

son, to call upon the public to withdraw its support and condemn them so that they may get isolated and be forced to suspend their activities, specially when a man holds the confidence of an influential section of the public! It is a pity that Gandhi does not and will not understand revolutionary psychology in spite of his life-long experience of public life. . . . To think that a revolutionary will give up his ideals if public support and appreciation is withdrawn from him, is the highest folly. Many a revolutionary has, ere now stepped on to the scaffold and laid his life down for the cause, regardless of the curses that the constitutionalist agitators rained plentifully upon him. If you will have the revolutionaries suspend their activities, reason with them squarely. This is the one and only way. For the rest let there be no doubt in anybody's mind. A revolutionary is the last person on earth to submit to bullying. . . .

#### VICTORY OR DEATH

There is no crime that Britain has not committed in India. Deliberate misrule has reduced us to paupers, has "bled us white." As a race and a people we stand dishonored and outraged. Do people still expect us to forget or forgive? We shall have our revenge—a people's righteous revenge on the Tyrant. Let cowards fall back and cringe for compromise and peace. We ask not for mercy and we give no quarter. Ours is a war to the end—to Victory or Death.

Long live revolution!

[Hale, *Political Trouble in India, 1917–1937*, 206–207, 208, 209–210, 214–215, 216.]

#### THE GANDHI–AMBEDKAR DEBATE

One of the most unusual thinkers, statesmen, and reformers of twentieth-century India, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), was born into the Untouchable Mahar (village servants) caste of Maharashtra. The key to his rise was education. At a time when less than one percent of his caste was literate, Ambedkar secured a BA in Bombay, an MA and PhD from Columbia University in New York, and a DSc from London University; he was also called to the bar from Grey's Inn, London. This extraordinary education, added to his great faith in parliamentary democracy and his lifelong commitment to improving the lives of Untouchables, enabled him not only to stamp his mark on his own caste, but also to improve the status of all of India's lowest castes by means of the Constitution and legal system of his country.

Ambedkar's father had left the traditional low-status work of the Mahars to join the British army. The birth of Bhimrao, his fourteenth child, coincided with a time when a number of Mahars had freed themselves from the village structure and begun to protest the limitations of their status. Ambedkar, pushed by his family and aided by caste Hindu reformers, secured the education that enabled him to organize and dominate this burgeoning movement. The direction was set in the early 1920s: organization

for social and political activity, attempts to secure civil and religious rights, and the building of pride and self-respect. In his thirty-five years as a leader of the movement, Ambedkar's activities paralleled those of African American leaders in the United States: the scholarship and literary interests of W. E. B. DuBois, and the charisma and innovative methods of Martin Luther King.

His earliest efforts included a newspaper, an organization of all "Depressed Classes" in Bombay to present grievances to government, the opening of a hostel to facilitate the education of Untouchables, testimony to government commissions investigating political conditions and education, and the holding of conferences for the Depressed Classes all over the Marathi-speaking area. Not until the 1930s did Ambedkar become an all-India personage. He was selected by the British as a delegate to the London Round Table Conferences (1930–1933), and there, confronted with demands for separate electorates by all the minorities of India, he stated his case for the Untouchables as a minority entitled to its own electorate.

The granting of special electorates for the Untouchables was unacceptable to Gandhi, who began a fast in 1932 against their separation from the Hindu body politic. Faced with the possibility of causing Gandhi's death, Ambedkar very reluctantly capitulated, accepting Gandhi's offer of separate electorates during primary elections, an increased number of reserved seats for Untouchables, and joint electorates for assembly seats. This involved drawing up a schedule of those castes needing special representation, and "Scheduled Castes" became thereafter the governmental name for Untouchables.

From this time on, Gandhi and Ambedkar pursued distinctly separate paths—Gandhi giving the name "harijan" (people of God) to Untouchables and pleading with caste Hindus to abolish Untouchability, and Ambedkar planning a political party. Ambedkar first joined others in attempting to secure temple entry and religious rights for Untouchables. When that failed, he rejected Hinduism and continued the drive toward education. Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party won fourteen seats in the Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1937; those elected under its banner included eleven Scheduled Caste members. The party attempted to abolish hereditary discrimination in village economic structures, to ban the use of the term "harijan," and to secure family-planning measures. Because it was a small minority party, it was unsuccessful, and although Ambedkar never lost faith in the party system, he never found the key to political power for a group that was, by definition, a permanent minority.

More conferences, including one to discuss conversion to another religion, broadened the movement during the 1930s, but Ambedkar also concerned himself with other issues. As Member for Labour in the viceroy's Executive Council, he worked on labor laws and dam projects. He taught at the Government Law College in Bombay. He wrote on the need to reform and liberalize the university system, and on the hypocrisy of the Congress and Gandhi. In 1945 he founded the People's Education Society; a year later he opened Siddharth College in Bombay. But as India drew near to independence, he again stressed separatism from other Hindu groups as the way to empower the Scheduled Castes in the battle for equality and integration. He was now known all over India as Babasaheb ("respected sir"), the champion of the Untouchables.

### BHIMRAO RAMJI AMBEDKAR: THE EVILS OF CASTE

In December 1935 Ambedkar was invited to present his ideas on the “problem of caste” at the Annual Conference in Lahore of an organization of Hindu social reformers called the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. Prior to the conference, which was to have been held in May 1936, members of the Mandal withdrew the invitation, since many caste Hindus of Lahore anticipated Ambedkar’s views and strenuously objected. In the following selection, Ambedkar reiterates many of the points that he had prepared to advance in the Mandal speech. One of the elements of Gandhi’s attitude that most disgusted Ambedkar was the former’s idealization of the *chatur* (four) *varna* system. Gandhi believed that all people could be classed according to occupations of equal dignity within the four broad rubrics of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, and that the Untouchables, who fall outside the classical *varna* system, should be included as Shudras. This, of course, was unacceptable to Ambedkar.

I appreciate greatly the honour done me by the Mahatma in taking notice in his *Harijan* of the speech on Caste which I had prepared for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. From a perusal of his review of my speech, it is clear that the Mahatma completely dissents from the views I have expressed on the subject of Caste. . . . Whatever the Mahatma may choose to say, my object in publishing the speech was to provoke the Hindus to think, and take stock of their position. I have never hankered for publicity, and if I may say so, I have more of it than I wish or need. But supposing it was out of the motive of gaining publicity that I printed the speech, who could cast a stone at me? Surely not those who, like the Mahatma, live in glass houses. . . .

The principal points which I have tried to make out in my speech may be catalogued as follows: (1) That Caste has ruined the Hindus; (2) That the reorganization of the Hindu Society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is impossible . . . ; (3) That the reorganization of the Hindu Society on the basis of Chaturvarnya is harmful . . . ; (4) That the Hindu Society must be reorganized on a religious basis which would recognize the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; (5) That in order to achieve this object the sense of religious sanctity behind Caste and *Varna* must be destroyed; (6) That the sanctity of Caste and *Varna* can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the *Shastras*. It will be noticed that the questions raised by the Mahatma are absolutely beside the point, and show that the main argument of the speech was lost upon him.

Let me examine the substance of the points made by the Mahatma. The first point made by the Mahatma is that the texts cited by me are not authentic. I confess I am no authority on this matter. But I should like to state that the texts cited by me are all taken from the writings of the late Mr. Tilak, who was a recognized authority on the Sanskrit language and on the Hindu *Shastras*. His second point is that these *Shastras* should be interpreted not by the learned but the saints; and that as the saints have understood them, the *Shastras* do not support Caste and Untouchability.

As regards the first point, what I [would] like to ask the Mahatma is, what does it avail to anyone if the texts are interpolations, and if they have been differently interpreted by the saints? The masses do not make any distinction between texts which are genuine and texts which are interpolations. The masses do not know what the texts are. They are too illiterate to know the contents of the *Shastras*. They have believed what they have been told, and what they have been told is that the *Shastras* do enjoin as a religious duty the observance of Caste and Untouchability.

With regard to the saints, one must admit that howsoever different and elevating their teachings may have been as compared to those of the merely learned, they have been lamentably ineffective. They have been ineffective for two reasons. Firstly, none of the saints ever attacked the Caste System. . . . They were not concerned with the struggle between men. They were concerned with the relation between man and God. They did not preach that all men were equal. They preached that all men were equal in the eyes of God—a very different and very innocuous proposition, which nobody can find difficult to preach or dangerous to believe in.

The second reason why the teachings of the saints proved ineffective was because the masses have been taught that a saint might break Caste, but the common man must not. A saint therefore never became an example to follow. . . .

The third point made by the Mahatma is that a religion professed by Chaitanya, Jnyandeo, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, Ramkrishna Paramahansa, etc., cannot be devoid of merit as is made out by me, and that a religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. . . .

The argument of the Mahatma that Hinduism would be tolerable if only many were to follow the example of the saints is fallacious. . . . By citing the names of such illustrious persons as Chaitanya, etc. what the Mahatma seems to suggest in its broadest and simplest form is that Hindu society can be made tolerable and even happy without any fundamental change in its structure if all the high caste Hindus can be persuaded to follow a high standard of morality in their dealings with the low caste Hindus. I am totally opposed to this kind of ideology. I can respect those of the caste-Hindus who try to realize a high social ideal in their life. Without such men India would be an uglier and less happy place to live in than it is. But nonetheless anyone who relies on an attempt to turn the members of the caste-Hindus into better men by improving their personal character is in my judgement wasting his energy and hugging an illusion. . . . As a matter of fact, a Hindu does treat all those who are not of his Caste as though they were aliens, who could be discriminated against with impunity and against whom any fraud or trick may be practiced without shame. *This is to say that there can be a better or a worse Hindu. But a good Hindu cannot be.* This is so not because there is anything wrong with his personal character. In fact what is wrong is the entire basis of his relationship to his fellows. The best of men cannot be moral if the basis of relationship between them and their

fellows is fundamentally a wrong relationship. To a slave his master may be better or worse. But there cannot be a good master. . . .

Does the Mahatma practice what he preaches? . . . The Mahatma is a Bania by birth. His ancestors had abandoned trading in favour of ministership, which is a calling of the Brahmins. In his own life, before he became a Mahatma, when [the] occasion came for him to choose his career he preferred law to [a merchant's] scales. On abandoning law, he became half saint and half politician. He has never touched trading, which is his ancestral calling. His youngest son—I take one who is a faithful follower of his father—born a Vaishya, has married a Brahmin's daughter, and has chosen to serve a newspaper magnate. The Mahatma is not known to have condemned him for not following his ancestral calling. . . .

Why does the Mahatma cling to the theory of everyone following his or her ancestral calling? He gives his reasons nowhere. But there must be some reason, although he does not care to avow it. Years ago, writing on "Caste versus Class" in his *Young India*, he argued that Caste System was better than Class System on the ground that Caste was the best possible adjustment of social stability. If that be the reason why the Mahatma clings to the theory of everyone following his or her ancestral calling, then he is clinging to a false view of social life. . . .

Some might think that the Mahatma has made much progress, inasmuch as he now only believes in *Varna* and does not believe in Caste. It is true that there was a time when the Mahatma was a full-blooded and a blue-blooded Sanatani Hindu. He believed in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures; and therefore, in *avatars* and rebirth. He believed in Caste, and defended it with the vigour of the orthodox. He condemned the cry for inter-dining, inter-drinking, and inter-marrying, and argued that restraints about inter-dining to a great extent "helped the cultivation of will-power and the conservation of a certain social virtue." It is good that he has repudiated this sanctimonious nonsense and admitted that caste "is harmful both to spiritual and national growth," and maybe his son's marriage outside his caste has had something to do with this change of view. But has the Mahatma really progressed? . . . What is the difference between Caste and *Varna*, as understood by the Mahatma? I find none. As defined by the Mahatma, *Varna* becomes merely a different name for Caste, for the simple reason that it is the same in essence—namely, pursuit of [one's] ancestral calling. . . . I am sure that all his confusion is due to the fact that the Mahatma has no definite and clear conception as to what is *Varna* and what is Caste, and as to the necessity of either for the conservation of Hinduism. He has said—and one hopes that he will not find some mystic reason to change his view—that Caste is not the essence of Hinduism. Does he regard *Varna* as the essence of Hinduism? One cannot as yet give any categorical answer. . . .

The real reason why the Mahatma is suffering from this confusion is probably to be traced to two sources. The first is the temperament of the Mahatma.