

# WHAT CONGRESS AND GANDHI HAVE DONE TO THE UNTOUCHABLES

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## CHAPTER XI GANDHISM

### The Doom of the Untouchables

#### I

Hitherto when Indians have been talking about the reconstruction of Indian social and economic life they have been talking in terms of individualism versus collectivism, capitalism versus socialism, conservatism versus radicalism and so on. But quite recently a new 'ism' has come on the Indian horizon. It is called Gandhism. It is true that very recently Mr. Gandhi had denied that there is such a thing as Gandhism. This denial is nothing more than the usual modesty which Mr. Gandhi wears so well. It does not disprove the existence of Gandhism. There have been quite a number of books with the title of Gandhism without any protest from Mr. Gandhi. It has already caught the imagination of some people both inside and outside India. Some have so much faith in it that they do not hesitate to offer it as an alternative to Marxism.

The followers of Gandhism who may happen to read what is said in the foregoing pages may well ask; Mr. Gandhi may not have done what the Untouchables expected him to do; but does not Gandhism offer any hope to the Untouchables? The followers of Gandhism may accuse me of remembering only the short, slow, intermittent steps taken by Mr. Gandhi for the sake of the Untouchables and of forgetting the potential length of the principles enunciated by him. I am prepared to admit that it does sometimes happen that a person, who enunciates a long principle takes only a short step and that he may be forgiven for the short step in the hope that some day the principle will by its native dynamics force a long step covering all who were once left out. Gandhism is in itself a very interesting subject for study. But to deal with Gandhism after having dealt with Mr. Gandhi is bound to be a tedious task and therefore my first reaction was to leave out the consideration of Gandhism and Untouchables. At the same time, I could hardly remain indifferent to the facts that the effect of my omission to consider the subject might be very unfortunate. For Gandhists, notwithstanding my exposure of Mr. Gandhi, might take advantage of it and continue to preach that if Mr. Gandhi has failed to solve the problem of the Untouchables still the Untouchables will find their salvation in Gandhism. It is because I wish to leave no room for such propaganda that I have overcome my original disinclination and engage upon discussion of Gandhism.

#### II

What is Gandhism ? What does it stand for ? What are its teachings about economic problem ? What are its teachings about social problem ?

At the outset it is necessary to state that some Gandhists have conjured up a conception of Gandhism which is purely imaginary. According to this conception Gandhism means return to the village and making the village self-sufficient. It makes Gandhism a mere matter of regionalism. Gandhism, I am sure, is neither so simple nor so innocent as regionalism is.

Gandhism has a much bigger content than regionalism. Regionalism is a small insignificant part of it. It has a social philosophy and it has an economic philosophy. To omit to take into account the economic and social philosophy of Gandhism is to present deliberately a false picture of Gandhism. The first and foremost requisite is to present a true picture of Gandhism.

To start with Mr. Gandhi's teachings on social problem. Mr. Gandhi's views on the caste system—which constitutes the main, social problem in India—were fully elaborated by him in 1921-22 in a Gujarathi Journal called NavaJivan. The article <sup>6</sup>[\[f.1\]](#)<sup>7</sup> is written in Gujarathi. I give below an English translation of his views as near as possible in his own words. Says Mr. Gandhi:

"1. I believe that if Hindu Society has been able to stand it is because it is founded on the caste system.

" 2. The seeds of Swaraj are to be found in the caste system. Different castes are like different sections of military division. Each division is working for the good of the whole.

"3. A community which can create the caste system must be said to possess unique power of organisation.

"4. Caste has a ready made means for spreading primary education. Every caste can take the responsibility for the education of the children of the Caste. Caste has a political basis. It can work as an electorate for a representative body. Caste can perform judicial functions by electing persons to act as judges to decide disputes among members of the same caste. With castes it is easy to raise a defence force by requiring each caste to raise a brigade.

"5. I believe that interdining or intermarriage are not necessary for promoting national unity. That dining together creates friendship is contrary to experience. If this was true there would have been no war in Europe... Taking food is as dirty an act as answering the call of nature. The only difference is that after answering call of nature we get peace while after eating food we get discomfort. Just as we perform the act of answering the call of nature in seclusion so also the act of taking food must also be done in seclusion.

"6. In India children of brothers do not intermarry. Do they cease to love because they do not intermarry ? Among the Vaishnavas many women are so orthodox that they will not eat with the members of the family nor will they drink water from a common water pot. Have they no love ? The Caste system cannot be said to be bad because it does not allow inter-dining or intermarriage between different Castes."

"7. Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning of such caste restrictions as interdining and intermarriage.

"8. To destroy caste system and adopt Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system. Hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a Brahmin if I cannot call him a Brahmin for my life. It will be a chaos if every day a Brahmin is to be changed into a Shudra and a Snudra is to be changed into a Brahmin.

"9. The caste system is & natural order of society. In India it has been given a religious coating. Other countries not having understood the utility of the Caste System it existed only in a loose condition and consequently those countries have not derived from Caste system the same degree of advantage which India has derived.

These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the Caste System,"  
 In 1922, Mr. Gandhi was a defender of the caste system. Pursuing the inquiry, one comes across a somewhat critical view of the caste system by Mr. Gandhi in the year 1925. This is what Mr. Gandhi said on 3rd February 1925 :—

"I gave support to caste because it stands for restraint. But at present caste does not mean restraint, it means limitations. Restraint is glorious and helps to achieve freedom. But limitation is like chain. It binds. There is nothing commendable in castes as they exist today. They are contrary to the tenets of the shastras. The number of castes is infinite and there is a bar against intermarriage. This is not a condition of elevation. It is a state of fall."

In reply to the question: What is the way out Mr. Gandhi said:

"The best remedy is that small castes should fuse themselves into one big caste. There should be four such big castes so that we may reproduce the old system of four varnas."

In short, in 1925 Mr. Gandhi became an upholder of the Varna system.

The old Varna system prevalent in ancient India had society divided into four orders : (1) Brahmins, whose occupation was learning; (2) Kshatriyas whose occupation was warfare, (3) Vaishyas, whose occupation was trade and (4) Shudras, whose occupation was service of the other classes. Is Mr. Gandhi's Varna System the same as this old Varna system of the orthodox Hindus ? Mr. Gandhi explained his Varna system. in the following terms [\[f.2\]](#) :

"1. I believe that the divisions into Varna is based on birth.

"2. There is nothing in the Varna system which stands in the way of the Shudra acquiring learning or studying military art of offence or defence. Contra it is open to a Kshatriya to serve. The Varna system is no bar to him. What the Varna system enjoins is that a Shudra will not make learning a way of earning a living. Nor will a Kshatriya adopt service as a way of earning a living. [Similarly a Brahmin may learn the art of war or trade.. But he must not make them a way of earning his living. Contra a Vaishya may acquire learning or may cultivate the art of war. But he must not make them a way of earning his living.

"3. The varna system is connected with the way of earning a living. There is no harm if a person belonging to one varna acquires the knowledge or science and art specialised in by persons belonging to other varnas. But as far as the way of earning his living is concerned he must follow the occupation of the varna to which he belongs which means he must follow the hereditary profession of his forefathers.

"4. The object of the varna system is to prevent competition and class struggle and class war. I believe in the varna system because it fixes the duties and occupations of persons,

"5. Varna means the determination of a man's occupation before he is born.

"6. In the Varna system no man has any liberty to choose his occupation. His occupation is determined for him by heredity."

Turning to the field of economic life, Mr. Gandhi stands for two ideals:

One of these is the opposition to machinery. As early as 1921 Mr. Gandhi gave vent to his dislike for machinery. Writing in the Young India of 19th January 1921, Mr. Gandhi said :

"Do I want to put back the hand of the clock of progress ? Do I want to replace the mills by hand-spinning and hand-weaving ? Do I want to replace the railway by the country-cart ? Do I want to destroy machinery altogether ? These questions have been asked by some journalists and public men. My answer is: I would not weep over the disappearance of

machinery or consider it a calamity."

His opposition to machinery is well evidenced by his idolisation of charkha (the spinning wheel) and by insistence upon hand-spinning and hand-weaving. This opposition to machinery and his love for charkha is not a matter of accident. It is a matter of philosophy. This philosophy Mr. Gandhi took special occasion to propound in his presidential address at the Kathiawad Political Conference held on 8th January 1925. This is what Mr. Gandhi said:

"Nations are tired of the worship of lifeless machines multiplied ad infinitum. We are destroying the matchless living machines viz., our own bodies by leaving them to rust and trying to substitute lifeless machinery for them. It is a law of God that the body must be fully worked and utilised. We dare not ignore it. The spinning wheel is the auspicious symbol of Sharir Yajna— body labour. He who eats his food without offering this sacrifice steals it. By giving up this sacrifice we became traitors to the country, and banged the door in the face of the Goddess of Fortune."

Anyone who has read Mr. Gandhi's booklet on Hind Swaraj (Indian Home Rule) will know that Mr. Gandhi is against modern civilisation. The book was first published in 1908. But there has been no change in his ideology. Writing in 1921 Mr. Gandhi said [\[f.3\]](#) :

"The booklet is a severe condemnation of 'modern civilisation.' It was written in 1908. My conviction is deeper today than ever. I feel that, if India would discard 'Modern civilisation' she can only gain by doing so." In Mr. Gandhi's view [\[f.4\]](#) :

"Western civilisation is the creation of satan."

The second ideal of Mr. Gandhi is the elimination of class-war and even class struggle in the relationship between employers and employees and between landlords and tenants. Mr. Gandhi's views on the relationship between employers and employees were set forth by him in an article on the subject which appeared in the NavaJivan of the 8th June 1921 from which the following is an extract :

"Two paths are open before India, either to introduce the Western principle of 'Might is right' or to uphold the Eastern principle that truth alone conquers, that truth knows no mishap, that the strong and the weak have alike a right to secure justice. The choice is to begin with the labouring class. Should the labourers obtain an increment in their wages by violence ? Even if that be possible, they cannot resort to anything like violence, howsoever legitimate may be their claims. To use violence for securing rights may seem an easy path, but it proves to be thorny in the long run. Those who live by sword die also by sword. The swimmer often dies by drowning. Look at Europe. No one seems to be happy there, for not one is contented. The labourer does not trust the capitalist and the capitalist has no faith in the labourer. Both have a sort of vigour and strength but even the bulls have it. They fight to the very bitter end. All motion is not progress. We have got no reason to believe, that the people of Europe are progressing. Their possession of wealth does not argue the possession of any moral or spiritual qualities.

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"What shall we do then ? The labourers in Bombay made a fine stand. I was not in a position to know all the facts. But this much I could see that they could fight in a better way. The millowner may be wholly in the wrong. In the struggle between capital and labour, it may be generally said that more often than not the capitalists are in the wrong box. But when

labour comes fully to realise its strength, I know it can become more tyrannical than capital. The millowners will have to work on the terms dictated by labour, if the latter could command intelligence of the former. It is clear, however, that labour will never attain to that intelligence. If it does; labour will cease to be labour and become itself the master. The capitalists do not fight on the strength of money alone. They do possess intelligence and tact.

"The question before us is this: When the labourers, remaining what they are, develop a certain consciousness, what should be their course ?' It would be suicidal 'if the labourers rely upon their numbers or brute-force, i.e., violence. By so doing, they will do harm to industries in the country. If, on the other hand, they take their stand on pure justice and suffer in their person to secure it, not only will they always succeed but they will reform their masters, develop industries and both master and men will be as members of one and the same family."

Referring to the same theme on another occasion Mr. Gandhi said [\[f.5\]](#) :

"Nor was it otherwise before. Indians history is not one of strained relations between capital and labour."

Particularly noteworthy are the views of Mr. Gandhi on strike as a weapon, in the hand of the workers to improve their economic condition. Mr. Gandhi says [\[f.6\]](#) :

"Speaking, therefore, as one having handled large successful strikes, I repeat the following maxims, already stated in these pages, for the guidance of all strike leaders :

- (1) There should be no strike without a real grievance.
- (2) There should be no strike, if the persons concerned are not able to support themselves out of their own savings or by engaging in some temporary occupation, such as carding, spinning and weaving. Strikers should never depend upon public subscriptions or other charity.
- (3) Strikers must fix an unalterable minimum demand, and declare it before embarking upon their strike.

"A strike may fail in spite of a just grievance and the ability of strikers to hold out indefinitely, if there are workers to replace them. A wise man, therefore, will not strike for increase of wages or other comforts, if he feels that he can be easily replaced. But a philanthropic or patriotic man will strike in spite of supply being greater than the demand, when he feels for and wishes to associate himself with his neighbour's distress. Needless to say, there is no room in a civil strike of the nature described by me for violence in the shape of intimidation, incendiarism or otherwise.. Judged by the tests suggested by me, it is 'clear that friends of the strikers could never have advised them to apply for or receive Congress or any other public funds for their support. The value of the strikers' sympathy was diminished to the extent, that they received or accepted financial aid. The merit of a sympathetic strike lies in the inconvenience and the loss suffered by the sympathisers."

Mr. Gandhi's view on the relationship between landlords and tenants were expounded by him in the Young India of 18th May 1921 in the form of instructions [\[f.7\]](#) to the tenants of U.P. who had risen against their landlords. Mr. Gandhi said:

"Whilst the U. P. Government is crossing the bounds of propriety, and intimidating people, there is little doubt that the Kisans too are not making wise use of their newly found power. In several Zamindaries, they are said to have overstepped the mark, taken the law into their own hands and to have become impatient of anybody who would not do as they wish. They are

abusing social boycott and are turning it into an instrument of violence. They are reported to have Stopped the supply of water, barber and other paid services to their Zamindars in some instances and even suspended payment of the rent due to them. The Kisan movement has received an impetus from Non-co-operation but it is anterior to and independent of it. Whilst we will not hesitate to advise the Kisans when the moment comes, to suspend payment of taxes to Government, it is not contemplated that at any stage of Non-co-operation we would seek to deprive the Zamindars of their rent. The Kisan movement must be confined to the improvement of status of the Kisans and the betterment of the- relations between the Zamindars and them. The Kisans must be advised scrupulously to abide by the terms of their agreement with the Zamindars, whether such is written or inferred from custom. Where a custom or even a written contract is bad, they may not try to uproot it by violence or without previous reference to the Zamindars. In every case there should be a friendly discussion with the Zamindars and an attempt made to arrive at a settlement."

Mr. Gandhi does not wish to hurt the propertied class. He is even opposed to a campaign against them. He has no passion for economic equality. Referring to the propertied class Mr. Gandhi said quite recently that he does not wish to destroy the hen that lays the golden egg. His solution for the economic conflict between the owners and workers, between the rich and the poor, between landlords and tenants and between the employers and the employees is very simple. The owners need not deprive themselves of their property. All that they need do is to declare themselves Trustees for the poor. Of course the Trust is to be a voluntary one carrying only a spiritual obligation.

### III

Is there anything new in the Gandhian analysis of economic ills ? Are the economics of Gandhism sound ? What hope does Gandhism hold out to the common man, to the down-and out ? Does it promise him a better life, a life of joy, and culture, a life of freedom, not merely freedom from want but freedom to rise, to grow to the full stature which his capacities can reach ?

There is nothing new in the Gandhian analysis of economic ills in so far as it attributes them to machinery and the civilisation that is built upon it. The arguments that machinery and modern civilisation help to concentrate management and control into relatively few hands, and with the aid of banking and credit facilitate the transfer into still fewer hands of all materials and factories and mills in which millions are bled white in order to support huge industries thousands of miles away from their cottages, or that machinery and modern civilisation cause deaths, maimings andcrippings far in, excess of the corresponding injuries by war, and are responsible for disease and physical deterioration caused directly and indirectly by the development of large cities with their smoke, dirt, noise, foul air, lack of sunshine and out-door life, slums, prostitution and unnatural living which they bring about, are all old and worn out arguments. There is nothing new in them. Gandhism is merely repeating the views of Rousseau, Ruskin, Tolstoy and their school.

The ideas which go to make up Gandhism are just primitive. It is a return to nature, to animal life. The only merit is their simplicity. As there is always a large corps of simple people who are attracted by them, such simple ideas do not die, and there is always some simpleton to preach



them. There is, however, no doubt that the practical instincts of men---which seldom go wrong---have found them unfruitful and which society in search of progress has thought it best to reject.

The economics of Gandhism are hopelessly fallacious. The fact that machinery and modern civilisation have produced many evils may be admitted. But these evils are no argument against them. For the evils are not due to machinery and modern civilisation. They are due to wrong social organisation which has made private property and pursuit of personal gain matters of absolute sanctity. If machinery and civilisation have not benefited everybody the remedy is not to condemn machinery and civilisation but to alter the organisation of society so that the benefits will not be usurped by the few but will accrue to all.

In Gandhism the common man has no hope. It treats man as an animal and no more. It is true that man shares the constitution and functions of animals, nutritive, reproductive, etc. But these are not distinctively human functions. The distinctively human function is reason, the purpose of which is to enable man to observe, meditate, cogitate, study and discover the beauties of the Universe and enrich his life and control the animal elements in his life. Man thus occupies the highest place in the scheme of animate existence. If this is true what is the conclusion that follows ? The conclusion that follows is that while the ultimate goal of a brute's life is reached once his physical appetites are satisfied, the ultimate goal of man's existence is not reached unless and until he has fully cultivated his mind. In short, what divides the brute from man is culture. Culture is not possible for the brute, but it is essential for man. That being so, the aim of human society must be to enable every person to lead a life of culture which means the cultivation of the mind as distinguished from the satisfaction of mere physical wants. How can this happen?

Both for society and as well as for the individual there is always a gulf between merely living and living worthily. In order that one may live worthily One must first live. The time and energy spent upon mere life, upon gaining of subsistence detracts from that available for activities, of a distinctively human nature and which go to make up a life of culture. How then can a life of culture be made possible ? It is not possible unless there is sufficient leisure. For it is only when there is leisure that a person is free to devote himself to a life of culture. The problem of all problems which human society has to face is how to provide leisure to every individual. What does leisure mean ? Leisure means the lessening of the toil and, effort necessary for satisfying the physical wants of life. How can leisure be made possible ? Leisure is quite impossible unless some means are found whereby the toil required for producing goods necessary to satisfy human needs is lessened. What can lessen such toil ? Only when machine takes the place of man. There is no other means of producing leisure. Machinery and modern civilisation are thus indispensable for emancipating man from leading the life of a brute, and for providing him with leisure and making a life of culture possible. The man who condemns machinery and modern civilisation simply does not understand their purpose and the ultimate aim which human society must strive to achieve.

Gandhism may be well suited to a society which does not accept democracy as its ideal. A society which does not believe in democracy may be indifferent to machinery and the civilisation based upon it. But a democratic society cannot. The former may well content itself with life of leisure and culture for the few and a life of toil and drudgery for the many. But a democratic society must assure a life of leisure and culture to each one of its citizens. If the

above analysis is correct then the slogan of a democratic society must be machinery, and more machinery, civilisation and more civilisation. Under Gandhism the common man must keep on toiling ceaselessly for a pittance and remain a brute. In short, Gandhism with its call of back to nature, means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast mass of the people.

The division of life into separate functions and of society into separate classes may not be altogether obliterated. In spite of many social and economic changes, in spite of the abolition of legal serfdom, legal slavery and the spread of the notion of democracy, with the extension of science, of general education through books, newspapers, travel and general intercourse in, schools and factories there remains and perhaps will remain enough cleavage in society into a learned and an ignorant class, a leisure and a labouring class.

But Gandhism is not satisfied with only notional class distinctions. Gandhism insists upon class structure. It regards the class structure of society and also the income structure as sacrosanct with the consequent distinctions of rich and poor, high and low owners and workers as permanent parts of social organisation. From the point of view of social consequences nothing can be more pernicious. Psychologically, class structure sets in motion influences which are harmful to both the classes. There is no common plane on which the privileged and the subject classes can meet. There is no endosmosis, no give and take of life's hopes and experiences. The social and moral evils of this separation to the subject class are of course real and obvious. It educates them into slaves and creates all the psychological complex which follows from a slave mentality. But those affecting the privileged class, though less material and less perceptible, are equally real. The isolation and exclusiveness following upon the class structure creates in the privileged classes the anti-social spirit of a gang. It feels it has interests 'of its own' which it makes its prevailing purpose to protect against everybody even against the interests of the State. It makes their culture sterile, their art showy, their wealth luminous and their manners fastidious. Practically speaking in a class structure there is, on the one hand, tyranny, vanity, pride, arrogance, greed, selfishness and on the other, insecurity, poverty, degradation, loss of liberty, self-reliance, independence, dignity and self-respect. Democratic society cannot be indifferent to such consequences. But Gandhism does not mind these consequences in the least. It is not enough to say that Gandhism is not satisfied with mere class distinctions. It is not enough to say that Gandhism believes in a class structure. Gandhism stands for more than that. A class structure which is a faded, jejune, effete thing a mere sentimentality, a mere skeleton is not what Gandhism wants. It wants class structure to function as a living faith. In this there is nothing to be surprised at. For class structure in Gandhism is not a mere accident. It is its official doctrine.

The idea of trusteeship which Gandhism proposes as a panacea by which the moneyed classes will hold their properties in trust for the poor is the most ridiculous part of it. All that one can say about it is that if anybody else had propounded it the author would have been laughed at as a silly fool who had not known the hard realities of life and was deceiving the servile classes by telling them that a little dose of moral rearmament to the propertied classes—those who by their insatiable cupidity and indomitable arrogance have made and will always make this world a vale of tears for the toiling millions—will recondition them to such an extent that they will be able to withstand the temptation to misuse the tremendous powers which the class



structure gives them over servile classes.

The social ideal of Gandhism is either caste or varna. Though it may be difficult to say which, there can be no doubt that the social ideal of Gandhism is not democracy. For whether one takes for comparison caste or varna both are fundamentally opposed to democracy. It would have been something if the defence of caste system which Gandhism offers was strong and honest. But his defence of the caste system is the most insensible piece of rhetoric one can think of. Examine Mr. Gandhi's arguments in support of caste and it will be found that everyone of them is specious if not puerile. To run through the arguments summarised earlier in this Chapter [\[f.8\]](#).

The first three arguments call for pity. That the Hindu Society has been able to stand while others have died out or disappeared is hardly a matter for congratulation. If it has survived it is not because of caste but because the foreigner who conquered the Hindus did not find it necessary to kill them wholesale. There is no honour in mere survival. What matters is the plane of survival. One can survive by unconditional surrender. One can survive by beating a cowardly retreat and one can survive by fighting. On what plane have the Hindus survived ? If they can be said to have survived after fighting and beating their enemies the virtue ascribed to the caste system by Mr. Gandhi could be admitted. The history of the Hindus has been one of surrender—abject surrender. It is true others have surrendered to their invaders. But in their case surrender is followed by a revolt against the foreign ruler. The Hindus have not only never withstood the onslaught of the foreign invader, they have never even shown the capacity to organise a rebellion to throw off the foreign yoke. On the other hand the Hindus have tried to make slavery comfortable. On this one may well argue the contrary namely that this helpless condition of the Hindus is due entirely to the caste system.

Argument in para 4 is plausible. But it cannot be said that caste is the only machinery for discharging such functions as the spread of primary education or the judicial settlement of disputes. Caste is probably the worst instrument for the discharge of such functions. It can be easily influenced and easily corrupted. Such functions have been discharged in other countries much better than they have been in India although they have had no caste system. As to using the caste as basis for raising military units the idea is simply fantastic. Under the occupational theory underlying the caste system this is unthinkable. Mr. Gandhi knows that not a single caste in his own Province of Gujarat has ever raised a military unit. It did not do it in the present World War. But it did not do so even in the last World War, when Mr. Gandhi toured through Gujarat as a Recruiting Agent of British Imperialism. In fact under the caste system a general mobilisation of the people for defence is impossible since mobilisation requires a general liquidation of the occupational theory underlying the caste system.

Arguments contained in paras 6 and 6 are as stupid as they are revolting. The argument in para 5 is hardly a good argument. It is quite true the family is an ideal unit in which every member is charged with love and affection for another member although there is no intermarriage among members of a family. It may even be conceded that in a Vaishnava family members of the family do not interdine and yet they are full of love and affection for one another. What does all this prove ? It does not prove that interdining and intermarrying are not necessary for establishing fraternity. What it proves is that where there are other means of maintaining fraternity—such as consciousness of family tie—interdining and intermarriage are not

necessary. But it cannot be denied that where—as in the caste system—no binding force exists intermarriage and interdining are absolutely essential. There is no analogy between family and caste, Inter-caste dinner and inter-caste marriage are necessary because there are no other means of binding the different castes together while in the case of a family there exists other forces to bind them together. Those who have insisted upon the ban against interdining and inter-marriage have treated it as a question of relative values. They have never elevated it to the level of a question of absolute value. Mr. Gandhi is the first one to do it. Inter-dining is bad and - even if it was capable of producing good it-should not be resorted to and why ? Because eating is a filthy act, as filthy as answering the call of nature ! The caste system has been defended by others. But this is the first time I have seen such an extraordinary if not a shocking argument used to support it., Even. the orthodox may say, "Save us from Mr. Gandhi," It. shows what a deep-dyed Hindu Mr. Gandhi is. He has outdone the most orthodox of orthodox Hindus. It is not enough to say that it is an argument of a cave man. It is really an argument of a mad man.

The argument in favour of the caste system outlined in para 7 is not worth much in terms of building up moral strength. The caste system no doubt prohibits a man from satisfying his lust for a woman who is not of his caste. The caste system no doubt prohibits a man from satisfying his craving for food cooked in the house of a man who is not of his caste. If morality consists of observing restraints without regard to the sense or sensibility of restraints then the caste system, may be admitted to be a moral system. But Mr. Gandhi does not see that these easy restraints are more than balanced by vast liberties permitted by Hinduism. For Hinduism places no restraint upon a man marrying hundred women and keeping hundred prostitutes within the ambit of his caste. Nor does it stop him from indulging in his appetite with his castemen to any degree.

The argument in para 8 begs the whole question. The hereditary system may be good or may not be good. It may be agreeable to some. It may be disagreeable to others. Why elevate it into an official doctrine ? Why make it compulsory ? In Europe it is not an official doctrine and it is not compulsory. It is left to the choice of an individual most of whom do follow the profession of their ancestors and some don't. Who can say that compulsory system has worked better than the voluntary system ? If a comparison of the economic condition of the people in India and the people of Europe is any guide there would be very few rationally-minded people who would be found to support the caste system on. this ground. As to the difficulty in changing nomenclature to keep pace with frequent changes in occupation it is only artificial, it arises out of the supposed necessity of having labels for designating persons following a particular profession. The class labels are quite unnecessary and could well be abolished altogether without causing difficulty. Besides what happens today in India ? Men's callings and their class labels are not in accord. A Brahmin sells shoes. Nobody is disturbed because he is not called a Chamar. A Chamar becomes an officer of the State. Nobody is disturbed because he is not called a Brahmin. The whole argument is based on a misunderstanding. What matters to society is not the label by which the individual's class is known but the service he offers.

The last argument set out in para 9 is one of the most astounding arguments I have heard in favour of the caste system. It is historically false. No one who knows anything about the Manu Smriti can say that the caste system is a natural system. What does Manu Smriti show ? It shows that the caste system is a legal system maintained at the point of a bayonet. If it has

survived it is due to (1) prevention of the masses from the possession of arms; (S) denying to the masses the right to education and (3) depriving the masses of the right to property. The caste system far from natural is really an imposition by the ruling classes upon the servile classes.

That Mr. Gandhi changed over from the caste system to the varna system does not make the slightest difference to the charge that Gandhism is opposed to democracy. In the first place, the idea of varna is the parent of the idea of caste. If the idea of caste is a pernicious idea it is entirely because of the viciousness of the idea of varna. Both are evil ideas and it matters very little whether one believes in varna or in caste. The idea of varna was most mercilessly attacked by the Buddhists who did not believe in it. Orthodox or the Sanatan Vedic Hindus had no rational defence to offer. All that they could say was that it was founded on the authority of the Vedas and that as the Vedas were infallible so was the varna system. This argument was not enough to save the varna system against the rationalism of the Buddhists. If the idea of the varna survived it was because of the Bhagvat Gita, which gave a philosophical foundation to the varna system by arguing that the varna was based on the innate qualities of man. The Bhagvat Gita made use of the Sankhya philosophy to bolster and buttress the varna idea which would have otherwise petered away by making sense of a thing that is absolute nonsense. Bhagvat Gita had done enough mischief by giving a fresh lease of life to the varna system by basing it upon a new and plausible foundation, namely that of innate qualities.

The varna system of the Bhagvat Gita has at least two merits. It does not say that it is based on birth. Indeed it makes a special point that each man's varna is fixed according to his innate qualities. It does not say that the occupation of the son shall be that of the father. It says that the profession of a person shall be according to his innate qualities, the profession of the father according to the father's innate quality and that of the son according to the son's innate qualities. But Mr. Gandhi has given a new interpretation of the varna system. He has changed it out of recognition. Under the old orthodox interpretation caste connoted hereditary occupation but varna did not. Mr. Gandhi by his own whim has given a new connotation to the varna. With Mr. Gandhi varna is determined by birth and the profession of a varna is determined by the principle of heredity so that varna is merely another name for caste. That Mr. Gandhi changed from caste to varna does not indicate the growth of any new revolutionary ideology. The genius of Mr. Gandhi is elvish, always and throughout. He has all the precocity of an elf with no little of its outward guise. Like an elf he can never grow up and grow out of the caste ideology.

Mr. Gandhi sometimes speaks on social and economic subjects as though he was a blushing Red. Those who will study Gandhism will not be deceived by the occasional aberrations of Mr. Gandhi in favour of democracy and against capitalism. For Gandhism is in no sense a revolutionary creed. It is conservatism in excelsis. So far as India is concerned, it is a reactionary creed blazoning on its banner the call of Return to Antiquity. Gandhism aims at the resuscitation and reanimation of India's dread, dying past.

Gandhism is a paradox. It stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of the existing political structure of the country. At the same time it seeks to maintain intact a social structure which permits the domination of one class by another on a hereditary basis which means a perpetual domination of one class by another. What is the explanation of this paradox ? Is it a part of a strategy by Mr. Gandhi to win the whole-hearted support of the

Hindus, orthodox and unorthodox, to the campaign of Swaraj ? If it is the latter, can Gandhism be regarded as honest and sincere ? Be that as it may there are two features of Gandhism which are revealing but to which unfortunately no attention has so far been paid. Whether they will make Gandhism more acceptable than Marxism is another matter. But as they do help to distinguish Gandhism from Marxism, it may be well to refer to them.

The first special feature of Gandhism is that its philosophy helps those who have, to keep what they have and to prevent those who have not from getting what they have a right to get. No one who examines the Gandhian attitude to strikes, the Gandhian reverence for Caste and the Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship by the rich for the benefit of the poor can deny that this is upshot of Gandhism. Whether this is the calculated result of a deliberate design or whether it is a matter of accident may be open to argument. But the fact remains that Gandhism is the philosophy of the well-so-do and the leisure class.

The second special feature of Gandhism is to delude people into accepting their misfortunes by presenting them as best of good fortunes. One or two illustrations will suffice to bring out the truth of this statement.

The Hindu sacred law penalized the Shudras (Hindus of the fourth class) from acquiring wealth. It is a law of enforced poverty unknown in any other part of the world. What does Gandhism do ? It does not lift the ban. It blesses the Shudra for his moral courage to give up property ! ! It is well worth quoting Mr, Gandhi's own words. Here they are [\[f.9\]](#) :

"The Shudra who only serves (the higher caste) as a matter of religious duty, and who will never own any property, who indeed has not even the ambition to own anything, is deserving of thousand obeisance. The very Gods will shower down flowers on him.

Another illustration in support is the attitude of Gandhism towards the scavenger. The sacred law of the Hindus lays down that a. scavenger's progeny shall live by scavenging. Under Hinduism scavenging was not a matter of choice, it was a matter of forced What does Gandhism do ? It seeks to perpetuate this system by praising scavenging as the noblest service to society ! ! Let me quote Mr. Gandhi : As a President of a Conference of the Untouchables, Mr. Gandhi said [\[f.10\]](#):

"I do not want to attain Moksha. 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 prayed that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra, but as an Atishudra.

"I love scavenging. In my Ashram, an eighteen years old Brahmin lad is doing the scavenger's work in order to teach the Ashram scavenger cleanliness. The lad is no reformer. He was born and bred in orthodoxy. But he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had become also a perfect sweeper, and that. if he wanted the Ashram sweeper to do his work well, he must do it himself and set an example.

"You should realise that you are cleaning Hindu Society."

Can there be a worse example of false propaganda than this attempt of Gandhism to perpetuate evils which have been deliberately imposed by one class over another ? If Gandhism preached the rule of poverty for all and not merely for the Shudra the worst that could be said about it is that it is a mistaken idea. But why preach it as good for one class only ? Why

appeal to the worst of human failings, namely, pride and vanity in order to make him voluntarily accept what on a rational basis he would resent as a cruel discrimination against him ? What is the use of telling the scavenger that even a Brahmin is prepared to do scavenging when it is clear that according to Hindu Shastras and Hindu notions even if a Brahmin did scavenging he would never be subject to the disabilities of one who is a born scavenger ? For in India a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not. If Gandhism preached that scavenging is a noble profession with the object of inducing those who refuse to engage in it, one could understand it. But why appeal to the scavenger's pride and vanity in order to induce him and him only to keep on to scavenging [\[f.11\]](#) by telling him that scavenging is a noble profession and that he need not be ashamed of it? To preach that poverty is good for the Shudra and for none else, to preach that scavenging is good for the Untouchables and for none else and to make them accept these onerous impositions as voluntary purposes of life, by appeal to their failings is an outrage and a cruel joke on the helpless classes which none but Mr. Gandhi can perpetuate with equanimity and impunity. In this connection one is reminded of the words of Voltaire who in repudiation of an 'ism' very much like Gandhism said: "Oh ! mockery to say to people that the suffering of some brings joy to others and works good to the whole ! What solace is it to a dying man to know that from his decaying body a thousand worms will come into life?"

Criticism apart) this is the technique of Gandhism, to make wrongs done appear to the very victim as though they were his privileges. If there is an 'ism' which has made full use of religion as an opium to lull the people into false beliefs and false security, it is Gandhism. Following Shakespeare one can well say: Plausibility ! Ingenuity ! Thy name is Gandhism.

#### IV

Such is Gandhism. Having known what is Gandhism the answer to the question, 'Should Gandhism become the law of the land what would be the lot of the Untouchables under it,' cannot require much scratching of the brain. How would it compare with the lot of the lowest Hindu ? Enough has been said to show what would be his lot should the Gandhian social order come into being. In so far as the lowest Hindu and the Untouchable belong to the same disinherited class, the Untouchable's lot cannot be better. If anything it might easily be worse. Because in India even the lowest man among the Caste Hindus—why even the aboriginal and Hill Tribe man—though educationally and economically not very much above the Untouchables is still superior to the Untouchables. It is not he regards himself as superior to the Untouchables. The Hindu society accepts his claim to superiority over the Untouchables. The Untouchable will therefore continue to suffer the worst fate as he does now namely, in prosperity he will be the last to be employed and in depression the first to be fired.

What does Gandhism do to relieve the Untouchables from this fate ? Gandhism professes to abolish Untouchability. That is hailed as the greatest virtue of Gandhism. But what does this virtue amount to in actual life ? To assess the value of this anti-Untouchability which is regarded as a very big element in Gandhism, it is necessary to understand fully the scope of Mr. Gandhi's programme for the removal of Untouchability. Does it mean anything more than that the Hindus will not mind touching the Untouchables ? Does it mean the removal of the ban on the right of

the Untouchables to education ? It would be better to take the two questions separately.

To start with the first question, Mr. Gandhi does not say that a Hindu should not take a bath after touching the Untouchables. If Mr. Gandhi does not object to it as a purification of pollution then it is difficult to see how Untouchability can be said to vanish by touching the Untouchables. Untouchability centres round the idea of pollution by contact and purification by bath to remove the pollution. Does it mean social assimilation with the Hindus ? Mr. Gandhi has most categorically stated that removal of Untouchability does not mean inter-dining or inter-marriage between the Hindus and the Untouchables. Mr. Gandhi's anti-Untouchability means that the Untouchables will be classed as Shudras instead of being classed as Ati-Shudras[f.12] There is nothing more in it. Mr. Gandhi has not considered the question whether the old Shudras will accept the new Shudras into their fold. If they don't then the removal of Untouchability is a senseless proposition for it will still keep the Untouchables as a separate social category. Mr. Gandhi probably knows that the abolition of Untouchability will not bring about the assimilation of the Untouchables by the Shudras. That seems to be the reason why Mr. Gandhi himself has given a new and a different name to the Untouchables. The new name registers by anticipation what is likely to be the fact. By calling the Untouchables Harijans Mr. Gandhi has killed two birds with one stone. He has shown that assimilation of the Untouchables by the Shudras is not possible. He has also by his new name counteracted assimilation and made it impossible.

Regarding the second question, it is true that Gandhism is prepared to remove the old ban placed by the Hindu Shastras on the right of the Untouchables to education and permit them to acquire knowledge and learning. Under Gandhism the Untouchables may study law, they may study medicine, they may study engineering or anything else they may fancy. So far so good. But will the Untouchables be free to make use of their knowledge and learning ? Will they have the right to choose their profession ? Can they adopt the career of lawyer, doctor or engineer ? To these questions the answer which Gandhism gives is an emphatic ' no. [f.13] ' The Untouchables must follow their hereditary professions. That those occupations they are unclean is no answer; That before the occupation became hereditary it was the result of force and not volition does not matter. ..The argument of Gandhism is that what is once settled is settled for ever even if it was wrongly settled. Under Gandhism the Untouchables are to be eternal scavengers. There is no doubt that the Untouchables would much prefer the orthodox system of Untouchability. A compulsory state of ignorance imposed upon the Untouchables by the Hindu Shastras made scavenging bearable. But Gandhism which compels an educated Untouchable to do scavenging is nothing short of cruelty. The grace in Gandhism is a curse in its worst form. The virtue of the anti-Untouchability plank in Gandhism is quite illusory. There is no substance in it.

## V

What else is there in Gandhism which the Untouchables can accept as opening a way for their ultimate salvation ? Barring this illusory campaign against Untouchability Gandhism is simply another form of Sanatanism which is the ancient name for militant orthodox Hinduism. What is there in Gandhism which is not to be found in orthodox Hinduism ? There is caste in Hinduism, there is caste in Gandhism. Hinduism believes in the law of hereditary profession, so does Gandhism. Hinduism enjoins cow-worship. So does Gandhism. Hinduism upholds the law



of karma, predestination of man's condition in this world, so does Gandhism. Hinduism accepts the authority of the Shastras. So does Gandhism. Hinduism believes in avatar or incarnations of God. So does Gandhism. Hinduism believes in idols, so does Gandhism[f.14]. All that Gandhism has done is to find a philosophic justification for Hinduism and its dogmas. Hinduism is bald in the sense that it is just a set of rules which bear on their face the appearance of a crude and cruel system. Gandhism supplies the philosophy which smoothens its surface and gives it the appearance of decency and respectability and so alters it and embellishes it as to make it even attractive. What philosophy does Gandhism propound to cover the nudity of Hinduism ? This philosophy can be put in a nutshell. It is a philosophy which says that "All that is in Hinduism is well, all that is in Hinduism is necessary for public good." Those who are familiar with Voltaire's *Candide* will recognise that it is the philosophy of Master Pangloss and recall the mockery Voltaire made of it. The Hindus are of course pleased with it. No doubt it suits them and accords with their interest. Prof. Radhakrishnan—whether out of genuine feeling or out of sycophancy we need not stop to inquire—has gone to the length of describing Mr. Gandhi as 'God on earth.' What do the Untouchables understand this to mean ? To them it means that: "This God by name Gandhi came to console an afflicted race: He saw India and changed it not saying all is well and will be, if the Hindus will only fulfil the law of caste. He told the afflicted race, 'I have come to fulfil the law of caste.' Not a tittle, not a jot shall I allow to abate from it."

What hope can Gandhism offer to the Untouchables ? To the Untouchables Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors. The sanctity and infallibility of the Vedas, Smritis and Shastras, the from law of caste, the heartless law of karma and the senseless law of status by birth are to the Untouchables veritable instruments of torture which Hinduism has forged against the Untouchables. These very instruments which have mutilated, blasted and blighted the life of the Untouchables are to be found intact and untarnished in the bosom of Gandhism. How can the Untouchables say that Gandhism is a heaven and not a chamber of horrors as Hinduism has been? The only reaction and a very natural reaction of the Untouchables would be to run away from Gandhism.

Gandhists may say that what I have stated applies to the old type of Gandhism. There is a new Gandhism, Gandhism without caste. This has reference to the recent statement[f.15] of Mr. Gandhi that caste is an anachronism. Reformers were naturally gladdened by this declaration of Mr. Gandhi. And who would not be glad to see that a man like Mr. Gandhi having such terrible influence over the Hindus, after having played the most mischievous part of a social reactionary, after having stood out as the protagonist of the caste system, after having beguiled and befooled the unthinking Hindus with arguments which made no distinction between what is fair and foul should have come out with this recantation? But is this really a matter for jubilation ? Does it change the nature of Gandhism ? Does it make Gandhism a new and a better 'ism' than it was before. Those who are carried away by this recantation of Mr. Gandhi, forget two things. In the first place all that Mr. Gandhi has said is that caste is an anachronism. He does not say it is an evil. He does not say it is anathema. Mr. Gandhi may be taken to be not in favour of caste. But Mr. Gandhi does not say that he is against the Varna system. And what is Mr. Gandhi's varna system ? It is simply a new name for the caste system and retains all the worst features of the caste system.



The declaration of Mr. Gandhi cannot be taken to mean any fundamental change in Gandhism. It cannot make Gandhism acceptable to the Untouchables. The Untouchables will still have ground to say :

"Good God Is this man Gandhi our Saviour?"

## [Contents](#)

## [Appendices](#)

[f.1] It is reprinted in Vol. 11 of the series called *Gandhi Sikshan* as No, 18,

[f.2] The extracts are taken from an article by Mr. Gandhi on the subject and is reproduced in the *Varna Vyavastha*—a book which contains Mr. Gandhi's writings in original Gujarathi.

[f.3] *Young India*, 26th January 1921.

[f.4] *Dharma Manthan*, p. 65.

[f.5] *Young India*. February 23, 1922.

[f.6] *Young India*, 11th August, 1921. Italics not in the original.

[f.7] Italics are not in the original. Kisan means a tenant and zamindar means landlord.

[f.8] See pages 275-277

[f.9] Quoted from *Varna Vyavastha*, p. 51.

[f.10] *Young India*, 27th April 1921.

[f.11] Some of the Provinces of India have laws which make refusal by a scavenger to do scavenging a crime for which he can be tried and punished by a criminal court.

[f.12] *Young India*, 5th February 1925.

[f.13] See *supra*, pages 275-77 for Mr. Gandhi's views on the subject.

[f.14] Mr. Gandhi's articles of faith have been outlined by him in *Young India* of 6th October 1921.

[f.15] Hindustan Times, 15th April 1945.