

### CHAPTER III

#### FACE TO FACE CONFLICT BETWEEN AMBEDKAR AND GANDHI: UNTOUCHABLE VS HORIZON.

Before discussing about the conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi, here we mention an extracts from Gandhi and Ambedkar conversation, which was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1932.

Ambedkar – “I want political power for my community. That is indispensable for our survival. The basis of the agreement therefore should be: I should get what is due to me. I wish to tell the *Hindus* that I should be assured of my compensation”.

Gandhi – “You are born an untouchable but I am an untouchable by adoption. As a new convert I feel more for the welfare of the community than those who are already there. At the moment I have before my eyes the dumb untouchables – unapproach – ables and unseables – of South India.<sup>24</sup>

It is well known to all of us that both Gandhi and Ambedkar were started working for the depressed classes almost all together in Bombay Presidency. Gandhi was a *Gujrati* caste *Hindu* and a *Modh Bania* by caste. He sought to raise the status of the *Depressed Classes* within the framework of all-embracing struggle for the freedom of which he was acknowledged as the father figure. On the other hand, Ambedkar was a *Marathi* untouchable and a *Mahar* by caste. He strove to raise the status of the depressed classes within the framework of British Policy. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar entered in public life as a barrister. Gandhi renounced his legal profession and turned out to be a social activist. Ambedkar was an author of scholarly works and he remained a westernized intellectual having commitment to the uplift of the *Depressed Classes*.

Generally Ambedkar was known as the “savior of the Untouchables”. Gandhi as “the father of Independence” has spoken and written more on untouchability than on any other subject.

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<sup>24</sup> CWMG, Vol.51, PP. 459-460, Mahadev Bhaini Diary, Vol-II, pp. 60-72.

Along with *Hindu-Muslim* unity, Gandhi publicly put his voice for abolition of untouchability. According to Gandhi, this was essential for India's true independence. That is why, for developing the social status of untouchables he made the popular term "Harijan" (children of God) for the untouchables. On the other hand, Ambedkar was regarded as the most highly educated Untouchables in India. He has been recognized as the untouchable's chief spokesman, the founder of a political party for untouchables. Side by side, he was moving spirit behind organizations; schools and colleges for establishing their uplift. Both Ambedkar and Gandhi were often at odds in their programs for the abolition of untouchability. In 1932, Gandhi dissatisfied about Ambedkar's attempt to gain political concessions from the British. But Ambedkar argued that, this concession is to be essential for the progress of untouchables. Working for a national goal, Gandhi was concerned as a dominant group leader. Gandhi from a moral standpoint and from a realization of the need for unity about injustice to a low status group within the nation was known as a group leader. On the other hand, Ambedkar's correlative role was to run as a militant leader of a politically conscious segment of the same depressed group. But what is important to notice here is that, the conflict between these two leaders are examined in terms of their ideological differences and the different solutions which they advocated for the resolution of one India's major social problems.

Before discussing about the matter of Gandhi's action and Ambedkar's reactions to them, it is important to know about the background and ideology of each of them. Gandhi in his autobiography identifies himself as a *Bania*. Actually Vaishya or *Bania* castes are the third in the traditional four-fold division of the *Hindu* society. Including *Brahmins* and *Kshatryas* they are also twice-born or *Dvija*. When Gandhi was fifty-two years old, he contains only a few references to untouchables or about the concept of untouchability. At the time of his assumption of the leadership of the *Indian National Congress*, he delivered his first strong

public statement on untouchability. As a politician Gandhi said: “Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity.”<sup>25</sup> And as a Mahatma he said: “I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an Untouchable....”<sup>26</sup> Although within few years his views regarding other caste-based practices was highlighted as different, but his statements on the evil of untouchability were clear from the first. According to him, inter-drinking, inter-dining and inter-marrying ceremony are not sufficient for annihilates the social curse of untouchability. In this regard he said: “If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select *Harijan* husbands.”<sup>27</sup> Actually, his change in attitude toward social practices was an unchanging belief in *Varnashramadharma*. According to him, untouchability had no part in the divine origin. That is why, the treatment of castes below the *Shudra* level as impure was not only inhuman, but it also harmful to *Hinduism*. He described it as a curse, an outgrowth of *Hinduism*, a poison, a cancer, a hydra-headed monster, a great blot, a device of *Satan* and a hideous untruth etc. It is true that he was not the first who was cried for the untouchables, but he was the most prominent caste *Hindu* who believed that it was harmful to *Hinduism*. That is why for remove these harmful practices it was necessary to take the responsibility of the caste *Hindu*.

On the other hand, the caste, the family status, social background and the intellectual environment of where Ambedkar was born, was totally different from Gandhi. By birth he was regarded as a *Mahar*, which was the largest untouchable’s caste of Maharashtra. They were the lower village servants. Their traditional duties were to maintenance of streets, walls etc. Their earning sources were to carrying messages, transportation away dead cattle and

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<sup>25</sup> *Young India*, 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1920.

<sup>26</sup> *Young India*, 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1920.

<sup>27</sup> *Harijan*, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1946.

similar unskilled and polluting task. But they were not responsible for cleaning the latrines or removal of night soil. During nineteenth and early twentieth centuries most of the *Mahars* removed them from their traditional village servant role. With the help of *Mahars* leaders, the spirit of militancy and the influence of education they were acquired in the army and in the domestic service. Along with others *Mahars*, his father and grandfather were served in the army camp. From his childhood, Ambedkar humiliated and discriminated by the higher castes *Hindu* in the name of untouchability. But his educational qualification and positive thinking for his society made him an untouchable leader.

It is true that before 1930s, Ambedkar and Gandhi were not meet face to face. But from 1920s, Mahatma's social activities had aroused the interest in the mind of untouchable leaders. Ambedkar was very much interested on Gandhi in this issue. In 1925, Ambedkar was first comment about Gandhi dates back and concerns regarding the *Vaikam Satyagraha*. Ambedkar declared in the occasion of the *Depressed Classes Conference* of the Bombay Presidency: "Before Mahatma Gandhi, no politician in this country maintained that it is necessary to remove social injustice here in order to do away with tension and conflict, and that every Indian should consider it has sacred duty to do so... However, if one looks closely, one finds there is a slight disharmony ... for he does not insist on the removal of untouchability as much as he insists on the propagation of *Khaddar* or the *Hindu-Muslim* unity. If he had he would have made the removal of untouchability a precondition of voting in the party. Well, be that as it may, when one is spurned by everyone, even the sympathy shown by Mahatma Gandhi is of no little importance."<sup>28</sup>

But in 1927, Ambedkar and his followers adopted an extreme course of action like burning of *Manusmriti* and organized the *Satyagrahas* for gaining access to *Mahad Choudar tank* and

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<sup>28</sup> Zelliott, E. Gandhi and Ambedkar, Article, cit.

entered into the temples (the *Pravati temple* of Poona in 1929 and *Kalaram temple* of Nasik in 1930). Although, it is not clear that whether the temple entry *Satyagrahas* at Poona and Nasik was non-violent or not, but the result of this movement formed an atmosphere of bitterness and distrust. They did not get any support from Gandhi and even from the Congress. That is why; Ambedkar and his followers became distrustful and critical towards Congress and Gandhi. At the time of the second session of Round Table Conference, Gandhi first came to know that Ambedkar was an Untouchable. We could see that in this Conference Gandhi and Ambedkar clashed about the matter of special electorate for the *Depressed Classes*. At that time, Gandhi and his followers attempt Ambedkar to highlights the temple entry question. But Ambedkar and his followers remained indifference on temple entry question. In a meeting of the *Depressed Classes* which was held on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1932 at Worli, Bombay, Ambedkar gave a relentless speech about this matter. Ambedkar said: “The object of the temple entry movement is good. But you should care more for your material good than for spiritual food. You did not get food to eat, clothes to wear, opportunities of educating your children and medical help for want of money. You should therefore be watchful of the political gains and you must develop your strength and struggle for gaining material advancement in life.”<sup>29</sup> After that Ambedkar told Gandhi on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1932 that: “I must honestly say that I have no interest in the temples being thrown open, common dinners and the like, because we suffer thereby. My people have to put up with beatings and bitterness increases.”<sup>30</sup>

Although Gandhi criticized Ambedkar’s move for conversion, but at the same time he showed an empathetic attitude towards the former’s point of view. Gandhi warned the Caste *Hindus* against the injustice of treating a highly educated and cultured man like Ambedkar, as

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<sup>29</sup> Keer. D, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, PP-217-218.

<sup>30</sup> CWMG, Vol.51, P-462.

an Untouchable. Gandhi said: “He is pronounced as belonging to the *Depressed Classes* and as being untouchable. Intellectually he is superior to thousand of intelligent and educated caste *Hindus*. His personal cleanliness is as high as that of any of us. Today he is an eminent lecturer in law. Tomorrow you may find him a judge of *High Court*. In other words, there is no position in the government of this country to which he may not aspire or rise, and to which an orthodox *Brahmin* can raise. But that orthodox *Brahmins* will be defiled by the touch of Dr. Ambedkar and that because of his unpardonable sin that he was born a *Mahar* (Untouchable).”<sup>31</sup> Gandhi advised to Ambedkar for judge *Hinduism* not by its “Worst Specimens” but by the best it might have produced. In this respect, he asked “can a religion that was professed by Chaitanya, Jnanadeva, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, Ramkrishna Paramahamsa, Raja Rammohan Roy, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda and a host of others who might be easily mentioned be so utterly devoid of merit as it made out in Dr. Ambedkar’s address?”<sup>32</sup>In this regard, Ambedkar asked Mahatma Gandhi that, why the worst number so many and the best so few? He also attacked the *Varna Vyavasatha* in which Mahatma firmly believed. According to him: “... the reorganization of *Hindu* Society on the basis of *Chaturvarna* is harmful because of the effect on the *Varna Vyavastha* is to degrade the messes by denying them opportunity to acquire knowledge and to emasculate them by denying them the right to be armed ... The *Hindu* society must recognize the principles of the Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; in order to achieve this object the sense of religious sanctity behind Caste and *Varna* must be destroyed. The sanctity of the Caste and *Varna* can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the *Shastras*.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Harijan, 20<sup>th</sup> June . 1936.

<sup>32</sup> Harijan, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1936.

<sup>33</sup> Ambedkar. B.R, *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi*, Jullundur, 1975, P-117.

Ambedkar contended that caste was a nation and it was a state of mind. The destruction of the caste therefore means a national change and a mental revolution. The real remedy must start on with the destruction of popular belief in the *Shastras*. People must be won over to an egalitarian outlook. Gandhi doubts on Ambedkar's statement of untouchability would not go without destruction of *Varnavyavastha*. Personally, he would restrict himself to the fight against untouchability. It was highly that at the end of it they should find that there was nothing to fight against *Varnashram*. If *Varnashram* even looked as an ugly thing, then the whole of *Hindu* society would fight against it. Humanity and an open mind were the lovable qualities of Gandhi. That is why he closed his reply to Ambedkar with these words: "At the end of the chapter, I hope that we shall all find ourselves in the same camp."<sup>34</sup>

Gandhi and Ambedkar differed on bearing of caste system and *Varnashram* on untouchability. For abolishing untouchability, Gandhi did not feel it is necessary to attack caste system. He did not think that it necessary to introduce inter-caste marriage and dinners for abolishing untouchability from *Hindu* society. That is why he wrote: "these two measures are not at all related to untouchability. No one is an untouchable in my eyes. But for that reason, is there any justice in suggesting that I should either sit down for a meal with one whom I do not regards as untouchable or marry my son or daughter to such a one? Both these things are a matter of personal preference and individual right. But it is not a matter of right to regard any man as untouchable because of his birth. That is a gross injustice and heinous sin."<sup>35</sup> But on the other hand, Ambedkar opined that untouchability was an integral part of the *Hindu* caste system. So, without abolishing caste system, it is impossible to annihilate untouchability. Ambedkar said: "The out caste is a bye-product of the caste system. There will be out caste as long as there are castes. Nothing can liberate the outcaste except the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 259-61.

<sup>35</sup> CWMG. Vol.55. P-2.

destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help to save *Hindus* and ensure their continued existence in the coming struggle except the purging of the *Hindu* faith of this odious and vicious dogma.”<sup>36</sup> Ambedkar again argued that the only effective method for abolishing caste system was inter-caste marriage. In this regard he said: “Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, become paramount the separatist feeling – the feeling of being aliens – created by caste will not vanish.”<sup>37</sup> That is why; Ambedkar raised his banner of revolt against caste system, *Varnashram* of *Hindu* religion for abolishing untouchability.

On the other hand, Gandhi was a firm believer of *Hindu Dharma* and *Varnashram*, but he rejected caste system. In this regard Gandhi said: “Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. *Varna* and *Ashram* are institutions which have nothing to do with caste. The law of *Varna* teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The calling of a *Brahmin* – spiritual teacher – and a scavenger are equal and their due performance carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to their livelihood and no more.”<sup>38</sup> Gandhi sought to integrate the untouchables into the traditional *Hindu* society. Because he realized that *Varnashrama* did not produce untouchability, but untouchability was the miss-interpretation of Caste system. Gandhi

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<sup>36</sup> *CWMMG*, Vol. 53, pp.259-60; the first issue of the *Harijan* weekly was published on 11 February 1933.

<sup>37</sup> Ambedkar. B.R. *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi*, Jullundur, 1975, P-83.

<sup>38</sup> *Harijan*, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1936.

expressed his views about the caste system: “*Varnashrama* is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature and *Hinduism* has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his *Varna* by choice. Not to abide by one’s *Varna* is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable caste is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four divisions are all-sufficing....The four divisions defines a man’s calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties. They confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of *Hinduism* to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower. All are born to serve God’s creation, a *Brahman* with his knowledge, a *Kshatriya* with his power of protection, a *Vaishya* with his commercial ability, and *Shudra* with bodily labour. This, however, does not mean that a *Brahman*, for instance, is absolved from bodily labour or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth marks a *Brahman* predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart learning to others. There is nothing again, to prevent the *Shudra* from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only he will best serve with his body and need not envy others their special qualities for service.”<sup>39</sup>

But Ambedkar wanted to integrate the untouchables into Indian society in modern ways. He strictly criticizes of Gandhi’s hatred for modern industries and his *trusteeship* theory. According to Ambedkar, Gandhi’s socio-economic theory has not suitable for modern democratic system. He argued that, Gandhi held that modern industrialization had led to the concentration of wealth in the hands of few, for which he was critical of machinery and industrialization.

The actual reason for Gandhi’s initial hesitation to attack caste and Ambedkar’s attack on caste, *Varna* and *Hinduism* can be understood in terms of their background and the role in

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<sup>39</sup> S. Radhakrishnan(ED); *Mahatma Gandhi, Essays and Reflections on his life and work*, Jaico Publishing House, New Delhi, 1956, P-423.

public life. Being a caste *Hindu* and as a national leader, Gandhi took the role of a reconciler. It was rather unnatural for him to alienate certain sections of the society by launching an attack on caste. On the other hand, being an untouchable and having suffered on that account, being highly qualified and sophisticated and working for the *Depressed Classes* uplift with undeviating purposefulness, Ambedkar could work in a more compartmentalized fashion. This is the cause for virtuous anger on conservative *Hindus*. But Gandhi was hopeful of removing untouchability which he considered an outgrowth without pulling down the whole system. But he wanted to fight *Varnashram* and reject the authority of *Shastras* for the sake of removing an inhuman practice like untouchability.

Ambedkar had declared war on the evil of untouchability from his childhood. It was the exigencies of this war which forced Gandhi to expand the front of his battle against the frightened structure of *Hindu* Society. The ceaseless struggle against untouchability drove him to oppose all attempts to detach the *depressed classes* from the *Hindu* fold. He staked his life to fight for separate electorates of the untouchables. He negotiated a generous settlement with the *Scheduled Castes* on the question of representation. It was again put the logic of his determination to root out untouchability which he sincerely and ardently subscribed from the very beginning. That drove him to attack the other citadels of *Hindu* exclusiveness and taboos about marriages and eating without giving up either his vegetarianism or his sound tenets about personal cleanliness or hygiene etc.

Thus, Gandhi came to wrestle with the inherent contradiction in his passion. He had to abandon his belief that *Hindus* should only apply their ancestral occupation or marry within caste. When he finally discarded *Varnashram*, which is based on birth, he was not surprisingly begun to approve inter-caste, *Savarna-Harijan* marriages as well as inter-communal marriages. His own son married a *Brahmin* lady and Gandhi gave his blessing to the union. It is true that before his death Gandhi had come to the same position as Ambedkar

had taken at the beginning of this great debate. Gandhi discarded his old views of the *Varna* system. Ambedkar also modified his stand on the issue of the *Scheduled Tribes*. Although, the congress had effective control over the *Constituent Assembly*, but it did not place its party interest above the nation's interest. It inducted into the *Constituent Assembly* by eminent non-Congress men. Ambedkar himself was brought into it by Sardar Patel. The essential role of the Congress in Constitution-making was stressed by Ambedkar himself. Ambedkar confessed that his election as chairman of the *Drafting Committee* pleasantly surprised him. He pointed out that it was the disciplined functioning of the Congress which made the smooth passage of the Draft Constitution possible.

Gandhi and Ambedkar are the most important persons for the contribution of the social advancement for the *harijans*. But their social identity was different. Gandhi came from a caste of *Vaishya*, whereas Ambedkar was born into an Untouchable caste. Gandhi approached the problem of untouchability from the standpoint of an upper caste *Hindu*. He wanted to decompose out untouchability from the fabric of society. On the other hand, Ambedkar struggle against the exploitation which the untouchables had suffered by the upper caste *Hindus* across the centuries. As a believer of *Hindu dharma*, Gandhi felt that it is important to reform the *Hinduism* of the outgrowth of Untouchability. On the contrary, Ambedkar was convinced that the problem of untouchability was a part of *Hinduism* and it was enshrined in its sacred scriptures. It is not easy to remove this unhealthy practice from the *Hindu* society. It is clear from it that the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar are not merely personal approaches, but it's continue to be debated within Indian Society even today. On the basis of this discussion, we shall make a brief examination of the backgrounds and values which influenced and motivates their styles of leadership in their respective struggles against untouchability.

Regarding the concept of untouchability, there was a vital point of difference and disagreement between Gandhi and Ambedkar. On the subject of reform Gandhi also differed from and disagreed with Ambedkar. Gandhi believed that reform must be propelled from the hearts of *Hindus*. That is why; they could be substantial and effective. Thus, Gandhi's method of removing the ill and prompting the *Hindus* was to think and repent for the overall suppression. They committed upon their brothers. When some *Hindus* suffered for the sake of the untouchability, at this time this change of heart could be possible. Then other *Hindus* would see this suffering and naturally follow their example. But Ambedkar felt the urgent need of arousing the conscience. He also felt the hearts of the *Hindus* for which purpose various *satyagrahas* had formed a very important plank. After the Poona Pact of 1932, a change came about in this policy. Gandhiji himself gave to more definite and clear-cut objectives, i.e., asking for safeguards, reservations and special legislation. Later on Ambedkar offered his well-planned scheme of *socio-politico-economic* reforms relating to the problems of untouchability. This reformatory idea was a logical development of his analysis of the problem.

Ambedkar was a practical politician who had come to the conclusion that the higher caste *Hindus*, especially *Brahmins* had nothing to gain but much to lose by the reforms of caste and untouchability. His remedies would elicit little and not co-operated with them. He could not get them any implement, because he himself was an untouchable and according to *Hindu* conduct he could not overstep the social barriers. His pleadings went unheeded to them. In these circumstances what could be done? After the careful consideration, he found another way to move towards the goal.

Ambedkar was clearly understood that this idea is not always fully realizable, because one had to make concessions due to a variety of indispensable considerations. But his approach about this era was more practical. He stated that the surest way of the depressed class has

elevation lay in higher education, higher employment and better ways of earning and living. In this way, one day they would get their elevation and they got well placed in the scheme of social life. Similarly, they would become respectable and they become respectable. One day we could perceive the religious outlook of the orthodox was sure to undergo change. If this did not happen, then it could do no injury to their material interests.

It is well known to all of us that, the main aim and mission of Ambedkar's life were to try to lead the depressed classes towards a higher social, political and economic status and to free them from the stigma of untouchability. The aim of Ambedkar's life was to secure complete equality for the depressed classes and bring them equal status with other *Hindus*. Under this circumstance he selected for himself the field relating to social reform-abolition of caste and untouchability. That is why; he would have to plan an all-round attack on the system of caste and untouchability, which was extremely difficult. To promote of this direction firstly he explains in a convincing manner - the defects, shortcomings and evil impact of the caste system and how these hindered the removal of untouchability. For this purpose he wrote a number of books. But according to me, the greatest contribution of Ambedkar lies as a leader of the *depressed classes*. He was able to awaken them from their lowly existence and the life of degradation and ignominy which they were leading from thousand years. He made them conscious of their weaknesses and told them how these rendered them powerless.

On the basis of the above discussion we can say that, Ambedkar's life was a noble dedication to the cause of social reform in India. He was the builder of modern India, who fought relentlessly to establish a society based on the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. He endeavored to eradicate sorrow from their life through a reconstruction of the social and economic order. He was very much well known about the economic property which could be available to every human being and tried to realizing them from a life of degradation and misery. He had aroused and awakened the depressed classes against social

injustice and instilled in them the spirit of self-reform, self-emancipation, self-reliance, self-respect and self-confidence etc. He tried to free their minds from the inferiority complex. According to him, these people had because of their belief belonged to the lowest strata of the *Hindu* society. This was inculcated in their mind by custom and usage, which has sanctioned by religion. That is why, he strongly protested against the social, political and economic segregation, which has practiced by the high caste *Hindu* society.

Now the question is: why Gandhi and Ambedkar have always conflicted with each other rather than dialogues? So it is important to understand how this happened. Though Gandhi has been regarded as the great national leader who always ready to compromise with the British in putting the 'social movement', but the reality is not so simple. Basically, Ambedkar's nationalism was expressed at many points. Gandhi himself made it clear that his first concern about this issue was not so much independents. Actually their family background made the different views regarding the social issue. Ambedkar, being an untouchable, runs his social movement for the development of *Dalit* rural and urban peoples. On the other hand, Gandhi, as a *Hindu* upper caste, access to all the wealth and resources for the upper castes. That is why Gandhi's 'social base' did not see the same as he did. There are many standard works set up by Gandhi regarding the issue of untouchability and caste. Although there are so many questions arises regarding 'moral' and 'political', but Gandhi has taken a passion, in fact, played a central role in building the conflictless Society.

There also we noticed the conflicts between Gandhi and Ambedkar about the meaning of Indian independence. But they were similar in placing the nature of that independence ahead of mere freedom from British control. In fact, Ambedkar seems to have a soft spot for Gandhi, perhaps taking him as a new phenomenon different from the *Brahminic* elitist leaders. Gandhi's photo had adorned the *pandal* for the *Mahad Satyagraha*: even the demands of the untouchables were put in terms of 'their rights as *Hindus*'.

Generally, Ambedkar has challenged *Hinduism*. He has become disgusted with the *Savarna Hindus* for the treatment that he and his people have received at their hands. He proposes to leave not only them but the very religion that is his and their common heritage. Many of the texts that Ambedkar quotes that the *Smriti* cannot be accepted as authentic. The law of *Varna* teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. The profound mistake that Ambedkar has made in his address is picking out the text of doubtful authenticity. Religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced.

On the other hand, Gandhi has completely disagreed from the views of Ambedkar on the subject of Caste. In this issue he took the role of opponent to Ambedkar. But Ambedkar said that he had never hankered for the publicity. Ambedkar in his speech said that caste has ruined the *Hindus*. *Varnavyavastha* is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose. *Varnavyavastha* will degrade the masses and denies the opportunity to acquire knowledge. *Hindu* society must recognize the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. *Varna* can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the *Shastras*. Mahatma said that the text cited by Ambedkar is not authentic. Ambedkar points out that the masses are too illiterate to know the contents of the *Shastras*. None of the Saints ever attacked the caste system, but they were believer of the caste system. The teaching of the Saints might break a caste; they did not give the masses which taught not to break. Again Ambedkar questions that - why the worst are so many in numbers and the best are few? The religious ideas are completely a wrong ideal. Actually the *Hindus* who always try to realize a high social ideal in their life; it will make India a happy place to live in. So, the society which is based on *Varna* or Caste is a society which is based on a wrong relationship. In this regard, Ambedkar questions why Gandhi did not practice what he preaches. It is well known to all of us that by birth Gandhi were a *Bania*. Before he became a Mahatma, he chooses his career as a lawyer. In leaving

law he became half saints and half politician. That is why; Ambedkar says that Gandhi is clinging to a false view of the social life. Gandhi agreed that the caste system was better than class system. Because according to him, caste was the best possible adjustment of social stability. Ambedkar again questions why does Gandhi cling to the theory of everyone following his or her ancestral calling? The essence of the Gandhi's conception of *Varna* is the pursuit of ancestral calling irrespective of natural aptitude. So, the difference between caste and *Varna* as understood by Gandhi is not clear. According to Ambedkar, for this confusion Gandhi has deceiving himself to the people.

Ambedkar has disgusted for the wrong ideals and wrong social life of *Hindus* and *Hinduism*. According to him, the *Hindu* leaders are quite unfit for the task of moral, intellectual regeneration. For their beliefs, *Hindu* leaders have become filled with an illicit passion when one proposes to deprive them of their companionship. Ambedkar argued that, even Mahatma is not an exception. That is why; Ambedkar specially criticized the *Hindu* caste system and its authority. Although he argued that inter caste dining and inter caste marriage is not sufficient to annihilate the caste system, but the real method of breaking of the caste system has to be explored. He thinks that religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced.

Whatever may be the real break came in the period 1930-32 between Gandhi and Ambedkar with the events of the *Round Table Conference* and the Puna Pact. It is not only the issue of Gandhi's rationalism versus Ambedkar's separatism. But it was rather that of *Dalit* autonomy within a broader national community. Generally Ambedkar had gone to the first *Round Table Conference* as a representative of the untouchables. Here he was almost alone among organized *Dalit* opinion, not only asking for separate electorates, but in saying it would be satisfied with reserved seats if there were adult suffrage.

In this conference he gave a powerful expression of support for independence and arguing that untouchables needed '*swaraj*'. Because only with it could they have a chance of sharing in political power – the requirement for their liberation. Ambedkar put his voice for separate electorates for untouchables along with *Muslims* and other minorities. But Gandhi opposed this demand and gave his emotional speech at the second *Round Table Conference*. Gandhi did not oppose separate electorates for *Muslims*, but he opposed about the demand of separate electorate for the untouchable. As a 'national' leader and a *Hindu*, he argued that the untouchables should be treated as part of *Hinduism*. Even for the sake of winning the freedom of India he would not seal the vital interest of the Untouchables. But he claims himself in his own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. He said, 'it would create a division in *Hinduism* which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever'<sup>40</sup>.

We could see the subsequent *Communal Award* and in time of *Poona Pact* Ambedkar did not change his heart. That is why; he spoke of the events with great bitterness that "to my mind there is no doubt that this Gandhi age is the dark age of India. It is an age in which people instead of looking for their ideals in the future are returning to antiquity"<sup>41</sup>. That is why; Ambedkar was ready to return to Indian tradition, specifically *Buddhism*. According to him, Gandhi's village-centered ideal was identified with upper caste dominance and with a denial of autonomy. This was confirmed when Gandhi set up the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. Ambedkar argued that the aim should not simply be uplift of untouchables, but their main aim should abolition of caste. On the other hand, Gandhi refused the issue of purifying *Hinduism* and of upper caste. *Hindus* were 'making expiation' for their sins of untouchability. Practically the result was to have a nation-wide body of high-caste social reformers, wandering through

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<sup>40</sup> Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, vol. II, Bombay, d.d. P.662-3

<sup>41</sup> *ibid Freedom versus Freedom*, , vol. I, P. 350-2

untouchable quarters cleaning up children and propagandizing against drunkenness, deriving a certain amount of self-respect. But in the process binding the low caste to a national movement dominated by what Ambedkar saw as the '*bourgeois-Brahman*' elite. Ambedkar's insistence on *Dalits* and low caste holding power to create their own liberation was certainly correct as against Gandhi's paternalism.

This paternalism was also to flaw Gandhi's most telling critical trust regarding the path of development itself. *Hind Swaraj* was originally written in Gujarati in 1909. It was a powerfully argued indictment of industrial civilization, denouncing parliament, factory exploitation, the practice of modern medicine and law and even modern transportation. Gandhi later comes down a good deal from its most extreme direction. But it continued to indicate what he considered an ideal direction, a village-centered, handicraft-oriented production system, with fulfillment of basic but minimal needs. The questioning of modern industrial development in *Hind Swaraj* has come to seem more and more relevant as the ecological and human destructiveness of contemporary capitalism grows and the 'statistic' alternative is discredited. Gandhi also succeeded in giving a mood of action that was an alternate to both 'Moderate' petitioning and 'Extremist' terrorism that was militant, morally-based and capable of rousing the masses.

On such issues Gandhi seems to have more to offer than Ambedkar. Ambedkar was a socialist but Gandhi was not. Through the 1930s it was with *Marxism* and the left that he seemed to be more interested to interact than the Gandhians. But the left was accenting heavy industry-based centralized development uncritically. The left also assumed that villages would mainly be a source of surplus, not the heart of society with any dynamism of their own. Ambedkar fitted into this rather easily; village to him were only 'cesspools' from which *Dalits* must escape. He assumed, private property was the source of exploitation (he took this as the heart of Marxism, still valid) and thus could be ended by 'state socialism' –

nationalization, the collectivization of land. This did not deal with hierarchical control of the administrative bodies, and exploitation by the elites (mainly *Brahmins*) who were at their top. As against this, Gandhi's comment that: "God forbid that India should take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world like locusts look remarkably prescient."<sup>42</sup> But surely part of the reason for Ambedkar's industrialist system was that the Gandhian alternative – the only viable model appearing at the time- seemed elitist and caste-biased. It was not simply a matter of a village orientation but of *Ram Rajya* with an uncritical acceptance of elite *trusteeship* of an opposition of industrial devastation tied to a religion belief in the limitation of needs. He makes this clear:

"We not that the mind is a restless bird: the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our emotion the more unbridled they become.... Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times, and our indigenous education remains the same. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hand and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them, and those poor men would be robbed by rich men.

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<sup>42</sup> Cited by Ramchandra Guha, *Chipko: A Grassroots Perspective on the Environmental Debate*, P.18.

They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule”.<sup>43</sup>

The self-sufficient village was linked to the paternalistic rule of kings in a society regulated by intellectuals (*Brahmins*). Not surprisingly, Ambedkar rejected it. It is however too bad that there was no real debate, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, on the nature of technology and industrialization in national development.

With all their differences, Ambedkar and Gandhi stood on the same side on some issues, most crucially on that of non-violence. Part of the difficulty in dealing with this is the discussion has been almost ritualized in India - Partly perhaps as a reaction to Gandhism. *Marxists*, at any rate, frequently seem impelled to eulogize violence as their differentiating feature. Particularly when, as with the *Naxalites* were the effort is to break out of the reformism of the established parties and parliamentary framework. ‘Violence’ is identified with being ‘revolutionary’; and even *Marxist* academics have a strong tendency to argue that ‘violence’ exerted in social agitation is a sign that more revolutionary. Lower- class interests are being expressed, while opting for *Satyagraha* or other non-violent mass methods is a characteristic of movements based on property – holding interests. Nor does it explain why Ambedkar opted for non-violence, unless his taken as simply a petty- bourgeois mass-leader. The difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar is that Gandhi claimed that non-violence was for him a ‘principle’ and not just a ‘policy’ (while for the Congress, he felt, it could only be adopted as a ‘policy’). For Ambedkar, it was primarily a policy. Yet Ambedkar also quite seriously dealt with the issue of means and ends. It was for him, is an important differentiating features between *Buddhism* and *Marxism*. If Ambedkar appears more rational to us today, it is not because of the effort to give a moral basis to politics (much of Gandhi is

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<sup>43</sup> *Hind Swaraj*, P.232-3

very compelling in this respect) but because the *advaita* base of Gandhi's religion-non-violence out of a desire to limit action upon the material world. The rejection of needs linked with rejection of technology and sexuality-is not one which we would choose. There are problematic dilemmas of these aspects of Gandhian non-violence, including the agonizing over the mercy killing of a sick calf at his *ashram* and his apparently unquestioned belief- a stark warning to feminists that their appreciation of Gandhi should be limited- that a girl would be better off being killed if one could not prevent her being raped. With this entire problem, the contributions of a non-violent policy of mass struggle remain, particularly in an age when the forces of military technology are providing to be more rampantly destructive and brutalizing than ever.

On the basis of the above discussion, we can say that the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi towards eradicating untouchability can never be over-emphasized. While others only preached the Mahatma practiced what he preached. Firmly believing in the equality of all human beings, he hardly found any justification in only a particular class of people doing the dirty work of scavenging and toilet cleaning. He not only condemned this practice, but also showed the way to others by actually doing this dirty work himself, at the *Calcutta Congress* Session in 1901. He writes in his autobiography, "My Experiment with Truth", as follows:

"There was no limit to insanitation. Pools of water were everywhere. There were only a few latrines, and the recollection of their stink still oppresses me. I pointed it out to the volunteers. They said point-blank; that is not our work, it is the scavengers work. I asked for a broom. The man stared at me in wonder. I procured one and cleaned the latrine. But that was for me. The rush was so great, and the latrines were so few, that they needed frequent cleaning; but that was more than I could do. So I had to content myself with simply

ministering to myself. And the others did not seem to mind the stench and the dirt.”<sup>44</sup> He continues to write: “But that was not all. Some of the delegates did not scruple to use the verandahs outside their rooms for calls of nature at night. In the morning I pointed out the spots to the volunteers. No one was ready to undertake the cleaning, and I found no one to share the honour with me of doing it.”<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, Ambedkar’s contribution towards the eradication of untouchability was certainly extraordinary. His writings, his speeches and his activities throughout his life, rather his entire life itself is a story of his untiring efforts for the eradication of untouchability. Despite a great challenge, he succeeded in his aim though partially. Untouchability was legally banned by the constitution of free India. It was a great victory for Dr. Ambedkar, at least *de jure*, if not *de facto*. The day, however, is not far when his dream is fully realized and *de facto* eradication of the centuries old evil practice is also achieved if and only if the politicians are stop using this social ill for their own upliftment.

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<sup>44</sup> M.K. Gandhi; *An Autobiography*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, Reprint1959, P-163.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*,P-163.