 1930's on behalf of the Muslims.

19. The jajmāni system is a network of exchange of goods and services in village India. The types of exchanges and the benefits resulting from these exchanges are determined by caste status. This network establishes a system of patronage, through which hereditary rights and benefits result for the castes involved. See Max Weber, The Religions of India (Glencoe: 1958), for a description of the jajmāni system.

conceptual framework of Ambedkar's politics can be separated into two complexes of ideas which are fundamentally contrary to each other. One set of ideas pertained to Ambedkar's vision of modern India. In his conception of India as a modern state, caste status would be replaced with citizenship status; the restrictive nature of caste identity would give way to the open opportunities of equal citizenship. The other set of ideas was rooted in Ambedkar's understanding of Hindu social structure. In this paradigm, the key features were power and privilege associated with special status.

In order to substantiate this argument, the two sets of ideas will be discussed separately. Although the two positions were often interwoven into one statement, it is possible to reconstruct each conceptual model, and then examine how they were played against each other in Ambedkar's thinking. The first model that will be presented is Ambedkar's vision of modern India. Much of the information needed to reconstruct this position comes from the Constituent Assembly Debates, where Ambedkar made some of the clearest statements on his understanding of the direction modern India was taking. As chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution²⁰, Ambedkar not only presented his position, but was required to defend it as the Constitution was debated. In this capacity he played a major role in formulating the definition of modern India. Even so, Ambedkar maintained repeatedly that his presence in the Constituent Assembly was for the sole purpose of guaranteeing Untouchables' rights.²¹

20. Ambedkar almost single-handedly drafted the Constitution. Of the six members appointed to the Drafting Committee, one died, one spent part of the time in America, one was occupied with state affairs, and two did not attend the meetings.

21. C.A.D., vol. II, op. cit., p. 973.

Whenever the question of the status of the Untouchables was raised in the debates, another deep-rooted conception on Indian social structure surfaced. This will be the second conceptual model discussed, as Ambedkar's understanding of how the caste system worked perpetuated the demand for a privileged status. This line of thinking can be traced back through all of Ambedkar's speeches and publications. He also attempted two definitive statements on Hindu social organization in the works, Who Were the Shudras²² and The Untouchables²³, both published in the mid-1940's. A reconstruction of Ambedkar's understanding of caste will be attempted using these works, backed up with both earlier and later statements.

Finally, the interplay between these two lines of thinking will be examined. At different times in his career, Ambedkar attempted different methods of forcing change. Many of these methods have already been discussed in the last chapter. One method, not yet discussed, was the initiation of a mass movement to convert to Buddhism in 1956. At first appearance, the movement seems inconsistent with the rest of his activities, yet there is a relationship. Almost all of Ambedkar's actions related directly to the politics of the Independence period, including the mass conversion ceremonies of 1956. Although it is true that mass conversion to Buddhism involved a change of the religious identity of the Untouchables, it will be demonstrated that the move was rooted in Ambedkar's struggle

22. Ambedkar, Who Were the Shudras? How They Came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society (Bombay: 1970, first published in 1946).

23. Ambedkar, The Untouchables (Lucknow: 1969, first published in 1948).

for political rights, and reflected the conflicting ideas found in his politics.

The question of conversion to another faith was raised as early as 1927, and was related to the issue of separate elections and reserved seats.²⁴ What took place in 1956 had its antecedents in those earlier events, and was consistent with Ambedkar's periodic threats of leaving the Hindu fold. Yet, in 1956, the mass conversions rendered those who became Buddhist ineligible for the political privileges Ambedkar had championed as political spokesman of the Untouchables. In effect, the conversion movement, initiated by Ambedkar, seems to have invalidated the main objective of his political career. Furthermore, mass conversion to Buddhism has by no means provided a solution to the problem of Untouchability. Evaluations of the Buddhist movement have indicated that conversion has not been a successful means of upgrading the status of Untouchables: Untouchable Buddhist converts are still treated as Untouchables.²⁵ However, instead of looking at the movement in terms of success or failure, it is possible to analyze it in terms of Ambedkar's approach to the question of Untouchability. In that way, the movement is seen as a resolution of the tension posed by the two conflicting visions of Indian social structure. The logical organization of the movement restructured the contradictions in Ambedkar's politics to overcome, and thus "solve" those tensions. This hypothesis will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

24. See p. 137.

25. See Isaacs, H., India's Ex-Untouchables, op. cit., 390.

Ambedkar's Vision of Modern India²⁶

When Ambedkar's statements in the Constituent Assembly are examined, it becomes clear that he envisaged fundamental changes in Indian society after Independence. In his thinking, Independence meant more than the transfer of power from British control to home rule. It represented the opportunity to transform Indian society from an archaic society comprised of a network of closed status groups to an open society in which all members had equal status. Such change would be brought about by entrenching the concept of equality in the political matrix. Ambedkar saw the principle of citizenship, "one man, one vote; one vote, one value"²⁷ as the foundation of the political order in post-Independent India. This principle embodied equality and automatically transformed the disparate statuses assigned to different castes into a uniform status held by each individual.²⁸ Through the Constitution, all Indians, even Untouchables, became citizens with the right to vote; all, at least by definition, were equal.²⁹ As of 26 January, 1950, each individual was guaranteed the right

26. The general structure given to the government, i.e., dual polity of State and Central legislatures, etc., will not be discussed here.
 • For more information, see C.A.D., vol. 7, pp. 35f, for Ambedkar's views:
27. C.A.D., vol. 11, p. 979.
28. C.A.D., vol. 7, p. 34. Ambedkar was clear on the issue of a single, uniform and equal citizenship:
 The proposed Indian Constitution is a dual polity with a single citizenship. There is only one citizenship for the whole of India. It is Indian citizenship. There is no State citizenship. Every Indian has the same rights of citizenship, no matter in what State he resides.
29. The Fundamental Rights of the Constitution make this clear. Article 14 establishes equality before the law; Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth; Article 16 provides equality of opportunity in matters of public

to participate in the maintenance of the political democracy. With this redefinition of every Hindu as a citizen, "the principle of graded inequality which means elevation for some and degradation for others"³⁰ was contradicted.

Ambedkar recognized the disparity between the new political structure and the existing social and economic structure³¹, but he proposed change by contrasting the working of Hindu society with the idea of the Indian nation. The recognition of the contradiction between the two, combined with the strong feeling to preserve the hard-won political democracy would force a realignment of the social structure in accordance with the definition given to the Indian nation by the Constitution. In this, Ambedkar meant a breakdown of caste barriers:³²

These are my reflections about the tasks that lie ahead of us. They may not be very pleasant to some. But there can be no

employment; 17, abolishes Untouchability; 18 abolishes titles; 19 gives the right to freedom of speech and expression, to peaceful assemblies, to form associations or unions, to move freely throughout India, to reside or settle in any part of India, to acquire, hold and dispose of property, and to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business; 23 prohibits forced labour (begar); 25 gives freedom to practice any religion and provides for the State to throw open Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. The Directive Principles reiterate the duty of the State to establish "a social order in which justice, social, economic, and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life". Article 44 provides for the replacement of personal law with a "uniform civil code".

30. C.A.D., vol. 11, p. 979.

31. Ibid., Ambedkar stated, "On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality".

32. Ibid., p. 980. Emphasis added.

gainsaying that political power in this country has too long been the monopoly of a few and the many are not only beasts of burden, but also beasts of prey. This monopoly has not merely deprived them of their chance of betterments, it has sapped them of what may be called the significance of life. These down-trodden classes are tired of being governed. They are impatient to govern themselves. This urge for self-realization must not be allowed to devolve into a class struggle or class war... Therefore the sooner room is made for the realization of their aspiration, the better for the few, the better for the country, the better for the maintenance of its independence, and the better for the continuance of its democratic structure. This can only be done by establishment of equality and fraternity in all spheres of life.

In effect, Ambedkar transformed the concept of caste identity into an obstacle to the realization of nationhood. Any idea of caste was anti-national:³³

How can people divided into several thousand castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word, the better for us. For then only we shall realize the necessity of becoming a nation and seriously think of ways and means of realizing the goal.

Through posing caste affiliations as divisive and thus unpatriotic, Ambedkar implied that any attachment to the ascriptive ties of communal identity would forfeit the political democracy India had just begun to celebrate. By so closely connecting the breakup of caste and communal grouping to the survival of the Indian nation, Ambedkar was using the momentum built up by the Independence struggle to engender a social environment congruent with the new political order. The commitment to the concept of nationhood, coupled with emotion elicited by the actual process of transfer of power, provided the right climate for social change.

33. Ibid.

The commitment to the idea of the Indian nation meant a commitment to the Constitution: parliamentary democracy, universal franchise, the universal right of all citizens to education, to any type of occupation, to property, and so forth provided a clear definition of a society in which the ascriptive limits of caste status had no authority.

Ambedkar spoke of the principles of "equality, liberty, and fraternity"³⁴. By enshrining the concept that all social interaction be regulated by the principle of citizenship, and not by notions of communal identity, in the Constitution, Ambedkar apparently felt that enough authority would be lent to these principles to involve them in all spheres of life. The "State" guaranteed these principles in the form of the Fundamental Rights comprising Articles 12-29³⁵ of the Constitution. As Ambedkar stated:³⁶

The object of the Fundamental Rights is two-fold. First, that every citizen must be in a position to claim those rights. Secondly, they must be binding upon every authority... they must be binding not only upon the Central Government, they must not only be binding upon the Provincial Government, they must not only be binding upon the Governments established in the Indian States, they must also be binding upon District Local Boards, Municipalities, even village panchayats and taluk boards, in fact every authority which has been created by law and which has got certain power to make laws, to make rules, or make by-laws.

According to Ambedkar, the "composite phrase... 'the State'", as used in Article 12 to represent all authority, imposed a universal obligation

34. C.A.D., vol. 11, p. 976. The theme of "equality, liberty, and fraternity" was one Ambedkar referred to throughout his career. He often compared the Independence struggle to the French Revolution. See C.A.D., vol. 1, p. 100.

35. See footnote 29 above.

36. C.A.D., vol. 7, p. 610.

to the Fundamental Rights.³⁷ A normative order was established, as the Fundamental Rights "emanated" from the highest authority in the land.

A set of Directive Principles³⁸ follow the Fundamental Rights in the Constitution. They were included to define the relationship between the State and the individual. The State was to ensure a social order for the promotion of the welfare of the people, "a social order in which justice, social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life"³⁹. Although the Constitution recognizes that the Directive Principles are not enforceable by any court of law, their inclusion was justified by Ambedkar on the grounds that such principles determined the context of order in which the Indian citizens lived. The important aspect the order represented by the Constitution was different from the existing order; according to Ambedkar, "What great value these directive principles possess will be realized better when the forces of right contrive to capture power"⁴⁰. Such apparently was the vision Ambedkar

37. Ibid., Article 12 establishes that "the State" refers to all authority, or bodies of authority within the territory of India.

38. Articles 38-46

39. Article 38.

40. C.A.D., vol. 7, p. 41. Ambedkar argued, pp. 40-41: The inclusion of such instructions in a Constitution such as is proposed in the Draft becomes justifiable for another reason. The Draft Constitution as framed only provides a machinery for the government of the country. It is not a contrivance to install any particular party in power as has been done in some countries. Who should be in power is left to be determined by the people, as it must be, if the system is to satisfy the test of democracy. But whoever captures power will not be free to do what he likes with it. In the exercise of it, he will have to respect these instruments of instructions which are called Directive Principles. He cannot ignore them. He may not have to answer for the breach in a Court of Law. But he will certainly have to answer for them before the electorate at election time. What great value these directive principles will be realized better when the forces of right contrive to capture power.

had of India once the Constitution was implemented. In establishing the central authority of the State and defining the order it represented, the Constitution provided an organizing matrix with which the social patterns of population would be coordinated.

Ambedkar had published a pamphlet on the reform of the caste system, Annihilation of Caste⁴¹, some ten years before the Constituent Assembly convened. In this pamphlet, he had written that the only way to approach the question of the problems of caste was through the belief system. He stated, "It must be recognized that the Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman or wrong-headed. They observe caste because they are deeply religious"⁴². He argued that unless social reform began with the modification of the belief system and its structure of authority, any attempts to change caste behaviour would run counter to the basis of order in the social organization. Such reform was akin to asking people to act contrary to their fundamental principles:⁴³

41. Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi (Jullundur City, Punjab: 1971, first printed in 1936). Here on cited as A. of C. The pamphlet was originally a speech to be given to the Jat Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore, an organization of Caste Hindu Social Reformers. The speech was never presented because according to head of the Mandal, Ambedkar "unnecessarily attacked the morality and reasonableness of the Vedas and other religious books of the Hindus, and... dwelt upon the technical side of Hindu religion, which has absolutely no connection with the problem at issue". A. of C., prologue, p. 23, citing a letter sent to Ambedkar from Har Bhagwan of the Mandal. When Ambedkar was unable to give the speech, he had it printed up and published.

42. A. of C., p. 90.

43. Ibid.: Ambedkar recognized that the authority of the Sastras was not what they said, but what they were believed to say.

Not to question the authority of the Shastras, to permit the people to believe in their sanctity and their sanctions and to blame them and to criticise them for their acts as being irrational and inhuman is a most incongruous way of carrying on social reform. Reformers working for the removal of untouchability including Mr. Gandhi, do not seem to realize that the acts of the people are merely the results of their beliefs inculcated upon their minds by the Shastras and that people will not change their conduct until they cease to believe in the sanctity of the Shastras on which their conduct is founded.

The reform proposed by Ambedkar at that time was to replace the authority of the Śastras with another authority from which the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity could be derived. He spoke of the establishment of the institution of democracy, "Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen"⁴⁴. The description he gave of the ideal society to replace the caste society corresponds to the image of India he extrapolated from the Constitutional outlines; Section XIV of Annihilation of Caste reads the same as the speech Ambedkar gave on 25 November 1949, at the ends of the debates on the Constitution⁴⁵, which summarized his view of the direction India should take. Only, at the time of the later statement, the Constitution, a central authority not unlike the Śastras in function, was about to be ratified by the Constituent Assembly.

In the Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar argued that the Hindu religion was nothing more than a series of injunctions provided by those who held the most power.⁴⁶ He argued that dharma was merely law, or a code

44. A. of C., op. cit., p. 72.

45. Compare A. of C., pp. 71-74, with C.A.D., vol. 1, pp. 973-981.

46. A. of C., op. cit., p. 104.

of ordinances invested with the character of finality and fixity, even-though it was understood to be a sacred precept. What made such commands and prohibitions effective was the belief in their authority. Once this belief was removed or transferred to another locus of authority, the "code of ordinances" could be changed. Article 44 of the Constitution, under the Directive Principles, specifies the replacement of personal law with a "uniform civil code". By applying a uniform civil code, the effectiveness of Hindu dharma, or in Ambedkar's terms, "legalized class ethics"⁴⁷ would be completely undermined.

Objections were raised in the Constituent Assembly that the Constitution enjoined the State to interfere in religious matters by seeking to establish a civil code, and that personal law should be exempt from state jurisdiction. Ambedkar replied that "the religious convictions in India are so vast that they cover every aspect of life, from birth to death" and rejected an exemption of personal law from state control:⁴⁸

There is nothing extraordinary in saying that we ought to strive hereafter to limit the definition of religion in such a manner that we shall not extend beyond belief and such rituals, as may be connected with ceremonials, which are essentially religious... I personally do not understand why religion should be given this vast, expansive jurisdiction so as to cover the whole of life and to prevent the legislature from encroaching upon that field. After all, what are we having liberty for? We are having this liberty in order to reform our social system, which is so full of inequities, so full of inequalities, discriminations, and other things, which conflict with our fundamental rights. It is quite impossible for anyone to conceive that the personal law shall be excluded from the jurisdiction of the State.

47. Ibid., p. 105.

48. C.A.D., vol. 7, p. 781.

Ambedkar spoke of relegating religion to a minor, ceremonial role in Indian life, but in effect what he sought to do was replace Hindu religion with a "civil ideology", which worked to guarantee certain patterns of behaviour in much the same way as the understood religion to work. In this "civil ideology" the Constitution and uniform civil code set up the structure of authority, while the Fundamental Rights, the Directive Principles, and the particulars of the civil code - which Ambedkar expected to be adopted shortly after Independence - provide the content. The ideals of this "civil religion" are not only clearly articulated by the Constitution, they are coterminous with order, as represented by the parliamentary democracy, and with authority, as represented by the government and the legal system.

In reference to his own role, Ambedkar spoke in terms of religious conversion: "My philosophy has a mission. I have to do the work of conversion; for I have to make the followers of Triguna theory⁴⁹ give it up and accept mine"⁵⁰. The key component of the conversion process was the opportunity provided by Independence to redefine and restructure the society's understanding of itself. As the power structure shifted to a system based on universal franchise, Ambedkar envisaged a comparable shift in the social structure:⁵¹ citizenship would replace the importance of caste status. Just as the government dealt with the individual directly,

49. Ambedkar defined the triguna theory as the social philosophy propounded in the Bhagavad Gītā, based on Sāṃkhya conception of three gunas.

50. Keer, op. cit., p. 459, citing an All-India Radio Broadcast in 1954.

51. In recounting Ambedkar's interview with All-India Radio, Keer indicates that Ambedkar expressed this view.

and not through the medium of communal grouping, individuals would interact directly, and not through the medium of ritual status. In this way Ambedkar saw the changes needed to resolve the question of Untouchability being implemented.⁵²

Yet, when the question of guarantees to the Scheduled Castes was raised, Ambedkar was unwilling to forfeit the value of caste identity. His statements from the Constituent Assembly Debates on a system of reservation for the Scheduled Castes hedge on the idea of complete disregard for community identity. Ambedkar's argument began with the recognition of the concept of citizenship:⁵³

There are three points of view which it is necessary for us to reconcile if we are to produce a workable proposition which will be accepted by all. Of the three points of view, the first is that there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens... Another view... is that, if this principle is to be operative - and it ought to be operative... to its fullest extent - there ought to be no reservations of any sort for any class or community at all, that all citizens, if they are qualified, should be placed on the same footing of equality so far as the public services are concerned.

In stating the third of the views, though, Ambedkar departed from the idea of equality of status:⁵⁴

although theoretically it is good to have the principle that there must be equality of opportunity, there must at the same time be a provision made for the entry of certain communities which have so far been outside the administration.

52. Others in the Constituent Assembly expressed the same idea. Dr. S.C. Banerjee of Bengal observed that caste distinctions were removed with the recognition of equal citizenship, hence the root cause of Untouchability was abolished. C.A.D., vol. 3, p. 413...

53. C.A.D., vol. 7, p. 701.

54. Ibid.

By qualifying the principle of equal opportunity with the argument that certain communities needed special provisions, Ambedkar ended up compromising the ideal of equality based on equal citizenship status. He inserted the qualification that equal opportunity meant special privilege on the part of certain communities. Although Ambedkar claimed to be reconciling the concept of equal status with the problem of unequal status, he in fact reverted to what he had all along considered axiomatic, that "there shall be reservations in favour of certain communities which have not had a 'proper look-in' so to say into the administration"⁵⁵.

The construction of his argument shifted the emphasis from equal status to the idea of opportunity. The principle that "all citizens, if they are qualified, should be placed on the same footing of equality so far as the public services are concerned" presents the idea of equal status, but Ambedkar subsumed this principle under a general postulate that "there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens", and further modified it with the provision specifically guaranteeing these opportunities to certain communities. From this shift of emphasis, it is clear that Ambedkar's understanding of equality was not based on an idea of shared attributes, i.e. determined by the equal status of citizenship conferred on all members of the Indian population, but was based on an idea of shared interactions, i.e. determined by the probability of equal participation in any activity. Furthermore, in order for the principle of participation to be viable according to Ambedkar's reasoning, the probability on the part of certain

55. Ibid.

communities had to be artificially increased. Therefore, through the special provisions for special communities, caste status must be acknowledged, and allowed to overrule citizenship status.

In other words, the retention of community distinctions was necessary to provide the opportunities Ambedkar sought for the Untouchable community. The concept of equal status was thus undercut by the explicit recognition of differentiated communal status. This differentiation was assured by the listing of castes eligible for guarantee privileges. The dynamics of opportunity mitigated the full application of the principle of citizenship. Ambedkar justified this compromise with the observation that neither public sector employment nor legislative representation was allocated to communal groups on a proportional basis, but that reservation was made in favour of one community due to "historical reasons"⁵⁶. This justification, in effect, is a restatement of his understanding of how the caste system worked: certain groups were guaranteed privileges and prerogatives in accordance with their special status.

Ambedkar's Understanding of Caste

Ambedkar's vision of caste probably reflects his community's position in the caste hierarchy. Unlike other Hindu spokesmen such as Gandhi who defended the caste system as an efficient means of maintaining a stable

56. Ibid.: "We had to reconcile this formula [of equal opportunity] with the demand made by certain communities that the administration which has now - for historical reasons - been controlled by one community, or a few communities, that situation should disappear and that others also must have an opportunity of getting into the public services".

and well-balanced network of production and service, Ambedkar viewed the system as the device of a small group to consolidate control over the other groups of the society. According to Ambedkar, the system was, in essence, comprised of a series of competing groups, some of which had more access to power than others. (Any sense of social cohesion was absent:⁵⁷

Hindu society is a myth... Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its own existence. Its survival is the be all and end all of its existence:

Although the groups together functioned as a whole, this semblance of order was really the result of techniques exercised by the controlling class to subjugate the rest. The techniques ranged from indoctrination to disarmament. Ambedkar lists five such techniques:⁵⁸

If the common man belonging to the servile classes in India is today so fallen, so degraded, so devoid of hope and ambition, it is entirely due to the Brahmins and their philosophy. The cardinal principles of this philosophy are five: (1) graded inequality between the different classes; (2) complete disarmament of the Sūdras and the Untouchables; (3) complete prohibition on the education of the Sūdras and the Untouchables; (4) ban on the Sūdras and the Untouchables occupying places of power and authority; (5) ban on the Sūdras and the Untouchables acquiring property.

He further observed that "the record of the Brahmins as law givers... is the blackest... no other intellectual class has prostituted its intelligence to invent a philosophy to keep his uneducated countrymen in a perpetual state of ignorance and poverty as the Brahmins have done in India"⁵⁹.

57. Ambedkar, A. of C., op. cit., p. 59.

58. Ambedkar, What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables, op. cit., p. 215. Here on cited as What Congress.

59. Ibid.

These techniques received their sanctity in the Vedas and Dharmaśāstras which Ambedkar considered "political in their motive, partisan in their composition, and fraudulent in their purpose"⁶⁰. By giving such literature a sacred configuration, the Brahmans were able to garner the authority necessary to maintain their status. In Who Were the Shudras?, Ambedkar supplies a list compiled from the Dharmaśāstras of the Brahmans' claims of superior status.⁶¹ These claims guaranteed the Brahmans their position as governing class, as Ambedkar considered the Brahmans the de facto administrators:⁶²

The governing class in India consists principally of the Brahmans. It is strange that the present-day Brahmans repudiate the allegation that they belong to the ruling class though at one time they described themselves as Bhūdevas (gods on earth)...

History shows that the Brahmin has always had other classes as his allies to whom he was ready to accord the status of a governing class provided they were prepared to work with him in subordinate co-operation.

The effectiveness of the techniques such as sacred authority and political alliance maintained order by keeping all other groups under control, but nonetheless, conflict between groups was latent. From Ambedkar's point of view, this conflict was exemplified by the relations between the Brahmans and the Untouchables. Among other things, the Untouchables as a class

60. Ambedkar, Who Were the Shudras?, op. cit., p. xvii.

61. Ibid., pp. 218f. The list includes the points that the Brahman must be acknowledged guru of all by the mere fact of birth; that the Brahman has the sole right of deciding the duties of other classes, their occupations, and that the king should rule in accordance with such instructions; that the Brahman is not subject to the authority of the king; and so forth. Ambedkar gave P.V. Kane, History of the Dharmaśāstra, vol. II, part 1, pp. 138-153, as reference.

62. Ambedkar, What Congress, op. cit., p. 204 and p. 206.

served to enable the Brahmans "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"⁶³.

This theory of caste closely resembles the British theory of group conflict as an explanation for caste. Such resemblance is understandable as Ambedkar's political position was dependent upon the British understanding of the Untouchables as a distinct, communal grouping. Interestingly enough, though, Ambedkar rejected the component of racial purity which, in the British theory, accounted for the origin of the different groups.⁶⁴ He argued instead that caste came into being long after the different races in India had mingled. Likewise, any suggestion that occupational differentiation was responsible for the make-up of the system was dismissed as untenable.⁶⁵ The reason why Ambedkar² rejected both the question of racial

63. Ibid., p. 196. Ambedkar also cited the economic benefits such a relationship gave the Brahmans and other Hindus.

64. Ambedkar raised this point repeatedly. See for example; A. of C., pp. 56ff, and The Untouchables, pp. 55-82. In A. of C., p. 56, he stated, "To hold that distinctions of Castes are really distinctions of race and to treat different Castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of facts." He testified at the Indian Statutory Commission that the theory linking Untouchables to pre-Aryans was only an opinion, and not proven theory. (Indian Statutory Commission, vol. XVI, Selections from Memoranda and Oral Evidence, Part I, p. 54). Ambedkar's presence and testimony in front the Indian Statutory Commission probably contributed to the final official definition of the Depressed Classes according to the "more discrete" criteria of restriction to temples and the pollution barrier, rather than a definition more overtly racial.

65. The Untouchables, op. cit., pp. 83-86.

purity and the association with unclean occupations as underlying explanations for the institution of Untouchability is not explicit, although the negative impact the acceptance of such ideas would have had on the Untouchables can be supposed. It is clear from Ambedkar's writings, though, that he reduced the issue of Untouchability to a question of power. Such an explanation was not only psychologically more satisfying, but was also more useful in light of the politics of the Independence struggle. By maintaining that the Untouchables' status was the result of a power struggle Ambedkar was able to assert a separate communal status, without unsavory connotations of racial impurity.

Ambedkar supported his argument with a reinterpretation of Vedic and later literature. He did this in essentially two phases represented by two monographs, Who Were the Shudras? and The Untouchables.⁶⁶ The first was written to prove that the Śūdras were originally Ksatriyas who lost their status as a result of a continuous feud with the Brahmins; the second was designed to prove that the Untouchables were originally Buddhists who were degraded in a similar manner. Although the work, The Untouchables was written as a sequel to Who Were the Shudras?⁶⁷, the connection between the two works is tenuous. Presumably the development of Untouchability took place after the Śūdras had "fallen", but each story is presented as a complete unit, leaving the reader to posit both connections and chronology. Each story has a mythic quality, by seeming to go back to the beginning of time to deal with the origins of Śūdras and Untouchables respectively.

66. See p. 165.

67. The Untouchables, op. cit., p. ix.

Ambedkar does not relate the origins of the one group to the other.

The basic structure of each of the stories is similar; each focuses on the theme of conflict with the Brahmans. In the account of the present position of the Śūdras, Ambedkar based his argument on the observation that Vedic society, like other primitive societies, was organized into groups based on the kinship ties of common ancestry.⁶⁸ By comparing a passage from the Mahābhārata with references in the Rg Veda⁶⁹, he concluded that the Śūdras were one such group descended from a common ancestor Paijavana, whose real name was Sudas.⁷⁰

These are the biographical bits regarding Paijavana referred to in the Shanti Parvan of the Mahabharata gleaned from the most authentic source, namely the Rig Veda. From the Rig Veda, we know that his real name was Sudas, that he was a Kshatriya. He was more than a Kshatriya. He was a king and a mighty king. To this, the Mahabharata adds a fresh and new detail, namely that he was a Shudra. A Shudra to be an Aryan, a Shudra to be a Kshatriya and a Shudra to be a king!

From this Ambedkar drew the conclusion that the Śūdras were a subset - a type of clan, phatry, or tribe - of the Ksatriya varna. Because he found no reference to the Śūdras as a distinct varna in the Vedic literature, except in the Puruṣa Sūkta which he discounted as a later interpolation, he maintained that Aryan society was originally composed of three varnas.⁷¹

68. Who Were the Shudras?, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

69. Ibid., Ambedkar cited the Mahabharata, verses 38-40, chapter 60 of the Shanti Parvan, in which reference is made to a Śūdra by the name of Paijavana, who performed a sacrifice and gave dakṣiṇa. Ambedkar compared nine manuscripts to validate this reading (pp. 123-124), and referred to the Rg Veda VII, 18: 22, 23, 25 to draw his conclusions (pp. 130-132). Many of Ambedkar's inferences are quite suspect, but the interest here is not the correctness of his theory, but the logic of it. It is obvious in reading these accounts, that Ambedkar began with a theory, and then chose and combined passages from the texts to furnish the evidence he needed.

The fall of the Śūdras came as a result of a conflict between Vasīṣṭa and Viśvāmitra, two priests who, according to Ambedkar, were respectively a Brāhman and a Ksatriya.⁷² Sudas intervened on behalf of Viśvāmitra, and enmity ensued between Sudas and Vasīṣṭa only to be continued by their sons. In addition to this enmity, Ambedkar referred to other conflicts between kings (who he claimed were all Śūdra kings), and Brāhmans.⁷³ The tyrannies, oppressions, and indignities perpetrated by the Śūdra kings against the Brāhmans led to retaliation on the part of the Brāhmans. This retaliation took the form of the denial of the upanāyana ceremony to the Śūdra clan. Once the upanāyana ceremony was denied, the Śūdras no longer had the same social status as other Ksatriyas, and fell to a rank below the Vaiśyas. Due to this degradation, they no longer had the right to own property, and no longer had the right to acquire knowledge and learnings⁷⁴, the loss of these rights accounts for their present social condition.⁷⁵

This explanation offered by Ambedkar for the present status of the Śūdras is similar in structure to many low caste accounts of the cause of their present degradation. These accounts essentially create a geneology

70. Ibid., p. 139.

71. Ibid., pp. 145-153.

72. Ibid., p. 166, Ambedkar cites numerous texts such as the Harivamsa, Viṣṇu Purāna, etc.

73. Ibid., pp. 170-176.

74. Ibid., pp. 196-197.

75. Ambedkar added an interesting qualification. He maintained that most of the present Hindus who are considered as Śūdras have no

of high caste ancestors, usually Ksatriyas, whose high status was lost through trickery or conflict. Such accounts both support the claims of higher status and justify the actions taken to secure that status. The premise of Ambedkar's account is that Indo-Aryan society was comprised of groups of equal status. Because of conflict with the Brahmins, the Sūdras were degraded and a system of unequal status groups ensued. The account thus implies that the establishment of the Brahmanical system of hierarchy resulted from the relations between the Brāhmins and the Sūdras, and that the Brāhmins, in order to overcome the Sūdras, resorted to the use of means to deny status.

The similarity between Ambedkar's explanation of the origin of the Sūdras and other low caste myths of origins may possibly suggest that Ambedkar was attempting to "sanskritize" the Untouchables by implication, or imply that the Untouchables were Sūdras, who were really Ksatriyas. As has been noted above, the difference between the Untouchables and Sūdras was often tenuous, and in Ambedkar's account, he clearly stated that Aryan society originally was made up of three equal groupings, the Brāhmins, Ksatriyas, and Vaiśyas. However, Ambedkar at no other time attempted to assimilate the Untouchables into the Sūdra classification. His long campaign for a separate political status for the Untouchables is clear testimony to that. He always spoke of the Untouchables and Sūdras as two different groups. His monograph on the Untouchables, published only two

connection with the Sūdra clan of the Indo-Aryan society. Rather, they are a "miscellaneous and heterogeneous collection of tribes who have nothing in common except that they are on a lower plane of culture" (p. 233) and who have come to be associated with the Sūdras. He apparently made this qualification to avoid criticism of his theory on the grounds that the Sūdras make up approximately eighty per cent of the Hindu population. The qualification is hidden on one page of his work; the rest of the work implies that this theory is the definitive account of the origins of the Sūdras.

years after the Śūdra monograph, made no attempt to connect the Untouchables to the Śūdras.

In the portrayal of the origins of the Śūdras, Ambedkar demonstrated that the Brāhmins were oppressed by the Śūdra kings. In that way the work is as much an account of the origins of the Brahman supremacy as an explanation of the Śūdras' present position. In stating that the Śūdras were equally responsible for the conflict which ensued, Ambedkar implied that the Śūdras are in some ways responsible for the workings of the caste system, even though they are repressed by it. This interpretation reflects Ambedkar's feeling about Hindu society in general. He saw it as a series of competing groups for which dominance was a matter of gaining power by asserting status.

His monograph on the Untouchables reflects this same theme of conflict. The content of Ambedkar's account of the origins of Untouchability is different from his Śūdra theory, although its structure is similar. This theory on the origins of the Untouchables will be discussed in greater detail at the end of the chapter when the mass conversion movement is examined. In brief, though, the explanation is based on the idea of confrontation between the Brahmins and Buddhists. The Brahmins eventually emerge in the better position through the manipulation of ritual practices: by co-opting the rule of ahimsā and adopting strict vegetarianism, the Brahmins countered the Buddhist challenge and established their supremacy. With this, their hold on the masses was secured, yet the Buddhists living

on the outskirts of villages neither adopted the Brahmanical injunctions nor gave up beef-eating. Out of contempt for these men both as Buddhists and as beef-eaters, the Brahmins relegated them to the status of Untouchable.⁷⁶

According to this account, the root of Untouchability is found in an ideological confrontation, with the opposing practices of vegetarianism and beef-eating symbolic of the confrontation. What varna status, if any, the Buddhist-Untouchables had at the time of their degradation is not told. Their only status identification is ideological: they were Buddhist and as such were outside the Brahmanical system altogether.

Although Ambedkar's Śūdra and Untouchable "myths" are similar in that both Śūdras and Untouchables begin with a better status, and lose this status due to the Brahmins' assertion of supremacy, and that in both, the Brahmins are portrayed as underdogs just before they establish their supremacy, there is an important difference. The Śūdras are associated with the Hindu social system, while for the Untouchables no such identification occurs. In the Untouchable account, two competing systems Buddhist and Brahmanical provide the grounds for the degradation to take place; in the Sudra account, all occurs within one system which shifted from a make-up of equal groups to unequal groups. As so much of Ambedkar's political campaign depended on the British recognition of the claim that the Untouchables were quite distinct from the rest of the Hindus, this difference is perhaps understandable - as is Ambedkar's - desire to dissociate the Untouchables from a system he found abominable.

76. The Untouchables, op. cit., p. 99 and pp. 155f.

By "proving" that an ideological difference separated the Untouchables from the rest of the Hindus, because the Untouchables were originally Buddhist, Ambedkar was drawing a political boundary around the Untouchables. This was consistent with his attempts to inculcate a political consciousness in the community as a whole as a group fundamentally in conflict with the Brahmans and their social order. He saw the Untouchables not as the lowest stratum of Hindus, helpless and dependent on the mercy of the higher castes, but as a group able to participate in a struggle for power.⁷⁷ The setting of the Independence struggle enabled Ambedkar to politicize this understanding of the Untouchables' separate status.

Further, because Ambedkar saw that success in such a conflict lay in the use of special status to gain and assert power, most of his politics were aimed at securing a special status for the Untouchables. Ambedkar believed that the Brahmans' position resulted from prestige and privileges their status guaranteed them; both his accounts of the origins of the Sūdras and Untouchables, explained the Brahmans' control of power through a manipulation of ritual symbols; the investiture of the sacred thread, and the adoption of strict vegetarianism. Such symbols not only differentiated the different groups, but led to the discrimination of some, the Sūdras and Untouchables, while enhancing the power of the Brahmans.

In much the same way - but to the benefit and not detriment of the Untouchables - Ambedkar campaigned for Untouchability to be recognized as

77. As early as the 1920's, Ambedkar had disclaimed the patronage of caste Hindu reformers, and advised the Untouchables to drop their attempts to integrate into Hindu society. See Keer, op. cit., p. 60, and Zellott, 1969, op. cit.

a special status, and for the Untouchables to be given special rights. The definition of the Depressed Classes as the Untouchables was clearly made only through the joint efforts of the Simon Commission, the Round Table Conferences, and the Indian Franchise Commissions⁷⁸; Ambedkar participated in all three and repeatedly submitted memoranda that the Depressed Classes should be defined as the Untouchables alone. The enumeration of the Scheduled Castes and their subsequent rights given by the 1935 India Act resulted from these meetings. Articles 330-342 in the Constitution entrenched the special status of the Scheduled Castes in the power structure of modern India.

The comments of another member of the Constituent Assembly suggest that the treatment the Scheduled Castes received in the Constitution elicited an unconscious recognition of this pattern. The member was drawing a parallel between the Manu Smrti and the Constitution:⁷⁹

In ancient times the Brahmins had no possessions and considered it unnecessary to secure protection for themselves. They did not consider it their duty to secure safeguards for themselves. Therefore the Constitution of ancient times, the Manu Smrti provided for their protection. In the present Constitution safeguards have been provided for Scheduled Castes and Tribes for some time. Their protection was necessary because they cannot protect themselves. Therefore we see that there is some similarity in the old Manu Smrti and the present Smrti. The only difference is that in place of go brāhmana hitāya ca [for the good of the cow and Brahman], there is go pariṅanita hitāya ca [for the good of the cow and the Scheduled Castes]:

The Constitution, in fact, declares all Indian citizens equal, but treats the Scheduled Castes and Tribes differently. Ambedkar's vision of modern

78. See above pp. 113f.

79. C.A.D., vol. 11, p. 910, the speaker was Shri Har Govind Pant of U.P.

India was not strong enough to supercede his deep-rooted feeling of how caste society worked. With reference to the Untouchables' position, even in modern India, his thinking was based on a model of caste conflict.

The interplay between these two lines of thinking is quite apparent in the techniques employed by Ambedkar. In the mid 1920's Ambedkar had staged a number of satyāgrahas in Maharashtra. These satyāgrahas served two purposes. One was to campaign for the recognition of individual equality, and to inculcate this idea of equality in the Untouchables. His speech at the Mahad Tank satyāgraha makes this clear: "We would not die if we do not drink water from this place... But in order to prove that we are equally human beings like others, we had staged this satyāgraha"⁸⁰. In the speech, Ambedkar referred to the principles of the Untouchables' struggle:

- 1) All men are born equal and remain equal until death.
- 2) Such human rights must remain an article of faith in politics.
- 3) A society should not be based on privileges.
- 4) All conditions which are contrary to the interest of society must be ended by law.
- 5) The law is not a restriction decided by a particular section of society.

The satyāgrahas served another purpose. They were held from the mid 1920's to the mid 1930's, at the same time the various commissions and conferences were studying the Depressed Classes. As minority status and the privileges that went along with it depended on the British conclusion that the Depressed Classes comprised a group distinct from the rest of the Hindus, the confrontations at the temples and water tanks provided proof that the Untouchables were excluded from Hindu society. The satyāgrahas

80. Kamble, J.R., op. cit., p. 148. Kamble has translated the speech from Marathi, as quoted in Mahad Magazine, Mahad, 1962, pp. 1-8.

were organized to secure a political status by providing a definition of the Untouchables for the British. The statement by Ambedkar at a Depressed Classes Conference makes this clear. He was exhorting the use of political means: "Do not forget that your fight at Mahad and Nasik won you what political status you are going to get. The news about Nasik satyāgraha which appeared in The Times, London, every day had interested and instructed the Britishers"⁸¹. Even though some of the satyāgrahas were held on the premise of gaining temple entry, Ambedkar discouraged religious practices: "It is, therefore, your duty to divert your attention from fast, worship and penance and apply it to capturing law-making power"⁸².

After 1935, Ambedkar withdrew support for temple satyāgrahas; by then the Untouchables' political status was guaranteed by the Government of India Act. Gandhi had also made the opening of temples part of his campaign to eradicate Untouchability. As Gandhi's objectives of reconciling the Untouchables and the Hindus ran counter to Ambedkar's, and as he had already secured the status he wanted for the Untouchables, Ambedkar dropped the technique of organized confrontation at the temples. He even denigrated the usefulness of the Untouchables' gaining the right to enter temples.

His reflections on the satyāgrahas reveal the two models of thinking presented above. The demonstrations were organized both to prove the equality of the Untouchables as individuals and their inequality as a group. Both positions were held simultaneously. At the Mahad confrontation,

81. Keer, op. cit., p. 233.

82. Ibid., p. 235.

Ambedkar compared the situation with the French revolution from which the values of liberty, equality and fraternity were derived, yet, at the same time he was aware that such confrontations would guarantee the Untouchables special privileges in the emerging power structure.

This pattern can be traced through all of Ambedkar's politics, up through the ratification of the Constitution. As the conflict of ideas found in Ambedkar's thinking on the Constitution has already been discussed at length above, the discussion will now turn to the mass movement to convert to Buddhism instigated by Ambedkar. The movement poses a number of questions in light of Ambedkar's political activity, and his views on the usefulness of religious belief. These questions can be resolved, though, if the movement is examined in structural terms, and compared to the analysis already presented.

Conversion to Buddhism

The conversion was preceded by a number of important events. While the debates on the Constitution were still taking place, Ambedkar placed a revised Hindu Code Bill before the legislative assembly. Although work had been done on codifying Hindu law since the early 1940's, Ambedkar's revision of the bill generated a great deal of controversy. Many members saw the bill as a complete abrogation of Hindu customs and traditions.⁸³ Ambedkar himself saw it as the first phase of establishing a uniform civil code. The bill revised family law to make it uniform for all Hindus,

83. Ibid., p. 417. See also C.A.D., vol. 7, p. 781.

Lingayats, members of the Brahma and Arya Samaj, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs.⁸⁴ Due to opposition to the bill both in and outside the Assembly, it was broken down into parts. In September, 1951, a clause relating to marriage and divorce was adopted by the assembly, but all other parts of the bill were dropped.

With the failure of the Hindu Code Bill to be passed in its entirety, Ambedkar submitted his resignation to cabinet, citing among other reasons the government's general apathy towards Scheduled Caste uplift.⁸⁵ In the elections of 1952 and 1954, Ambedkar attempted reelection, first as a candidate for the Scheduled Caste Federation and then as an independent candidate. Both times he contested a reserved seat and both times he was defeated by a Congress candidate. Although he did secure a nomination as a representative of Bombay State in the Council of States in 1952, his political life essentially ended with his resignation from the Law Ministry in 1951.

Out of the political arena, Ambedkar returned to the issue of religious conversion. In 1956 he publically converted to Buddhism ceremony at Nagpur, Maharashtra in a diksa ceremony officiated by a Buddhist Monk.⁸⁶ Ambedkar's gesture was followed by the mass conversion of the Untouchables

84. Lokhander, G.S., Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (New Delhi: 1977), pp. 152f. Lokhander gives a summary of the points in the Hindu Code Bill.

85. Ambedkar cited five reasons for his resignation. He claimed that he was left out of every Cabinet Committee, that the government was indifferent to the uplift of the Scheduled Castes, that he differed with government policy over Kashmir, that Indian foreign policy was alienating friends and increasing enemies, and that Nehru was neither sincere nor eager to pass the Hindu Code Bill. See Keer, op. cit., p. 431

86. Ibid., pp. 495-505.

(mainly Mahars) attending the ceremony. This initial mass conversion was followed by subsequent ceremonies, resulting in the conversion to Buddhism by several million Mahars.⁸⁷ Clearly, personal failure, coupled with general disillusion at the new government's slow implementation of social change, led to Ambedkar's revival of the issue of religious conversion. The reasons why Ambedkar turned to religious conversion are, however, not so clear.

One explanation of Ambedkar's move is that he sought further support for his claim that the Untouchables comprised a separate group. Ambedkar had never been satisfied with the Poona Pact's definition of the Untouchables as Hindus, for whom the special representation in the legislature would be determined by the votes of the entire Hindu community. Right into the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar had fought this compromise which gave the Untouchables reserved seats, but qualified their separate status. Although the Untouchables had reserved seats in most of the special constituencies the majority of votes determining the Scheduled Caste representative were from Caste Hindus. Ambedkar felt that this compromise had undermined the self-determination of the Untouchables. As early as 1935, Ambedkar had publically threatened a mass religious conversion of the Untouchables,

87. The census figures for Maharashtra show that in 1951, 2,487 were returned as Buddhists. In 1961, this number had increased to 2,789,501. In other states, a significant number of Buddhists were returned: Madhya Pradesh, 113,365; Uttar Pradesh, 12,893; Punjab, 14,957; Mysore and Gujurat also showed increases of 8,000 and 3,000 respectively. The total number returned for all of India was 3,250,227 which represents an increase of 1,670.71 percent. These figures are cited in A. Ziske, "Buddhism in India Today", in H. Dumoulin and J. Maraldo, eds, The Cultural, Political and Religious Significance of Buddhism in the Modern World (New York: 1976), p. 141. They were taken from Census of India, Paper No. 1 of 1963; 1961 Census-Religion.

and had periodically reiterated the threat. The earlier threats were part of political moves designed to guarantee the Untouchables a share in the redistribution of power. In the 1930's Ambedkar was working within the political structure set up by the British, who treated the make-up of Indian society as the sum total of a series of disparate groups. At that time the issue of conversion was raised to guarantee minority status. All of the ensuing threats of conversion were made in similar circumstances, and concerned the political viability of a separate status. By 1956, though, all of that had changed; the question of religious minority groups had been resolved with the partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

As the memory of the violent after-effects of partition was still fresh in 1956, it is possible that Ambedkar sought some sort of concessions from Hindu leaders by posing a new threat of renewed minority consciousness. Ambedkar had, in the 1940's issued demands for separate Untouchable settlements, much in the same way as Jinnah had called for the creation of Pakistan.⁸⁸ However, this explanation is unsatisfactory. The act of conversion involved issues more complex than just the re-enforcement of the danger posed by a politically conscious, but socially separate Untouchable group.

88. Ambedkar, States and Minorities, op. cit., p. 56: "It is the system of the village plus the ghetto which perpetuates Untouchability and the Untouchable therefore demand that the nexus be broken and the Untouchables who are as a matter of fact socially separate should be made separate geographically and territorially also, and be settled into separate villages exclusively of Untouchables in which the distinction of the high and the low and of Touchable and Untouchable will find no place." This is the explanation given for the demand of separate settlements presented in Part II, Clause 2 of the proposed constitutional draft submitted by Ambedkar in 1945.

By inciting the Mahars to renounce Hinduism in favour of neo-Buddhism⁸⁹ in 1956, Ambedkar effectively rendered the Mahars ineligible for the political and social benefits he had spent most of his life campaigning for. Once the Mahars renounced Hinduism, they relinquished the Scheduled Caste status which accorded them the benefits provided in the Constitution.⁹⁰ This is in contrast to 1935, when conversion was

89. The term, "neo-Buddhism", has been adopted by a number of scholars to refer to the particular type of Buddhism adopted by Ambedkar's followers. See T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas, eds., Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement (Bangalore: 1972).
90. By the time the Constitution was drafted, only Hindu castes were considered eligible for the classification of Scheduled Caste. The emphasis on the Hindu component of the Scheduled Caste Identity resulted from the controversy generated as the question of minority rights and Depressed Classes was raised. As has been stressed in the previous chapters, the British classification of the Depressed Classes implied that because the Depressed Classes were not fully "Hinduized", they were depressed. The Hindu response that the Depressed Classes were "part and parcel of the Hindu community". This was the opinion adopted by the Constituent Assembly: The word 'minorities' so far as international treaties and international law is concerned, is only restricted to racial, linguistic, and religious minorities. The Harijans, generally known as Scheduled Castes, are neither a racial minority nor a linguistic minority, not certainly a religious minority... It was only... when the Government of India Act was moved that the definition of 'minorities' was so extended by Sir Samuel Hoare as to include every minority which the Governor thought fit to consider as minority. This is a very mischievous extension of the term and my amendment seeks to clarify the position that so far as Scheduled Castes are concerned, they are not minorities in the strict sense of the term; that the Harijans are part and parcel of the Hindu community, and the safeguards are given to them to protect their rights only until they are completely absorbed in the Hindu community. (K.M. Munshi, C.A.D., vol. 5, p. 227).
Four Sikh castes were included for benefits on the ground that the Sikhs formed a subset of Hindus. This concession, however, reflected the events that were taking place in the East Punjab following partition. (See Constituent Assembly Debates, vol. 8, Minority Report, Appendix, p. 315, and the ensuing discussion). Otherwise, the legal position was that only Hindus could be eligible for Scheduled Caste benefits.

proposed as a means of securing these rights and privileges. Ambedkar was fully aware of this in 1956, as he had participated in all the debates concerning the identity of the Scheduled Castes. When questioned about the loss of Scheduled Caste guarantees, Ambedkar responded that self-respect was more important than special privileges.⁹¹ He also spoke about maintaining rights through a new political party, the Republican Party, but that point is moot: he died in December, 1956, without resolving the issue. The neo-Buddhists, deprived of the prerogatives shared by other Untouchables, have appealed to the courts to reinstate their lost benefits. To date, the educational and employment guarantees have been re-extended to the Buddhist converts; the right of guaranteed political representation has not. The question whether Ambedkar chose conversion as a means to re-enter the political mainstream, by forcing another political battle over the rights of neo-Buddhists, cannot be answered in light of his death.

In this setting, the instigation of mass conversion is mystifying. Although the gesture of conversion was consistent with previous declarations, the earlier political motivations were not only lacking, but the immediate result of the mass conversion seems to have been counter to these motivations. To consider the conversion as the culmination of Ambedkar's "spiritual quest"⁹² is also unsatisfactory; the gesture, both public and well-publicized

91. Keer, op. cit., p. 498.

92. Certain scholars have expressed this opinion. See B.A.M. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar" in Wilkinson and Thomas, op. cit., pp. 33-70; and Zelliot, "Background of the Mahar Buddhist Conversion", Ambedkar's official biographer, D. Keer, op. cit., also implies that Ambedkar's shift to Buddhism fit into a traditional pattern.

was meant to generate a response in the Hindu community. Ambedkar's statements on religion throw doubt on any great spiritual inclinations:⁹³

that religion is the source of power is illustrated by the history of India where the priest holds a sway over the common man often greater than the magistrate and where everything, even such events as strikes and elections, so easily take a religious turn and can so easily be given a religious twist...

Still, Ambedkar's attempts to inculcate a neo-Buddhist consciousness in the Mahars went deeper than was necessary if conversion had been only a political ploy. His and the subsequent mass conversions had an elaborate air of ritual. Both the ceremonies and Ambedkar's speeches reflected a great deal of religious symbolism.

Ambedkar was in the process of rewriting the Buddhist doctrine when he died in 1956. This work, The Buddha and His Dhamma, was published posthumously, but it summarizes Ambedkar's treatment of Buddhism.⁹⁴ The compendium outlines, as according to Ambedkar, the life and teachings of the Buddha in order to exemplify a neo-Buddhist way of life. It is broken down into parts⁹⁵, sections, and verses which were apparently intended to

93. Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste, op. cit., p. 49.

94. Ambedkar's version of Buddhism was criticized by traditional Buddhist scholars as "so different from the (Buddhist) text that there is hardly anything recognizable". (From The Light of Dhamma, vol. 6, 1959, p. 69, quoted in A. Fiske, "'Religion' and 'Buddhism' Among India's New Buddhists" in Wilkinson and Thomas, op. cit., p. 123). Other reviews of the book in Maha Bodhi and Indian Cultures Quarterly have made similar appraisals. Neo-Buddhists, writing in the years following Ambedkar's conversion, however, see it as quite acceptable from a modern point of view: "This perfect and well-arranged publication is really evolutionary in certain aspects as in it the modern Bodhisattva has reinterpreted the Dharma in the light of the experience and knowledge gained by humanity during the last 2500 years. (D.C. Ahir, Buddhism and Ambedkar, New Delhi: 1968, p. 61.)

95. Ambedkar, The Buddha and His Dhamma (Bombay: 1974), contains eight parts: Book I. Siddhartha Gautama-How a Bodhisattva became a Buddha; Bk. II. Campaign of Conversion; Bk. III. What the Buddha Taught; Bk. IV Religion

be incorporated into a neo-Buddhist's beliefs and behaviour. Many of the verses are slogans easily memorized. In compiling the canon, Ambedkar followed much the same pattern as he used to draft the Indian Constitution: he edited and arranged what he chose as key ideas to provide both a definition of social reality and a model for social organization. As well, Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism followed a conceptual configurations not dissimilar to that of the Indian Constitution, except that it used the authority of the Buddha and a religious system as a conveyance.

To justify this reformulation of Buddhism, Ambedkar established certain criteria of selection which were used to extract what he argued were the essential Buddhist teachings:⁹⁶

11. One has therefore to be very careful in accepting what is said in the Buddhist canonical literature as being the word of the Buddha.
12. There is however one test available.
13. If there is anything which could be said with confidence it is: He was nothing if not rational, if not logical. Anything therefore, which is rational and logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of the Buddha.
14. The second thing is that the Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion which was not profitable for man's welfare. Therefore, anything attributed to the Buddha which did not relate to man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the word of the Buddha.

With these criteria, Ambedkar was able to discard certain features of Buddhism, and rewrite others. For example, he rejected the Four Noble Truths completely, as a distortion of later interpretations.⁹⁷

and Dhamma; Bk.V. The Sangh; Bk.VI. He and His Contemporaries; Bk.VII. The Wanderer's Last Journey; Bk.VIII. The Man Who Was Siddhartha Gautama.

96. Ibid., pp. 350-351 (Bk. IV, Part II, section V, verses 11-14).

97. Ibid., p. x, "This formula cuts at the root of Buddhism. If life is sorrow, death is sorrow, and rebirth is sorrow, then there is an end

In this manner, Ambedkar changed the whole emphasis of Buddhism. A few definitions will illustrate. He kept the issue of suffering as the basic Buddhist problem, but he reformulated its thrust, to stress inter-human relations. Thus dukkha assumed a rather unique configuration as it became associated with the problem of class conflict: "The conflict between classes is constant and perpetual. It is that which is the root of all sorrow and suffering in the world"⁹⁸. This observation was, according to Ambedkar, the cause of the "going-forth" of the Buddha, and the religious quest posed by his teachings "is to find a solution for this problem of social conflict"⁹⁹. The coordinates of the neo-Buddhist system were in turn defined as that which led to such a solution. Nibbana was defined as "another name for righteous life"¹⁰⁰ and concerned the perfection of "righteous relations between man and man in all spheres of life"¹⁰¹; nibbana had no focus outside of this life. All interest in "life after death" did not agree "with profit to humanity or with the first principle of holy life... to perfect wisdom, nor to nibbana"¹⁰².

To follow the Buddhist dhamma was to reach this perfection; "to live in nibbana is dhamma"¹⁰³. The purpose of dhamma "is to reconstruct

of everything. Neither religion nor philosophy can help a man to achieve happiness in this world... For the Four Aryan Truths deny hope to man... (and) make the gospel of the Buddha a gospel of pessimism. Do they form part of the original gospel or are they a later accretion by the monks?" The question is rhetorical.

98. Ibid., p. 45 (Bk. I, II, 610).

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., p. 162 (Bk. III, III, 3:50).

101. Ibid., p. 227 (Bk. IV, I, 9).

102. Ibid., p. 292 (Bk. IV, V, 12).

103. Ibid., p. 160 (Bk. III, III, 3).

the world", unlike that or religion, which "is to explain the origin of the world"¹⁰⁴. The reconstruction prescribed by Ambedkar's Buddha and His Dhamma was to break down the barriers between man and man; to realize that worth, and not birth is the measure of man; to promote equality between man and man; and so forth.¹⁰⁵ The net result of this definition is that dhamma becomes coterminous with a morality Ambedkar called "sacred and universal", based on justice, love, liberty, equality and fraternity.¹⁰⁶

These statements provide the meaning system of neo-Buddhism. As was the case in the Indian Constitution, a series of directive principles are set up to define the basis of human activity. By giving these principles a near-metaphysical configuration through association with Buddhist terms and their "religious sancity", Ambedkar provided the psychological motivations a system that was only legal would not have. In an earlier work, The Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar had argued that there was little difference between a religious system and a legal system, except that the religion was based on principles, whereas a legal system was often only a code of ordinances which derived their force from the principles enshrined by the religious system.¹⁰⁷ Ambedkar also argued that the Hindu religion had degenerated into a mere "code of ordinances" or "at best legalized class ethics":¹⁰⁸

104. *Ibid.*, pp. 215-220 (Bk. III, V, 4:1-3).

105. *Ibid.*, p. 231 (Bk. IV, I, 6).

106. *Ibid.*, p. 159 (Bk. III, II, 1:21-25).

107. Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste, *op. cit.*, pp. 103ff.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Once you clear the minds of the people of this misconception and enable them to realize that what they are told is Religion is not Religion but that it is really-Law, you will be in a position to urge for its amendment or abolition. So long as people look upon it as Religion they will not be ready for a change, because the idea of religion is generally speaking not associated with the idea of change. But the idea of law is associated with the idea of change and when people come to know that what is called Religion is really Law, old and archaic, they will be ready for a change...

Part of the religious reform proposed by Ambedkar at that time was a return to a "Religion of Principles" upon which civil society would be based. The first point of this reform entailed a recompilation of such principles, through "one and only one standard book of Hindu religion, acceptable to all Hindus and recognized by all Hindus... all other books of Hindu religion such as Vedas, Shastras, Puranas, which are treated as sacred and authoritative, must by law cease to be..."¹⁰⁹ The Indian Constitution, with its collorary Hindu Code Bill was Ambedkar's attempt at "civil religion"¹¹⁰, through providing an outline of directive principles and a general strategy for fulfilling these principles. The shift from one system of ordinances to another system of principles, however, was not effected:

109. Ibid.

110. Some of the ballads sung about Ambedkar by neo-Buddhists imply this connection. Owen Lynch, "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Myth and Charisma" in M. Mahar, ed., 1971, op. cit., p. 110, has recorded a song from the Jatav group in Agra:
 Oh the beautiful little baby-Bhim was born.
 Oh let the land be given in charity; your people have become immortal,
 Oh he taucht us the art of politics and raised on high the blue flag
 (the flag of the Republicain Party).
 Oh our Bhim steeped in knowledge, made to shine like the stars his
 oppressed people.
 Yes, writer of the Cosntitution, he has changed our government.
 Yes, it was he who drafted the Hindu Code Bill.

the new legal system had no means of implementing change in the population's general mentality. Neither the proclamation of new principles, nor the proscription of old patterns of behaviour engendered much response.

Seen in this light, the neo-Buddhist doctrine was a redraft of what the Constitution was meant to be. Where the Constitution was written as a civic document, the neo-Buddhist charter was intended to be a "sacred" charter. The influence of Durkheim's definition of religion is apparent. When Ambedkar had published his theory on the origin of Untouchability, he referred to Durkheim's definition of religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices which (1) relate to sacred things and (2) which unite into a single community all those who adhere to them"¹¹¹. In this discussion Ambedkar recognized the interplay of ideas of sacred and profane, and the power of that which is associated with the sacred:¹¹²

the interdictions relating to the sacred are binding on all. They are not maxims. They are injunctions. They are obligatory but not in the ordinary sense of the word. They partake of the nature of a categorical imperative. Their breach is more than a crime. It is sacrilege.

In disillusionment with the political process and through forced acknowledgement of the power a religious configuration had on the Indian population, Ambedkar attempted to set up a value system which could compete in the same arena with the existing system. Ambedkar had realized that a new legal system superimposed on the existing value structure had only resulted in incongruity between legal theory and social practices. By

111. Ambedkar, The Untouchables, op. cit., p. 156. Ambedkar is citing Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 47.

112. Ambedkar, The Untouchables, op. cit., pp. 158f.

reformulating the legal theory in religious terms, Ambedkar attempted to manipulate religious symbolism to "indoctrinate" the population. Once this indoctrination took root, patterns of behaviour would be adjusted accordingly. A sufficient contradiction between new beliefs and old practices would implement a change to behaviour based on the principles of "liberty, equality and fraternity". What Ambedkar had not accomplished as "modern Manu" when he drafted the Constitution, he attempted to do as a charismatic religious leader, or "Bodhisattva" as his followers have taken to calling him.¹¹³

In addition to using legal language in the one role and religious language in the second, there is one other important difference. The system outlined in the Indian Constitution pertained to all residents of India, whereas neo-Buddhism was directed specifically at the Untouchables. Although the two systems share cognate structures, the message of neo-Buddhist dhamma was specifically a message of Untouchable uplift. The strategy that is implicit in The Buddha and His Dhamma moves from a general level of indoctrination to specific advice directed at the Untouchables. This advice, in combination with the neo-Buddhist doctrine, redefined the social situation of the Untouchables to encourage suitable behavioural modifications. Many of the injunctions found in The Buddha and His Dhamma pertain specifically to the Untouchables' way of life, such as the statement of the necessity of "following a righteous trade"¹¹⁴.

113. Ambedkar had been near-deified by large numbers of his followers. See Ahir, Buddhism and Ambedkar for a hagiographic account of Ambedkar's life.

114. Ambedkar, The Buddha and His Dhamma, op. cit., p. 286.

By encouraging such things as change of occupation, the neo-Buddhist doctrine furthered the conflict between the neo-Buddhist-Untouchables and the Hindus, as the idea of change of occupation is counter to Hindu dharma. The changes in both the Untouchables' thinking and behaviour brought about by conversion to Buddhism, although resonant with the model of modern India outlined in the Constitution, was dissonant with the Hindu model of social reality. Ambedkar had aimed the mass conversion movement directly at the Untouchables; through their conversion to Buddhism, the Untouchables were, at least initially, further in conflict with the Hindus and the Hindu way of life.

This analysis suggests several things. First, Ambedkar's basic understanding of Hindu-Untouchable relations was that of inherent conflict between two communities. This point has been made above. The re-identification of the Untouchable community as a Buddhist Community further emphasized the primordial conflict. Second, Ambedkar recognized an ideological conflict between a Hindu form of order, and a modern one, represented by the Constitution. He acknowledged that the values of the Hindu social system were in conflict with the values he embodied in the Constitution. Third, by refiguring these values in Buddhist terms and by promoting mass conversions to Buddhism among the Untouchables, Ambedkar was attempting to instill in the Untouchables the modern value system. He was attempting to force an ideological shift among the Untouchables through their religious conversion. Furthermore, this ideological shift realigned the old Hindu-Untouchable conflict in new ideological terms, as the conflict was now between Buddhists and Hindus. The realignment also gave the new Buddhists

an advantage, as their "Buddhist" ideology was both modern and superior; the Constitution affirmed that. These features outline the logical structure of Ambedkar's mass conversion movement.

Returning to Ambedkar's theory of the origins of Untouchability, it is seen that the same logical structure appears. Ambedkar had theorized that the Untouchables were originally "Broken Men", or a floating population of nomadic tribes and stray individuals who had made the transition to village life after a settled community had already been established. Because of their later settlement, the "Broken Men" lived on the outskirts of the settlements: "they were not deported and made to live outside the village because they were declared Untouchables. They lived outside the village from the very beginning because they were Broken Men who belonged to a tribe different from the one to which the Settled Tribe belonged"¹¹⁵.

These Broken Men were also Buddhists, or Buddhist converts, who, in the ensuing conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism, were degraded and relegated to their present state of Untouchables:¹¹⁶

The Broken Men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism and the Brahmin imposed untouchability upon the Broken Man [sic] because they would not leave Buddhism. On this reasoning it is possible to conclude that one of the roots of untouchability lies in the hatred and contempt which the Brahmins created against those who were Buddhist.

In order to compete with the encroachment of Buddhism, the Brahmins not only adopted a policy of ahimsā, or non-injury, but further extended it

115. Ambedkar, The Untouchables, op. cit., p. 44.

116. Ibid., p. 99.

to include the non-eating of meat.¹¹⁷ Because the Broken Men did not give up "eating the flesh of the dead cow" which did not contravene the doctrine of Ahimsā", the Broken Men were stigmatized. As the cow became a symbol of the sacred, "there was no fate left for the Broken Men except to be treated unfit for association, i.e. Untouchable"¹¹⁸. One other important point is made in this theory. Ambedkar claimed the present Untouchables had no connection with the groups considered asprśya (literally untouchable, but translated by Ambedkar to read Impure) in the Smṛti literature.¹¹⁹ According to Ambedkar, the present Untouchables were former Buddhists; the Impure comprised another category¹²⁰ altogether which later collapsed into untouchability.

In reviewing this theory of origins, which is more mythic than factual, the same structural configuration earlier suggested as underlying Ambedkar's instigation of neo-Buddhism clearly emerges. This myth of origin is based on a situation of ideological conflict: Buddhism versus Brahmanism. The Brahmans "win" the conflict for two reasons, one of which is less clear than the other. The first is that the Brahmans modify their

117. Ibid., p. 148.

118. Ibid., p. 162.

119. Ibid., pp. 181f.

120. Ibid., pp. 168-182. According to Ambedkar, the Impure were certain communities, such as the cāṇḍalas, which polluted only the Brahman. Interestingly enough, Ambedkar used the Census figures to prove that the twelve Impure communities mentioned in the Dharmaśāstric literature could not possibly account for the 429 communities returned as Untouchable. On those grounds, he argued that his Buddhist explanation was more valid.

practices - to avoid Buddhist critique, they suspended the requirement of animal yajña - to enhance their competitive position. The second reason, much less explicit, is that the Brahman ideology was meant to win, and the Broken Men are losers for following the "wrong" ideology. Ambedkar was writing his Untouchable myth from the perspective that the Brahmanism had won, and incorporated this fact into his account. Ambedkar pointed out that Buddhism was the prevailing ideology at the time of the conflict, but he emphasized how easily Brahmanism overtook Buddhism once beef-eating was given up by the Brahmans.

The same elements of conflict, specifically ideological conflict, advantageous behavioural modification, and "winning" ideology are found in both of Ambedkar's versions of the Untouchables as Buddhists. One version is spelled out in the work The Untouchables, the other in the neo-Buddhist conversion movement. The form of both versions is the same. The Untouchables are Broken Men in conflict with a way of life exemplified by the Brahmans. Through the Untouchable's Broken Men's commitment to Buddhism, the conflict is increased, but it is finally resolved with one group gaining superiority over the other. The outcome of the two versions is reversed, though. In the mythic version, the Broken Men's conversion to Buddhism led to their downfall as it was neither the "winning" ideology, nor encouraged advantageous modifications in social activity. In the neo-Buddhist version, the conversion was intended to do just the opposite: to engender advantageous changes in outlook and behaviour as well as to bring the Untouchables into line with the correct ideology for modern India.

In the first version the Untouchables emerge as the losers; in the second the implication is otherwise. The Brahmans won in the first instance because of the strength of their practice of ahimsā; in the second instance, the neo-Buddhists can do the same because of their practice of "liberty, equality and fraternity". As Buddhists, the Untouchables were the descendents of a great and flourishing culture¹²¹; as neo-Buddhists, they could "inherit" the benefits of modern culture.

Ambedkar saw all of India becoming Buddhist (or rather, returning to Buddhism) through his conversion movement:

that is the greatest benefit I am conferring on the country by embracing Buddhism; for Buddhism is part and parcel of Bharatiya culture. I have taken care that my conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture and history of this land.

According to Keer, he had predicted at a news conference just prior to the diksa ceremony that "in the next ten or fifteen years the wave of mass conversions would spread all over the country, and India would become a Buddhist country. The Brahmans would be the last to follow"¹²². The advantages the Untouchables would have as the Buddhism returned to India was their "special status" as the first neo-Buddhists, while the Brahmans would have the disadvantage of being the last.

Ambedkar died before he could see whether his predictions were true. In spite of the epic dimensions of his thought, his ideas the neo-Buddhist movement express a coherent strategy, similar to that of his political

121. The Buddhist Monuments of Elura, Ajanta, etc., in Maharashtra were testimony to this.

122. See Owen Lynch, "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Myth and Charisma" in M. Mahar, op. cit., pp. 97-112.

campaign. The neo-Buddhists have incorporated this strategy into their struggle for a better existence in Indian society.

Prior to the neo-Buddhist movement, one of the major techniques of change followed the pattern called Sanskritization.¹²³ Sanskritization, as defined by M.N. Srinivas, is the process by which low castes attempt upward movement in the hierarchical order of castes, through the emulation of customs, rituals, ideology, and general way of life of the high, usually Brahman, castes.¹²⁴ This process neither rejects the system of gradations found in caste, nor challenges any of the means of authority that hold the system in place. Instead it is an attempt to rise within the system by manipulating certain symbols.

The Mahars had, in the early part of the twentieth century, followed this pattern. They had attempted the upanāyana, or investiture of the sacred thread, with the claim that they were actually ksatriyas, whose real status had been forgotten.¹²⁵ This and other similar actions were taken by the Mahars until the mid-1920's when Ambedkar persuaded them to devote their energy either to social reform or the removal of Untouchability.¹²⁶

123. Srinivas, op. cit., p. 6.

124. This attempt is usually unsuccessful, unless the Sanskritization is preceded by a change in the economic circumstances of caste. Unless a change of occupation or of resources has taken place to put the caste in a position to demand more services, command more respect, etc., the attempt to Sanskritize has no power base. This has been discussed above,

125. Zelliott, "Background of the Mahar Buddhist Conversion" in R. Sakai, Studies on Asia (Lincoln, Nebraska: 1966), pp. 52-53.

126. Ibid., p. 52.

By claiming to be ksatriyas, the Mahars were in a sense giving sanction to the caste system's gradations of inequality. The Brahman in his traditional role was needed to validate the Mahars' claims, which both acknowledged and supported belief in inherited differences of purity. As ksatriyas, the Untouchables would be absorbed higher up in the system, and their Untouchable status would be passed off as a case of mistaken identity. By Sanskritizing, the Mahars were attempting to purify themselves, and thus lose their Untouchable status.

As neo-Buddhists, though, their separate status became their very means of changing their existence. The claim to a Buddhist identity¹²⁷ was based on the recognition of an alternate system, which, according to the neo-Buddhists' understanding of the Buddha's teachings, was democratic and treated all men as equal. The source of the neo-Buddhists' problem was the Brahmanical system itself, as opposed to a relative position within that system. In affirming a status distinct from one sanctioned by the caste system, neo-Buddhism provided the motives not only to break down casteism, but to reconstruct the ideal, democratic system Buddhism was thought to be. Since this conception of Buddhism matched the Constitutional definition of India, the alternate system posited by neo-Buddhists already existed; the neo-Buddhists were thus provided with the incentive to become involved with that political system. The additional psychological benefit was that the Untouchables felt that their own "special" status was in some

127. In some ways the Buddhist myth is a variation of the Ksatriya myth as there is a tendency to identify the Buddhists with the local chieftains or "ksatriyas", and to see the conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism as a conflict between the chieftains and Brahman interlopers.

way connected to the realization of the goals defined by the directive principles of the Constitution.

The neo-Buddhists' reflections on the values of the Constitution indicate an awareness of parallel ideas. They see the Constitution as an embodiment of ideas derived from Buddhist teachings, their personal legacy. They see Ambedkar as the one who revived these values and returned them to India, which had been corrupted by the Brahmanical teachings: "Ambedkar's laws surpass those of Manu because of their humanity. It is a new humanism of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity", which is "derived from the teachings of the Buddha"¹²⁸. Such reflections indicate the ideological usefulness of a religious idiom; through his politics alone, Ambedkar had been unable to provide that identification with the new order of India.

The use of religious means also worked in a language familiar to the Untouchables: "We became Buddhists because Dr. Ambedkar told us to"; "I was a college student and didn't know anything about conversion or Buddhism. I went to the Diksa [1956] ceremony and he [Ambedkar] asked us to follow him so I did, just as he asked, without knowing what I was doing"¹²⁹. The statements contrast with the later reflections cited above; the later reflections demonstrate a shift of thinking. Ambedkar chose the religious medium of conversion to instill his vision of modern India in the Untouchables when it became apparent that they were making little use of the

128. Ziske, 1972, op. cit., p. 121, quoting D.R. Jatava.

129. Ibid., p. 112, quoting two informants.

political means at his disposal, and that they were still at the mercy of the rest of the population. In this, Ambedkar was using a Gandhian technique of mobilizing religious sentiment to convey his ideas.

In distinction, though, Ambedkar's "religion" made its impact only on one section of the population, whereas Gandhi had attempted to unite all the Hindus to work towards a single goal. Although Ambedkar had spoken of all India becoming Buddhist, his logic still worked in terms of confrontation between communities: the separateness of the Untouchables was still a fundamental part of his thinking. Where Gandhi's thought worked on the idea of Hindu versus British, Indian culture versus alien culture, and often traditionalism versus modernization, Ambedkar's worked in terms of Untouchable versus Brahman, equality versus oppression, and modern India versus traditional India. The anomaly in Ambedkar's conception of modern India was that it consistently included the idea of a "special" Untouchable status.

Conclusion

Ambedkar's politics played an integral role in entrenching a special Scheduled Caste status in the Indian Constitution. During the Independence struggle, Ambedkar had entered the political arena specifically to campaign for Untouchable rights. The type of campaign Ambedkar led was largely determined by the power structure set up by the British during the negotiations for the transfer of power. Within this structure, the British had defined the Untouchables as a minority group. A minority status

guaranteed the Untouchables a share in the redistribution of political power. For this reason, Ambedkar's politics revolved around the issue of minority status. Yet, although Ambedkar's actions reflected the British political framework, his thinking on the issue of Untouchability was quite different.

The logic of Ambedkar's politics operated on two levels. On one level, Ambedkar believed that the outcome of the Independence struggle would result in fundamental changes in Indian society which would give the Untouchables rights and opportunities previously denied. He often compared the Independence struggle to the French Revolution, from which his key phrase of "equality, liberty and fraternity" was derived. With the implementation of a political system based on universal franchise and a legal system enshrining uniform rights to all individuals, Ambedkar envisaged a society in which the restrictive nature of caste identity would give way to the equal status of citizenship. He envisaged the redefinition of India that was taking place on the political level to reflect on the social level, as the authority of the Dharmaśāstras would be displaced by the principles and rights entrenched in the Constitution. These changes would abolish the practice of Untouchability, as the pollution barrier no longer had the support of legal authority.

On another level, though, Ambedkar was unwilling to relinquish the communal status the Untouchables had. This was due in part to the way the British were organizing the transfer of power. Because the British saw Indian society as nothing more than the sum total of different communal

parts the political structure they created for the transfer of power gave specific recognition to each communal part. In the case of the Untouchables, this was tantamount to the recognition of a separate status. Ambedkar employed tactics, such as the temple satyāgrahas, which were really organized confrontations with caste Hindus, to guarantee the Untouchables the political power given to a minority group.

His logic, though, was also bound by the parameters of his own understanding of how caste society worked. As he understood the caste system to be comprised of a series of competing groups, held together by the exercise of power on the part of the upper castes, his campaign for political powers guaranteed to the Untouchables as a group reflected his caste consciousness. His theory on caste, contained in the monographs on Śūdras and Untouchables indicate that he believed the assertion of special status was a key factor in manipulating power, or in other words, that special status was coterminous with power, and power with dominance. This would indicate that his politics were not directed at abolishing the Untouchables' status, but merely transforming it into a political weapon. This also indicates the commonly held idea that his goal was to integrate the Untouchables into the rest of society is also incorrect. His politics consistently worked to maintain a separate status for the Untouchables.

The interplay between these two levels of thought, or models of Indian society, accounts for the different actions Ambedkar took. The satyāgrahas operated on both levels. They were both a demand for equality and an assertion of separate status. His organization of a political

party, the Scheduled Castes Federation, was aimed at establishing a power base for the Scheduled Castes, while utilizing the principle of universal franchise. In his role as chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution, he gave structure to his vision of modern India while retaining a special status for the Untouchables; while Article 17 abolishes the practice of Untouchability, Articles 330 to 342 transform the Untouchables' status into political privilege.

This interplay also accounts for his mass conversion movement. Although the neo-Buddhist movement seems completely at odds with his politics, the internal "logic" of the move reflects the same thinking found in his politics. The Untouchables became Buddhist for the same reasons they became the Scheduled Castes: to secure a special status which would enable them to shift the Untouchable-Hindu conflict in their favour. Ambedkar defined the neo-Buddhist ideology in virtually the same terms as he defined the ideology of modern India in the Constitution. The move to Buddhism was an attempt to guarantee the Untouchables a superior position as Indian society shifted from archaic to modern.

As the content of Ambedkar's two monographs on caste demonstrates, his understanding of caste conflict often bordered on mythic thought. The present analysis of the neo-Buddhist movement suggests much the same. He envisaged that all of India would become Buddhist, and in so doing, the injustices of the present social system would be rectified. Ambedkar sought to return India to the equalitarian state of Buddhism, the same state defined by the Constitution; he sought to return India to a modern state.

CHAPTER IV

GANDHI'S COUNTERATTACK: HARIJAN

The caste Hindu response to the politics of Untouchability came from Gandhi, who attempted to take the issue out of the political arena. His contribution to the issue has associated him with the goal of eradicating Untouchability from modern India, even though his approach to the question of Untouchability was often determined by the political conditions within which he was operating. The anti-Untouchability legislation of post-Independent India is usually considered the legacy of Gandhi's work in the 1930's, yet he was publically opposed to reform through legislation.¹ Instead, Gandhi promoted volitional changes through means of persuasion as not to upset social cohesion in the Hindu community. He took these initiatives to counter what he saw as British intervention on an issue unrelated to the Independence question and to counter the challenge posed by Ambedkar which threatened to further divide the population already split on Hindu Muslim lines.

An examination of Gandhi's autobiography, which covers his life up to 1921, reveals little mention of the issue of Untouchability.² The

1. Gandhi wrote in The Harijan, op. cit., February 18, 1953, p. 5, in reference to Sjt. Ranja Iyer's Bill on temple entry: "I am opposed to any reference by our legislature... in any of our religious organizations or religious matters."

often quoted passage about his refusal at the age of twelve³ to accept Untouchability as part of the Hindu religion does not come from his autobiography, but from an article written for his journal Young India. Although Gandhi made frequent reference to the problem of Untouchability in this journal in the 1920's, it was in the 1930's that he turned his full attention to the issue. This heightened attention reflected the political climate in India at that time; the Round Table Conferences and resulting Communal Award had made the Untouchables a separate political entity. When Gandhi began publishing The Harijan, in 1933, it was a journal specifically devoted to the eradication of Untouchability. By the 1940's, the journal was, in Gandhi's words, "published purely in the interests of the cause of India's independence"⁴. The later editions of The Harijan still carried articles about Untouchables, but these articles were outnumbered by articles on the war effort, Subhas Chandra Bose's army, famine, nature cures, cottage industries, and so forth. The shift from full focus on the uplift of the Untouchables to greater attention on issues related

-
2. Gandhi, M.K., Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth, translated by M. Desai (Washington: 1948). See also E. Zelliot, 1972, op. cit., pp. 71f.
 3. Gandhi, M.K., The Removal of Untouchability, selections compiled and edited by B. Kumarappa (Ahmedabad, 1954), pp. 18-19, from Young India, 27-4-21:
A Scavenger named Uka, an "untouchable", used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him. If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that it should be so... I often had tussles with my parents on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering contact with Uka a sin.
 4. The Harijan, 24-2-46, vol. X, p 20.

to the state of the nation reflected the political atmosphere created by the British.

Gandhi made frequent disclaimers that his campaign to eradicate Untouchability in the 1930's had a connection with the political issues at hand, but the tone of these disclaimers suggests otherwise. Gandhi wrote:⁵

It is in no shape or form a political movement that I am conducting - not in any sense of the word 'political'. I have never denied that it will have political consequences, but they will be a by-product... My activities have no communal taint. It is my implicit faith that if Hinduism rids itself of the distinctions of high and low, the Hindus will be in a position to mix with Mussalmans, Christians and others on terms of absolute equality. To-day there is a bar between them. I would like to lift that bar... you should remember that this is purely an internal reform.

The government thought otherwise, as well. In 1933, the Madras government banned all civil servants from participation in Gandhi's movement, on the grounds that "while it is true that in many respects the campaign against Untouchability is primarily a social reform movement, it has, by conjunction and circumstance become controversial, and in many respects a political movement"⁶.

The Communal Award made by Prime Minister MacDonald in 1932, prompted Gandhi's immersion in the issue of Untouchability. His "epic fast" in protest of the award of separate elections to the Depressed Classes marked Gandhi's "retirement" from politics to take up the question of Untouchability. The Prime Minister's intervention in the form of the Communal Award was the only way to resolve the deadlock reached in the

5. The Harijan, 29-12-33, vol. I, p. 7.

6. Ibid., 1-7-33, p. 4.

Round Table Conferences; the acrimonious debates between Gandhi and Ambedkar over the question of status and representation of the Depressed Classes had made no compromise possible. The tension of the period has sometimes been attributed to the clash of the personalities of Gandhi and Ambedkar. The danger of Gandhi's death from the "epic fast" forced a quick settlement with Ambedkar, and enmity, especially on the part of Ambedkar, continued right up to Independence. However, the tension went beyond personal differences or the question of which of the two really represented the Untouchables. It was fundamentally a conflict of visions of India.

Gandhi's Vision of India

As has been discussed in the last chapter, Ambedkar's projections of post-Independent India shifted between two conceptions, with the common feature of both an attack on the existing social system. His politics were designed to reorganize the social structure of Hindu society as a whole on the lines of a western model, and specifically with reference to the Untouchables through a redistribution of power. Gandhi's thinking was radically opposed to such ideas; he wanted to preserve what he conceived to be the essence of Hindu social organization. In that way, his vision was much less complex. Gandhi defended both the traditional, albeit theoretical, four-fold stratification of society, the catuvarna system, upon which he claimed the existing Hindu social structure was based, and the idea that classification within one of the four divisions was fixed by birth. He sought a return to the purity of four fixed strata, from which all associations of inequality between the different strata had been

removed:⁷

This law Hinduism discovered and called the Law of Varna, and carried it out in practice, more or less, perfectly with amazing success. What we see to-day in Hinduism is its caricature. It is my conviction that obedience to this law alone can save the perishing world. Its conscious recognition means contentment and consequent freeing of human energy for moral uplift. Its disregard spells unhealthy discontent, greed, cut-throat competition and moral stagnation ending in spiritual suicide.

Gandhi claimed that the law of varna was "one of absolute equality among all creatures of God"⁸. Although he acknowledged that the verses of some smṛti literature indicated otherwise, he rejected those verses as contrary to the essence of Hinduism⁹, which he saw contained in one mantra, the first verse of the Iśopanisad. According to his translation:¹⁰

God the Ruler pervades all there is in this Universe. Therefore, renounce and dedicate all to Him and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to the lot. Never covet anybody's possessions.

Gandhi's translation reads the obligations of varnadharma into the verse. His commentary drew the conclusion that because all in the universe is pervaded by God, "no matter what caste they belong to... there is none that is high and none that is low, all are absolutely equal"¹¹. According to Gandhi's logic, the problem with caste was the hierarchical gradations associated with differentiation, and not the compulsory and

7. The Harijan, 11-3-33, vol. I, p. 2.

8. Ibid., 28-9-34, vol. II, p. 258.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 30-1-37, vol. V, p.9.

11. Ibid.

involute nature of the caste differentiations. For him, "caste in the sense of varna fulfils Nature's law of conservation of human energy and true economics" and it was necessary to recognize and obey this law.¹²

The law of varna, or "predetermination in the choice of man's profession" was, in Gandhi's mind, immutable, as it was not a human invention, but was part of divine order.¹³ In maintaining that the law of varna was "not a thing superimposed on the Hindus", Gandhi was implicitly criticizing the British superimposition of order in India, and their intervention in social matters. Although he felt that the immutable nature the law of varna provided all the justification that was necessary, he explained his position with the idea of "conservation of human energy". Because birth determined one's occupation in accordance with one's characteristics and nature, one did not have to struggle for one's livelihood. This minimized competition in the economic sphere, and reduced greed because it limited material ambitions.

Moreover, according to Gandhi, it freed the spirit to pursue the only acceptable goal in life: spiritual liberation. In Gandhi's words:¹⁴

Of all the animal creation of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his Maker. Man's aim in life is not therefore to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions but his predominant calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker, and from this definition it was that the Rishis of old discovered this law of our being. You will realize that if all of us

12. Ibid., 4-3-33, vol. I, p.5.

13. Young India, 14-3-27, from The Removal of Untouchability, B. Kumarappa, p. 41.

14. Y.I., 20-10-37, ibid., p. 46.

follow ~~this~~ law of Varna we would limit our material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and wherethrough we can know God.

Gandhi thus began with God and ended with God. However satisfactory such a justification of hereditary occupation was to orthodox Hindu, Ambedkar and other Untouchable spokesmen found it unacceptable.

Definition of Untouchability

Unlike the British officials and Ambedkar, who validated their positions with theories of the origins of Untouchability, Gandhi refused to theorize about the cause of Untouchability on the grounds that it contributed little to the solution of the problem. Nonetheless, he did offer explanations for the practice of Untouchability. He treated Untouchability not as an integral feature of caste divisions, but as a mere by-product "of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it"¹⁵. It was the issue of inferior and superior that Gandhi repeatedly attacked, while arguing that the varna divisions, complementary by nature, were functional divisions having nothing to do with the question of status. For Gandhi, the treatment of certain groups of Hindus as Untouchables was aberrational behaviour brought about by the corruption of ideas of social gradation. Once this corruption was removed, the caste system would resume its natural, functional order. Hence Gandhi's argument reads that the removal of Untouchability was necessary in order to preserve the caste system, as opposed to Ambedkar, who maintained that in order to

15. The Harijan, 11-2-33, p. 3.

remove Untouchability, one had to, in Ambedkar's words, "apply dynamite" to the caste system. The underlying theme of Gandhi's approach was the cohesion of the Hindu community; for Ambedkar, no such cohesion existed.

In calling for the restoration of a moral order through the removal of the "sin of untouchability", Gandhi declared the devastating earthquake of Bihar in 1934 was an omen, "a visitation for the sin of untouchability":¹⁶

I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation even though the connection is instinctively felt by me... But it would be terrible if it is an expression of the divine wrath for the sin of untouchability, and we did not learn the moral lesson from the event and repent of that sin... I have the faith that our own sins have more force to ruin that structure of creation than any mere physical phenomenon. With me the connection between cosmic phenomena and human behaviour is a living faith that draws me nearer to my God, humbles me and makes me readier for facing him.

Gandhi also inferred that the "Satanic rule" of the British raj was¹⁷ caused by the prevalent practice of Untouchability. This argument was in direct response to the British position that one of the impediments to the transfer of power to the Indians was the status and treatment of the Depressed Classes.

The solution to the question of the status of the Untouchables proposed by Gandhi followed his vision of restoring the ideal Hindu society. He maintained that the Untouchables were sūdras. Arguing that no fifth varṇa existed in the varṇāśramadharmā schema, Gandhi maintained that Untouchables were part of the sūdra varṇa, and should be accepted, like sūdras "as the much privileged labourers of society"¹⁸. Their services to society accorded them equal respect; however change of occupation, or

16. Ibid., 16-2-34, p. 7.

17. Ibid.

18. Y.I., 5-11-25, from None High, None Low, op. cit., p. 4.

change of varna was only possible in another incarnation.¹⁹ Gandhi emphasized this equation of the Untouchables with the sūdras in his writings in the 1920's; his campaign in the 1930's was essentially an applied means of realizing this argument. The campaign focussed mainly on changing higher caste attitude towards the Untouchables. In 1936 he spoke of respect for the Bhangi:²⁰

It is the Bhangi who enables society to live. A Bhangi does for society what a mother does for her baby. A mother washes her baby of dirt and insures his health. Even so the Bhangi protests and safeguards the health of the entire community by maintaining sanitation for it... Society is sustained by several services. The Bhangi constitutes the foundation of all services.

Moreover, such respect would be deserved, as the Bhangi "while deriving his livelihood from his occupation, would approach it only as a sacred duty"²¹. To complete his schema, Gandhi also spoke of the contributions the Bhangi would make to the change of attitudes taking place:²²

In my opinion an ideal Bhangi should have a thorough knowledge of the principles of sanitation. He should know how a right kind of latrine is constructed, and the correct way of cleaning it. He should know how to overcome the odour of excreta and the various disinfectants to render them innocuous. He should like-wise know the process of converting night-soil and urine into manure.

This same line of argument is found up through the 1940's, only there was more and more emphasis on employing "scientific" methods in sanitation

19. Y.I., Chapt. II, from The Removal of Untouchability, op. cit., p. 39.

20. The Harijan, 28-11-36, vol. IV, p. 336.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

work, to avoid physical contact with the excreta. Apparently, Gandhi's approach became more pragmatic as the interest generated by his "epic fast" decreased.

Gandhi based his argument that the Untouchables should be absorbed into the sūdra varṇa on his interpretation of the concept of Untouchability. He recognized that the idea of pollution resulting from contact with matter classified as unclean, or with someone in association with a source of unclean matter, was clearly defined in the Hindu psychology, but he argued that pollution with the concomitant state of untouchability was conditional, and never permanent. He wrote "Untouchability of a healthy kind is undoubtedly to be found in the Shastras and it is universal in all religions. It is a rule of sanitation. That will exist to the end of time"²³. Such untouchability was a temporary state of impurity, resulting from certain actions and conditions.

He used an analogy of his mother to illustrate his point:²⁴

For instance, every time that my mother handled unclean things she became untouchable for the time being and had to cleanse herself by bathing... such untouchability as it is recognized by religion is very transitory - easily removable and referable to the deed, not the doer.

By applying this analogy to the status of the Untouchables, he, in effect, acknowledged that their traditional work rendered them impure, as it necessitated contact with polluting matter such as excrement, but he argued that this state was only temporary, and was neither permanent, nor coterminous with caste membership. The emphasis Gandhi placed on improved methods of

23. The Harijan, 11-2-33, p. 8.

24. Y.I., 22-1-25, p. 29; from Caste Must Go, pp. 25-26.

sanitation work, modern tanning techniques²⁵ and so forth was intended to minimize the association with uncleanness. The construction of his argument, meant to realign Hindu thinking on the issue of Untouchability, nonetheless, associated certain occupations with pollution.²⁶ This must have become apparent to Gandhi, because by the mid 1940's, he was suggesting that all Hindus engage in their own sanitation work; he used himself and his āśrama as an example.²⁷

Harijan

The key feature of Gandhi's anti-Untouchability campaign was his focus on a change of attitude on the part of the high caste Hindus. The term he chose to apply to the Untouchables exemplifies his approach. "Harijan", suggested to him in 1931, was adopted as a symbol of his campaign. The reasons he gave for adopting this term are clearly patronizing:²⁸

Harijan means 'a man of God'. All the religions of the world describe God pre-eminently as the friend of the friendless, help of the helpless, and protector of the weak. The rest of the world apart, in India who can be more friendless, helpless or weaker than the forty million or more Hindus of India who are classified as untouchables? If, therefore, any body of people can be fitly described as men of God, they are surely these helpless, friendless, and despised people. Hence... I have adopted Harijan as the name signifying untouchables. Not that

25. My Soul's Agony, 14-11-32, pp. 32-36; *ibid.*, pp. 87-92.

26. He wrote: "Therefore, a person who is to attend to scavenging, whether it is a paid Bhangi, or an unpaid mother, they are unclean until they have washed themselves clean of their unclean work". The Harijan, 11-2-33, p. 8.

27. The Harijan, 10-5-42, pp. 151-152.

28. The Harijan, 11-2-33, p. 7.

the change of name brings about any change of status, but one may at least be spared the use of terms which in itself is one of reproach.

Gandhi may have claimed that his label had "purer" connotations, but his reiteration of the helplessness and weakness of, in his appraisal, a group totally at the mercy of the rest of the Hindu population alienated the politically conscious Untouchables pressing for self-determination.

Self-respect on the part of the Harijan was not a feature of Gandhi's crusade. In fact, Gandhi's comments often undermined the supposed respect his campaign was giving the Harijans. For example, in a response to a Christian missionary, Gandhi advised prayer for the Harijans, as they did not have "the mind and intelligence to understand what you talked". "Would you preach the Gospel to a cow? Some of the 'untouchables' are worse than cows in their understanding"²⁹. Gandhi's remarks were apparently intended to discourage attempts at conversion, but his choice of words insinuated that the Harijans existed at a much lower plane than the other Hindus. Such suggestions, in combination with the tone of his campaign that only caste Hindus could help the Harijans, served to reinforce stereotypic ideas and caste prejudice.

Gandhi may have talked about all classes being equal, but his references to the Harijans were anything but equitable. Although his repeated reference to the less than human state in which the Harijans existed, their appalling state of personal uncleanness, etc., was meant to prick the guilt of the caste Hindus, who, according to Gandhi were

29. Ibid., 19-12-36, Ambedkar in Gandhi and Gandhism cites this comment with the observation that it summarized Gandhi's feelings. See The Harijan, vol. IV, p. 361.

responsible for the Harijan's condition, his emphasis excluded the Harijans from participation in his campaign. They were merely the object of his campaign.

The Harijan Campaign

Gandhi considered his campaign an act of penance carried out by the caste Hindus for the transgressions they had committed against the Harijans. For him, the whole scope of the movement rested in the hands of the caste Hindus, whose obligations were "on the one hand, to do constructive work among Harijans, and on the other, to engender the conversion of Savarnas i.e., with varna, or the caste Hindus, by persuasion, arguments and above all, by correct conduct"³⁰. The promotion of self-help among the Harijans incited dissatisfaction and risked the perpetuation of "a vicious division amongst Hindus"³¹. The division Gandhi was speaking of pertained not only to the social divide created by the pollution barrier, but to the factionalism the political climate was producing.

The organized confrontations at temples and water tanks, coupled with the political "militancy" of the Untouchable leaders, had led to instances of violent backlash against the Untouchables. The satyāgraha at the Chowder Tank in Mahad had, for example, provoked village attacks on the Untouchable delegates who had participated in the conference held in conjunction with the procession to the tank.³² Other Untouchables who

/30. The Harijan, 15-6-34, vol. II, p. 140.

31. Ibid.

32. Keer, op. cit., pp. 72-77.

showed signs of asserting their civil rights were subjected to social boycott or assault. Gandhi's repeated assertion that the Harijans were too helpless to help themselves was an attempt to mitigate the increased violence between the caste Hindus and the Untouchables.³³

They are too downtrodden to rise in revolt against their suppressors. It is only ceaseless effort that can raise these downtrodden fellowbeings from degradation, purify Hinduism, and raise the whole Hindu society and with it the whole of India.

Notwithstanding Gandhi's aversion to communal violence, his lack of reference to educated, socially progressive Untouchables, of which numerous examples existed, clearly set the tone of his campaign. This suggests why Ambedkar was so outspoken in his attacks on Gandhi.³⁴

Gandhi had defined his campaign in terms of duty involving service to the Harijans, yet, often the descriptions he used drew attention to the aversion felt by caste Hindus:³⁵

Whatever is done now by the caste Hindus for Harijans will be but a tardy reparation for all the wrongs done to them for generations, and if now they [the Harijans] have to be received in their existing state, as they must be, it is a well-deserved punishment for the past guilt.

Gandhi called the movement a process of conversion or a process of purification, self-purification for those participation in the campaign and a purification of the Hindu heart of the rest of society. By calling participation in the movement an act of self-purification, Gandhi was

33. Gandhi, in a Press statement issued in 1932, from None High; None Low, op. cit., p. 42.

34. Both What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables and Gandhi and Gandhism are diatribes against Gandhi.

35. Gandhi, in a Press statement issued in 1932, from None High; None Low, op. cit., p. 41.

employing, in a symbolic gesture, a set of ideas which were interwoven in caste consciousness.

First, by maintaining that it was the duty of caste Hindus to do service for the Harijans in the form of constructive work, etc., he utilized a principle of evaluation in the caste hierarchy, the association between service and status: the higher the caste, the more service it commanded.³⁶ Applied in conjunction with the lowest castes, a symbolic reversal of roles took place. Statements such as "the Bhangi protects and safeguards the health of the entire community" and "the Bhangis are entitled to our highest reverence"³⁷ figured the Bhangi, a symbol of the lowest caste, in terms usually reserved for the Brahman. The obligation of service to the Harijans underscored the concept of interdependence Gandhi espoused in reference to his varnāśramadharmā schema. Nonetheless, he was aware that the parameters of his campaign ran counter to traditional thinking. Whether the penance he spoke of was the interchange of status, or merely the service to the Harijans cannot be inferred; Gandhi apparently anticipated that the caste Hindus would find both unsettling.

Second, by speaking of the movement as an act of purification, Gandhi was also making an implicit reference to the service the Harijans performed. As discussed above, Gandhi acknowledged that the concept of pollution was a pervading theme in the organization of Hindu thought. His approach to the question of pollution was empirical, though, as he argued

36. See McKim Marriott, 1959, op. cit., and 1968, op. cit.

37. The Harijan, 28-11-36, p. 396, and Y.I., 22-1-25, p. 29, from Caste Must Go, op. cit., p. 26.

that it referred to sanitation and cleanliness, nothing more. Pollution, however, does refer to something more: the hierarchical structure of the caste system is derived from the interplay of ideas of ritual purity and pollution. Status, with reference to the caste system, is a question of ritual status; each caste group is defined by ritual status, or by the amount of ritual purity and impurity it embodies. On the scale of hierarchical gradations, an inherent degree of purity is associated with each caste group, with the highest state of purity recognized in the highest castes. The differentiated regulation of intercaste contact presented by the Dharmaśāstric injunctions is more comprehensive at the higher end of the scale indicating a greater degree of purity which must be protected from polluting contacts.³⁸

At the opposite end of the scale, the Untouchables have the greatest association with impurity, and the functions performed by the Untouchables are polluting with respect to their own caste status. But, the same functions are purifying, with respect to the ritual status of the other castes. Through their handling of biological matter, the removal of cow carcasses, excreta, etc., the Untouchables prevent the other castes from becoming impure, by protecting the other castes from the sources of pollution, or diverting the flow of pollution onto themselves.³⁹ The result of this diversion is the Untouchable status, even though the Untouchable himself is an agent of purification.⁴⁰

38. See Orenstein, H., "Structure of Hindu Caste Values", op. cit.

39. See Harper, E.B., "Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion", op. cit.

40. Many of the ethnographic works on intercaste relationships have pointed out that an Untouchable is not polluting while engaged in his traditional work. For example, a washerman can freely enter a Brahman house to collect dirty laundry, while at any other time entry would be prohibited.

Gandhi's interpretation of the varna system as a network of four different, but equal classes, mutually interdependent, has a configuration quite different from a caste system based on a principle of ritual purity and impurity. In calling his campaign a movement of purification, or self-purification, though, Gandhi had picked a theme which related to the concept of ritual purity. According to Gandhi's explanation of Untouchability, the caste Hindus had "polluted" the Untouchables, by ascribing to them the lowest status for services which "purified": "whilst the 'untouchable' has toiled and miled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him"⁴¹. Gandhi's campaign dictated that as the caste Hindus were responsible for the "pollution" of the Untouchables, that is, for their ascriptive status, it was necessary that the caste Hindus in turn assume the role of agents of purification. This process of purification, as emphasized by Gandhi, was self-purification - a process which could only be directed at themselves, and not at the Untouchables - which, in effect, would deflect the flow of pollution - the attitudes and notions which made up the concept of pollution - away from the Untouchables. The change of attitude Gandhi spoke about was a change in ideas about pollution: by "purifying" themselves, the caste Hindus stopped "polluting" the Untouchables. Hence the Untouchables became Harijans, as they were no longer defiled by the attitudes of the rest of society. Once no longer defiled, they could no longer be defiling.

41. Y.I., 6-8-31, from None High; None Low, op. cit., p. 59.

Gandhi's writings do not indicate whether he was cognizant of these implications. The message is suggested through his repetition of the theme:⁴²

Caste Hindus are responsible for the present condition of the untouchables... therefore, they repent for the sin and purify themselves by removing the load of untouchability from off the backs of the untouchables...

While Gandhi only spoke of purification in terms of caste Hindu purification, much of the duties he prescribed for the workers in his campaign suggested that in addition to stopping "polluting" the Harijans, the caste Hindus were also responsible for "purifying" the Harijans. Major emphasis was placed on instruction in matters of hygiene. He set up a platform of six points to which all energy of the Harijan worker was to be devoted:⁴³

- i) Promotion of cleanliness and hygiene among the Harijans.
- ii) Improved methods of carrying on what are known as unclean occupations.
- iii) Giving up of carrion and beef if not meat altogether.
- iv) Giving up intoxicating liquors.
- v) Inducing parents to send their children to day-schools wherever they are available, and parents to night schools.
- vi) Abolition of untouchability among themselves.

The performance of these duties, especially the cleaning of the Harijans, absorbed, in a figurative sense, the sources of the Harijans' polluted state. By removing the traits, such as the eating of carrion beef, to which the Untouchable status was attributed, the Harijan workers were performing services not unlike those the Untouchables performed for the

42. Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (Ahmedabad: 1972), vol. LII, 1932-1933, p. 151, from the Bombay Chronicle, 9-12-33.

43. My Soul's Agony, 14-11-32, pp. 32-36, from Caste Must Go, op. cit., pp. 87-92.

caste Hindus. As well, at face value, these services made the Harijans more respectable.⁴⁴

Even though the course of action outlined by Gandhi and the theme of his campaign worked within the structural framework of ritual interactions, Gandhi's statements drew attention away from the issue of ritual purity. Gandhi's argument that pollution referred to poor sanitation, and his constant reiteration of the poor personal hygiene of the Harijans indicates that he wished to define Untouchability for his followers, both Hindu and otherwise, only in terms of dirt and poor personal habits, and not in terms of ritual status. Such a definition both preserved his idealization of the varnāśramadharmā scheme, and responded to the criticisms of the Hindu system by foreign observers. By limiting the associations Untouchability had for a Hindu only to a matter of sanitation, Gandhi reduced Untouchability to a problem his campaign could take care of. He sought to enlist the whole of India in his movement as Harijan workers, and employed numerous techniques to gain popular support. Many of these techniques, such as a self-purifying fast undertaken in 1933, shortly after his "epic fast", a tour through the country, with part in Madras State done on foot, and living in Bhangi quarters in Bombay, used his reputation as a Mahatma to appeal to the masses.

Ambedkar scorned Gandhi's movement because of the image of the Harijan it was creating. The point has been raised above that in Gandhi's

44. The message is still repeated in the works that grew out of Gandhi's campaign. In The History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1932-1968, op. cit., p. 2, the observation is made: "It was thus commonly accepted that penance and ritual could remove the disability of Untouchability, just as cleanliness and bathing removed the filth and dirt".

approach, the Harijan played little part other than passive participant. The role Gandhi reserved for the Harijan was in some ways quite contrary to the roles he described in his ideal varna system, based on the concept of interdependence through interaction devoid of high-low differentiation. The definition of Harijan presented by Gandhi was coterminous with dependence; in his approach, the Harijan was totally and unequivocally dependent not only on high caste goodwill, but on the services provided for education, cleanliness, proper diet, and so forth. In nurturing an image of dependence, Gandhi was emphasizing the Harijan's low status.

The suggestion has been made above that the approach taken by Gandhi's campaign can be interpreted as an attempt to force Hindus to re-evaluate the status given to Harijans by symbolically exchanging the roles of the Harijan and caste Hindu through the requirement of service to the Harijan. This approach, as suggested by the analysis, implicitly used the means of status evaluation operating in the caste system, with, however, one important omission: the Harijan assuming the role of the high caste Hindu. The important element in status evaluation is the ritual transaction in which both castes equally participate, but on unequal terms. One caste persuades, manoeuvres or commands the other to remove impurities, perform ritual services, accept food - which demonstrates dependency - in order to assert a higher, or purer status. Caste ranking, or status evaluation, is done according to the code acknowledged by all members of the system which classifies one role in the transaction superior to the other.⁴⁵ The assertion of higher status made in the ritual context is more successful when supported by economic or political viability.

45. See McKim Marriot, 1968, op. cit.

While, as has been suggested above, Gandhi's campaign worked within a Hindu framework of thinking, by attempting to displace notions of superiority by reorienting the role of the caste Hindu, it neglected the complementary role of the Harijan. Furthermore, by definition in Gandhi's movement, the Harijan was totally incapable of any participation at all. Through Gandhi's designation of helplessness, the Harijan was denied a power base to validate any claim, whether of higher or of equal status. Nor were any claims to be made by the Harijan: all "change of heart" had to come unilaterally from the caste Hindu. In setting these restrictions on his movement, Gandhi created a system of patronage with much the same results as the traditional means of ranking castes through ritual exchanges. Defined as dependent on the patronage of the higher castes, "Harijan" had all the connotations of inferiority. Through his one-sided emphasis on the caste Hindus' change of attitude, Gandhi ignored the dynamics of transaction, perhaps because he treated status as a predetermined and absolute state, imposed by divine will, and held in place as the law of nature.

The Harijan Sevak Sangh

Gandhi coordinated his campaign through the organization of the Harijan Sevak Sangh headed by G.D. Birla as President and A.V. Thakkar as General Secretary. Founded in late September, 1932, as a direct outcome of the Poona Pact it was originally called the All-India Anti-Untouchability League. This name was changed in December, 1932, to the Servants of the Untouchables Society because it too closely resembled the name of another

association, the All-India Untouchability League led by V.R. Shinde⁴⁶, and because, according to Gandhi, the name, Servants of the Untouchables Society, more correctly expressed the nature of the organization.⁴⁷ Later, the name was translated to Harijan Sevak Sangh, in keeping with the Hindu nature of the movement and Gandhi's redefinition of Untouchable as Harijan. The objective of the Sangh was to organize workers to engage in constructive work for the uplift of the Harijans through a network of centres.⁴⁸ Each province was broken down into a number of units, and each unit was headed by paid workers who in turn organized volunteer workers.

The Sangh relied on donations to provide the funds needed for its work. Gandhi embarked on his All-India tour, which began on November 7, 1933, and ended on July 29, 1934, to arouse enthusiasm for the cause of abolishing Untouchability, and to collect funds for the Sangh. A total of approximately eight lakhs, or eight hundred thousand rupees was collected.⁴⁹ The First Annual Report of the Sangh⁵⁰ indicates that the funds were spent to provide scholarships; to establish separate schools for the Harijan

46. The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. VII, op. cit., p. 57, in a letter addressed to Birla.

47. Statement made to Bombay Chronicle, 9-12-32, *ibid.*, p. 151.

48. According to the Constitution of the H.S.S., the objective is "the eradication, by truthful and non-violent means, of untouchability in Hindu society with all its incidental evils and disabilities, suffered by the so-called untouchables, in all walks of life and to secure for them the absolute equality of status with the rest of the Hindus". From M.B. Verma, History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1932-1968, op. cit., p. ii.

49. The Harijan, 3-8-34, vol. II, p. 196.

50. Verma, M.B., The History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1932-1968, op. cit., pp. 128-136.

children at the primary level in areas where admittance to common schools was difficult⁵¹; to establish hostels of Harijan students, to set up training centres, such as the Cottage Tanning Institute in Calcutta with 21 pupils; and to provide water supply for the Harijans by sinking new wells, installing tube wells, repairing existing wells, or persuading local government bodies to perform these services. In addition, the Sangh carried on propaganda work, which will be discussed shortly.

The manner in which the Sangh dispensed its funds met some criticism that the funds benefited the members of the Sangh, who were almost all caste Hindus, appointed to the organization and not the Harijans. Gandhi replied to the criticism:⁵²

I have come to the conclusion that in an organization like ours, there is no room for election, democracy or anything of that sort. Ours is a different kind of institution. It is not a peoples' organization in the ordinary sense. We handle money as self-appointed trustees, using it solely for the benefit of the Harijans and in such a way that it finds its way directly into their pockets. Ours is an organization formed with a view of doing our duty by those whom we have despised.

Gandhi's defense of the way in which money was controlled by the Sangh was a defense of the way in which the Sangh operated. The exclusion of Harijans from the Sangh also brought complaints:⁵³

-
51. Other reasons are also suggested. Gandhi often indicated that he felt the Harijan children needed preliminary training in cleanliness.
52. The First Annual Report of the H.S.S., quoted in Verma, op. cit., p. 130.
53. The Harijan, 4-3-33, the letter was written by an unnamed Harijan, and was cited by Gandhi, apparently to remind the Sangh workers that a change of attitude was necessary. (p. 7).

The organizations are run principally by Caste men who have their own axes to grind or who are in need of some occupation that would maintain them decently. The utmost that some of these have done is to fling a few scholarships at Harijan boys. Some others have been great at delivering lectures. All have come to us as patrons. Hardly has anyone come as a friend and equal, let alone as a servant. Your provincial organization is no exception. It is difficult for a Harijan to approach its chief man without fear and trembling. He is always in danger of being met with a frown.

In 1935, Gandhi justified his opposition to the inclusion of Harijans on the central board of the Sangh:⁵⁴

Today the vast majority are helpless. Some even believe that they would commit a heinous sin, if they regarded themselves as anything but the meanest and tabooed creation of God.

At other times Gandhi countered the argument that sufficient men could be found among the Harijans who were enlightened and able to be entrusted in the leadership of the Sangh with the rejoinder that such an argument demonstrated an incorrect understanding of the reason for the organization. He suggested that the Harijans could form an advisory committee to certify whether the caste Hindu was fulfilling his obligations to the Harijans.⁵⁵ He maintained that the total initiative lay with the Caste Hindus.

When the Sangh was founded, however, three Untouchables were included on the Central Board of the Sangh, Ambedkar, M.C. Rajah, and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan. Srinivasan had participated, along with Ambedkar, in the Round Table Conferences, and Rajah had played a number of roles in the political negotiations, the most unusual of which was to strike up a pact while the Round Table Conferences were taking place with Dr. Moonje of

54. The Harijan, 15-2-35, vol. III, p. 7.

55. Ibid., 5-1-34, vol. II, p. 5.

the Hindu Mahasabha opposing a separate Depressed Classes electorate.⁵⁶ Ambedkar resigned from the Board shortly afterwards in disagreement with the course of action the Sangh was taking. His resignation was followed by the resignations of Rajah and Srinivasan.

In a letter mailed from en route to the Third Round Table Conference, Ambedkar had proposed to Thakkar, the General Secretary of the Sangh, that the organization be devoted to a campaign for civil rights, even if such a campaign cause social disturbance:⁵⁷

The silent infiltration of rational ideas among the ignorant mass of caste Hindus cannot, I am sure, work for the elevation of the Depressed Classes... the Caste Hindu like all human beings follows his customary conduct in observing untouchability towards the Depressed Classes... When that customary mode of behaviour has or is believed to have behind it the sanction of religion, mere preaching, if it is not resented and resisted, will be allowed to waft along the wind without creating any effect on the mind. 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... The great defect in the policy of least resistance and silent infiltration of rational ideas lies in this that they do not compel thought; for they do not produce crisis. The direct action in respect of Chawdar Tank in Mahad, the Kalaram Temple in Nasik... have done in a few days what million days of preaching by reformers would never have done.

The reason Ambedkar gave for resigning from the Central Board of the Sangh was that he felt the Sangh had the possibility of destroying the independent movement created by the Untouchables by substituting token constructive work for a genuine change in the inequities of Hindu social organization.⁵⁸

56. See Keer, op. cit., pp. 195ff. Rajah had first cabled Ambedkar in favour of separate electorate while Ambedkar was arguing for reservation and separate electorate at the R.T.C. The pact with Moonje retracted the support quite unexpectedly. This led to a rift between Ambedkar and Rajah. Much later they were reconciled.

57. Ambedkar, What Gandhi and Congress Have Done to the Untouchables, op. cit., p. 136, reproducing a letter dated 14-11-32, sent to A.V. Thakkar, from aboard the M/N Victoria.

58. Ibid., p. 141.

To a certain extent, Ambedkar's claim that the function of the Harijan Sevak Sangh was to stifle a movement among the Untouchables for civil rights was true. There is no question that Gandhi demonstrated a genuine concern for the Harijans, but he was equally concerned with the preservation of the unity of Indian society. The pursuit of crisis situations would further undermine the social cohesion already weakened by the British recognition of the Depressed Classes as a group antagonistic to the Hindus. By bringing the Harijans together under caste Hindu leadership, Gandhi was attempting to reunite the Harijans with the rest of the Hindus in a struggle against British rule. The "campaign of least resistance" was also a demonstration to the not dispassionate foreigner that the Hindus were fully capable and moreover willing to secure a better lifestyle for the Harijans.

The Untouchable leaders, on the other hand, were less interested in Swaraj than in the civil rights of the Untouchables, and were adopting increasingly militant tactics to coerce the caste Hindus into giving them these rights. This, coupled with the uncertainty as to what political shape would emerge after the violence of the Independence struggle had subsided, led Gandhi to focus on tactics such as "constructive work", designed to avoid a total breakdown of order. The propaganda work done by the Sangh was largely oriented to counter the militancy engendered in the Harijans by leaders like Ambedkar.

The Sangh's propaganda work centred on the issue of temple entry. In the activities of the Sangh and in the statements of Gandhi it would appear that the question of temple entry superceded all other concerns.

Gandhi had argued that when the Harijan gained admittance to temples, he had gained full acceptance by the other Hindus, and social advancement followed. Temple entry was the necessary first step for the Harijan: "For when Harijans are freely admitted to temples, all the avenues to economic betterment must be automatically open to Harijans as to others"⁵⁹. There were other reasons, as well, for the emphasis on temple entry.

The issue was taken up as a counter offensive to weaken the Government (which at that time was the British government) position that the Depressed Classes constituted a minority group. The Franchise Committee had settled on the restriction on temple entry as one of the two primary criteria to define whether a caste was a Depressed Caste.⁶⁰ The non-admission to temples was, for the British, definitive proof that the Depressed Classes were excluded from Hindu society. The implications this understanding had on the political structure emerging from the negotiations with the British were profound.

The system of reservations for the Scheduled Castes is based on this conclusion drawn by the British. The system as it now stands is a modified version; when the MacDonald Award was announced in 1932, the Depressed Classes had been given a separate electorate, along with their reserved seats, which were taken out of the total number of seats allotted to the Hindus, thus cutting down on the communal majority of the Hindu representation. This was changed to a reserved seat in a Hindu

59. The Harijan, 16-3-34, p. 36.

60. See Chapter 2.

constituency⁶¹, or a constituency made up of both Depressed Class members and caste Hindus, in the Poona Pact resulting from Gandhi's "epic fast". It would seem that the compromise forced by Gandhi's threat of death only changed the electorate for the reserved seats from a Depressed Classes electorate to a general Hindu electorate.⁶² This "minor" change however kept the Depressed Classes "within the Hindu fold" as it were, though, and mitigated the threat of the creation of a "power base" of Depressed Classes antagonistic to the Hindu population, however theoretical such a "power base" would have been, given the conditions of the Depressed Classes.

During the Anti-Untouchability Week, which followed Gandhi's fast a campaign to throw open all the temples in India to the Untouchables was mounted. With the MacDonald Award and the Poona Pact in the background, it is easy to see why the campaign focussed on the opening of temples.

As the argument that the Depressed Classes constituted a separate political

61. The system was originally modified to provide reserved seats for which both caste Hindus and Untouchables would vote. In the choice of a candidate, a panel system was devised in which the Untouchables exclusively voted to elect the candidates who were to contest the seat. This panel system operated in a similar fashion to a primary election. It was dropped after Independence, as its operation proved cumbersome. The system that followed was a system of double-member constituencies. Where the Scheduled Castes constituted a minority of the population, the constituency was doubled in size, and two seats were created, one reserved for the Scheduled Castes and one for the general electorate. This system was used in the first two elections, but it also proved cumbersome, as the constituencies were twice as large in size as a single-member constituency. In 1960, the double-member constituencies were bifurcated, leaving one a reserved seat constituency, and one a general constituency, notwithstanding that an Untouchable majority did not exist in the new single-member reserved seat constituency. This has also brought protest, but is still in operation at present. See L. Dushkin, "Scheduled Caste Politics" in M. Mahar, 1972, op. cit., pp. 186-212.

62. See pp. 125f.

group rested in large part on their non-admission to Hindu temples, the demonstration that Hindu temples were open to the Untouchables disproved what the British were claiming. The publicity garnered by the week of frenzied activities, and the opening of "thousands" of temples to Untouchables across India countered the publicity given to the earlier violent confrontations at temples. As many of the temples which welcomed Untouchables during Anti-Untouchability Week returned to the regular procedure of barring entry after the excitement of Gandhi's "epic fast" had died down, it followed that the Harijan Sevak Sangh adopted the issue of temple entry as the key to the Harijan problem.⁶³

In calling for the Hindus to open their temples to the Harijans, Gandhi referred to this issue:⁶⁴

Nature has not made of Harijans a separate species distinguished from caste Hindus by definite unmistakable signs. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Harijans enter temples without being detected. Only Hindus can claim no merit for the undetected entry of the so-called State-made untouchable into temples.

He also accused the Census Reports of supporting the problem of untouchability by delineating the Depressed Classes. He claimed to have asked the trustees of one temple how they recognized the prohibited Untouchables, to which the response was that they followed the Census Reports' classification.⁶⁵

63. Verma, op. cit., p. 81, citing the Fifth Annual Report of the H.S.S., 1935-1936.

64. The Harijan, 15-7-33, vol. I, p. 4.

65. Ibid., 30-3-34, p. 55, and 1-6-34, p. 124.

Gandhi was also faced with the problem of caste Hindu opposition to Harijan temple entry, compounded by the organization of satyāgrahas at temples by the more militant Untouchable groups. Gandhi's statements on the question of temple entry indicate that he was confronted with the problem of Harijans "not so interested in temple entry as in their political and economic amelioration and... a rise in their social status"⁶⁶, who were at the same time engaged in demonstrations at temples. His solution was the technique of persuasion.

He was opposed to legislation on the question, because he felt it was interference by the government in matters outside its concern. He did, however, support the proclamation passed by the Maharaja of Travancore on November 12, 1936, removing all restrictions on any Hindu entering public temples. Although, this support was pragmatic, as the Maharaja had already passed the law, Gandhi justified it on the grounds that the Maharaja had the authority as the temples were under his domain in contradistinction to the public temples maintained by temple trustees, or regular visitors in other areas.⁶⁷ He also cited the views of people he had interviewed during the Vykom satyāgraha about legislation by the Maharaja or Maharani: "I just asked the question supposing... the Maharani issued orders to open the roads to the Avarna Hindus [the Harijans] ... without the slightest hesitation they said: '... a Hindu Prince or Princess has every right to issue an order of a Smṛti'."⁶⁸

66. The Harijan, 20-6-36, p. 149.

67. Ibid., 20-11-37, p. 335.

68. Ibid., 6-2-37, p. 416.

With respect to other temples, he took the approach of "least resistance". He disavowed the use of violence to gain entry, and stated that "nowhere should temples be opened where there is an active minority opposed to the opening". He required the "practical unanimity" of the community the temple served before the temple was opened, in accordance with his policy of placing the onus of change on the purification of the caste Hindus' attitudes. To this familiar approach an innovation was added: the use of referenda. Gandhi employed the idea of franchise, which was becoming an important concept as the idea of universal franchise was beginning to take hold and which had associations of modern reform. He proposed the use of referenda to prove a majority in favour of opening the temples: "there should be a methodical taking of temple-goers, say within a ten-mile radius. And in order to have the thing absolutely above the board, signatures should be taken at public meetings in the presence of witnesses known to the signatories with their full names, addresses and occupations, together with age and sex"⁶⁹.

In using a technique which had the connotations of political reform, Gandhi was attempting to move the question of Untouchability out of the centre of the political arena, by setting up structures which mimicked the approach demanded by the political-minded reformers. This use of political means of a sort, the voting procedure, the principle of democratic process and majority rule, etc., was a proof that the problem of status of the Harijans could be resolved outside of the confrontation of power

69. The Complete Works of Gandhi, op. cit., p. 81, from a letter to Mr. Kelayyan, dated 12-11-32.

groups in the political arena. In this, Gandhi was making the point that the problem was essentially a religious issue of caste Hindus' attitudes, to which non-religious means such as techniques of modern democracy, could be applied, but only in the proper context, and moreover, only by the proper people. According to Gandhi, the Harijans were neither to attempt temple entry, nor utilize means of protest, but were to wait until their presence was welcome. In the late 1930's and 1940's, Gandhi took a more vigorous approach of persuasion, and spent more time representing Harijan grievances, but his basic position of non-confrontation remained the same.

The year 1937 marked a turning point for his campaign. The Government of India Act of 1935 came into effect, putting the Government in charge of providing education and other amenities for the Harijans. After 1937, the Sangh devoted a greater portion of its work to the welfare activities. The fact that the funds collected by Gandhi were almost exhausted may also account for this turn. Gandhi as well began a return to the question of Swaraj. While his concern for the Harijans never subsided, his attention was turned elsewhere.

Conclusion

Gandhi's approach to the Harijans changed little over the years. Although his position shifted from a theoretical reconstruction of the caturvarna system to a more practical approach as the Harijan movement progressed, his basic attitude remained about the same. Because he defended a traditional model of Indian society, his approach to the question of Untouchability was not as threatening as other thinkers and reformers

who sought a complete transformation of Hindu society. Gandhi's reconstruction of the varna system and his defense of varnāśramadharmā as the solution to India's problems continues to guide many social workers and reformers. Eleanor Zelliot cites the views of one:⁷⁰

In fact, the entire Varna system is devised to co-ordinate and assemble the best and the utmost of group welfare, by yoking each section of the group to duties and responsibilities in terms of the efficiency of the specific work and service each of the sections is able to render unto the community life.

In Gandhi's defense of the traditional Hindu model of social organization, the reason why he took up the issue of Untouchability can be found. The British denunciation of the position of the Depressed Classes in Hindu society was a direct challenge to the integrity of Hindu society, and moreover to the right of the Hindus to govern themselves. Both by defending the moral nature of varna differentiation and by launching a well-publicized campaign to demonstrate that the Hindus were fully capable of solving their own social problems, Gandhi was providing evidence to counteract the British accusations. When he argued that there would be no svaraj without the removal of Untouchability, he was responding to the British attack that no Hindu government could be a just government because the Hindus practiced Untouchability.

Gandhi's Harijan campaign was a demonstration of social cohesion both to external and internal criticisms. His proclamation that all Hindus had the duty to purify themselves for their practice of Untouchability.

70. Zelliot, 1972, op. cit., p. 94, citing Dr. Pandharinatl Prabhu of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences at a seminar of "Casteism and the Removal of Untouchability".

along with the portrayal of the Harijan as a helpless creature for whom all Hindus were responsible was meant to engender a sense of co-operation social unity threatened by the militancy of Untouchable leaders who were becoming more and more adamant in their demands for rights. The campaign centered on the obligations the rest of Hindu society had towards the Harijans, but in doing so depicted the state of the Harijan as one of utter dependence, a state which reflects low ritual status more than anything else. In that way, Gandhi's campaign served to reinforce stereotypes about the Harijans and support traditional attitudes. Although Gandhi's personal crusade brought attention to the issue of Untouchability, his portrayal of the Harijan is to some degree responsible for the ambiguous feelings the term evokes. Even in his lifetime, the term took on a connotation of condescension.

CONCLUSION

Almost any scholar who has attempted to write about the lowest stratum of the Hindu population has been confronted with the problem of choosing a label for these people. There are a number of terms to choose from, but none is completely satisfactory. The alternate problems of too many terms and no entirely satisfactory term indicate a more basic problem of definition. This problem in turn has two aspects: the question of self-definition, or how this population segment views itself, and the question of how others have understood it. The range of terms, and the different nuances of meaning in their use indicate that often these understandings do not agree.

Each of the terms applied to this group of people, or assumed by its members encodes an interpretation of their social situation and by doing that embodies a strategy of dealing with it. By choosing a label, a definition is asserted and a meaning validated; both form and legitimacy are given to an understanding of what this group comprises and what it represents. The different understandings are often conflicting understandings; this reflects an ambiguous status of the group in and of itself, and in relation to Hindu society. The conflict stems from the question of how to react to that ambiguity; each term designates a strategic analysis. The difference in these analyses is the issue this study took up.

Four terms of reference which were popularized, if not coined, during the Independence period were examined to understand the interplay of ideas behind the interest in this group manifested by certain people involved in the Independence struggle. Government provisions, directed alternately at Untouchables (Article 17 of the Constitution) and at the Scheduled Castes (Articles 330-342) evolved out of this interest, and much of the logic of the provisions refers back to the terms of reference involved. The context of the use of these terms was also considered, as much of the meaning the terms were given was determined by the arena in which their use took place. Due to the unique circumstances of the Independence struggle, discussions about the welfare and status of this group were carried on in the middle of negotiations for the transfer of power. The strategy implied by each term was thus also a political strategy reflecting the interests of a party involved in the political processes.

Within the political arena, four main terms were used, and three main lines of thinking emerged. These three models were discussed and compared, and the interactions of the main thinkers who used these terms were analyzed to understand the composite nature of the government policy which resulted. The contrary themes of the policy reflect these interactions and the political power struggle at play; the different terms were used to defend the often opposing positions in this struggle.

The British defended their presence in India in the terms "Depressed Classes" and "Scheduled Castes". These terms encode a need of special protection, and justify the role of the British in extending this protection

by governing in India. The term "Depressed Classes" presented an interpretation of Hindu culture that questioned its integrity. An underlying appraisal of the caste system and the principles it involved, as a system of segmentation in which differentiation was used to oppress the members of the marginal groups legitimized the British presence.

Explanations of the origins of the system, which traced its operating principles of purity and pollution back to be conquest and subjugation of the Dravidian race by the Aryans, supported this appraisal. By identifying this subjugated group as the Depressed Classes, the British gave form to their understanding of the caste system. The classification of these castes, the "scheduling", asserted the British definition. Even though the scheduling was done according to principles taken out of the context of the Hindu system, the type of order the "Scheduled Castes" represent was devised by the British. In the identification of the Scheduled Castes with a political order the British government provided, a strategic analysis of the situation in the political arena was portrayed. The British "created" the Scheduled Castes as a group eligible for special benefits that initially only they could give. This "creation" mirrors the British conceptual model of Hindu culture and their position in the Independence struggle. They set up a system of reservation in response to their analysis of the situation.

Dr. Ambedkar followed the British initiative. While working within the political framework set up by the British, Ambedkar sought to redefine the terms of reference. His campaign was to create a self-image of the Untouchable that could respond to the change in order resulting from the

British strategy. Ambedkar's politics were aimed at redefining the meaning of the term "Untouchable" to engender the self-respect necessary to utilize the power these people were suddenly enfranchised with.

His understandings of what "Untouchable" meant filtered into the legacies of his career, the Constitution and the neo-Buddhist movement. His strategy followed the thinking that all men were equal, even the Untouchables, but that the Untouchables were treated differently. This difference meant status, and his campaign focussed on that. Understanding Hindu society to work on a model of conflict in which special status was used to secure power as well as cause oppression, Ambedkar fought to gain power through separate status. He sought to identify the Untouchables with a means of power through the system of reservations the British were setting up. This campaign was taken right into the Constituent Assembly, where Ambedkar proposed a vision of India in which citizenship would replace caste, but in which special status for certain communities would remain. His interpretation of the nature of "Untouchable" was embodied in the Constitution, in the legal provisions aimed at the Scheduled Castes. His analysis was that these provisions would both foster unity among the Untouchables and forge for them a strong identity. In doing that these provisions would provide them with a power base.

When the power base showed little signs of emerging in face of the election defeats of 1952 and 1954, Ambedkar reopened the issue of religious conversion. The mass conversion of the Untouchables to Buddhism pushed the redefinition of the group farther. By making the Untouchables Buddhists whose identity correlated with the new order embodied in the Constitution,

Ambedkar was fostering a self-image unlike the previous images the Untouchables had of themselves. The Buddhist model, supported by his reconstruction of the Untouchables' origins, shifted the emphasis away from a low ritual status within an oppressive system to a new status on the vanguard of a new order. Implicit in this redefinition was the strategy that such an image would provide the incentive necessary to become involved in the process of creating that new order.

"Harijan" was Gandhi's response to the British "creation" of the Depressed Classes, and to Ambedkar's redefinition of the Untouchables. In calling the group "Harijans", Gandhi attempted to "eradicate" the issue of the status of this group. Through the connotative effect of the idea of God's creation, Gandhi attempted to suppress a common understanding of the group and supplant it with an attitude of respect. His analysis of the complementarity of the groups within Hindu society led to his campaign to generate cohesion within. Reciprocity was the theme he stressed to challenge the negative image of the Depressed Classes or the Untouchable. However, the image of the Harijan his campaign created had all the associations of inferiority his campaign was trying to overcome. In that way, his professed strategy of the situation did not match the terms he chose to describe the Harijan, and in the outcome, brought the question of status to the forefront while attempting to suppress it.

In combination, these three approaches worked to create often conflicting images of the group of the lowest Hindu castes. No clear definition has emerged, and the interest in the changing status of this group indicates that the process of definition is still continuing. The attention

these people receive is to a certain extent a result of the controversy generated in the Independence period which brought world-wide attention. This attention, however, has been based on unclear definitions.

BIBLIOGRAPHYBook and Articles

- Aggarwal, P. Equality through Privilege. New Delhi: Shri Ram Center for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, 1976.
- Ahir, D.C. Buddhism and Ambedkar. New Delhi: Vikas Press, 1968.
- . Dr. Ambedkar and Indian Constitution. Lucknow: Buddha Vihara, 1973.
- Ambedkar, B.R. Annihilation of Caste, with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi. Jullundur City: Punjab Bheem Patrika Publications, 1971.
- . The Buddha and His Dhamma. Bombay: Peoples' Education Society, 1974.
- . Gandhi and Gandhism. Edited by C.R. Balley. Jullundur: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1970.
- . Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables. Bombay: Thacker, 1943.
- . Pakistan or the Partition of India. Bombay: Thakkar, 1940. Reprint 1946.
- . Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah. Jullundur: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1943. Reprint 1964.
- . States and Minorities: What are Their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of Free India. Hyderabad: The Baba Saheb Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Society, 1947. Reprint 1970.
- . Thus Spoke Ambedkar. Selected Speeches. Compiled by Bhagwan Das. Jullundur City: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1963.
- . The Untouchables. Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables. Gonda: Bharatiya-Bauddha Shiksha Parisad, Second Edition, 1969.
- . What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables. Bombay: Thacker, 2nd ed., 1946.
- . Who Were the Shudras? How they came to be the 4th Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society. Bombay: Thacker, 1946. Reprint 1970.

- Anant, Santokh S. The Changing Concept of Caste in India. Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1972.
- Bailey, F.G. Caste and the Economic Frontier. A Village in Highland Orissa. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1957.
- Béteille, A. "Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamilnad", Caste in Indian Politics. Edited by R. Kothari. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970.
- and M.N. Srinivas. "The Harijans of India", Castes Old and New. Edited by André Béteille. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969.
- "Pollution and Poverty", Untouchables in Contemporary India. Tuscon, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1972, 411-420.
- Bhandare, R.D. "Problems of Indian Buddhists", Maha Bodhi, 79 (February-March, 1971), 73-80.
- Bharill, Chandra. The Social and Political Ideas of B.R. Ambedkar. Jaipur: Aaleka Publishers, 1977.
- Blunt, E.A.H. The Caste System of Northern India with Special Reference to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1931.
- Bose, Subhas Chandra. Indian Struggle, 1920-1942. Compiled by the Netaj: Research Bureau, Calcutta. Bombay, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964.
- Bougle, Celestin. Essay on the Caste System. Translated by A.M. Hocart. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Briggs, George Weston. The Chamars. London: H. Milford for Oxford University Press. Calcutta: Association Press, 1920.
- Caldwell, Rev. Bishop. A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages. Madras: Univ. of Madras, 1961. First published in 1856.
- Coatman, John. "Reforms in India and the Depressed Classes", Asiatic Review (London), XXIX (97, January 1933): 41-53.
- Cohn, Bernard S. "The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste", Village India: Studies in the Little Community. Edited by McKim Marriott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955. Also Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1961.
- Dass, Mahart M. A National Penitance: Removal of Untouchability. Government of India: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1976.

Derrett, J.D.M. Religion, Law and the State in India. London: Faber and Faber, 1968.

Dumont, Louis. Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications. Translated by Mark Sainsbury. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Dushkin, Lelah. "The Backward Classes: Special Treatment Policy", Economic Weekly, XIII (1961), 1665-68, 1695-1705, 1729-38.

----- . The Policy of the Indian National Congress Toward the Depressed Classes: An Historical Study. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of South Asian Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1957.

----- . "Scheduled Caste Policy in India: History, Problem, Prospects", Asian Survey, VII (1967), 626-36.

----- . "Scheduled Caste Politics", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 165-227.

Fiske, Adele. "Buddhism in India Today", The Cultural, Political and Religious Significance of Buddhism in the Modern World. Edited by H. Dumoulin and J. Maraldo. New York and London: Collier Books, 1976.

----- . "Scheduled Caste Buddhist Organizations", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 113-143.

----- . "The Understanding of 'Religion' and 'Buddhism' among India's New Buddhists", Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement. Edited by T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1972, 101-129.

Foot, Isaac. "The Round Table Conference, The Future and the Depressed Classes", Contemporary Review, 139 (1931), 282-90.

Galanter, Marc. "The Abolition of Disabilities-Untouchability and the Law", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 227-317.

----- . "Changing Legal Conceptions of Caste", Structure and Change in Indian Society. Edited by Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn. Chicago: Aldine, 1968.

----- . "Equality and Protective Discrimination in India", Rutgers Law Review, XVI (1961), 44-74.

----- . "Law and Caste in Modern India", Asian Survey, III (1963), 544-49.

- Galanter, Marc. "The Religious Aspects of Caste: A Legal View", South Asian Religion and Politics. Edited by Donald E. Smith. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- Gandhi, M.K. All Are Equal in the Eyes of God. Selections from Mahatma Gandhi. Delhi: Government of India, Publications Division, 1964.
- An Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth. Trans. M. Desai. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948.
- Caste Must Go and the Sin of Untouchability. Compiled by R.K. Prabhu. Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1964.
- The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, LII. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1972.
- My Varnashrama Dharma. Edited by Anand T. Hingovani. Bombay: Bhavatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965.
- None High; None Low. Edited by Anand T. Hingovani. Bombay: Bhavatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965.
- The Removal of Untouchability. Compiled and edited by Bharata Kumarappa. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1954.
- Ghurye, G.S. Caste and Race in India. 7th ed. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969.
- Gough, E. Kathleen. "Caste in a Tanjore Village", Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan. Edited by E.R. Loach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, 11-60.
- Hardgrave, R. "The Nadars of Tamil Nadu", Essays to the Political Sociology of South India. New Delhi: USHA Publications, 1976, 125-188.
- Harijan: A Journal of Applied Gandhism 1933-1955. New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1973.
- Harper, E.B. "Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion", Journal of Asian Studies, 23 (1964), 81-197.
- "Social Consequences of an 'Unsuccessful' Low Caste Movement", Social Mobility in the Caste System in India: an Inter-disciplinary Symposium. Edited by James Silverberg. Comparative Studies in Society and History Supplement III. The Hague: Mouton, 1968b.
- Hutton, J. Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963.
- Isaacs, Harold. India's Ex-Untouchables. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965.

- Isaacs, Harold R. "The Ex-Untouchables", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 375-411.
- Jacob, Alice, ed. Constitutional Developments Since Independence. Bombay: N.M. Tripathi, 1975.
- Jatava, Daya Ram. Dr. Ambedkar's Role in the National Movement 1917-1947. New Delhi: Bauddha Sahitya Sammelan, 1979.
- Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar. Agra: Phoenix Publishing Agency, 1965.
- Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar. Agra: Phoenix Publishing Agency, 1965.
- To the Critics of Dr. Ambedkar. New Delhi: Bharatitya Shoshit Jan Utthan Parishad, 1975.
- Jha, M.L. Untouchability and Education (A Socio-Psychological Study of Attitudes). Meerut: Namita Publications, 1973.
- Kamble, J.R. Rise and Awakening of the Depressed Classes in India. New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1979.
- Kane, Pandurang Vaman. History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval, Religious and Civil Law). Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930-1962, 5 vols. (Govt. Or. Series, Class B, no 6).
- Keer, Dhananjay. Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1954. Reprint 1971.
- Kuber, W.N. Dr. Ambedkar: A Critical Study. New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973.
- The Laws of Manu. Translated by G. Bühler. The Sacred Books of the East, vol. 25. Edited by Max Muller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885.
- Leach, E.R. (ed.). Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960 (Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology, 2).
- Lokhander, G.S. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar: a Study in Social Democracy. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1977.
- Lynch, Owen. "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar - Myth and Charisma", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 97-113.

- Lynch, Owen. "The Politics of Untouchability: A Case from Agra, India", Structure and Change in Indian Society. Edited by Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn. Chicago: Aldine, 1968.
- . The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.
- Mahar, J. Michael. "Agents of Dharma in a North Indian Village", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 17-36.
- . India, A Critical Bibliography. Tucson, Arizona: The Univ. of Arizona Press, 1964.
- Majumdar, R.C. The History and Culture of the Indian People. Vol. 9. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1979.
- Marriott, McKim. "Interactional and Attributional Theories of Caste Ranking", Man in India, vol. XXXIX (No 2, 1959), 92-107.
- . "Caste Ranking and Food Transactions: A Matrix Analysis", Structure and Change in Indian Society. Edited by M. Singer and B.S. Cohn. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968, 133-171.
- Mayo, Katherine. "Mahatma Ganshi and India's Untouchables", Current History, 32 (1930), 264-70.
- Mencher, J. "Change and Continuity in an Ex-Untouchable Community of South India", The Untouchables in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tucson, Arizona: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1972, 37-56.
- . "The Caste System Upside Down on the Not So Mysterious East", Current Anthropology, 15, no. 4 (December 1974), 469-493.
- Miller, Robert J. and Kale Plamodh. "The Burden on the Head is Always There", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 317-361.
- Moffatt, Michael. An Untouchable Community in South India. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Molony, J. Chartres. "The Depressed Classes", Political India. 1832-1932. Edited by John Cumming. London: Humphrey Milford for Oxford University Press, 1932.
- Monier-Williams, M. A Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Delhi, Varanasi and Patna: Motilal Banarsidass, 1899. Reprint 1976.
- Nadel, S.F. The Theory of Social Structure. London: Cohen and West, 1957. Reprint 1958.

- Nadkarni, S.D. On Rama Rajya Slave Mentality of Orthodox: An Expositulatory Letter to the Greatest Hindu of the Age from a Critical Co-religionist. Bombay: Samaj Samata Sangh Dada, 1932.
- Natarajan, S. A Century of Social Reform in India. 2nd ed. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962.
- Nehru, J. Mahatma Gandhi. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1949. Reprinted 1966.
- Towards Freedom. New York: John Day, 1942.
- Nesfield, John C. Brief View of the Caste System of the North Western Provinces and Oudh, Together with an Examination of the Names and Figures Shown in the Census Report, 1882. Allahabad, 1885.
- Orenstein, H. "Structure of Hindu Caste Values", Ethnology, 4 (1965), 1-11.
- Ouwkerk, Louise. The Untouchables of India. London: Oxford University Press, 1945.
- Paradkar, B.A.M. "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement. Edited by T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas. Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1972, 33-71.
- Philips, P. ed. Histories of India, Pakistan and Ceylon. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Pyarelal, N. The Epic Fast. Ahmedabad: Mohanlal Maganlal Bhatt, 1932.
- Report of the Seminar on Casteism and Removal of Untouchability. Delhi, September 26-October 2, 1955. Bombay, Indian Conference of Social Work, 1955.
- Revankar, Ratna G. The Indian Constitution - A Case Study of Backward Classes. Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971.
- Risley, Herbert H. The People of India. London: W. Thacker, 1908. Reprint 1911.
- Rowe, W.L. "The New Cauhans: A Caste Mobility Movement in North India", Social Mobility and the Caste System in India. Edited by J. Silverberg. The Hague: Mouton, 1968, 66-77.
- Rudolph, Lloyd and Suzanne. "Tradition Structures and Modern Politics: Caste", Modernity of Tradition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Saraswathi, S. Minorities in Madras State. Delhi: Impex India, 1974.
- Singh, Mohinder. The Depressed Classes of India. Their Social and Economic Condition. Introduction by Radhakamal Mukerjee. Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1947.

- Silverberg, James (ed.). Social Mobility in the Caste System in India. The Hague: Comparative Studies in Society and History, Supplement 3, Mouton, 1968.
- Sitaramayya, B. Pahabhi. History of the Indian National Congress. Introduction by Rajendra Prasad. Vol. 1, 1885-1935. Vol. 2, 1935-1947. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bharan, 1946-47.
- Smith, W.R. Nationalism and Reform in India. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938.
- Srinivas, M.N. Caste in Modern India and Other Essays. Bombay: Asia Publ. House, 1962.
- Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Social Change in Modern India. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.
- Stanton, H.U. Weitbrecht. "The Untouchables of India and their Enumeration", Asiatic Review, 16: 171-84.
- Stevenson, H.N.C. "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, LXXXIV, no 1-2 (1954), 45-65.
- Taylor, Richard W. "The Ambedkarite Buddhists", Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement. Edited by T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas. Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1972, 129-163.
- Verma, Muknt Behari. History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1932-1968. Delhi: Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1971.
- Wadhwa, K.K. Minority Safeguards in India. Delhi: Thompson, 1975.
- Weber, Max. The Religion of India. The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism. English translation by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958. New York: The Free Press, 1967.
- Wilkinson, T.S. Buddhism and Social Change among Mahars, Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement. Edited by T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas. Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1972, 71-101.
- Wolpert, Stanley. A New History of India. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962.

Vyayahumar, W.R. "A Historical Survey of Buddhism in India", Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement. Edited by T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas. Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1972, 1-33.

Zelliot, Eleanor. "Background of the Mahar Buddhist Conversion", Studies on Asia. Edited by Robert K. Sakai. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

----- . "Bibliography on Untouchability", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 431-487.

----- . "Buddhism and Politics in Maharashtra", South Asian Politics and Religion. Edited by Donald E. Smith, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966.

----- . Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1969.

----- . "Gandhi and Ambedkar. A Study in Leadership", Untouchability in Contemporary India. Edited by M. Mahar. Tuscon, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1972, 69-97.

----- . "Learning the Use of Political Means: The Mahars of Maharashtra", Caste in Indian Politics. Edited by Rajni Kothari. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970, 29-69.

Government Documents

Appadorai, A. and Sir H. Gwyer. Speeches and Documents of the Indian Constitution, 1921-1947, vol. II. London: Oxford University Press, 1957.

Census of India, 1901. Vol. I. Risley, H.H. India, vol. I, Report I, Report II, Ethnographic Appendices. Calcutta: Gov't Printing, 1903.

Census of India, 1911. Vol. I. Gait, T.A. India, vol. I, Part I, Report. Calcutta: Gov't Printing, 1913.

Census of India, 1931. Vol. I. Ethnographic Report, Part III, Vol. I. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1933.

Census of India, 1931. Vol. III. "The Depressed and Backward Classes of Assam", Appendix I to Chapter XII, Vol. III, Assam, Part I, Report. Shillong: Supt Assam Government Press, 1933, 209-27.

- Census of India, 1931. Vol. V. "The Depressed Classes", Appendix I, vol. V, Bengal and Sikkim, Part 1, Report. Calcutta: Central Publishing Branch, 1933, 494-513.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. VII. "The Depressed Classes", Appendix III, vol. VII, Bihar and Orissa, Part 1, Report. Patna: Supt. of Government Printing, 1933, 283-87.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. VIII. "The Depressed Classes", Section V, vol. VIII, Bombay Province, Part 1, General Report. Bombay: Gov't Central Press, 1933, 383-84.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. XIV. "Depressed Classes", Chapter XII, vol. XIV, Madras, Part 1, Report. Calcutta: Gov't of India Central Publishing, 1932, 342-47.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. XVII. "Adi-Dharmi", Section 4, Chapter XI, "Depressed Classes", Appendix III, vol. XVII, Punjab, Part 1, Report. Lahore, 1933, 310-11.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. XVIII. "Notes on (I) Untouchables, (II) Depressed Classes, and (III) Backward Classes", Appendix No. 2, vol. XVIII, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Part 1, Report. Allahabad: Supt. of Printing, 1933, 626-38.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. XX. "The Depressed Classes", Appendix III, Vol. XX, Central India Agency, Part 1, Report. Calcutta: Gov't of India, Central Publication Branch, 1933, 280-82.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. XXI. "Depressed Classes", Appendix II, vol. XXI, Cochin, Part 1, Report. Gunakulum: Supt. of Cochin Government Press, 1933, 289-99.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. XXIII. "The Depressed Classes", vol. XXIII, The Nizam's Dominions (Hyderabad State), Part 1, Report. Hyderabad: Government Central Press, 1932, 355-68.
- Census of India, 1931. Vol. XXVII. "The Depressed and Backward Classes", Appendix II, vol. XXVII, Travancore, Part 1, Report. Trivandrum: Supt. of Government Press, 1932, 430-41.
- Constituent Assembly of India. Constituent Assembly Debates, 1947-1950. 12 vols. Delhi: Manager of Publications.
- Constituent Assembly of India. Draft Constitution of India, Prepared by the Drafting Committee. New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1948.
- Great Britain. East India (Constitutional Reforms). Addresses presented in India to His Excellency the Viceroy and the Right Honourable, the Secretary of State for India. London: H.M.S.O. Cmd. 9178, 1918.

The Indian Constitution. Constitutions of the Countries of the World, VII. Edited by Albert P. Blaustein and Gilbert H. Hand. Dobbs Ferris, New York: Ocean Publications, Inc., 1979, 20-

Indian Franchise Committee, 1932. Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, 1932. 5 vols. London: H.M.S.O. Vol. I. Report, cmd. 4086. Vols. IV and V. Selections from Memoranda Submitted by Individuals and Oral Evidence, 1932.

Indian Round Table Conference, 1st, London, 1930-31. Indian Round Table Conference, 12th November, 1930-19th January, 1931. Proceedings. London: H.M.S.O. Cmd. 3778, 1931.

Indian Round Table Conference, 2nd. London, 1931. Indian Round Table Conference, 7th September, 1931-1st December, 1931. Proceedings. London: H.M.S.O. Cmd. 3997, 1932.

Indian Round Table Conference, 2nd. London, 1931. Proceedings of the Federal Structure Committee and Minorities Committee. London: H.M.S.O., 1932.

Indian Statutory Commission (1928). Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, 17 vols. London: H.M.S.O. Vol. I. Survey. Cmd. 3568. Vol. III. Reports of the Committees appointed by the Provincial Legislative Councils to Cooperate with the Indian Statutory Commission. Cmd. 3572. Vols XVI, XVII. Selections from Memoranda and Oral Evidence by Non-Officials. 1929-1930.

Indian Statutory Commission (1928). Review of Growth of Education in British India. London: H.M.S.O. Cmd. 3407, 1929.

The Reforms Committee (Franchise, 1918). Evidence Taken Before the Reforms Committee, 2 vols. Calcutta: Government of India, 1919.