

# All Are Equal in the Eyes of God

Selections from Mahatma Gandhi's Writings

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## FOREWORD

I feel honoured by being asked to write a foreword to this book.

It is a good idea to bring out a selection from Mahatma Gandhi's writings against untouchability under the title "All are Equal in the Eyes of God". I would suggest that this is translated into all Indian languages and widely published.

Untouchability is forbidden by Article 17 of our Constitution; and long before India became independent, social reformers and political thinkers preached that this stigma on the Hindu society must be removed at the earliest. It is a matter of regret, however, that 16 years after independence, although untouchability is now an offence under the law and has lost its edge, it is still widely practised in the rural areas. Gandhiji in his characteristic way practised what he preached and his words should be a powerful instrument for governmental as well as non-official agencies in the campaign for eradication of this evil.

New Delhi

January 25, 1964

G.L. NANDA

## UNTOUCHABILITY AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition, I, therefore, pray that if I should be born again I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra, but as an Atishudra.

*Young India, May 4, 1921*

### **No Sanction for Untouchability**

Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability. It has degraded us, made us pariahs. Even the Mussalmans have caught the sinful contagion from us.

*Young India, April 24, 1921*

I assure you that in Hinduism there is no sanction for treating a single human being as untouchable. In the estimation of a Brahmin, knowing and living his religion, a Shudra is as good as himself. The *Bhagavad-Gita* has nowhere taught that a Chandala is in any way inferior to a Brahmin. A Brahmin ceases to be a Brahmin immediately he becomes insolent and considers himself a superior being. India owes a deep debt to the Brahmins who voluntarily sacrificed themselves for the betterment of all. It was Brahmins who have called God Servant of Servants, the Purifier of the Fallen. It was Brahmins who taught that the prostitute and the Chandala could attain *moskha* if she or he only purified her or his heart.

But unfortunately for the human race the Brahmin shares with mankind the frailties of all. In common with others he has neglected his duty of giving knowledge to mankind, of guiding them in the right and truest path. We glibly charge Englishmen with insolence and haughtiness. Let us, before we cast the stone at them, free ourselves from liability to reproach. Let us put our own house in order.

*Young India, May 11, 1921*

It is therefore, our duty to see that the 'untouchables' do not feel that they are despised or looked down upon. Let them not be offered leavings from our plates for their subsistence. How can I accord differential treatment to any person, be he a Brahmin or Bhangi, who worships the same God and keeps his body and soul pure and clean? I for one would regard myself as having sinned if I gave to Bhangi unclean food from the leavings from the kitchen or failed to render him personal assistance when he was in need.

Let me make my position absolutely clear. While I do hold that the institution of untouchability as it stands today has no sanction in Hinduism, Hinduism does recognize 'untouchability' in a limited sense and under certain circumstances. For instance, every time that my mother handled unclean things she became untouchable for the time being and had to cleanse herself by bathing. As a Vaishnava I refuse to believe that anyone can be regarded as untouchable by reason of his or her birth, and such untouchability as is recognized by religion is by its nature transitory-easily removable and referable to

the deed, not the doer. Not only that. Just as we revere our mother for the sanitary service that she renders us when we are infants, and the greater her service the greater is our reverence for her, similarly, the Bhangis are entitled to our highest reverence for the sanitary service they perform for society.

*Young India, January 22, 1925*

### **The Shastras and Untouchability**

A very thoughtful Mussalman once told me that so long as there was untouchability in Hinduism it was difficult for Mussalmans to entertain any regard for that faith or its followers. I have repeated times without number that an 'untouchable' community is unknown to the Shastras. The weaver and the scavenger are not classed as untouchables by the Shastras. I am both. My mother was certainly a scavenger inasmuch as she cleaned me when I was a child. But she did not on that account become an untouchable. Why then should a Bhangi, who renders similar necessary service, be regarded as untouchable? Even if the whole world of *shastris* were to be against me I would proclaim from the house-tops that they are wrong in considering untouchability to be part of the Hindu religion.

*Young India, February 26, 1925*

I cannot myself subscribe to the prohibition against Shudras learning the Vedas. Indeed, in my opinion, at the present moment, we are all predominantly Shudras so long as we are serfs.

*Young India, August 27, 1925*

The claim advanced on behalf of the Brahmins as to vegetarianism is not wholly true. It is true only regarding the Brahmins of the South. But elsewhere they freely eat fish, and in Bengal, Kashmir, etc., even meat. Moreover in the South all meat-eaters and fish-eaters are not unapproachables. And even an 'unapproachable' who is severely pure is an outcaste because he is born in a family lawfully regarded as 'untouchable' or 'unapproachable'. Do not Brahmins brush shoulders with meat-eating non-Brahmins if they happen to be persons in authority? Do they not pay respect to the meat-eating Hindu royalty?

*Young India, January 21, 1926*

### **When He Became an Outcaste**

Time hung heavily on my hands in Bombay. I dreamt continually of going to England.

Meanwhile my caste-people were agitated over my going abroad. No Modh Bania had been to England up to now, and if I dared to do so, I ought to be brought to book! A general meeting of the caste was called and I was summoned to appear before it. I went. How I suddenly managed to muster up courage I do not know. Nothing daunted, and without the slightest hesitation, I came before the meeting. The Seth-the headman of the community-who was distantly related to me, and who had been on very good terms with my father, thus accosted me:

"In my opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids voyages abroad. We have also heard that it is not possible to live there without compromising religion. One is obliged to eat and drink with Europeans!

To which I replied: "I do not think it is at all against our religion to go to England. I intend going there for further studies. And I have already solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from the three things you fear most. I am sure the vow will keep me safe."

"But we tell you," rejoined the Seth, "that it is not possible to keep our religion there. You know my relations with your father and you ought to listen to my advice."

"I know the relations," said I. "And you are as an elder to me. But I am helpless in this matter. I cannot alter my resolve to go to England. My father's friend and adviser, who is a learned Brahmin, sees no objection to my going to England, and my mother and brothers have also given me their permission."

"But will you disregard the orders of the caste?"

"I am really helpless. I think the caste should not interfere in the matter."

This incensed the Seth. He swore at me. I sat unmoved. So the Seth pronounced his order: "This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him to go to see him off at the dock, shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee four annas."

The order had no effect on me, and I took my leave of the Seth.

*Young India, February 25, 1926*

### **Who is Untouchable?**

Untouchability is a snake with a thousand mouths through each of which it shows its poisonous fangs. It defies definition. It needs no sanction from Manu or the other ancient law-givers. It has its own local *Smriti*. Thus in Almora a whole class of people, whose occupation is, even according to the Sanatana Dharma so-called, innocents, are untouchables. They are all cultivators owning their own holdings. They are called *Shilpi*, i.e. farmers. Another similar class of people called Boras, suffer in the same manner although they do not even eat carrion or take liquor and observe all the rules of sanitation as well as any. Tradition has condemned them as untouchables. Hinduism that refuses to think, accepts the tradition unquestioningly and exposes itself to merited ridicule and worse. Reformers are trying to cope with the evil. I feel, however, that much more drastic methods are needed than are employed to rid Hinduism of the blot. We are needlessly afraid to wound the susceptibilities of orthodoxy. We have to shed the fear, if we expect to end the evil in our own generation. This untouchability naturally recoils on the heads of those who are responsible for it. In Almora the *choka*- untouchability at the time of dining-has worked its insidious way even among castes and sub-castes till at last every man makes himself an untouchable. This *choka* exercises its evil sway even in national institutions like Prem Vidyalaya. I was considerably relieved when, upon enquiry, I found that none of the trustees believed in the *choka*, and that they were tolerating it so as not to scare the parents of the boys attending the institution.

*Young India, July 11, 1929*

I take pride in calling myself a Hindu, because I find the term broad enough not merely to tolerate but to assimilate the teachings of prophets from all the four corners of the earth. I find no warrant for untouchability in this Book of Life. On the contrary it compels me, by an appeal to my reason and a more penetrating appeal to my heart, in language that has a magnetic touch about it, to believe that

all life is one and that it is through God and must return to Him. According to Sanatana Dharma taught by that venerable Mother, life does not consist in outward rites and ceremonial, but it consists in the uttermost inward purification and merging oneself, body, soul and mind, in the divine essence.

*My Soul's Agony, November 4, 1932*

The difference, therefore, between the caste system and untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind. An 'untouchable' is outside the pale of respectable society. He is hardly treated as a human being. He is an outcaste hurled into an abyss by his fellow-beings occupying the same platform. The difference, therefore, is somewhat analogous to the difference between heaven and hell.

There is one thing more to be remembered about the caste system. For me, it is not the same as Varnashrama. Whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need, Varnashrama is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not so the caste system. While there are innumerable castes (some dying out and new ones coming into being), the Varnas are, and have always been, four. I am a firm believer in Varnashrama. I have not hesitated before now to consider it as a gift of Hinduism to mankind. Acceptance of that Dharma is, so far as I have been able to see, a condition of spiritual growth. The four divisions are not a vertical section, but a horizontal plane on which all stand on a footing of equality, doing the services respectively assigned to them. In the Book of God, the same numbers of marks are assigned to the Brahmin that has done his task well as to the Bhangi who has done likewise.

*Harijan, February 11, 1933*

The touch-me-not<sup>1</sup>-ism that disfigures the present day Hinduism is a morbid growth. It only betrays a woodenness of mind, a blind self-conceit. It is abhorrent alike to the spirit of religion and morality.

*Harijan, April 20, 1934*

The verses in the *Smritis* about Shudras deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity.

*Harijan, September 28, 1934*

### **Scavenging as a Fine Art**

Scavenging is a fine art. Not only must the cleaning be perfect, but the manner of doing it and the instruments used must be clean and not revolting to one's sanitary sense. You have only to see the privy I use. It is spotlessly clean without a trace of smell. That is so because I clean it myself. The municipal Bhangi pours out the contents of the night-soil waggons over a cliff converting a beauty spot into a plague spot. If you become your own Bhangis, not only will you insure perfect sanitation for yourself, but you will make your surroundings clean and relieve the Bhangis of the weight of oppression which today crushes them. Do not imagine that thereby you would deprive them of their living. Today we have reduced them to the level of the beast. They earn a few coppers but only at the expense of their human dignity. The same Bhangi serves in the municipality as well as in your bungalow, with the result that he can do justice to neither. Look at him as "he eats his food, cowering under the shadow of the latrine wall, surrounded by filth. It is enough to break one's heart. It should not be difficult for you to find a more decent avocation for him to follow.

*Harijan, August 11, 1946*

Untouchability is not only a part and parcel of Hinduism, but also a plague, which it is the bounden duty of even Hindu to combat. It has received religious sanction in India, and reduced lakhs and crores of human beings to a state bordering on slavery.

*From Yeravda Mandir, p. 32*

There is an ineffaceable blot that Hinduism today carries with it. I have declined to believe that it has been handed down to us from immemorial times. I think that this miserable, wretched, enslaving spirit of 'untouchableness' must have come to us when we were at our lowest ebb. This evil has stuck to us and still remains with us. It is, to my mind, a curse that has come to us, and as long as that curse remains with us so long, I think, we are bound to consider that every affliction in this sacred land is a proper punishment for the indelible crime that we are committing.

Untouchability as it is practised in Hinduism today is, in my opinion, a sin against God and man and is, therefore, like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. In my opinion, it has no sanction whatsoever in the Hindu Shastras taken as a whole. 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; but untouchability as we are observing today in India is a hideous thing and wears various forms in various provinces, even in districts. It has degraded both the untouchables and the touchables. It has stunted the growth of nearly 40 million human beings. They are denied even the ordinary amenities of life. The sooner, therefore, it is ended the better for Hinduism, the better for India, and perhaps better for mankind in general.

Swaraj is a meaningless term if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture. We are seeking the aid of God in this great purifying movement, but we deny to the most deserving among His creatures the rights of humanity. Inhuman ourselves, we may not plead before the Throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others.

That untouchability is an old institution, nobody has ever denied. But if it is an evil, it cannot be defended on the ground of its antiquity. If the untouchables are the outcastes of the Aryan society, so much the worse for that society. And if the Aryans at some stage in the progress regarded a certain class of people as outcastes by way of punishment, there is no reason why that punishment should descend upon their progeny irrespective of the causes for which their ancestors were punished. That there is untouchability even amongst untouchables merely demonstrates that the evil cannot be confined and that its deadening effect is all-pervading. The existence of untouchability amongst untouchables is an additional reason for cultured Hindu society to rid itself of the curse with the quickest dispatch. If the untouchables are so because they kill animals and because they have to do with flesh, blood, bones and night-soil, every nurse and every doctor should become an untouchable and so should Christians and Mussalmans and all so-called high-class Hindus who kill animals for food or sacrifice. The argument that because slaughter houses, toddy-shops, and houses of ill fame are or should be isolated, untouchables should likewise be isolated betrays gross prejudice. Slaughter houses and toddy-shops are and should be isolated. But neither butchers nor publicans are isolated.

In attacking untouchability I have gone to the very root of the matter and, therefore, it is an issue of transcendental value, far surpassing Swaraj in terms of political constitutions and I would say that such a constitution would be a dead-weight if it was not backed by a moral basis in the shape of the present

hope engendered in the breasts of the down trodden millions that the weight is going to be lifted from their shoulders.

In its inception, untouchability was a rule of sanitation and still is in all parts of the world outside India. That is to say, an unclean person or thing is untouchable but immediately his or its uncleanliness is shed, he or it is no longer untouchable. Therefore, persons who are to attend to scavenging, whether a paid Bhangi or an unpaid mother, they are unclean until they have washed themselves clean of their unclean work. If instead of being regarded an untouchable forever, the Bhangi was treated as a brother and was given an opportunity and even made to become clean after performing an unclean service for society he should be as acceptable as any other member of that society.

I do not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from Varnashrama, to be an odious and vicious dogma. It has its limitations and its defects but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability, and if it is a by-product of the caste system, it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it or a crop because of the weeds. The outcasteness, in the sense we understand it, has therefore, to be destroyed altogether. It is an abscess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and- low'-ness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into true *varnadharma*, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other.

*Harijan, February 11, 1933*

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

In the temple, all the touchables exchange their love and service, and the fruits of civilization. The "untouchables" are automatically barred from all that. In many places, being required to live outside the village, they are deprived of even the protection of their life, and property. In the social division of labour they do the utmost and one of the most important duties to the society, and they are deprived of the fruits of the great social life which is evolved by the family of castes. Untouchability has made the "depressed" classes the Cinderella of Hindu society.

*Young India, December 29, 1920*

Untouchability is not a sanction of religion, it is a device of Satan. The devil has always quoted scriptures. But scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth. I am not going to burn a spotless horse because the Vedas are reported to have advised, tolerated, or sanctioned the sacrifice. For me the Vedas are divine and unwritten. 'The letter killeth'. It is the spirit that giveth the light. And the spirit of Vedas is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon. Would that God give us the strength and the wisdom to become voluntary scavengers of the nation as the 'suppressed' classes are forced to be. There are Aegean stables enough and to spare for us to clean.

*Young India, January 19, 1921*

*Q. But what about animistic beliefs? Should they not be corrected?*

A. Well, we have been working amongst the so-called untouchables and backward classes, and we have never bothered ourselves with their beliefs, animistic or otherwise. Superstitions and undesirable things go as soon as we begin to live the correct life. I concern myself not with their belief but with asking them to do the right thing. As soon as they do it, their belief rights itself.

*Young India, August 11, 1927*

If some people for their inward satisfaction and growth change their religion, let them do so. As regards taking our message to the aborigines, I do not think I should go and give my message out of my own wisdom. Do it in all humility, it is said. Well I have been an unfortunate witness of arrogance often going in the garb of humility. If I am perfect, I know that my thought will reach others. It taxes all my time to reach the goal I have set myself. What have I to take to the aborigines and the Assamese hill men except to go in my nakedness to them? Rather than ask them to join my prayer, I would join their prayer. We were strangers to this sort of classification- 'animists', 'aborigines', etc., but we have learnt it from the English rulers. I must have the desire to serve and it will put me right with people. Conversion and service go ill together.

*Young India, January 19, 1928*

### **The Breath of My Life**

God's ways are inscrutable! The most unexpected event of my life has happened. I have been used to the most unexpected things in the course of a very long public life, but this is the most unexpected of all. What is now in store for me? How I shall use this life out of prison, I do not know. But I may say this that whether in prison or outside prison, Harijan service will be always after my heart and will be the breath of the life for me, more precious than the daily bread. I can live for some days at least without the daily bread, but I cannot live without Harijan service for one single minute. It is a constant prayer to the Almighty that this blot of untouchability may be removed in its entirety from Hindustan and that the millions of caste Hindus may see the sun of Truth which shines upon us, if we would only remove the scales from our eyes, as I have repeatedly said in these columns. My life is a dedication to this cause and I shall consider no penance too great for the vindication of this Truth.

*Harijan, August 26, 1933*

Correspondents have asked whether interdining and intermarriage are a part of the movement of untouchability. In my opinion they are not. They touch the castemen equally with the outcastes. It is, therefore, not obligatory on an anti-untouchability worker to devote himself or herself to interdining and intermarriage reform. Personally, I am of opinion that the reform is coming sooner than we expect. Restriction on inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage is no part of Hindu religion. It is a social custom which crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline, and was then meant to be a temporary protection against disintegration of Hindu society. Today, those two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society and the emphasis on them has turned the attention of the mass mind from the fundamentals which alone are vital to life's growth. Wherever, therefore, people voluntarily take part in functions where 'touchables' and 'untouchables', Hindus and non-Hindus are invited to joint dinner parties, I welcome them as a healthy sign. But I should never dream of making this reform, however desirable in itself it may be, part of an all-India reform which is long overdue. Untouchability, in the form we all know it, is a canker eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. Dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society. I think the distinction is fundamental. It would be unwise in a hurricane campaign to overweight and thus endanger the main issue. It may even amount to breach of faith with the masses to call upon them suddenly to view the removal of untouchability in a light different from what they have been taught to believe it to be. On the one hand, therefore, whilst interdining may go on where the public itself is ready for it, it should not be part of an India-wide campaign.

As I read them with a detached mind, I find no contradictions between the two statements especially if they are read in their full context. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon interdining and intermarriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh. There is one word that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 today. Instead of 'prohibition' I should repeat the expression used in the same article just a few lines before and say 'self-imposed restriction against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of soul'.

*Harijan, April 29, 1933*

### Conversion No Solution

[Among the group there were some who were then known by the name of 'Christian Harijans'. The phrase was a misnomer, but it demonstrated how the canker of untouchability had travelled beyond its limits and had contaminated other faiths also. The Harijans who some time earlier had changed their faith to escape the hardships inflicted on them by Caste Hindus had, they said, fared no better in the Christian fold. The stigma of untouchability still attached to them. Many of them had met Gandhiji in Malabar and Tamil Nadu and asked for redress of their wrongs.]

"We are in the same position." said the friends present at this interview, "as Adi Dravida Hindus. Are we to have any share in this movement?"

"Indirectly, yet," said Gandhiji.

"But we do not get any benefit at all."

"You are getting indirect benefit. The Christian missionaries are wide awake and recognize that they should do something."

Life-long suffering had made the friends impatient.

They said, "We have decided to face the oppressors boldly. We think of changing our faith."

"I cannot say anything about that. But I feel that oppression can be no reason for changing one's faith."

"We have no other go. Shall we get any relief in future from this movement?"

"Yes", replied Gandhiji, "I am absolutely certain that, if this movement succeeds, untouchability in Christianity is also bound to go."

*Harijan, February 23, 1934*

[The behaviour of the Missionaries] has been as bad as the rest who are in the field to add to their numbers. What pains one, is their frantic attempt to exploit the weakness of Harijans. If they said, 'Hinduism is a diabolical religion and you come to us', I should understand. But they dangle earthly paradises in front of them and make promises to them which they can never keep. When in Bangalore a deputation of Indian Christians came to me with a number of resolutions which they thought would please me, I said to them: "This is no matter for bargain. You must say definitely that this is a matter to be settled by the Hindus themselves. Where is the sense of talking of a sudden awakening of spiritual hunger among the 'untouchables' and then trying to exploit a particular situation? The poor Harijans have no mind, no intelligence, no sense of difference between God and no-God. It is absurd for a single individual to talk of taking all the Harijans with himself. Are they all bricks that they can be moved from one structure to another? If Christian Missions here want to play the game, and for that matter Mussalmans and others they should have no such idea as that of adding to their ranks whilst a great reform in Hinduism is going on.

*Harijan, November 28, 1936*

### **Travesty of Religion**

It hurts me to find Christian bodies vying with the Muslims and Sikhs in trying to add to the members of their fold. It seemed to me an ugly performance and a travesty of religion. They even proceeded to enter into secret conclaves with Dr. Ambedkar. I should have understood and appreciated your prayers for the Harijans, but instead you made an appeal to those who had not even the mind and intelligence to understand what you talked; they have certainly not the intelligence to distinguish between Jesus and Muhammad and Nanak and so on.

Would you preach of Gospel to a cow? Well, some of the untouchables are worse than cows in understanding. I mean they can no more distinguished between the relative merits of Islam and Hinduism and Christianity than can a cow. You can only preach through your life. The rose does not say 'Come and smell me'.

*Harijan, December 19, 1936*

### **To a Christian Clergyman**

*What do you say to the attempts to convert?*

I strongly resent these overtures to utterly ignorant men. I can perhaps understand overtures made to me, as indeed they are being made. For they can reason with me and I can reason with them. But I certainly resent the overtures made to Harijans. When a Christian preacher goes and says to a Harijan that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God, he will give him a blank stare. Then he holds out all kinds of inducements which debase Christianity.

*Would you say a Harijan is not capable of reason?*

He is. For instance if you try to take work out of him without payment, he will not give it. He also has a sense of ethical values. But when you ask him to understand theological beliefs and categories he will not understand anything. I could not do so even when I was 17 and had a fair share of education and training. The orthodox Hindus have so horribly neglected the Harijan that it is astonishing how he adheres to the Hindu faith. Now I say it is outrageous for others to shake his faith.

*Harijan, March 6, 1937*

One could understand the attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would do helpful constructive work which would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism from the very foundation and replace it by another faith. It is like an attempt to destroy a house which though badly in want of repair appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer to do so themselves. But he would most decidedly resist those who sought to destroy the house that had served well him and his ancestors for ages, unless he, the dweller, was convinced that the house was beyond repair and unfit for human habitation. If the Christian world entertains that opinion about the Hindu house, 'Parliament of Religions' and 'International Fellowship' are empty phrases. For both the terms presuppose equality of status a common platform. There cannot be a common platform as between inferiors and superiors, or the enlightened and unenlightened, the regenerate and the

unregenerate, the high born and the low born, the caste-man and the outcaste. My comparison may be defective, may even sound offensive. My reasoning may be unsound. But my proposition stands.

*Harijan, March 13, 1937*

Men and women do not seek the fellowship of the Christian Church. Poor Harijans are no better than the others. I wish they had real spiritual hunger. Such as it is, they satisfy by visits to the temples, however crude they may be. When the missionary of another religion goes to them, he goes like any vendor of goods. He has no special spiritual merit that will distinguish him from those to whom he goes. He does, however, possess material goods which he promises to those who will come to his fold. Then mark, the duty of the Christian Church in India turns into a right. Now when duty becomes a right it ceases to be a duty. Performance of a duty requires one quality—that of suffering and introspection. Exercise of a right requires a quality that gives the power to impose one's will upon the resister through sanctions devised by the claimant or the law whose aid he invokes in the exercise of his right. I have the duty of paying my debt but I have no right to thrust the owed coppers (say) into the pockets of an unwilling creditor. The duty of taking spiritual message is performed by the messenger becoming a fit vehicle by prayer and fasting. Conceived as a right, it may easily become an imposition on unwilling parties.

*Harijan, April 3, 1937*

### **Conversion for Convenience**

Presentation, with a view to conversion of a faith other than one's own, can only necessarily be through an appeal to the intellect or the stomach or both. I do maintain that the vast mass of Harijans, and for that matter Indian humanity, cannot understand the presentation of Christianity, and that generally speaking their conversion wherever it has taken place has not been a spiritual act in any sense of the term. They are conversions for convenience. And I have had overwhelming corroboration of the truth during my frequent and extensive wanderings.

*Harijan, June 12, 1937*

*Q. If the object of the Congress in the liquidation of untouchability is to give Harijans a status of equality with the rest, is this not achieved by their conversion to Islam? Why does the Independence Pledge allocate the programme of the removal of untouchability to the Hindus only? Does this not show that the Congress is anxious to maintain a Hindu majority and therefore denies to the Mussalmans their right of conversion?*

A. Liquidation of untouchability cannot be attained by conversion of untouchables to Islam or any other religion. For it is the so-called caste Hindu who has to rid himself of the sin of untouchability. He can wash away the stain only by doing justice, however tardy, to the outcaste. You will thus see why Muslims are not invited by the Congress to share the burden with the Hindus. They have committed no sin against the untouchables. I cannot prevent you from looking at a simple but necessary social reform as a political dodge to maintain a majority. Tens of thousands of Hindus who are doing penance have no thought of majority. All they want is to do justice to those whom under the guise of religion, caste Hindus have reduced to a state worse than slavery. Lastly, you are hopelessly wrong in suggesting that the Congress denies the right to Muslims to convert 'untouchables'. The Congress

cannot prevent anybody from doing conversion work. Whether you will exercise the right in the right manner or wrong is for you to consider.

*Harijan, April 20, 1940*

In that song one is asked to take the lesson from the trees which themselves suffer the fierce rays of the sun and give shade to those who take shelter under them. To those who throw stones at them they respond by dropping fruit. That is true philanthropy. To learn the philanthropy we are asked in that song to go to Harijans. Today society has condemned Harijans to a life of filth and degradation. That is not their shame but our shame. Society has treated them as untouchables and condemned them to live in ghettos and yet they continue to render invaluable services to society for a mere pittance. It was open to them to take to more lucrative avocations as some of them have done.

The fact that the vast majority of them have chosen not to, redounds to their credit. If they can show that spirit of service in spite of their ignorance and backwardness, how much more spirit of selfless service and sacrifice ought the so-called *Savarna* classes to show?

*Harijan, May 26, 1946*

### **Equality**

We are all one, born to be equal sharers in the goods of the earth with no one higher or wealthier than the other. Yet the world is today full of inequalities of wealth and invidious distinctions of high and low. This is folly. In our arrogance we forget that we are all one day going to be levelled with the dust by death that knows no distinctions.

*Harijan, September 29, 1946*

### **Real Hunger of Harijans**

..The real hunger of the Harijans which needs to be satisfied is for decent living as self-respecting, equal citizens, for a square deal as human beings, for freedom from fear, inculcation of clean and sanitary habits, thrift, industry, education. This requires perseverance, self-sacrifice and patience, intelligent labouring on our part. If you give me money to feed Harijans, I shall refuse to accept it. For I do not want to make beggars and idlers of them.

*Harijan, September 29, 1946*

### **A Problem of Life and Death**

So far as I am concerned with the untouchability question it is one of life and death for Hinduism. As I have said repeatedly, if untouchability lives, Hinduism perishes, and even India perishes; but if untouchability is eradicated from the Hindu heart, root and branch, then Hinduism has a definite message for the world. I have said the first thing in hundreds of audiences, but not the latter part. Now that is the utterance of a man who accepts Truth as God. It is therefore no exaggeration. If untouchability is an integral part of Hinduism, the latter is a spent bullet. But untouchability is a hideous untruth. My motive in launching the anti-untouchability campaign is clear. What I am aiming at is not every Hindu touching an 'untouchable', but every touchable Hindu driving untouchability from his heart, going through a complete change of heart. Interdining or intermarrying is not the point. I

may not dine with you, but I should not harbour the feeling that if I dined with you I should be polluted. If I was a woman to be married, I should not say, 'I cannot marry a man because he is an untouchable.' I am making this clear because in the programme of the Harijan Sevak Sangh we say we don't ask the orthodox Hindus to interdine or intermarry with the 'untouchables'. Many of us have no scruples about interdining or intermarriage. That untouchability is an ancient custom I admit, but there are many such things intertwined with Hinduism because it is an ancient religion, even a prehistoric religion. Instead of being the dead faith that it threatens to be, I want it to be a living faith, so that it may exist side by side with other religions of the world.

*Harijan, December 19, 1936*

*Q. Does your Harijan Sangh do anything for the spiritual welfare of the people?*

A. With me moral includes spiritual and so my answer to your question will be 'everything' and 'nothing'. 'Nothing', because we have no department to look after their spiritual welfare; 'everything', because we except the personal touch of the workers to transform the men among whom they are working. Even as it is, we are caught in the coils of hypocrisy; but when you set apart a department for the work, you make the thing doubly difficult. In my career as a reformer I have regarded everything from the moral standpoint. Whether I am engaged in tackling a political question or a social or economic one, the moral side of it always obtrudes itself and it pervades my whole attitude. But I admit I have no special department to look after the Harijans' spiritual welfare.

*Harijan, March 29, 1935*

## EVILS OF UNTOUCHABILITY

### The Crime of Untouchability

Has not a just Nemesis overtaken us for the crime of untouchability? Have we not reaped as we have sown? Have we not practised Dyerism and O'Dwyerism on our own kith and kin? We have, segregated the pariah and we are in turn segregated in the British Colonies. We deny him the use of public wells; we throw the leavings of our plates at him. His very shadow pollutes us. Indeed there is no charge that the pariah cannot fling in our faces and which we do not fling in the faces of Englishmen.

How is this blot on Hinduism to be removed? 'Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you.' I have often told English officials that, if they are friends and servants of India, they should come down from their pedestals, cease to be patrons, demonstrate by their loving deeds that they are in every respect our friends, and believe us to be equals in the same sense as they believe fellow Englishmen to be their equals. After the experiences of the Punjab and Khilafat, I have gone a step further and asked them to repent and change their hearts. Even so, is it necessary for us Hindus to repent of the wrong we have done, to alter our behaviour towards those whom we have suppressed by a system as devilish as we believe the English system of the Government of India to be. We must not throw a few miserable schools at them; we must not adopt the air of superiority towards them. We must treat them as our blood brothers as they are in fact. We must return to them the inheritance of which we have robbed them. And this must not be the act of a few English-knowing reformers merely, but it must be a conscious voluntary effort on the part of the masses. We must aim at bringing it about within this year of grace, probation, preparation and *tapasya*.

*Young India, January 19, 1921*

### Early Realization

I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. The idea was not brought home to me by bitter experiences during the South African struggle. It is not due to the fact that I was once an agnostic. It is equally wrong to think-as some people do-that I have taken my view from my study Christian religious literature. These views date as far back as the time when I was neither enamoured of, nor was acquainted with, the Bible or the followers of the Bible.

I was hardly yet twelve when the idea had dawned on me. 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 untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that it was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child, and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

While at school, I would often happen to touch the 'untouchables', and as I never would conceal the fact from my parents, my mother would tell me that the shortest cut to purification after the unholy touch was to cancel the touch by touching a Mussalman passing by. And simply out of reverence and regard for my mother I often did so but never did so believing it to be a religious obligation.

The Ramayana used to be regularly read in our family. 'How can the Ramayana', I thought to myself, 'in which one who is regarded nowadays as an 'untouchable' took Rama across the Ganga in his boat, countenance the idea of any human being 'untouchables' on the ground that they were polluted souls?' The fact that we address God as the 'purifier of the polluted' and by similar appellations, shows that it is a sin to regard anyone born in Hinduism as polluted or 'untouchable' that it is Satanic to do so. I have hence been never tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I do not pretend that this thing and crystallized as a conviction in me at the age of twelve, but I do say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin. I narrate this story for the information of the Vaishnavas and orthodox Hindus.

*Young India, April 27, 1921*

Hinduism is like the Ganga pure and unsullied as its source but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganga it is beneficent in its total effect.

The Shastras are ever growing. The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas and Itihasas did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate a new the eternal truths, but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'slough of despond'. Because the practice of animal sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time we used to eat beef; shall we also do so now? Because at one time we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive the barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child marriages? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as outcastes?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth. Every day we add to our knowledge of the power of Atman, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same.

*Young India, April 8, 1926*

It is bad enough when dictated by selfish motives to consider ourselves high and other people low. But it is not only worse but a double wrong when we tack religion to an evil like untouchability. It, therefore, grieves me when learned pandits come forward and invoke the authority of Shastras for a patent evil like untouchability. I have said, and I repeat today, that we, Hindus, are undergoing a period of probation. Whether we desire it or not, untouchability is going. But if during this period of probation we repent for the sin, if we reform and purify ourselves, history will record that one act as a supreme act of purification on the part of the Hindus. But if, through the working of the time spirit, we are compelled to do things against our will and Harijans come into their own, it will be no credit to the Hindus or to Hinduism. But I go a step further and say that if we fail in this trial, Hinduism and Hindus will perish.

*Harijan, January 5, 1934*

### **The Earthquake and Untouchability**

When at Tinnevely I first linked the earthquake (in Bihar) with untouchability, I spoke with the greatest deliberation and out of the fullness of my heart. I spoke as I believed. I have long believed that physical phenomena produce results both physical and spiritual. The converse I hold to be equally true...

Visitations like droughts, floods, earthquakes and the like, though they seem to have only physical origins, are, for me, somehow connected with man's morals. Therefore, I instinctively felt that the earthquake was a visitation for the sin of untouchability. Of course, Sanatanists have a perfect right to say that it was due to my crime of preaching against untouchability. My belief is a call to repentance and self-purification. I admit my utter ignorance of the working of the laws of Nature. But, even as I cannot help believing in God, though I am unable to prove His existence to the sceptics, in like manner, I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation even though the connection is instinctively felt by me. If my belief turns out to be ill-founded, it will still have done good to me and those who believe with me. For we shall have been spurred to more vigorous efforts towards self-purification, assuming of course, that untouchability is a deadly sin. I know fully well the danger of such speculation. But I would be untruthful and cowardly if, for fear of ridicule, when those that are nearest and dearest to me are suffering, I did not proclaim my belief from the house-tops. The physical effect of the earthquake will be soon forgotten and even partially repaired. 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 not that faith which Gurudev has that "our own sins and errors, however enormous, have not got enough force to drag down the structure of certain to ruins". On the contrary, I have the faith that our own sins have more force to ruin that structure than any mere physical phenomenon. There is an indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit. Our ignorance of the results of the union makes it a profound mystery and inspires awe in us, but it cannot undo them. But a living recognition of the union has enabled many to use every physical catastrophe for their own moral uplifting.

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. Such a belief would be a degrading superstition, if out of the depth of my ignorance I used it for castigating my opponents.

*Harijan, February 16, 1934*

## HOW TO REMOVE UNTOUCHABILITY

Non-cooperation against the government means co-operation among the governed, and if Hindus do not remove the sin of untouchability there will be no Swaraj whether in one year or in one hundred years. If I invite the depressed classes to join the movement of non-cooperation, I do so because I want them to realize strength. Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity.

*Young India, December 29, 1920*

The curse of foreign domination and the attendant exploitation is the justest retribution meted out by God to us for our exploitation of a sixth of our own race and their studied degradation in the sacred name of religion. Hence is it that I have put the removal of untouchability as an indispensable condition of attainment of Swaraj. Slave-holders ourselves, we have no business to quarrel with our own slavery if we are not prepared unconditionally to enfranchise our own slaves. We must first cast out the beam of untouchability from our own eye before we attempt to remove the mote from that of our masters.

*Young India, October 13, 1921*

I still confess my literary ignorance of the Shastras, but I do profess to understand the secret of Hinduism. And I venture to say in all humility but with all the strength I can command, that to perpetuate untouchability in the manner we have done is a serious blot on Hinduism, an unwarranted abuse of the Smritis and a negation of love which is the basis of Hinduism.

*Young India, October 27, 1921*

This removal of untouchability is much more than building a temple of brick and mortar. Hindus must bleed for it, must pay for it. They must be prepared to forsake wife, children and all for the sake of removing the curse.

*Young India, May 1, 1924*

To remove untouchability is a penance that caste Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of 'untouchables' but of the so-called superior castes. There is no vice that is special to the 'untouchables', not even dirt and insanitation. It is our arrogance which blinds us, superior Hindus, to our own blemishes and which magnifies those of our downtrodden brethren whom we have suppressed and whom we keep under suppression. Religions like nations are being weighed in the balance. God's grace and revelation are the monopoly of no race or nation. They descend equally upon all who wait upon God. That religion and that nation will be blotted out of the face of the earth which pins its faith to injustice, untruth or violence. God is Light, not darkness, God is Love, not hate, God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is great. We His creatures are but dust. Let us be humble and recognize the place of the lowliest of His creatures. Krishna honoured Sudama in his rags as he honoured no one else. Love is the root of religion.

*Young India, December 26, 1924*

I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the *Gita*. The *Gita* teaches us that members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis. It does not prescribe the same *dharma* for the Brahmin as for the Bhangi. But it insists that the latter shall be entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning.

*Young India, January 22, 1925*

### **Not by Use of Force**

Some members of the 'untouchable' class said when I was at Poona that they would resort to force if the Hindus did not alter their attitude towards them. Can untouchability be removed by force? Can the amelioration of 'untouchables' come through these methods? The only way by which you and I can wean orthodox Hindus from their bigotry is by patient argument and correct conduct. So long as they are not converted, I can only ask you to put up with your lot with patience. I am willing to stand by you, to share your sufferings with you. You must have the right to worship in any temple in which members of other castes are admitted. You must have admission to schools along with the children of other castes without any distinction. You must be eligible to the highest office in the land not excluding that of the Viceroy. That is my definition of the removal of untouchability.

But I can help you in this only by following the way indicated by my religion and not by following Western methods. For, that way, I cannot save Hinduism. Yours is a sacred cause. Can one serve a sacred cause by adopting Satan's methods? I pray to you, therefore, to dismiss from your mind the idea of ameliorating your condition by brute force. The *Gita* tells us that by sincerely meditating on Him in one's heart, one can attain *moksha*. Meditation is waiting on God. If waiting on God brings the highest bliss of salvation, how much quicker must it bring removal of untouchability? Waiting on God means increasing purity.

*Young India, January 22, 1925*

Immediately, therefore, we remove the taint of birth, i.e., the idea of superiority and inferiority attaching to birth, we purify Varnashrama. The scavenger's children may remain scavengers without being or feeling degraded and they will be no more considered untouchables than Brahmins. The fault does not therefore lie in recognizing the law of heredity and transmission of qualities from generation to generation, but it lies with the faulty conception of inequality.

*Young India, August 13, 1925*

Recognition of the essential identity and oneness of all that lives excludes the very idea of superiority and inferiority. Life is duty, not a bundle of rights and privileges. That religion is doomed to destruction which bases itself upon a system of gradations high and low. Such is not the meaning for me of Varnashrama. I believe in it because I imagine that it defines the duties of men belonging to different vocations. And Brahmin is he who is the servant of all, even of the Shudras and the 'untouchables'. He dedicates his all to such service and lives upon the charity and sufferance of his fellow-beings. He is no Kshatriya who puts forth pretensions to rank, power and privileges. He alone is a Kshatriya who uses the whole of himself for the defence and honour of society. And a Vaishya who earns for himself only, and believes in merely amassing wealth, is a thief. A Shudra because he labours for hire on behalf of society is in no way inferior to the 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 Shudras. Varnashrama seems to me to be an ideal system conceived for the highest good of society. What we see today is a travesty and a mockery of the original. And if Varnashrama is to abide, Hindus must sweep away the mockery and restore Varnashrama to its pristine dignity.

*Young India, November 5, 1925*

I have declared from the house-tops that a man's caste is no matter for pride, that no superiority or inferiority attaches to any of the four divisions. A true Brahmin will feel it an honour to serve the lowliest of Shudras. In fact a Brahmin, to be a Brahmin, should have the qualities of a Kshatriya, a Vaishya and a Shudra plus his own. Only he should predominantly be a man of divine knowledge.

But caste today is in the crucible and only Heaven knows, or perhaps the Brahmins know, the final result.

*Young India, January 21, 1926*

There is nothing in common between Varnashrama and caste. Caste, if you will, is undoubtedly a drag upon Hindu progress, and untouchability is as I have already called it or described it an excrescence upon Varnashrama. It is a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out, as we weed out the weeds that we see growing in wheat fields or rice fields. In this conception of Varna, there is absolutely no idea of superiority and inferiority.

*Young India, October 20, 1927*

### **To Caste Hindus**

Let me tell you that it is not enough for you to hold the belief passively that untouchability is a crime. He who is a passive spectator of crime is really, and in law, an active participant in it. You must therefore begin and continue your agitation along all lawful and legitimate lines.

*Young India, October 20, 1927*

### **Removal of Untouchability**

Untouchability implies pollution by touch, and therefore in the words of Akha, it is an excrescence. Wherever it obtains, empty formalism replaces and corrupts religion. None can be untouchable, as all souls are sparks of one and the same Fire. It is wrong to treat human beings as untouchables. It is also wrong to entertain false scruples about touching a dead body, which should be an object of pity and respect. It is only out of considerations of health that we bathe after handling a dead body or after an application of soil or a shave. One who does not bathe in such cases may be looked upon as dirty but not as a sinner. A mother may be 'untouchable' so long as she has not bathed or washed her hands and feet after handling her child's waste, but if a child then touches her in play, it will not be polluted by the touch, nor will its soul be affected adversely. But Bhangis, Dheds, Chamars and the like are contemptuously looked upon as untouchables from birth. They may bathe for years with any amount of soap, dress and put on a Kanthi like Vaishnavas, read the *Gita* every day and follow a learned profession and yet they remain untouchables. This is not religion but rank irreligion fit only to be destroyed. By making removal of untouchability a plank in our platform, we assert our belief that untouchability is not only not a part and parcel of Hinduism but a corroding and sinful superstition

which has infected Hinduism, and that it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to strive for its abolition. Every Hindu, therefore, who considers it a sin, should atone for it by fraternizing with untouchables, touching them in a spirit of love and service deeming himself purified by that touch, redressing their grievances, helping them patiently to overcome ignorance and other evils due to the slavery of ages' and inspiring other Hindus to do likewise. When one visualizes the removal of untouchability from this spiritual standpoint, its material and political results sink into insignificance in his eyes, and one befriends the so-called untouchables regardless of such results. Seekers after truth will never waste a thought on the material consequences of their quest, which is not a matter of policy with them but something interwoven with the very texture of their lives. This is equally true of the removal of untouchability. And when we have once realized the supreme importance of this observance, we shall discover that the evil it seeks to combat is not restricted in its operation to the suppressed classes. Evil, no bigger than a mustard seed in the first instance, soon assumed gigantic proportions, and in the long run destroys that upon which it settles. Similarly endless are the ramifications of untouchability, which now embraces within its scope followers of other faiths and sects and even followers of the same denomination, so much so, that some varieties of untouchability have become a veritable burden to the earth. They have hardly enough time even to look after themselves thanks to their never-ending ablution and exclusive preparation of food. While pretending to pray to God they offer worship not to God but to themselves. This observance therefore is not fulfilled merely by making friends with 'untouchables' but by loving all life as one's own self. Removal of untouchability means love for and service of the whole world and it thus merges into *ahimsa*. Removal of untouchability spells the breaking down of barriers between man and man and between the various orders of Being. We find such barriers erected everywhere in the world, but here we have been mainly concerned with the untouchability which has received religious sanction in India and reduced lakhs and crores of human beings to a state bordering on slavery.

*Young India, September 18, 1930*

### **Religious, and not Political, Movement**

The cause of Harijans and Hinduism will not be served by the methods of (the) rabble. This is perhaps the biggest religious reform movement in India, if not in the world, involving as it does the well being of nearly forty million human beings living in serfdom. The orthodox section that disapproves of it is entitled to every courtesy and consideration. We have to win them by love, by self-sacrifice, by perfect self-restraint, by letting the purity of our lives produce its own silent effect upon their hearts. We must have faith in our truth and love converting the opponents to our way.

There is no doubt whatsoever that deliverance of forty million human beings from age-long suppression will not be brought about by mere showy demonstrations. There has to be a solid, constructive programme contemplating attack on all fronts. This enterprise requires the concentrated energy of thousands of men, women, boys and girls who are actuated by the loftiest religious motives. I would, therefore, respectfully urge those who do not appreciate the purely religious character of the movement to retire from it. Let those who have the faith and the fervour, be they few or many, work the movement. Removal of untouchability may produce, indeed it will produce, great political consequences, but it is not a political movement. It is a movement purely and simply of purification of Hinduism. And that purification can only come through the purest instruments. Thanks be to God that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of such instruments working in all parts of India. Let the

impatient sceptics watch, wait and see. But let them not mar the movement by hasty, ill-conceived interference even though it may be prompted by laudable motives.

*My Soul's Agony, November 7, 1932*

### **Origin of the Name Harijan**

The other day a friend suggested to me that the word 'Harijan' (man of God) be substituted for the word Antyaja (the last-born) that is being used for 'untouchables'. It was a word used by the great saint Narasinha Mehta, who belonged to the Nagar Brahmin community and who defied the whole community by claiming the 'untouchables' as his own. I am delighted to adopt that word which is sanctified by having been used by such a great saint, but it has for me a deeper meaning than you may imagine. The 'untouchable', to me, is, compared to us, really a Harijan—a man of God, and we are *Durjan* (men of evil). For whilst the 'untouchable' has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the shortcomings and faults that we lay at the door to these 'untouchables'. It is still open to us to be Harijans ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them.

*Young India, August 6, 1931*

### **Why 'Harijan'**

Harijan means 'a man of God'. All the religions of the world described God pre-eminently as the Friend of 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, anybody of people can be fitly described as men of God, they are surely these helpless, friendless and despised people. Hence, in the pages of *Navajivan*, I have always adopted Harijan as the name signifying 'untouchables'. Not that the change of name brings about any change of status, but one may at least be spared the use of a term which is itself one of reproach. When Caste Hindus have of their own winner conviction and, therefore, voluntarily, got rid of the present-day untouchability we shall all be called Harijans, for, according to my humble opinion, Caste Hindus will then have found favour with God and may, therefore, be fitly described as His men.

*Harijan, February 11, 1933*

### **To Harijans**

You cannot be free from this self-purification. You, too, have to bring your own sacrifice to this altar and that consists in the strict observance of the laws of sanitation-internal and external-and secondly, in giving up of carrion and beef-eating, wherever the habit still persists. In every part of the civilized world carrion is abhorred. It is considered unfit for human consumption. And no one can call himself a Hindu and partake of beef. Sacredness of the cow and her worship are an integral part of Hinduism. Thirdly, I would ask every Harijan man and woman present here, to give up the habit of drinking. Let no Harijan say to himself or herself or to me that many *Savarna* Hindus also drink. I would beseech you as a fellow-Harijan by choice to shun all vices of *Savarna* Hindus. In spite of all the reparation that Hindus may make to you, in spite of all the repentance they may show in the presence of God, after all, in the ultimate resort, your salvation will rest with yourself.

*Harijan, January 19, 1934*

It is not enough that Hindus caste begin to touch Harijans. Mere touch can give me no satisfaction whatsoever. Their hearts must be moved, and they must sincerely believe that it is an affront to human dignity to consider a single human being as lower than one's self. In that sense you can easily understand why I call this movement against untouchability one for the realization of the brotherhood of man-not merely of Hindu man, but of man in general, no matter to what part of the world he belongs, to what race he belongs or to what faith he belongs. For caste Hindus to change their hearts in connection with those whom they consider untouchables is merely a stepping-stone to this grand realization. I have invited the whole world to take part in this movement; and the whole world can take part in this movement by extending its sympathy to it and by studying it.

*Harijan, March 2, 1934*

It is news to me that Harijans are required by the Arya Samajists to perform the ritual of Shuddhi before being admitted to the Arya Samaj. But I have seen the Shuddhi ceremony performed in order to strengthen the Harijans in the due fulfillment of the vow that they take as to abstention from beef, carrion-eating, drinking intoxicating liquors, etc. The correspondent quite rightly says that, if an 'untouchable' is really a Hindu, no Shuddhi is required of him. If any is required, it is required of the caste Hindu who has committed the sin of believing in untouchability.

*Harijan, April 6, 1934*

I do preach to the Harijans cleanliness, abstention from carrion-eating and intoxicating drinks and drugs, necessity of taking education themselves and giving it to their children, also abstention from eating the leaving from Caste Hindus' plates, etc. Only, I do not put these before Harijans as conditions precedent to the removal of untouchability. On the contrary, I suggest to Caste Hindus that the shortcomings are not inherent to Harijans but they are due to our criminal neglect of-even deliberate suppression of these brethren of ours. Therefore, the disappearance of these shortcomings will take place sooner for our fraternizing with Harijans even as they are, and then helping them to become better men and women. That is the least penance Caste Hindus can do for the past wrongs. We must approach Harijans as penitents or debtors, not as their patrons or creditors extending generosity to the undeserving.

*Harijan, September 28, 1934*

*Q. You have said caste should go. But then will Hinduism survive? Why do you thus mix up Hinduism with the progressive religions like Christianity or Islam?*

A. I maintain that caste as it is understood must go if Hinduism is to survive. I do not believe that Christianity and Islam are progressive and Hinduism static i.e., retrogressive. As a matter of fact I notice no definite progress in any religion. The world would not be the shambles it has become if the religions of the world are progressive. There was room for *varna*, as a duty. This is true of all religions whether the name used was other than *varna*. What is a Muslim Maulvi or a Christian priest but a Brahmin if he teaches his flock is true duty not for money but because he possesses the gift of interpretation? And this is true of the other divisions.

*Harijan, March 16, 1937*

### **The 21-Day Fast**

One experience stands quite distinctly in my memory. It related to my 21 days' fast for the removal of untouchability. I had gone to sleep the night before without the slightest idea of having to declare a fast the next morning. At about 12 o'clock in the night something wakes me up suddenly, and some voice- within or without, I cannot say-whispers, 'Thou must go on a fast,' 'How many days?' I ask. This voice again says, 'Twenty- one days.' 'When does it begin?' I ask. It says, 'You begin tomorrow.' I went quietly off to sleep after making the decision. I did not tell anything to my companions until after the morning prayer. I placed into their hands a slip of paper announcing my decision and asking them not to argue with me, as the decision was irrevocable. Well, the doctors thought I would not survive this fast. But something within me said that I would, and that I must go forward. That kind of experience has never in my life happened before or after that date.

*Harijan, December 10, 1938*

Untouchability will not be removed by the force even of law. It can only be removed when the majority of Hindus realize that it is a crime against God and man and are ashamed of it. In other words, it is a process of conversion, *i.e.* purification, of the Hindu heart. The aid of law has to be invoked when it hinders or interferes with the progress of the reform as when, in spite of the willingness of the trustees and the temple-going public, the law prohibits the opening of a particular temple.

*Harijan, September 23, 1939*

Untouchability cannot be eradicated by the expenditure of crores of rupees. But it can be eradicated in the twinkling of an eye without spending a penny if there is a true change of heart among the so-called Caste Hindus. This will elevate both the Harijans and the *Savarnas*. Today the *Savarnas* ride on the backs of so-called untouchables. That degrades them both. For it is nature's law that one cannot degrade another without degrading himself.

*Harijan, June 2, 1946*

## PROGRESS IN REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Just as I do not want the so-called untouchables to despise you, so also I do not want you to entertain any feelings of hatred and ill-will towards them. I do not want you to wrest your rights by violence. The trend of world opinion is against such violence. I can clearly see a time coming in the world when it will be impossible to secure rights by arbitrament of force, so I tell you today that if you resort to force for the attainment of your purpose you will certainly fail. I do not want to employ diplomacy in my dealings with you or for that matter with anyone. I do not want to keep you under any false illusion or win your support by holding out temptations. I would not exploit you for gaining any political ends of mine. The issue with me is bigger even than Swaraj. I am anxious to see an end put to untouchability because for me it is an expiation and a penance. Hinduism has committed a great sin in giving sanction to this evil and I am anxious if such a thing as vicarious penance is possible—to purify it of that sin by expiating for it in my own person.

That being so, it follows that the only means open for my purpose are those of Ahimsa and Truth. I have adopted an 'untouchable' child as my own. I confess I have not been able to convert my wife completely to my view. She cannot bring herself to love her as I do. But I cannot convert my wife by anger, I can do so only by love. If any of my people have done you any wrong, I ask your forgiveness for it. Some members of the 'untouchable' class said when I was at Poona that they would resort to force if the Hindus did not alter their attitude towards them.

Let us by prayer purify ourselves and we shall not only remove untouchability but shall also hasten the advent of Swaraj.

*Young India, January 22, 1925*

### **Entry into Temples**

The opening of the roads is not the final but the first step in the ladder of reform. Temples in general, public wells, and public schools must be open to the 'untouchables' equally with the caste Hindus. But that is not the present goal of satyagrahis. We may not force the pace. The schools are almost all open to the 'untouchables'. The temples and the public wells or tanks are not. Public opinion should be carefully cultivated and the majority should be converted before the reform can be successfully carried out. Meanwhile the remedy lies in founding temples and digging tanks or wells that would be open to the untouchables and to the other Hindus. I have no doubt that the movement for the removal of untouchability has made tremendous headway. Let us not retard it by indiscretion or over-zeal. Once the idea of pollution by the touch of a person by reason of his birth is gone the rest is easy and bound to follow.

*Young India, April, 2, 1925*

I have so often said that my effort for the removal of untouchability is an integral part of my life, and you cannot isolate it from my other activities. I would not be a true Hindu unless I live and move and have my being in trying to rid Hinduism of this curse. Those therefore who do believe in untouchability

as part of Hinduism, or who are indifferent in the matter, cannot give me an address of welcome. I am no official, nor a Sardar, that you should give me a conventional address. I am a Bhangi, a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver and a labourer, and I want, if at all, to be honoured as such. Swaraj cannot be had without Hindu-Muslim unity and though we may not have it today, we are bound to have it some day- but the absence of Hindu-Muslim unity does not mean the destruction of Hinduism.

At the worst we may have to fight a few pitched battles before we unite. The absence of Khaddar and Charkha similarly does not mean the destruction of Hinduism. But untouchability spell its ruin. We shall be the laughing stock of humanity if we hug this curse, and the religion that nurses it shall stand condemned by the world.

*Young India, April 23, 1925*

### **A String of Questions**

*Q. In the accounts of your interview with some gentlemen belonging to the untouchable class at Faridpur published in the issue of the Young India dated 14th May 1925, you have asked them to do things by way of self- purification. Now what do you think by self-purification? What are the outer manifestations of self-purification? Does self-purification consist in kayik, manasik and vachik purification or one of them alone?*

A. Self-purification means cleaning oneself of all impurities whether of the mind, speech or body. The 'untouchable' friends were asked to think no evil, speak no untruth or abuse and to keep the body pure by careful wash, pure food and avoidance of carrion or other impure food or intoxicating liquors or drugs.

*Q. If any class or individual attains that standard, can they or he be treated as untouchable?*

A. Even if a person does not attain the standard and it is unattainable at once by most of us, he may not be regarded as untouchable. It will go hard with us if that standard was applied to us.

*Q. It is suggested that if entrance to public places of worship and confectionery shops be opened to sanitarily clean Hindus, that will be the first step to bring about unity. What is your opinion about it?*

A. Places of public worship should be open to all who obey the laws of common decency. Who shall judge the standard of cleanliness in dress? These things are regulated not by law but by public opinion. A confectioner, if he is himself clean, would undoubtedly refuse to sell to those who are dirty. If he did not, he would lose his customer. But a confectioner who refuses to sell to an 'untouchable' because he is so called, forfeits his right to carry on his business.

*Q. Your sense of untouchability is a difficult one. Even among higher class Hindus, they do not drink water and eat cooked food from the hands of their asanskrit children. Do you call this untouchability?*

A. I do not call that untouchability. I have explained scores of times that there is no such thing as a fifth varna in Hinduism. The untouchable, therefore, should have all the rights common to the four varnas.

*Q. Some suggest that instead of putting too much stress on the drinking of water, it is better to try to remove the sense of superiority and inferiority from the heart of higher caste Hindus and increase mutual love and help. Do you approve of this suggestion?*

A. I do approve of the suggestion where it is not made to cover hypocrisy. You shall judge a tree by its fruit. I never lay stress on drinking and eating. But I do and would when a man refuses to drink at the hands of an untouchable because he is so called. For, then, the refusal is a sign of arrogation of superiority.

*Q. To that end spread of Vaishnava teachings by religious Kirtana and religious feasting in a body irrespective of creed and caste is an easy and simple method. This method has been in vogue for more than four centuries. What is your opinion about this suggestion?*

A. I have not studied the effect of these kirtans. But I would welcome any good method that will break down the wall of insolent superiority.

*Young India, July 2, 1925*

*Q. You admit that untouchability is a blot not only upon Hinduism but upon humanity. Why then do you restrict the circle of reformers to Hindus only? Why may not Mussalmans take up the reform the same as Hindus?*

A. Although the evil of untouchability is not merely a blot upon Hinduism but is also a blot upon humanity, it is a question which Hindus must solve for themselves even as they are solving several other questions regarding Hinduism. There is the question of Devdasis for instance. Their existence is not a small evil. The institution is a blot upon humanity. But no non-Hindu thinks of meddling with it in the same sense in which Hindus are. The reason is obvious. Removal of these abuses has to come from within, not imposed upon Hindus. This can only be brought about by Hindus. Mussalmans, Christians and other non-Hindus are at perfect liberty to criticise untouchability as any other evil in Hinduism. They can lend the reform their moral support. But they may not go further without exposing themselves to the charge of having designs upon Hinduism.

*Young India, July 9, 1925*

*Q. What methods do you suggest for the propaganda for removal of untouchability?*

A. Not much lip propaganda is necessary now. Work is propaganda. You should work fearlessly unmindful of social ostracism for bettering the condition of the 'untouchables'. Lectures may be arranged when leading men pay you a visit.

*Q. There are two shades of opinion in our Andhra Province, and a resolution was proposed to the effect that money should not be spent for the non-Panchamas to do propaganda work. Some people think that the Panchamas should be educated first, and the demand for the removal should come from them, while others think that paid propaganda should be done among the higher classes to change their hearts, and make them feel that untouchability is a sin, and pandits and workers should be appointed to do this work.*

A. I would not spend even a single pie over the pandits. If you pay them they become hirelings. They must not work for pay. Money should be spent on the Panchamas to make them realize their own

position. Our methods should always be nonviolent. Men of the so-called higher classes must change their attitude, and remove the ban for their own elevation and purification. If they do not do so and persist in suppressing them, time must come when the untouchables will rebel against us, and may have recourse even to violent methods. I am trying my utmost to prevent such a catastrophe, and so must we all do who believe untouchability to be a sin.

*Q. Do you think that schools started exclusively for the Panchamas will help in any way in removing untouchability?*

A. They must in the long run to do so, as all education must. But such schools should not be exclusively Panchama schools as boys from other castes also should be welcomed. They will not come at present. But the prejudice will break down in time if the schools are well-managed. If you want mixed schools, you must start one in your locality. Suppose you own a house. Nobody can ask you to go away from your house. Bring an untouchable boy to your house and start a school with him. Induce other boys to come and attend the school.

*Q. In our Province encouragement is given to the schools where children of both the untouchables and the touchables read together.*

A. Yes. You may encourage them. But you should not refuse help to schools or institutions where there are only untouchables.

*Q. In some Taluk Boards, there are orders that schools will be abolished if admission is refused to the untouchables. Do you advise us to help the Panchamas at such places in getting admission through our propagandists?*

A. Certainly. You should help them. But there is no need for special propagandists. Your workers will do for that purpose.

*Q. Then what about the propaganda work? Do you think that silent work will do?*

A. Yes. There is no good of propaganda when there is no solid work behind to elevate the Panchamas.

*Q. Are you going to take up the question of untouchability more vigorously at any time in the near future?*

A. I have already taken up that question as vigorously as possible. We are trying to start schools, dig wells, and build temples, etc. for them wherever it is possible. The work does not stop for want of money. Perhaps you are thinking that nothing is done for them, because it is not advertised in the papers.

*Q. According to the Belgaum resolution, no school can be called 'national' where Panchamas were refused admission.*

A. Certainly. They are not national schools.

*Q. Do you say that such schools should not be given help from Congress funds, even though they satisfy all the other conditions to be called national schools?*

A. No help should be given.

*Young India, September 10, 1925*

### **To Caste Hindus**

Let me, if my voice will reach them, carry my voice to the Brahmin priests who are opposing this belated reform. It is a painful fact, but it is a historical truth, that priests who should have been the real custodians of religion have been instrumental in destroying the religion of which they have been custodians. I see before my eyes the Brahmin priests in Travancore and also elsewhere destroying the very religion of which they are supposed to be custodians, from their ignorance or worse. All their learning, when it is utilized in order to sustain a hideous superstition, a terrible wrong, turn to dust. I wish therefore that they will recognize before it is too late the signs of the times and march with the events which are taking them and us voluntarily or involuntarily along the path of truth.

*Young India, October 20, 1927*

*Q. In the attempt to spiritualize politics, what is the limit to which you want to relegate untouchability?*

A. There is no limit. The very beginning of spiritualization of politics rests in the banishing root and branch of untouchability as it is practised today. Untouchability attaching to birth or a calling is an atrocious doctrine repugnant to the religious sense of man.

*Young India, October 3, 1929*

### **Temples for Untouchables**

In the beginning of the movement as I had conceived it on my return from South Africa in 1915, I had thought that it was wholly in consistent with the movement for removing untouchability to build separate temples or schools for them. But experience taught me that the movement could not proceed upon strict logic and that we Hindus had so much suppressed a third of ourselves that even after the articulate Hindus had with one voice declared for removal, the suppressed brethren would for a long time need the helping hand in a variety of ways. After the theoretical, lip removal of untouchability, if no special effort was made, the vast bulk of them would not readily take advantage of the removal and the ignorant mass would not tolerate them especially when the latter would be naturally clumsy in their deportment or pardonably forward in the enjoyment of long withheld freedom. I am therefore convinced that the two things will have to go hand in hand-perfect freedom to enter ordinary temples and ordinary schools and to use common wells at the same time as erection of model schools and model temples specially designed for the convenience of 'untouchables' but open to the others subject always to the priority for 'untouchables'. It was along this line of reasoning that I suggested in the brief note for the Calcutta Municipal Gazette that the municipalities could foster removal of untouchability by erecting temples and model schools for the suppressed classes side by side with the attempt to have the existing temples thrown open to these countrymen of ours.

My note may therefore on no account be taken as an excuse for condoning prohibition against entry into temples etc. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the manifesto of the Bombay leaders who have advised the removal of the prohibition against temple entry throughout the Bombay Presidency. I have therefore just read with great joy the news that Ramchandra temple in Bombay has been thrown open to the suppressed classes by Sjt. Thakordas Nanabhai, a trustee of the temple. I hope that there will be no relaxation in the effort initiated in Bombay.

*Young India, November 28, 1929*

The trustees and the others concerned in the opening to the so-called untouchables of eight temples in Jabalpur and one in Bombay deserve congratulations for their timely action. By it they have rendered a service to Hinduism and India and brought fresh hope to the 'untouchables' who had begun to show signs of impatience. It is impossible to avoid an exhibition of impatience and worse, if after having awakened them to a sense of their awful position, we do not succeed in easing it for them before it, becomes too late. They must drink the ozone of freedom just as much as the so-called higher classes expect to do as a result of the mass awakening that has come into being. We Hindus may not expect freedom as long as we hold a fifth of ourselves as bondmen unfit even to be touched and sometimes even to approach us within a certain distance or to be seen by us.

*Young India, December 12, 1929*

### **The Yeravda Pact**

With rare exceptions, at hundreds of these mass meetings or at private meetings in all parts of India, there has been no protest against my presentation of the case against untouchability. Crowds have passed resolutions denouncing untouchability and pledging themselves to remove it from their midst, and they have on innumerable occasions called God as witness to their pledge and asked for His blessing that He may give them strength to carry out their pledge.

It was against these millions that my fast was undertaken, and it was their spontaneous love that brought about a transformation inside of five days and brought into being the Yeravda Pact. And it will be against them that the fast will be resumed if that pact is not carried out by them in its fullness. The Government are now practically out of it. Their part of the obligations they fulfilled promptly. The major part of the resolutions of the Yeravda Pact has to be fulfilled by these millions, the so-called caste Hindus, who have flocked to the meetings I have described. It is they who have to embrace the suppressed brethren and sisters as their own, whom they have to invite to their temples, to their homes, to their schools. The untouchables in the village should be made to feel that their shackles have been broken, that they are in no way inferior to their fellow villagers, that they are worshippers of the same God as other villagers and are entitled to the same rights and privileges that the latter enjoy. But if these vital conditions of the Pact are not carried out by caste Hindus, could I possibly to live to face God and man? I ventured even to tell Dr. Ambedkar, Rao Bahadur Raja and other friends belonging to the suppressed group that they should regard me as a hostage for the due fulfillment by caste Hindus of the conditions of the Pact.

The (impending) fast, if it has to come, will not be for the coercion of those who are opponents of the reform, but it will be intended to string into action those who have been my comrades or who have taken pledges for the removal of untouchability. If they belie their pledges, or if they never meant to abide by them and their Hinduism was a mere camouflage, I should have no interest left in life. My fast, therefore, ought not to affect the opponents of my reform, nor even fellow-workers and the millions who have led me to believe that they were with me and the Congress in the campaign against untouchability if the latter has on second thoughts come to the conclusion that untouchability is not after all a crime against God and humanity. In my opinion, fasting for purification of self and others is an age-long institution and it will subsist so long as man believes in God. It is the prayer to the Almighty from an anguished heart. But whether my argument is wise or foolish, I cannot be dislodged from my

position so long as I do not see the folly or the error of it. The fast will be resumed only in obedience to the inner voice, and only if there is a manifest breakdown of the Yeravda Pact, owing to the criminal neglect of caste Hindus to implement its conditions. Such neglect would mean a betrayal of Hinduism. I should not care to remain its living witness.

*My Soul's Agony, November 4, 1932*

### **Sanatanists and the Harijan Movement**

I make an offer to Shri Iyengar and the other Sanatanists who say that they do not wish to ill-treat Harijans and would like to promote their economic and other temporal welfare. Let them join the Servants of Untouchables Society and finance and work its programme of temporal uplift and leave merely the temple entry to me and those who think with me. Shri Iyengar should know that Society contains few Congressmen. The organization contains many prominent liberals. Indeed Sanatanist can, if they mean what they say, by bringing money and workers to the Society, take charge of it and shape its policy. If this will not suit them, let them run a rival organization and spread its branches all over the country and win the hearts and gratitude of Harijans. I would take my chance of gaining religious merit by prosecuting the temple entry movement and showing that it will at a stroke uplift the Harijans and caste Hindus, purify both, and automatically promote the temporal welfare of the former. Shri Iyengar should realize that in a matter concerning masses no 'stunt' can be of much use. They are open to be appealed to by everybody and honesty and hard work can win in the end.

*My Soul's Agony, January 27, 1933*

### **The Fast**

The work of removal of untouchability is not merely a social or economic reform whose extent can be measured by so much social amenities or economic relief provided in so much time. Its goal is to touch the hearts of the millions of Hindus who honestly believe in the present day untouchability as a God-made institution, as old as the human race itself. This, it will be admitted, is a task infinitely higher than mere social and economic reform. Its accomplishment undoubtedly includes all these and much more. For it means nothing short of a complete revolution in the Hindu thought and the disappearance of the horrible and terrible doctrine of inborn inequality and high-and-lowness, which has poisoned Hinduism and is slowly undermining its very existence. Such a change can only be brought about by an appeal to the highest in man. And I am more than ever convinced that appeal can be made effective only by self-purification, i.e. by fasting conceived as the deepest prayer coming from a lacerated heart.

I believe that the invisible effect of such fasting is far greater and far more extensive than the visible effect. The conviction has, therefore, gone deeper in me that my fast is but the beginning of a chain of true voluntarily fasts by men and women who have qualified themselves by previous preparation for them and who believe in prayer as most effective method of reaching the heart of things. How that chain can be established I do not know as yet. But I am striving after it. If it can be established, I know that it will touch, as nothing else will, the hearts of Hindus, both the opponent of reform and the Harijans. For the Harijans have also to play their part in the movement no less than the reformers and the opponents. And I am glad to be able to inform the reader that the Harijans have not been untouched by the fast.

*Harijan, July 8, 1933*

## The Temple Entry Bill

Economic and educational uplift is no doubt an essential of true repentance by caste Hindus. It is a test of the sincerity of their professions. But the uplift will not be complete without the throwing open of temples. The throwing open of temples will be an admission of the religious equality of Harijans. It will be the surest sign of their ceasing to be the outcastes of Hinduism, which they are today.

It is beside the point that tens of thousands of Harijans do not want to enter temples. If it were properly probed, the fact would be found to be quite otherwise. Thousands of Harijans do want to enter temples. Only they have been so accustomed to the prohibition that the very hope of entering temples has dried up in them. They believe that admission to temples on a par with the other Hindus is an impossibility.

But whether Harijans desire the consolation of temple entry or not, caste Hindus have to perform their simple duty. They have to open their temples for Harijans to offer worship in, precisely on the same terms as for themselves. A debtor is not absolved from the duty of payment because his creditor does not care for the payment, or has forgotten the debt altogether.

And when temples are thrown open to Harijans, schools, well and many similar facilities will be automatically open to Harijans. It is surely easy enough to realize that untouchability may exist side by side with economic uplift. Many Ezhavas in Travancore and Namsudras in Bengal possess decent fortunes and are yet treated as pariahs of society. The bar sinister is all the more galling to them by reason of their flourishing condition. Dr Ambedkar suffers from the curse in spite of his high education attainments and his superior economic conditions. He is naturally more sensitive to the insult of untouchability. But the reproach will be automatically removed immediately caste Hindus proclaim the banishment of untouchability by admitting Harijans to their temples on terms of absolute equality with themselves. It will not then become necessary for any Harijan individually to go to temples if he does not desire to do so. The declaration of the opening of temples will cover him with the rest. It will be like the abolition of slavery. It will be a vast and glorious step in the much-needed and overdue purification of Hinduism.

Temple entry permission, to be use, has naturally to be voluntary act on the part of Hindus. It has to be, therefore, a genuine change of heart in the caste Hindus. Legislation is nevertheless necessary because of the fact that in law the entry of Harijans into caste Hindu, temples is said to be prohibited. Legislation will constitute the seal of approval of the vast mass of Hindus. I personally should not want that legislation in the teeth of universal caste Hindu opposition. My own belief is that caste Hindus as a whole do not oppose temple entry by Harijans. I should abide by the result of an honestly conducted referendum. Anyway let the reformers realise that, whatever happens in the Legislature at Delhi, the movement for temple entry and the necessary legislation must continue.

*Harijan, September 2, 1933*

Untouchability will not be removed by force or, which is perhaps the same thing, by law, nor will temples be opened by such means. Legislation is badly required to remove legal obstruction which has been created by certain judicial decisions. But if and when the two bills are passed, untouchability lurking in the Hindu heart will not necessarily be removed nor will public temples be automatically opened. Untouchability will go when the Hindu heart has melted, and public temples will be opened

when the worshippers have discovered that God is no respecter of persons and that He does not reside in temples which man's insolence or ignorance has closed against anybody of persons who are desirous of offering worship on the same terms as they.

*Harijan, October 21, 1933*

### **What of Sweepers if...?**

Sanitary service is by no means a hereditary occupation of long standing. All the evidence hitherto collected by me goes to show that before Mohammedan conquest there were no professional sweepers; the Hindu social system, being based on rural conditions, did not necessitate such sanitary service as is indispensable in the days of rapid urban growth. I do not, however, wish to convey the meaning that rural sanitation during the purely Hindu period was by any means perfect or even fairly satisfactory. On the contrary it seems to have been very crude. The highly scientific methods evolved and still being developed in the West are undoubtedly a recent and very beneficial growth...

The difficulty can only, and must always, arise when things are done in a patronizing and selfish manner. I would, for instance, be patronizing if I offered now and then to work a little in a touch-me-not fashion, side by side with my sweeper, just in order to be able to declare at public meetings that even I did sweeping alongside my sweeper. I would be acting selfishly if I did my own sweeping for the sake of keeping my closets cleaner than they would otherwise be and did not want to waste my time in teaching my sweeper the modern method or did not want to pay more for more efficient and more intelligent service. But there never can be any offence taken when I serve my sweeper neighbours in a variety of ways and by doing my own sweeping, teach them by example that sanitary service is not only not a mean occupation, but a perfectly honourable and most useful occupation, which everyone should learn and many may follow with great benefit to society, if it is taken up in a humanitarian spirit.

*Harijan, October 21, 1933*

### **Advice to Harijan Workers**

It is the obvious duty of Harijan workers to carry on internal reform to the extent it is possible even in the face of the existing state of things. Harijan workers should, therefore, devote all their energy to:

- a) promotion of cleanliness and hygiene among the Harijans;
- b) improved method of carrying on what are known as unclean occupations, e.g., scavenging and tanning;
- c) giving up of carrion and beef, if not meat, altogether;
- d) giving up of intoxicating liquors;
- e) inducing parents to send their children to day-schools wherever they are, available, and parents themselves to attend night-schools wherever such are opened;
- f) abolition of untouchability among themselves.

*My Soul's Agony, November 14, 1933*

### What Students Can Do

If you, the students who have assembled here have followed me so far and understood the implications of this mission of mine, you will soon extend the help I want from you. Many students have written to me asking what party they can take in helping this movement. It is a surprise to me that students are obliged to ask this question. The field is so vast and near you that you need not ask the question as to what you may do and what you may not. It is not a political question. It may become one, but for you and me, for the time being it is not connected with politics. My life is governed by religion. I never lost sight of the principle that governs my life when I began dabbling in politics. As this is a humanitarian campaign, students must devote a part of their spare time, if not the whole, to the service of thousands of Harijans. I have found that if I get many helpers who can give their spare time, much work can be done. This work cannot be done by hired labour. With hired labour we cannot go to Harijan quarters and sweep their roads, enter their houses and wash their children. I have described in the columns of the Harijan what students can do. A Harijan teacher has shown what a herculean task it is for him to tackle. Even wild children are better than Harijan children. Wild children are not sunk in utter degradation, as the Harijan children are, nor do they live in such filthy surroundings. This problem cannot be tackled by hired labour. No amount of money can enable me to do this. It must be your prerogative. It is an acid test of the education received by you in schools and colleges. Your worth will not be measured by your ability to make faultless English speeches. Your worth will be measured by the service you render to the poor and not by government posts worth Rs. 60 or Rs. 600 that you may have got. I wish you would do this work in the spirit I suggest. I have not met a single student who has said that he cannot spare one hour per day. If you write your diary from day to day, you will find that you waste many a precious hour in 365 days of the year. If you want to turn your education to good account, you will turn your attention to this work while this hurricane campaign lasts. Erstwhile students are serving Harijans within a radius of 5 miles round about Wardha. They are doing good silent work; therefore, you do not know them. I invite you to see their work. It is hard but pleasurable. It will give you joy greater than your cricket or tennis. I have repeatedly said that money will come if I have real, intelligent, honest workers. As a boy of 18, I began my education in begging. I have found that money can be found easily if we have the right kind of workers. Money alone will never satisfy me. I would ask you to pledge yourselves to devote a definite number of spare hours to Harijan service.

*Harijan, November 17, 1933*

I am painfully conscious of the fact that, if thousand were suddenly called upon to enforce in their own lives what they seem to approve by their attendance at these meetings, they would fail to respond not from want to will, but from sheer inability. I have discovered this again and again amongst my closest associates, who have flatly confessed their inability to enforce immediately in their conduct what they knew was the right thing and what they knew had to be done immediately. They have to put up a brave fight against their traditional repugnance. The mere intellectual grasp that untouchability is an evil, corroding Hinduism, and that belief in it is tantamount to disbelief in God, His goodness and His Fatherhood, is not enough to destroy the monster. The vicarious penance of the comparatively pure is needed to bring about a change in the hearts of both *Savarnas* and Harijans.

A movement, so grand and so pure, so religious and so humanitarian, must not be exploited by anybody for his own end. Certainly, not for its political consequences. It will be discovered, as the movement progresses that the political approach can only end in accentuating the strife. It can only

add to the confusion already existing and add one more, if not many more warring parties, to the existing ones. May God save us and save the movement from such a calamity.

I am essentially a lover of peace. I do not have the slightest wish to create dissensions among the Hindus. It would be best for the Sanatanists and reformers to confer among themselves and make an effort to arrive at an understanding. But if that effort fails, both parties should resort to peaceful and honourable methods and both should learn to tolerate one another. I believe myself to be both a Sanatanist and a reformer. I have tried to gather in me all the goodwill which caste-Hindus can have towards Harijans. God alone knows how far I have succeeded in the effort. I am also trying, as best as an imperfect human being like myself can, to see with Harijans' eyes and to realize what is going on in their hearts. It is not given to man to know the whole truth. His duty lies in living up to the truth as he sees it, and, in doing so, to resort to the purest means, i.e., to non-violence. I do not want to hurt the feelings of the Sanatanists. I want to convert them to my view in the gentlest manner. I want, if I can, to steal into their hearts. I would love to melt their hearts by my suffering. I firmly believe that untouchability, as we practise it today, has no sanction in the Shastras. But I do not wish to enter into a discussion of what the Shastras support and what they do not. I only put before you, as humbly as I can, the truth as I see it, and am prepared to sacrifice my life, if need be, in an unceasing effort to live up to that truth. It is clear to my mind, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that if untouchability is not eradicated, both Hinduism and Hindus are bound to perish. Ever since I was a child of ten I have considered untouchability a sin. My heart has never been able to reconcile itself to untouchability based on birth. I tried to study the Shastras to the best of my ability. I consulted as many pundits as I could. And a majority of them have supported my view. But truth is not to be found in books. Truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there, and to be guided by truth as one sees it. But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth.

I would appeal to the temple-goers here who are in favour of Harijans entry into the temple to go into the temple only after the Sanatanists who have blocked the way leave the place. We do not want to score a victory over them. Do not be angry with them, do not insult them; on the contrary, feed them if they are hungry and would accept your hospitality. We have to win them over by love. We may not ask for police aid against them. I do not say this because I am a non-cooperator but because I believe in the law of non-retaliation. Again, I believe that religion can never be protected by force or hooliganism, but by penance and suffering. I am, therefore, prepared to give up my life, if need be, as a final act of penance.

*Harijan, November 24, 1933*

### **Religious Obligation**

Harijan service is a religious obligation. There is no room in it for cunning. It has to be absolutely truthful and non-violent. It can be accomplished only by sacrifice and penance. I very much fear that we shall not be able to win the trust of Harijans without self-purification. It should not surprise us if today they look upon all we 'do with suspicion and distrust. Hitherto we had been riding on their shoulders. We must dismount if we would do justice to them, and regard them as we regard other Hindus. Do you not realize that, if they were to boycott us and make us untouchables, life itself would become unbearable and come to a standstill?

It can be demonstrated that by our shabby treatment of the Harijans we not only lose spiritually but also materially. Western science has made the discovery that a society that is indifferent to the welfare of its servants suffers a heavy material loss. It should be easy enough for us to realize that society at large will gain much materially by treating its Harijans well and giving them instruction in matters of hygiene and sanitation. True material welfare is not inconsistent with performance of religious obligations. Nearly 50 years' observation of the working of a religious life confirms the above observation. Indeed, it can be shown that conduct which is inconsistent with true religion results in earthly loss. I go a step further and content that, if we would act correctly towards Harijans and purify our hearts of untouchability, we should find that we had taken a long stride towards the achievement of communal unity.

I would ask you to believe me when I say that there is no political motive behind my Harijan work. The political consequences of the removal of untouchability have no attraction for me. Indeed, I believe that, if we approached this question with a political motive, we should fail to serve the Harijans and we should damage Hinduism. That real removal of untouchability will have political consequences is true enough. A duty religiously performed carries with it many other important consequences. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and everything else will be added unto you," is to my mind a scientific truth.

*Harijan, December 1, 1933*

### **A Harijan Sevak's Difficulties**

[A good Harijan Sevak had been plodding away for four years without much result; he had failed to get enough money for his institution from the Harijan Sevak Sangh; he had failed to enlist the sympathies of young men, who would come for a few days, work with him for a time and leave abruptly as the work was uninteresting; he had obstacles placed in his way by non-Brahmins who alleged that by working for and among the Harijans he lowered their standard of living; even the Harijans were often a cause of despair inasmuch as they promised to lead cleaner lives and abjure drink and carrion, but many did not keep their pledges; and so on and so forth... Gandhiji had no other message to give him than to plod on and persist.]

What are four years in the life of a Nation, and what is even a lifetime in the vast space of eternity, when one remembers that one has to conquer the prejudices of centuries? And have we tried enough and suffered enough? Look at Booker T. Washington. Have any of us suffered as much as he did? We narrate the woes of Harijans but do we ever share with them those woes? They are sharp-witted enough to see that we do not starve, whilst it is they who have to starve; we have plenty of clean water to drink whereas they have dirty pools to depend upon.

The Harijan Sevak Sangh does not give you money. Well, it is right from its point of view. We have begun at the wrong end; we rely on outside assistance instead of relying on our own strength. The time has come when we must cease to be spoonfed. Why not teach the boys in the verandahs or their own sheds and make the school a natural growth from the soil? Why not get them to help you in growing your own grain and your vegetables and thus reduce the expenses of the boarding house? It is preposterous for a school, say in Trivandrum, to depend on Delhi. It is so unnatural. It may have been necessary in the initial stages, but it should be no longer necessary now. The man in charge of the school depending for his salary on Delhi is a foreigner there. If he completely identifies himself

with Harijans, they will share with him their meagre fare and will certainly not allow him to starve. It is no use looking up to the Central Board every now and then. The Central Board will keep the whole show nicely moving, but the sinews should come from the offshoots, the Provincial Boards. But my mind is daily making so many discoveries that I feel that we might even dispense with collections. If we have no money we have other resources, if only we knew the art of discovering them.

And why should the Harijans be the cause of despair? Show me many people who can keep their pledges. Have we kept all our pledges? And why do we make so much of their carrion-eating? We want them to give it up no doubt but it is no use getting impatient with them. If many *Savarna* Hindus eat flesh, naturally they will eat carrion. There is hardly any chemical difference between meat and carrion. You will remember Dr Deshmukh wrote to me that he would find it impossible to distinguish between fresh meat and fresh carrion. And the logic at least is with the Harijans. A rich Hindu may afford to have a goat killed for himself, but what is a poor Harijan to do? You will give him no live goat and you will not allow him to eat a dead goat's flesh that chance throws in his way. No. We must realize that there is no vice among Harijans that is not traceable to us. It is we who have to do all the penance. If crores of *Savarna* Hindus will give up the meat-eating, Harijans will today give up carrion.

*Could we ask them to leave their wretched abodes and settle in our midst?*

That is more easily said than done. If all caste Hindus become reformers your question won't arise. Today the reformers would be powerless to defend Harijans from molestation if they settled in *Savarna* quarters. But I would advocate exodus by Harijans from where they are persistently persecuted, as by Nattars for example.

*What about making them go through an Upanayana ceremony:?*

No, it involves the assumption that they are low and that they have got to be raised to a higher status. There is nothing low about them. Whatever appears to be low in them is a reflection of our own terrible lowness. Supposing I have a diseased child, what shall I do with it? Shall I discard it, shall I suffer for my sins, and that therefore, it deserves extra care from me. But here with the Harijans, let me tell you that I literally hold that they are far superior to us. They have remained with us in spite of our persecution, and they are still clinging on to us. It is a marvel of marvels to me that they continue to hold on to a religion, of which some of the adherents say that it has no place for them. No, we must come down from the high pedestal we have occupied all these years and take our natural place with them.

*Harijan, June 15, 1935*

The Harijan does not know how to secure redress. He has no will to defend himself. He is wholly unconscious of his human dignity or innate ability to protect himself against the insolence of fellow human beings. The reformer has to carry the torch of knowledge among the persecutors, for they know not what they are doing. Leaflets may be distributed among them. But the *Savarna* lynchings rarely read newspapers or leaflets. They are self-contained and self-satisfied. Personal contact is the only way of approach to them. They must be visited if need be in their own homes. Meetings should be addressed in their villages. No amount of anger or declaration will cure them of their ignorance. The quickest way to combat ignorance is the spread of knowledge that would tell them how cattle diseases are contracted and how by careful treatment they may be prevented or cured.

All this means patient labour on the part of those who will carry on the propaganda. The States concerned should also be moved to protect the poor Harijans who are molested. Where the reformers are fairly numerous they may have to settle in the midst of Harijans and themselves share their hardships, if their presence does not prevent molestation. In this campaign against ignorance the Sanatanists' assistance should also be invoked. I am sure no sane Sanatanist will defend the cruel persecution of the utterly innocent Harijans by ignorant, misguided Savarnas.

Harijan, August 31, 1935

Miracles are their own demonstration. As witness the miracle in Travancore. Nobody believed a month ago that the more than 2,000 temples of Travancore could be opened to Harijans, and that Harijans would enter them in their hundreds without let or hindrance from the most orthodox Hindus. Yet that event has happened in Travancore with even he who runs may see. It is beside the point whether it can be called a miracle or not. I see in it the visible finger of the Invisible God.

Harijan, December 19, 1936

### **From the Vykom Speech**

I want to quote one historical fact that took place when I was here in connection with Vykom Satyagraha. Some of you may remember that I had more than one serious discussion with the Shastries who were then residing with the temple precincts, and who were attached, if I remember rightly, to the temple in some shape or other; I am trying to give you as correct version of that discussion as I can recall at the present moment. In support of the proposition that even roads leading to the temples were barred against non-Hindus, they produced a book called *Shankara Smriti*. I had never heard of such a Smriti before I came to Vykom and heard it quoted. You will be astonished to find that when I had that Smriti translated for me, I could not find in it any authority for closing the roads. But I grant that it was enough for them that they believed that the *Shankara Smriti* supported their contention. Then, as I was negotiating through the then Commissioner of Police and with the Senior Maharani, I just asked the question, supposing as a result of the negotiations the Maharani issued orders to open the roads to the *Avarna* Hindus, what would be their attitude to them? Then without the slightest hesitation they said: 'Oh! That is a different thing altogether; a Hindu Prince or Princess has every right to issue an order which has the authority of Smriti.' They said that was implied in Hinduism as Hindu Kings are repositories of Hindu faith and they have every right to issue orders which are not inconsistent with Smriti. I asked them whether the same thing applied to the opening of the temples. They said, 'Most decidedly.' Let me tell you that these Shastris were not the only Shastris that gave this reply. I put the same question to Shastris in Cochin and Tamilnadu and they gave the same answer. As a matter of fact that is the historical evolution of Smritis and for that matter of eighteen Puranas. They were all produced or inspired in response to the want to those time.

Harijan, February 6, 1937

### **Harijan Sevak's Qualifications**

*Q. What are the qualifications that a Harijan Sevak should have in order to make his work felt?*

A. Every Sevak must be fired with a passion to purify Hinduism and must be ready to lay down his life in the attempt. Such a Sevak will be ready to sacrifice his all-family connections, social advantages,

and life itself-in order to wipe out the blot on Hinduism. The work should be as one of life's essential functions, e.g. offering one's prayers, ablutions, etc. not carrying emolument or reward. If the worker is fired with this passion, the way will be clear before him. Thus a worker would rather starve than allow the Harijans to be starved, would hesitate to use amenities which are denied to the Harijans and feel increasing identification with them everyday. All this work is to be done without regard to political results, and only in order to keep Hinduism pure and alive.

*Harijan, February 1, 1942*

I have of late been saying... that the Hindus have to become *atishudras* not merely in name but in thought, word and deed. For that token scavenging is not enough. I have therefore decided that I must go and actually live among Harijans in Harijan quarters.

I however do not delude myself with the belief... that by staying here I am sharing the actual life with the Harijans. I have seen some Harijan quarters and the squalor, the dirt and the filth in the midst of which the Harijans live. I know too that this place has been brightened up. Indeed, I feel embarrassed by the amenities that have been provided here by Sheth Birla for me and my party. My coming to stay here, I hope, is my first step, not the last. It is my constant prayer and I look forward to the day when I would actually go and stay in a Harijan hut, and partake of the food they may provide me there. In the meantime, it gives me some satisfaction to be able to live in this dharmashala surrounded by Harijan dwellings on all sides.

*Speaking of a hostile Harijans' demonstration against him on his arrival at New Delhi:*

I can quite understand their pent up resentment at the way in which they have been treated by the so-called *Savarnas*. They might even want to wreak vengeance. There is such a glaring contradiction between our profession and practice. They have a right to feel impatient. I can only plead with them to bear with the Hindu society. An age-old evil cannot be eradicated in a day. I know it has to go or Hinduism must perish. In the meantime the least expiation that we can make, is to share with the Harijans their disabilities and to deny ourselves the privileges.

### **A Harijan by Choice**

I myself have become a Harijan by choice. I would love to be in a place where Harijans too can come and dwell. A Harijan by birth may repudiate his varna but how can I who has become a Harijan by choice? I have not hesitated to suggest to caste Hindus that today they have all to become *atishudras*, if the canker of caste feeling is to be eradicated from Hinduism and Hinduism is not to perish from the face of the Earth.

*Harijan, June 9, 1946*

### **No Publicity Required for Inner Change**

A Brahmin correspondent asks to public the fact that he has become a Harijan and wants to eliminate his name as a caste Hindu from the census too. This is a sequel to my having asked all caste Hindus to look upon themselves as Harijans of the so-called lowest stratum. But what is the point in giving publicity to an inner change? The real proof is for the convert to practise the change in his daily life. He will, therefore, mix freely with Bhangis and take an active part in their life. If possible, he will live

with them or get a Bhangi to live with him. He will give his children in marriage to Harijans and on being questioned he will say that he has become a Harijan of his own free will and will register his name either as a Harijan or Bhangi in the census when he has to classify himself. But having done so he will on no account arrogate to himself any of the rights of Harijans as, for example, he will not enter his name as a voter on their list. In other words, he will undertake to fulfill all the duties of a Harijan without seeking any of the rights that pertain to them. So long as separate voting lists are maintained he will cease to be a voter.

*Harijan, June 16, 1946*

### **Marriage between Harijans and Non-Harijans**

If an educated Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu, the couple ought to devote themselves to the service of Harijans. Self-indulgence can never be the object of such a marriage. That will be improper. I can never encourage it. It is possible that a marriage entered into with the best of intentions turns out to be a failure. No one can prevent such mishaps. Even if one Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu with a high character it will be good to both the Harijans and caste Hindus. They will set up a good precedent and if the Harijan girl is really worthy, she will spread her fragrance far and wide and encourage others to copy her example. Society will cease to be scared by such marriages. They will see for themselves that there is nothing wrong in them. If children born of such a union turn out to be good, they will further help to remove untouchability. Every reform moves at the proverbial snail's pace. To be dissatisfied with this slowness of progress betrays ignorance of the way in which reform works.

It is certainly desirable that caste Hindu girls should select Harijan husbands. I hesitate to say that it is better. That would imply that women are inferior to men. I know that such inferiority complex is there today. For this reason I would agree that at present the marriage of a caste Hindu girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a caste Hindu. If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands. That it is most difficult I know from experience. Old prejudices are difficult to shed. One cannot afford to laugh at such prejudices either. They have to be overcome with patience. And if a girl imagines that her duty ends by marrying a Harijan and falls a prey to the temptation of self-indulgence after marriage, the last state would be worse than the first. The final test of every marriage is how far it develops the spirit of service in the parties. Every mixed marriage will tend in varying degrees to remove the stigma attached to such marriages. Finally there will be only one caste, known by the beautiful name Bhangi, that is to say, the reformer or remover of all dirt. Let us pray that such a happy day will dawn soon.

*Harijan, July 7, 1946*

It is one thing for me to hold certain view and quite another to make my view acceptable in their entirety to society at large. My mind, I hope, is ever growing, ever moving forward. All may not keep pace with it. I have therefore to exercise utmost patience and be satisfied with hastening slowly. As you must have seen from my preface to a recent Navajivan publication of my writings on *Varna-Vyavastha*, I am wholly in agreement with you in principle. If I live up to 125 years, I do expect to convert the entire Hindu society to my view.

Harijan Sevak Sangh ought to 'try to secure for the Harijans political power by demanding due representation for them on gram panchayats, municipalities and legislatures.'

*Harijan, July 28, 1946*

*Q. Does the clause incorporated in the Draft Constitution on the abolition of untouchability in itself represent a great reform?*

A. No. That clause does not represent a great or any reform. It registers the fact that a great revolutionary reform has taken place in Hindu society. I confess that untouchability has not yet been pulled out root and branch from the soil. Like the evil effects of the British connection, those of untouchability, a much older institution, do not disappear in a flash. It may take some years, perhaps, before a stranger coming to India can say there is no untouchability in any shape or form.

*Harijan, May 18, 1947*

That very famous temple Rameshwaram has been thrown open to the Harijans today, thus completing the list of all the famous temples in the South except those in Cochin. Here is the list of the most known supplied to me by Rajaji: Madurai, Tinnevely, Chidambaram, Srirangam, Palani, Triplicane, Tirupathi, Kanchi and Guruvayur. This does not exhaust the list. The Harijan Speaker of the Madras Assembly has been going round most of these temples leading the Harijans and other worshippers. Highly educated Harijans and others may belittle this belated reform. But its significance should not be lost upon us, because the reform has been brought about bloodlessly. Let us hope that Cochin will soon follow in the wake of Travancore, Tamilnadu and British Kerala and throw open its temples to the Harijans. Temple entry reform will be incomplete until temples become really holy by necessary internal reform.

*Harijan, June 13, 1947*

### **To Wrong Way**

To blame the Harijans for their present condition is like a slave-holder blaming his slave for the misery and squalor the latter may be living in. We would ridicule the slave-holder, perhaps even accuse him of insincerity, if he made the removal of squalor by the slave a condition precedent to the grant of freedom. It should be borne in mind that the Harijans will enter temples subject to the same condition that is applicable to the rest of Hindus. Nature has not made Harijans a separate species distinguished from caste Hindus by definite unmistakable signs. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Harijans enter temples without being detected. The studies of census reports published in these columns must make it clear to anybody that those who were not classified as untouchables must have entered temples without let or hindrance. The mere fact of a new enumeration, for the first time including certain classes and excluding certain other classes from the Harijan list, surely cannot be used as any test of untouchability or touchability. I cannot repeat too often that by untouchability I mean the thing as it is practised today. Let the professor and those who think like him remember that the reform the anti-untouchability campaign stands for is no mere make-shift for placating Harijans. It stands for a fundamental change in Hindu practice, it stands for the total abolition of the practice of high-and-lowness that has crept into Hinduism inspite of its lofty and unequivocal declaration that all life is one and that differentiation is Maya, is false.

A vigorous campaign with a definite time limit for the complete removal of all the disabilities under which the Harijans suffer ought to be launched. Emancipation of the Harijans can no longer be postponed to an indefinite distant date. It has to be realized here and now even like Independence.

Independence itself will turn into bitter ashes in our mouth if the most useful section of the community is balked of its essential rights.

*Harijan, June 16, 1946*

## HOPE FOR FUTURE

### **No Swaraj along with Untouchability**

So long as the Hindus willfully 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.

We are guilty of having suppressed our brethren; we make them crawl on their bellies; we have made them rub their noses on the ground; with eyes red with rage, we push them out of railway compartment — what more than this has British rule done? What charge that we bring against Dyer and O-Dwyer, may not other, and even our own, people lay at our doors? We ought to purge ourselves of this pollution. It is idle to talk of Swaraj so long as we do not protect the weak and helpless, or so long as it is possible for a single Swarajist to injure the feelings of any individual. Swaraj means that not a single Hindu or Muslim shall for a moment arrogantly think that he can crush with impunity meek Hindus or Muslims. Unless this condition is fulfilled we will gain Swaraj only to lose it the next moment. We are no better than the brutes until we have purged ourselves of the sins we have committed against our weaker brethren.

But I have faith in me still. In the course of my peregrinations in India I have realized that the spirit of kindness of which the poet Tulsidas sings so eloquently, which forms the cornerstone of the Jain and Vaishnava religions, which is the quintessence of the Bhagvat and with which every verse of the Gita is saturated—this kindness, this love, this charity, is slowly but steadily gaining ground in the hearts of the masses of this country.

*Young India, May 4, 1921*

### **The Impassable Barrier**

The existence of untouchability must remain an impassable barrier in the path of our progress, which we must break down with supreme effort. There seems to be a lurking thought with many of us, that we can have Swaraj and retain untouchability. They do not even see the contradiction inherent in the thought. Swaraj is as much for the 'untouchable' as for the 'touchable'. A correspondent from Narayanavaram writes: 'In our parts Panchamas are very badly treated by the Hindus, especially the Brahmins. In the villages they are not allowed to go about the streets inhabited by Brahmins. They must stand at a considerable distance when speaking to Brahmins.' Read Sahebs for Brahmins and Indians for Panchamas, and see how you feel. And yet I have no doubt that some Sahebs are infinitely better than some Brahmins. God will not let us have Swaraj so long as we treat a brother as an outcaste by reason of his birth.

*Young India. September 22, 1921*

### **Freedom**

Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our country-men. If the lot of the Panchama is not improved when we are all suffering, it is not likely to be better under the intoxication of Swaraj. If it is

necessary for us to buy peace with the Mussalmans as a condition of Swaraj, it is equally necessary for us to give peace to the Panchama before we can, with any show of justice or self-respect, talk of Swaraj. I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from my yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange 'king log for king stork.' Hence for me the movement of Swaraj is a movement of self-purification.

*Young India, June 12, 1924*

### **Under Swaraj**

I gladly give my opinion as to what is likely to be the interpretation of the Congress resolution on untouchability. There will be no untouchability. The untouchables will have the same rights as any other. But a Brahmin will not be made to touch anybody. He will be free to make himself untouchable and have his own well, his own temple, his own school and whatever else he can afford, so long as he uses those things without being a nuisance to his neighbours. But he will not be able, as some do now, to punish untouchables for daring to walk on public streets or using public wells. There will be under Swaraj no such scandal as that of the use of public temples being denied to untouchables when it is allowed to all other Hindus. The authority of the Vedas and the other Shastras will not be denied but their interpretation will not rest with individuals but will depend upon the course of law in so far as these religious books will be used to regulate public conduct. Conscientious scruples will be respected, but not at the expense of public morals or the rights of others. Those who will have extraordinary scruples will have themselves to suffer inconvenience and pay for the luxury. The law will not tolerate any arrogation of superiority by any person or class whether in the name of custom or religion. But all this is my dream. I am not the Congress. Those who would have the Congress do otherwise had better make haste to join it and make others of their opinion join it. The Congress represents or it has a constitution wide enough to represent popular will.

*Young India, June 11, 1931*

### **Service of the Untouchables**

We have behaved towards these unfortunate brethren of ours nothing better than a man turned monster behaves towards brother man. And the programme of removal of untouchability that we have set before us is just some little expiation for a monstrous wrong. I admit that it was I who pushed the item to the forefront of the Congress programme, and anyone bent on cavilling at me might say that it was a clever bait held out by me to the 'untouchables'. Let me say at once that charge is idle. It grew on me very early in life that those who believed themselves to be Hindus must perform the penance in the shape of wiping out this stain before they could be proud of Hinduism, and as the majority of Congressmen were Hindus, and as the programme then put before the Nation was not one of self-purification. I put it in the forefront of the Congress programme, in the conviction that unless the Hindus were prepared to wipe out this stain they could not regard themselves as fit for Swaraj. That conviction has come upon me as a self-evident proposition. If we come into power, with the stain of untouchability uneffaced, I am positive that the 'untouchables' would be far worse under that 'Swaraj' than they are now, for the simple reason that our weakness and our failings would then be buttressed by the accession of power. That in brief is my position, and I have always held that this self-purification is an indispensable condition of Swaraj. It is not a position that I have arrived at today. It is as old as when I began to think of Swaraj.

*Young India, August 6, 1931*

### **The Untouchables Case**

One word more as to the so-called untouchables. I can understand the claims advanced by other minorities, but the claims advanced on behalf of the untouchables is to me the 'unkindest cut of all. It means the perpetual bar sinister. I would not sell the vital interests of the untouchables even for the sake of winning the freedom of India. I claim myself, in my own person, to represent the vast mass of the untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll. And I would work from one end of India to the other to tell the untouchables that separate electorate and separate reservation is not of them, but of orthodox Hinduism. Let this committee and let the whole world know that today there is a body of Hindu reformers who are pledged to remove the blot of untouchability. We do not want on our register and on our Census untouchables classified as a separate class Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity, so may Muslims, so may Europeans. Will untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity? I would far rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived. Therefore, with all my regard for Dr. Ambedkar, and for his desire to see the untouchables, uplifted, with all my regard for his ability, I must say, in all humility, that here is a great wrong under which he has laboured and, perhaps, the bitter experiences he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgement. It hurts me to have to say this but I would be untrue to the cause of untouchables, which is as dear to me as life itself, if I do not say it. I will not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world. I am speaking with a due sense of responsibility when I say it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of untouchables in India. It will create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind the untouchables being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of political rights of untouchables do not know India and do not know how Indian society is today constructed. Therefore, I want to say with all emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I will resist it with my life.

*Young India, November 26, 1931*

### **Prove Your Credentials**

If you want to convince Hindu society that untouchability cannot be part of religion, and that it is a hideous error, you have to develop character and to show in your lives that to believe in some people being touchables and some untouchables is not religion but the reverse. If you have no character to lose, people will have no faith in you. You will have to move among the masses you will have to bring about a change in their hearts. The so-called orthodox do not represent the masses, nor do they represent the correct interpretation of the scriptures. They can react on the masses. But character alone will have effect on the masses. Masses will not argue. They will simply want to know who are the men who go to them. If those men have credentials the masses will listen to them; if they have no credentials the masses will not listen.

It is in the midst of these people that you have to go and being a ray of light and hope. You will have to bend your backs and work in their midst and assure them that you have gone to them not with any

mental reservation, nor with any base motives, but with the pure motive of serving them and taking the message of love and peace in their midst. If you will do that you will find a ready response from them.

*Harijan, December 27, 1933*

The only motive, therefore, that guides me in working for the Harijan- cause is to see Hinduism purified of the curse of untouchability. And if, in so becoming, it is represented only by one Hindu. I would have no repentance but real joy that it was not dead.

*Harijan, April 6, 1934*

### **Harijan Cooks**

A correspondent suggests that at the next session of the Congress all the cooks should be Harijans and to that end a corps of Harijan cooks should be trained in the observance of cleanliness and the art of cooking scientifically and as behoves a poor country like ours. He would have this privilege and duty given to the Congressmen in the province in which the Congress session is to be held. After the session these cooks should be taken over by those Congressmen who can afford it and keep cooks. Any suggestion like this which shows in practice that untouchability is a thing of the past is to be welcomed. I would only add that Congressmen who endorse it need not wait for the session. They should from now take up Harijans not merely as their cooks but have them in all other capacities. What is more, let those who can afford it take Harijans in their families as their own children and give them proper training. All this can only happen if men and women are sincere in their professions and if the truth has gone home that under the garb of religion Hinduism is said to have consigned to untouchability their own kith and kin for no fault of theirs.

*Harijan, May 19, 1946*

### **Reform Through Public Education**

The establishment of a Congress ministry does not mean that henceforth reforms will be imposed upon the people. There is the least room for the use of force in such things. An evil like untouchability which has found its way to the very marrow of the people's bones, and that too in the name of religion cannot be removed forcibly. But an alien government uses its influence to further suppress the suppressed by force. And when it tries to help them from a motive, pure or selfish, that too is done by the exercise of force. The Congress has not established its position through force. It is a purely democratic organization. Therefore, it is hoped that the Congress ministers will educate public opinion and win popular support for all its progressive measures. This should result in an impetus to reforms like Harijan work in their province and the forces standing in the way of such reforms would automatically disappear.

*Harijan, June 9, 1946*

### **A Minority**

The place of 'untouchables' in the Swaraj of my conception will be the same in every respect as that of the so-called caste Hindus. Such is also the position of the Congress. It has talked less and one more for minorities than any cosmopolitan body known to me.

The untouchables are not a minority in the sense in which Parsis, Jews, Christians and others can call themselves minorities. Harijans are a minority, if Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are minorities and Shudras are a majority. These are not minorities and majorities in the sense we are used to. We have fortunately not come to that pass. When we do, it will be goodbye to any kind of Swaraj. The English may go today. They will go some day, but if we become savages cutting one another's throats we will have the freedom that savages have.

The significance is that the untouchables are an integral part of Hindus. They are, therefore, better than minorities and worse if they claim to be and become a distinct community. A few educated untouchables may keep themselves as a class apart but the mass of them must sink or swim with the Hindus who, if they continue their misbehaviour towards Harijans, the so-called untouchables, must become extinct as a separate branch of the human family.

### **Separate Electorates**

They must go even to the extent they exist today. They are a device of Satan named Imperialism. It was never meant for the protection of the 'untouchables'. It was a prop of Imperialism. Even statutory separation has been in furtherance of the policy of 'divide and rule'. It is inherent in the life of Imperialism even if it were to be called by a sweeter name.

Separation must mean either change of religion or setting up a new religion-confusion added to confusion.

*Harijan, July 28, 1946*

## SCHEDULED CASTES AND TRIBES

### Depressed Classes

Vivekananda used to call the Panchamas 'suppressed classes'. There is no doubt that Vivekananda's is a more accurate adjective. We have suppressed them and have consequently become ourselves depressed. That we have become the 'Pariahs of the Empire' is, in Gokhale's language, the retributive justice meted out to us by a just God. A correspondent indignantly asks me in a pathetic letter what I am doing for them. 'Should not we the Hindus wash our bloodstained hands before we ask the English to wash theirs?' This is a proper question reasonably put. And if a member of a slave nation could deliver the suppressed classes from their slavery without freeing myself from my own, I would do so today. But it is an impossible task. A slave has not the freedom even to do the right thing. It is right for me to prohibit the importation of foreign goods, but I have no power to bring it about. It was right for Maulana Mohamed Ali to go to Turkey and to tell the Turks personally that India was with them in their righteous struggle. He was not free to do so. If I had a truly national legislature. I would answer Hindu insolence by erecting special and better wells for the exclusive use of suppressed classes and by erecting better and more numerous schools for them so that there would be not a single member of the suppressed classes left without a school to teach their children. But I must wait for that better day.

Meanwhile, are the depressed classes to be left to their own resources? Nothing of the sort. In my own humble manner, I have done and am doing all I can for my Panchama brothers.

There are three courses open to these downtrodden members of the Nation. For their impatience they may call in the assistance of the slave-owning Government. They will get it, but they will fall from the frying pan into the fire. Today they are slaves of slaves. By seeking Government aid, they will be used for suppressing their kith and kin. Instead of being sinned against, they will themselves be the sinners. The Mussalmans tried it and failed. They found that they were worse off than before. The Sikhs did it unwittingly and failed. Today there is no more discontented community in India than the Sikhs. Government aid is, therefore, no solution.

The second is rejection of Hinduism and wholesale conversion to Islam or Christianity. And if a change of religion could be justified for worldly betterment, I would advise it without hesitation. But religion is a matter of the heart. No physical inconvenience can warrant abandonment of one's own religion. If the inhuman treatment of the Panchamas were a part of Hinduism, its rejection would be a paramount duty both for them and for those like me who would not make a fetish even of religion and condone every evil in its sacred name. But I believe that untouchability is no part of Hinduism. It is rather its excrescence to be removed by every effort. And there is quite an army of Hindu reformers who have set their heart upon ridding Hinduism of this blot. Conversion, therefore, I hold, is no remedy whatsoever.

Then there remains, finally, self-help and self-dependence, with such aid as the non-Panchama Hindus will render of their own volition, not as a matter of patronage but as a matter of duty. And herein comes the use of non-co-operation. My correspondent was correctly informed by Mr. Rajagopalachari

and Mr. Hanumantrao that I would favour well-regulated non-co-operation for this acknowledged evil. But non-co-operation means independence of outside help, it means effort from within. It would not be non-co-operation to insist on visiting prohibited areas. That may be Civil Disobedience if it is peacefully carried out. But I have found to my cost that civil disobedience requires far greater preliminary training and self-control. All can non-co-operate, but few only can offer civil disobedience. Therefore, by way of protest against Hinduism, the Panchamas can certainly stop all contact and connection with other Hindus so long as the special grievances are maintained. But this means organized intelligent effort. And so far as I can see, there is no leader among the Panchamas who can lead them to victory through non-co-operation.

The better way, therefore, perhaps, is for the Panchamas heartily to join the great national movement that is now going on for throwing off the slavery of the present Government. It is easy enough for the Panchama friends to see that non-cooperation against the evil Government presupposes cooperation between the different sections forming the Indian Nation. The Hindus must realize that, if they wish to offer successful non-cooperation against the Government, they must make common cause with the Panchamas even as they have made common cause with the Mussalmans. Non-cooperation when it is free from violence is essentially a movement of intensive self-purification. That process has commenced and whether the Panchamas deliberately take part in it or not, the rest of the Hindus dare not neglect them, without hampering their own progress. Hence though the Panchama problem is dear to me as life itself, I rest satisfied with the exclusive attention to national non-co-operation. I feel sure that the greater includes the less.

*Young India, October 27, 1920*

### **The Panchamas of Madras**

Nowhere is the 'untouchable' so cruelly treated as in this presidency. His very shadow defiles the Brahmin. He may not even pass through Brahmin streets. Non-Brahmins treat him no better. And between the two, the Panchama as he is called in these parts is ground to atoms. And yet Madras is a land of mighty temples and religious devotion. The people with their big tilak marks, their long locks and their bare clean bodies look like Rishis. But their religion seems almost to be exhausted in these outward observances. It is difficult to understand this Dyerism towards the most industrious and useful citizens in a land that has produced Shankara and Ramanuja. And in spite of the satanic treatment of our own kith and kin in this part of India, I retain my faith in these Southern people. I have told them at all their huge meetings in no uncertain terms that there can be no Swaraj without the removal of the curse from our midst. I have told them that our being treated as social lepers in practically the whole world is due to our having treated a fifth of our own race as such... I make bold to prophesy that the moment India has repented of her treatment of the 'untouchables' and has boycotted foreign cloth, that moment India will be hailed, by the very English officials who seem to have hardened their hearts, as a free and a brave Nation. And because I believe that if Hindus will, it is possible for them to enfranchise the so-called Panchamas and extend to them the same rights that they claim for themselves, and it is possible for India, if she wills, to manufacture all the cloth she needs even as she cooks all the food she eats. I therefore also believe that Swaraj is attainable this year. This transformation cannot take place by any elaborately planned mechanical action. But it can take place if God's grace is with us. Who can deny that God is working a wonderful change in the hearts of everyone of us? Anyway it is the duty of every Congress worker everywhere to befriend the

untouchable brother and to plead with the un-Hindu Hindus, that Hinduism of the Vedas, the Upanishads, Hinduism of the Bhagvad Gita and of Shankara and Ramanuja contains no warrant for treating a single human being, no matter how fallen, as an untouchable. Let every Congressman plead in the gentlest manner possible with orthodoxy that the bar sinister is the very negation of Ahimsa.

### **With Aboriginals**

From Chakradharpur to Chaibasa is a pleasant motor ride over a very good road. It was at Chaibasa that I made the acquaintance of the Ho tribe - a most interesting body of men and women, simple as children, with a faith that is not easy to shake. Many of them have taken to Charkha and Khaddar. Congress workers began the work of reformation among them in 1921. Many have given up eating carrion and some have even taken to vegetarianism. The Mundas are another tribe whom I met at Khunti on my way to Ranchi. The scope for work in their midst is inexhaustible. Christian missionaries have been doing valuable service for generations but in my humble opinion their work suffers because at the end of it they expect conversion of these simple people to Christianity. I had the pleasure of seeing some of their schools in these places. It was also pleasing. But I could see the coming conflict between the missionaries and the Hindu workers. The latter have no difficulty in making their service commendable to the Hos, the Mundas and the others. How very nice it would be if the missionaries rendered humanitarian service without the ulterior aim of conversion! But I must not reiterate the remarks I made before the Missionary Conference and other Christian bodies in Calcutta. I know that such a revolutionary change in Christian endeavour as I am advocating cannot come through any advice, especially from an outsider, however well meant it may be; it can only come either out of a definite individual conviction or out of some great mass movement among Christians themselves. Among these tribes there is quite a colony of them called Bhaktas, literally meaning devotees. They are believers in Khaddar. Men as well as women ply the Charkha regularly. They wear Khaddar woven by themselves. Many of them had walked miles with their Charkhas on their shoulders. I saw nearly four hundred of them all plying their Charkhas most assiduously at the meeting I had the privilege of addressing. They have their own bhajans which they sing in chorus.

*Young India, October 8, 1925*

I can no more bear to be present in a place where they [the Harijans] are slighted or insulted, than a devoted student of Ramayana can bear to stay in a place where the name of Rama is dragged in the mire. Pray, therefore, either permit them to come and sit with you, or permit me to go and sit among them. The cordon that you have drawn goes right against the grain of my being. Either remove that cordon or put me with these brothers. But mind you, I want you to do what you do with the courage of your conviction and not to please me. If you exclude me I assure you I shall congratulate you on your courage and your instinct of self-preservation. But if you admit the 'untouchables' I adjure you to do so with the maturest deliberation, so that you might not later have to be in the sorry plight of those people at Mangrol who after I left them recanted their vows and expiated for their sins. Let this be the first object lesson in Satyagraha.

No cordons. Reserve spaces if you like for the orthodox as you have reserved accommodation on railway trains for Europeans and Anglo-Indians. I could bear to address a meeting from where the 'untouchables' were entirely excluded, but not one where they sat with the ban of insult and inferiority.

*Young India, October 29, 1925*

### **The Hydra-headed Monster**

A friend has sent me a gist of what appears in the Southern vernacular press from the pen of a learned Pandit. He summarises the Pandit's plea for untouchability in this fashion:

- (1) The fact that once Adi-Shankara asked a chandala to be aloof from him, and the fact that Trishankar when he was condemned to be a chandala was shunned by all people, prove that untouchability is not of recent growth.
- (2) The chandals are the outcastes of the Aryan society.
- (3) The untouchables themselves are not free from the sin of untouchability.
- (4) The untouchables are so because they kill animals and because they have constantly to do with flesh, blood, bones and night-soil.
- (5) The untouchables must be isolated even as slaughterhouses, toddy-shops and houses of ill fame are or should be.
- (6) It should be enough that untouchables are not denied the privileges of the other world.
- (7) A Gandhi may touch these people, but so can he fast. We may neither fast nor touch the untouchables.
- (8) Untouchability is a necessity for man's growth.
- (9) Man has magnetic powers about him. The sakti is like milk. It will be damaged by improper contacts. If one can keep musk and onion together one may mix Brahmins and untouchables.

There are the chief points summarised by the correspondent. Untouchability is a hydra-headed monster. It is therefore necessary, each time the monster lifts its head, to deal with it. The stories told in the Puranas are some of them most dangerous if we do not know their bearing on the present conditions. The Shastras would be death-traps if we were to regulate our conduct according to every detail given in them or according to that of the characters therein described. They help us only to define and argue out fundamental principles. If some well-known character in religious books sinned against God or man, is that a warrant for our repeating the sin? It is enough for us to be told, once for all, Truth is the only thing that matters in the world, that Truth is God. It is irrelevant to be told that even Yudhisthira was betrayed into an untruth. It is more relevant for us to know that when he spoke an untruth, he had to suffer for it that very moment and that his great name in no way protected him from punishment. Similarly, it is irrelevant for us to be told that Adi-Shankara avoided a chandala. It is enough for us to know that a religion that teaches us to treat all that lives as we treat ourselves, cannot possibly countenance the inhuman treatment of a single creature, let alone a whole class of perfectly innocent human beings. Moreover, we have not even all the facts before us to judge what Adi-Shankara did or did not do. Still less do we know the meaning of the word chandala where it occurs. It has admittedly many meanings, one of which is a sinner. But, if all sinners are regarded as untouchables, it is very much to be feared that we should all, not excluding the Pandit himself, be under the ban of untouchability. That untouchability is an old institution, nobody has ever denied. But if it is an evil, it cannot be defended on the ground of antiquity.

If the untouchables are the outcastes of the Aryan society, so much the worse for that society. And, if the Aryans at some stage in their progress regarded a certain class of people as outcastes by way of punishment. There is no reason why that punishment should descend upon their progeny irrespective of the causes for which their ancestors were punished.

That there is untouchability even amongst untouchables merely demonstrates that evil cannot be confined and that its deadening effect is all prevading. The existence of untouchability amongst untouchables is an additional reason for cultured Hindu society to rid itself of the curse with the quickest despatch.

If the untouchables are so because they kill animals and because they have to do with flesh, blood, bones and night-soil, every nurse and every doctor should become an untouchable and so should Christians, Mussalmans and all so-called high-class Hindus who kill animals for food or sacrifice.

The argument that because slaughter houses, toddy-shops, and houses of ill fame are or should be isolated, untouchables should likewise be isolated betrays gross prejudice. Slaughterhouses and toddy-shops are and should be isolated. But neither butchers nor publicans are isolated. Prostitutes should be isolated because their occupation is revolting and detrimental to the well-being of society. Whereas the occupation of 'untouchables' is not only desirable but a necessity for the well-being of the society. To say that 'untouchables' are not denied privileges of the other world, is the acme of insolence. If it was possible to deny them the privileges of the other world, it is highly likely that the defenders of the monster would isolate them even in the other world.

It is throwing dust in the eyes of the people to say that "a Gandhi may touch the 'untouchables', not so other people," as if the touching and service of 'untouchables' was so injurious as to require for it men specially proof against untouchable germs. Heaven only knows what punishment is in store for Mussalmans, Christians and others who do not believe in untouchability!

The plea of animal magnetism is altogether overdone. The high-class men are not all sweet-smelling like musk, nor are untouchables foul-smelling like onion. There are thousands of untouchables who are any way infinitely superior to the so-called high class people.

It is painful to discover that even after five years of continuous propaganda against untouchability, there are learned people enough found to support such an immoral and evil custom. That belief in untouchability can co-exist with learning in the same person adds no status to untouchability but makes one despair of mere learning being any aid to character or sanity.

*Young India, July 29, 1926*

### **The Criterion of the Depressed Classes**

It is, however, by no means a simple matter to devise a satisfactory criterion by which to distinguish the depressed classes. The problem itself being essentially social and religious, the criteria which have been at various times suggested themselves depend upon social observance or social precedence. During the census of 1901 the castes in Bengal were distinguished into seven groups upon an elaborate classification. The first group contained Brahmins only as the acknowledged superiors of all other classes in the caste hierarchy. In the second group were placed castes whose respectability was never in question and who are either twice-born or were held to be superior to all other Shudra castes. A

third group consisted of the so-called *navashakha*, or nine branches, now indeed containing more than nine groups but all characterized by being held worthy to offer water the drinking of which would not pollute the higher classes. Below this third group were distinguished a fourth containing clean castes with degraded Brahmins; a fifth containing castes lower than group four whose water is not usually accepted, a sixth comprised low castes abstaining from beef, pork and fowls, and seventh embracing castes by whom forbidden foods were eaten and who pursue the most degraded occupation as scavengers, etc. In 1911 the Census Commissioner for India directed provincial superintendents to enumerate castes and tribes returned as Hindus who do not conform to certain standards or are subject to certain disabilities "leaving the reader to draw his own inferences". They were asked to prepare a list of all but the minor castes which *qua* castes-

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

The enquiry was intended to furnish material, if possible, from which an answer could be given to the difficult question "who is a Hindu?" Up to 1916 in Bengal at least the expression "depressed classes" was unknown. In 1916, however, the Bengal government was invited to prepare a list including certain criminal tribes and aboriginals and amounting in all to 31 groups. This list was used by the Commissioner for Education in writing his quinquennial report on the progress of education in India for the years 1912-1917. The term thus introduced remained and both the Calcutta University Commission (1917-1919) and the Census Report for 1921 contained lists of the depressed classes. In neither of these last instances, however, was any clear criterion set forth to show on what grounds the groups were included. The Indian Statutory Commission without giving any criterion referred to them as the "lowest castes recognized as being within the Hindu religious and social system... Their essential characteristic is that according to the tenets of Orthodox Hinduism, they are, though within the Hindu system, untouchable - that is to say, that for all other Hindus by cause pollution by touch and defile food and water. They are denied access to the interior of an ordinary Hindu temple (though this is also true of some who would not be classified as 'untouchable'). They are not only the lowest in the Hindu social and religious system, but with few individual exceptions are also at the bottom of the economic scale and are generally quite uneducated. In the villagers they normally segregated in a separate quarter and not unfrequently eat food which would not be touched by any section of the Hindu Community."

At the later date the Franchise Committee, driven to lay down simple criteria adopted No. 7 and 8 of the distinctions made in the Census Report of 1911. For Bengal these distinctions have been elaborated on behalf of the Depressed Classes Association as follows:

- (a) Castes from whose hands the three high castes or even the *navashakha* (that is, the caste Hindus) would not accept water and whose presence either in the kitchen or in the room where water and cooked food are kept would pollute the same according to their estimation;
- (b) Castes who would not be allowed into any public temple and whose presence there would defile articles of worship;
- (c) Castes who would not be allowed to enter or to have their meals inside the dining room of a hotel or eating house run by caste Hindus;
- (d) Castes at whose socio-religious functions Srotriya Brahmins, that is, the priests, officiating in such functions in the house of the caste Hindus would not officiate; and
- (e) Castes who would not be served by the Srotriya Napit (that is the barber) whose services are necessary in various socio-religious functions of the Hindus."

*Harijan, April, 29, 1933*

### **Human Manufacture**

The note on 'depressed classes' in the Census Report for 1931 for Bihar and Orissa contains significant and suggestive items of information. Mr. Lacey, ICS the Census Commissioner, presents 31 castes as falling within the category of the depressed classes and refers to the difficulty in defining the depressed classes thus:

"Inasmuch as the term 'depressed classes', although freely used nowadays in political parlance, has never yet been clearly defined, the *selection* (italics ours) of the castes which should be included in this category was attended with much difficulty. The objective adopted was to confine to term to those castes which, by reason of their traditional position in society (and most particularly in Hindu society), suffer from certain social disabilities as for instance that they are not permitted to penetrate beyond the outer precincts of the village temple, they may not draw water from the common well, they are not supposed to sit with other children in the village school. Judged by this standard, the distinction between the depressed classes and what are commonly known as the 'untouchable castes' may appear to be a fine one. But so far as Bihar and Orissa is concerned, the term untouchable, though possibly easier to define in the abstract, gives rise to still greater difficulties and complexities when an attempt is made to distinguish the castes which in actual practice are comprehended in that category. In this province conditions are very different from those which, it is believed, obtain in Southern India, where the line of cleavage between the caste Hindus and untouchable castes is much more distinctly marked. There are certain castes which on account of their traditional occupation, are technically unclean and which in other parts of India are possibly subject to real social disabilities for this reason, but in Bihar and Orissa, although here and there a high-caste Hindu may still seek to avoid personal contact with them, they do not really labour under any special handicap. For example, the Telis in this province cannot be described as depressed. Educationally, they are above the average for all communities taken together. In point of material prosperity, they are as a rule far better off than great cultivating castes. It may be that in an orthodox assembly they would be denied access to the interior

of a Hindu temple, but this does not afford sufficient ground for including them in the list of depressed classes. Much the same remarks apply to the Sunris and Kalwars. A Chamar, on the other hand, is genuinely depressed. Not only is he almost always ill-educated and poverty-stricken, but the stigma attaching to his caste operate to deprive him every day of his life in a greater or less degree of what may be regarded as the ordinary right of a citizen. But here, again, conditions vary from district to district, and even from village to village within the district. In a village which contains a number of orthodox Brahmins or conservative Rajputs, the disabilities to which a Chamar or a Dom is subject are likely to be more severe than elsewhere, indeed, there are undoubtedly places where their use of the village well etc. is not challenged at all, and, so long as they 'keep their place,' they may participate in the daily life of the village without let or hindrance. But even in such places the 'inferiority complex' is still there, and a Musahar who aspired to climb the social ladder on his own merit (as distinct, let us say, from one who might be propelled up it by friendly, if not wholly disinterested, hands to a position of uncomfortable eminence) would always, and everywhere, find the dice heavily loaded against him.

"To the question which of these castes for how many members of any particular caste would themselves elected to be numbered among the depressed classes, a direct answer cannot be returned. For one thing the implications of the question would seldom be understood. A Dosadh, intercepted on his way home from a meeting of his caste sabha at which it had been firmly impressed on his mind that he is a Gahlot Rajput and must live up to it, would doubtless repudiate with scorn any suggestion that seemed to reflect on his social status. But, were it a question of securing special educational facilities or of the reservation of a specified quota of Government appointments, not only the average Dosadh but an overwhelming majority of other castes which do not figure in the present list at all would clamour for inclusion."

Then follows an interesting paragraph about the gradual 'Hinduization' of the primitive tribes, as a result of which, they lose their 'study, independent and intensely proud' race characteristics and become more and more identified with the depressed classes.

**Says Mr Lacey:**

"Take again the aboriginals, or primitive tribes. Excepting those of them who have been converted to Christianity the standard of education among the tribes is extremely low, and in many cases lower than what is found in castes treated as depressed. But they stand on a different footing. In the first place, they are (or originally were) entirely outside Hindu society and were thus unaffected by its laws and inhibitions. Food touched by a Munda might be anathema to a caste Hindu, but so also would be food touched by a European or a Muslim. A Santal formerly was conscious of no inferiority complex, nor is the unspoiled Santal today. He is sturdy, independent and intensely proud. In areas where these aboriginal tribes are concentrated in large numbers, where, in fact, they still feel that they are 'at home' and that the Hindus and everybody else except themselves are interlopers, they do not as a rule suffer from any disabilities. But even in these areas they are being gradually 'Hinduized', and the further this process is carried, the more are they in danger of becoming identified with the depressed classes. With some tribes the process has already gone so far that they are practically indistinguishable, and for this reason it has been thought proper to include in the 'depressed' list the eight castes or tribes mentioned in the margin, although they are, without doubt, non-Aryans and have much the same origin as the Chota Nagpur aboriginals, who have been more successful in maintaining their identity. The total strength of these eight tribes is about two million persons, but

only 20,000 of this number were returned as following their old tribal religions. Ninety-nine per cent of them are now Hindus, and a large proportion of these have probably adopted much the same outlook on life, and are exposed to much the same disadvantages, as the depressed Hindu castes."

The most informing part of the note, however, is section 8, instituting a comparison between the 1931 list of the depressed classes and the list compiled in connection with the census of 1911. The latter comprised altogether 37 castes and the total number of persons included was about 13.4 millions, while the 1931 list contains 31 castes and numbers only about millions. It should be noted also that only 14 castes are common to both the lists.

"With the exception of the Bhumij and Raj wars, who were included in 1911 on the sole ground that they 'were not served by good Brahmanas as family priests', all these particular castes were definitely classified as *untouchable*. Of the 17 castes which have been listed at the present census but do not figure in the 1911 list, all except 3 (Bhogta, Ghasi and Turi) numbered less than 1 per mille of the total population and were consequently excluded from the scope of the previous enquiry."

"Twenty-three castes and tribes included in the former list have been omitted from the present one. Of these, eight were omitted because they are aboriginal tribes which were regarded as being on a different footing from the depressed Hindu castes. Four other castes, namely, Ganda, Kalwar, Sunri and Tiyar, were classed in 1911 as 'causing pollution by touch of within a certain distance'. There are reasons for holding that now-a-days the Kalwars and Sunris cannot be considered to be depressed. The other two castes are very much on the border line. Reports received from the districts where they are chiefly found indicated that, although they are backward and poor and held in low estimation, the same stigma did not attach to them as to the other castes which have been included in the present list. In regard to the other eleven castes which figured in the list of 1911, the only disability alleged on behalf of most of these communities was that they were not served by good Brahmanas as family priests, though a few (Mallah, Tanti and Teli) were also said to be denied access to the interior of Hindu temples. The Vaisnavs were included because of their habit of burying their dead. For present purposes, it is doubtful whether any of these eleven castes should be treated as depressed classes."

A dispassionate consideration of the details set forth above will place it beyond doubt that the question as to who are to be included in the untouchables or depressed classes is decided mostly by the discretion of census enumerators. Nor is even this done on a uniform basis. The instructions for compiling such lists vary from time to time and from province to province. It follows that the numbers as well as the castes making up the total of the depressed classes (and untouchables) are undergoing constant and considerable changes and that the position at any given time have very little in common with what it was, say, a generation or two earlier. To make any definite quality and the quantity of untouchability obtaining at a particular time down or discover uniform, immutable laws about untouchables and their status in society, which, by the way is undergoing a rapid transformation all the time, can only be considered the result of despair, while nothing can be farther from truth and reason than the claim a divine origin and dispensation for untouchability and thereby endeavour to attach a religious sanction to that blot on the fair escutcheon of Hinduism.

*Harijan, May 20, 1933*

This subject was years ago that dealt with in the pages of Young India. The name 'Harijan' has sacred associations. It was suggested by a Harijan as a substitute for *Asprishya* (untouchable), *Dalita*

(depressed), or for the different categories of 'untouchable' such as *bhangis, mehtars, chamars, pariahs, etc.* The Government officers put them in a schedule and therefore called them the Scheduled Classes, thus making confusion worse confounded. Those who were not untouchables were classed among the scheduled and the ones who could be so called were excluded. We have now arrived at a stage, thanks to the Government policy, when to be included among the Scheduled Classes is to be coveted. The Government have created a separate electorate agitating for seats in all elective institutions. I do not mind such ambition, if it carries honest merit with it. But it becomes positively mischievous when seats are coveted irrespective of merit. The wish to be so educated as to be qualified for the highest post is to be appreciated and encouraged; the wish to be appointed to such a post on the basis of belonging to a caste or a class is essentially to be deprecated and discouraged.

The real remedy has been suggested by me. The feeling of inferiority must go. It is going, but too slowly. The process can be accelerated if every Hindu would deliberately shed his superiority and in practice become a Harijan or, if you like, a methar, the lowest class among Harijans. Then we will all become true children of God as the word 'Harijan' means. Until this is done, no matter which word signifies 'untouchables', it will smell of inferiority. The process has to be carried out thoroughly in every walk of life till the last trace of untouchability is removed. When that happy day arrives, every quarter will be a Harijan quarter and cleanliness of the heart and the home will be the order of the day.

*Harijan, April 14, 1946*

### **The Rights of Harijans**

I have received letters from Harijan friends and some have been to see me too. Now that power has come into the Nation's hands, they feel that there should be more than one Harijan minister. Their population ration demands at least three. Moreover, they claim representation in every department on this basis. It would be wrong, they say, to hold that there are not enough able persons among them. They maintain that the rule of capability is by no means applied to non-Harijans. They can cite instances of nepotism.

I am not ready to admit the correctness of all they say. My mind works quite differently. Man is master as far as performance of his duty is concerned and I hold that his rights really spring from duties properly performed. Such rights alone are befitting as also lasting. If every non-Harijan who had ability was able to exercise his rights, society would be disrupted. Performance of duty is open to everyone. The field of service is immense. Few can become master and he fails who seeks to become master. I know, however, that people do not act as I have suggested. Hence, there is a general scramble for power. And many are turned away disappointed. Holding the views I do, I have tried to act on them for the last fifty years. I am uninterested in the unbecoming struggle for power. My sole advice to Harijans is that they should think only in terms of their duties and rights will follow as surely as day follows night.

*Harijan, October 6, 1946*

The untouchables, the scheduled classes, are the target because they are the weakest point of Hinduism. One reads reports of Muslim League speakers holding forth that the scheduled classes in Pakistan can have separate electorates. Is that to be a call for joining Islam of the Pakistan type? I do

not wish to recall the tales of forcible conversions. But having heard so much from their own mouths, I shudder to contemplate the worst. What is the answer to this fear or threat? Undoubtedly there should be no untouchability whatsoever in Hinduism, no scheduled classes, therefore, in India, no caste divisions whatsoever in the eye of the law. Hindus are all one, no high or low. All the neglected classes such as the scheduled classes and the so-called aboriginal classes should receive special treatment in the matter of education, housing etc. On the electoral role they will be one. This must never mean a worse state than the present but better in every way. Will Hinduism come up to the high level or will it court extinction by hugging infamous superstitions and aping bad manners?

*Harijan, June 6, 1947*