

The Question of Dalit Reservation: Reflections from the Poona Pact

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Abstract

In June 1936, the Hindu Mahasabha leader B. S. Moonje and the Dalit leader and trenchant critic of Hinduism Dr B. R. Ambedkar jointly proposed mass conversions of the 'untouchables' to Sikhism. According to Ambedkar, if the untouchables converted to Sikhism, they would leave the Hindu religion but not Hindu culture. The untouchable converts to Sikhism would escape caste oppression without getting 'denationalized'. This initiative provoked a major controversy, and leaders as diverse as M. M. Malaviya, Mahatma Gandhi, M. C. Rajah and P. N. Rajabhoj expressed their views on the subject. This article explores what Ambedkar meant by expressions like 'de-nationalization' and 'Hindu culture'. Malaviya's anxieties about the weakening of the Hindu community because of this initiative, Rajah's fear that mass conversions could lead to a Sikh-Hindu-Muslim problem at a national level, Gandhi's emphasis on spiritual values and the voluntary removal of untouchability in a spirit of repentance, and Tagore's universalist and humanist attitude towards religion are explored. The complex political and intellectual responses of Hindu and Dalit leaders to the proposed mass conversions to Sikhism in the mid-1930s reveal dimensions not often considered in mainstream narratives about Hindu nationalism or Dalit conversions. The main aim of the paper is to trace out the role and importance of Poona Pact and its impact on the Dalits/depressed classes. The Poona Pact (September 1932), signed between Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar is concerned as a watermark development as far as the Dalit/Depressed Class reservation and their share in the Indian council is concerned. According to the various Acts passed by the British Government different sections of Indian society like Muslims, Sikhs and Anglo Indians etc. got the right of separate electorates and the demand for separate electorates for the depressed classes was highlighted by the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald who later passed Communal Award in (August 1932). Gandhi Ji thought this would divide the Hindu community. Later there were negotiations between Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar and this resulted in the formulation of Poona Pact.

KEYWORDS: B.R. Ambedkar, bahujan Samaj Party, Dalits, Depressed Classes Gandhiji, Government of India Act, Poona Pact, Prime Minister's Award, Ramsay Mac Donald, Rao Bahadur, R. Srinivasan Yerwada, Marginalized Women, Structural Humiliation, Intersectionality, Women's Dignity, Educational Empowerment, Ambedkarian Perspective

INTRODUCTION

The concept of separate electorates came into emergence due to the introduction of Government of India Act 1909. Under this Act Muslims were given separate electorates. Later under the Government of India Act 1919, other communities were also given

separate electorate. The demand of separate electorates for depressed classes was unfulfilled. Championed by B.R. Ambedkar, they were given separate electorates in 1932. The British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin (1867-1947) constituted Indian Statutory Commission comprising seven British Parliamentarians under the chairmanship of Sir John Allsebrook (1873-1954) on 26 November 1927, to review the functioning of the constitutional system in India, the Government of India Act 1919, and to grant next tranche of political rights and to suggest changes by the Indian political leaders. The constitution of India was to be reformed every 10 years after Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. At the time of introducing the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms 1919 the British Government declared its decision that a commission would be sent to India after 10 years to examine the repercussions and operations of the Constitutional Reforms and to suggest more reforms for India.¹ The Commission led by Sir John Simon, an eminent lawyer and parliamentarian, as its chairman was to visit in 1928 to seek different views of various political parties, groups and individuals and to recommend the forms of reforms of electoral representation for the proposed constitutional reforms. All the members included in it, were English men hence known as whitemen's Commission. The non-inclusion of Indian member in the Commission was fully resented by the Indian people. The Indians demanded from the British Government equal representation in the commission. But the Indian demand was turned down. The Indian educated people took it ill and felt a national insult for Indian people. The Indian political party condemned the action of the government and boycotted the Commission and was decided not to participate in its fact-finding process. The Commission visited India on 3 February 1928 at Bombay. The Commission was boycotted everywhere all over India with mass protests, and black flag demonstrations with the slogan 'Simon Go Back'. The British controlled the situation with brutal repression and suppressed the movement even not sparing the eminent leaders. Dr Ambedkar, M.A Jinnah along with other members of Muslim League, and the Central Sikh League took part in the deliberations of the Commission. They placed their demands for all the Constitutional framework and representation for their communities. Several other leaders of the other organizations also gave evidence before the Simon Commission. Ambedkar submitted a memorandum on behalf of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha and argued for untouchables' seat quota. He was acidly condemned for his cooperation with the Simon Commission. Ambedkar in a statement before the Simon Commission demanded that dalits should be treated as a distinct and independent minority. He was dubbed as a British stooge and a traitor.² The Simon Commission, however, submitted its report on 3 May 1930. It proposed the abolition of diarchy and recommended the establishment of representative government in the provinces, separate communal electorates be retained. Nehru Report submitted in September 1928 refuted the charges that Indians could not find a constitutional consensus among themselves. The recommendations of the Simon Commission were vehemently condemned by all the political parties in India as it was not a part of the negotiations. The Congress had launched a comprehensive Civil Disobedience Movement against the British Government under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) Mahatma Gandhi was arrested and after his arrest there were wide spread mass demonstrations and protests against the British Government. As a result, the British Government decided to initiate talks with Indians by convening Round Table Conference in London.

¹C.F. Andrew (2017) India And The Simon Commission Report, Routeledge, reprint of 1930, First Edition.p-11.

² Keer, Dhananjay (2005) Ambedkar: Life And Mission, Bombay,p-116.

Hence, according to the recommendations of the Simon Commission and having glossed over Indian's wide and severe reactions to the Simon Commission the British Government convened a first Round Table Conference in Britain to chalk out a workable constitution for India and to settle the communal problem with a view to satisfying the demands and safeguards for the people of India. The British Government also wanted to deliberate upon the separate electorate for the Untouchables. The British Government wanted to have a common sitting with British political parties and leading Indian leaders. The first Round Table Conference was scheduled to be held in London from 12 November 1930 to 19 January 1931 at St. James' Palace, London, to discuss the proposed Constitutional Reforms. The British Government wanted to have a common communal problems and separate electorate for the untouchables. The British political parties were represented by 16 delegates, Indian delegation consisting of 89 delegates including 57 politicians from British India and 16 delegates from the princely states including Ambedkar's benefactor, Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaikward, The Indian National Congress decided to boycott the first Round Table Conference and did not participate because Congress had launched a Civil Disobedience Movement against the British Government. Dr. Ambedkar the veteran statesman of Depressed Classes, along with Rao Bahadur Sri Nivasan, a Depressed Classes leader from Madras, represented the Depressed Classes.³The other veteran statesmen were Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Mohammad Shafi, Agah Khan of Muslim League, B.S. Moonje, M.R., Jayakar and S. Ujjal Singh of the Sikhs. Dr. Ambedkar got the invitation to the first Round Table Conference through the Viceroy on 6th September 1930. The Round Table Conferences were held in three rounds for the future constitution of India and Ambedkar attended all the three Round Table Conferences.

The first Round Table Conference started on 12th November 1930, with the inauguration by his Majesty king – Emperor. He observed it was the good opportunity and he wished 'May your names go down to history as those of men who served India well'. The Conference was chaired by the then Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. There was no any compromise regarding the Constitutional Reforms as the different political parties expressed their discrete views and stood for their own stands. The first Round Table Conference was a good opportunity for the Untouchables to express their grievances of age old discrimination, injustice and denial of civic rights to them. Dr. Ambedkar as representative of the Depressed Classes got a unique opportunity to highlight the political and social condition of India in general and that of down-trodden in particular to achieve rights and safeguards in the future Constitution of India. Dr. Ambedkar speaking in the plenary session of the first Round Table Conference mounted a scathing attack on the British Government by telling the worse condition of the untouchables. He emphatically said that the untouchables had not been granted any right and their condition has not been changed. Speaking on the political representation for the untouchables Ambedkar said, 'At every successive step taken by the British Government to widen the scope of representative Government the Depressed Classes have been systematically left out. No thought has been given to their claim for political power. I protest with all the emphasis I can that we will not stand this any longer. The settlement of our problem must be a part of the general political settlement and must not be left over to the shifting stands of the sympathy and good will of the rulers of the future.'⁴ Ambedkar very enthusiastically pointed out, 'when we compare our present position with the one which it was our lot to bear in Indian Society

³. Round Table Conference Proceedings 1931, London.

⁴. Round Table Conference (12 November 1930 to 19 January 1931 Proceedings 1931 Government of India, Central Publication Branch, Calcutta, pp.126-127.

of the pre-British. We were in the loathsome condition due to our untouchability. Has the British Government done anything to remove it? Before the British Government we were denied entry into the Police Force. Does the British Government admit us in the Force? Before the British we were not allowed to serve in the military. Is that career open to us? To none of these questions can we give an affirmative answer. Our wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted, although 150 years of British rule have rolled away.⁵ He said, 'we feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we can't remove them unless we get political power in our own hand. It is only in a Swaraj Constitution that we stand any chance of getting political power into our own hands, without which we can't bring salvation to our people' ⁶Ambedkar put the dalit question as a separate demand by saying, 'Depressed by the Government, suppressed by the Hindu and disregarded by the Muslims, we are left in a most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention.'⁷

Ambedkar had to grapple with twin issues in London. First the unrelenting stance of Gandhi against political representation of Dalits and; second Gandhi's claim that it was not Ambedkar but it was he who represents the Dalits.⁸ Ambedkar's rational views impressed the British Government and Conference and he told about the worse condition of the untouchables. His benefactor, Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaikward was so impressed with the speech that Dr. Ambedkar was invited to a special dinner hosted by the Maharaja and ended the years of estrangement over the scholarship⁹ Ambedkar was highlighted by the New York Times, Screaming Front Page on 30 November 1930, 'Dr. Ambedkar Leads Fights to Free, 43,000,000 in India from Ancient Fetters'.¹⁰ India daily Mail hailed his speech as 'Super Specimen of Oratory'

Ambedkar was appointed to serve on the minorities' sub-committee, and the service committee. He suggested that Depressed Classes should be regarded for electoral purpose, as a separate community and that they could not consent to any governing constitution for India unless their demands were not in a reasonable manner.

Dr. Ambedkar said to the Prime Minister, 'the Round Table Conference has had to grapple with two most important questions which must arise in any attempt to organize the political life of a community. The problem of the responsible government was one of them and the other was that of representative government'.¹¹

Before starting the Second Round Table Conference political change came over in Britain. The Labour Government was replaced by the National Government. The Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald was there but the Secretary of State for India William Wedgwood Benn (1877-1960) was replaced Sir Samuel Hoare (1880-1959).

⁵Proceedings of the RTC (first session). Govt of India, Central publication branch, Calcutta, pp.123-129.

⁶Dr. Ambedkar, at RTC plenary session, 20 November 1930.

⁷RTC proceedings (12th November 1930 to 19th January 1931) Govt. of India central Publication Branch Calcutta.p.127.

⁸Vundru, Raja Sekhar (2018) Ambedkar, Gandhi and Patel: The Making of India's Electoral System, Bloomsbury, New Delhi.p.31.

⁹Jadhav, Narendra (2014) Ambedkar: Awakening India's social conscience, Konark publication, New Delhi.p.133

¹⁰New York Times 30 November 1930.

¹¹Proceedings of Round Table Conference (1930-1931) First Session,pp.432-47.

In the first Round Table Conference Ambedkar suggested that the untouchables should be named as non-caste Hindu, protestant Hindu, or non-conformist Hindu. He clarified that the untouchables had a separate existence from Hindus. They were actually on a level between serfs and slaves. The Hindus called them their men only to usurp their rights.¹² Ramsay MacDonald informed in the house of people that the Constitution of India would be framed as recommended by the Conference. It would protect the interests of the minority and the untouchable community. The foundation of self-rule in India was laid at the conference. However, the material being sub-standard, the foundation could not be made strong still the interests of the untouchables were somehow protected at the Conference.¹³ Consequently the first Round Table Conference was adjourned Sine-die on dated 19 January 1931 as the leaders cling to their own stand.

At the time of first Round Table Conference Indian delegation to the first Round Table Conference and other leading leaders of the Congress as Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, C.Y. Chintamani M.R Jayakar and Srinivasa Sastrimet Indian leaders at Allahabad to discuss about the participation of Indian national Congress in the second Round Table Conference. They persuaded Mahatma Gandhi to talk with the Lord Irwin and with their initiative the Government released Mahatma Gandhi and other Congress Leaders on 26th January 1931. Indian politics entered a new phase of metamorphosis. Political paradigms also went under a transformation. But the Congress changed its political strategy and decided to take part in the second Round Table Conference. Mahatma Gandhi made a pact with the government. A pact was reached between Mahatma Gandhi and Viceroy Lord Irwin. There were detailed negotiations between Gandhi and Viceroy Lord Irwin. There held eight meetings between Mahatma Gandhi and Viceroy Lord Irwin to reach the negotiation. On March 5, 1931, a pact was reached between the two according to which Mahatma Gandhi was to withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement and promised to participate in the second Round Table Conference scheduled to commence on September 7, 1931. And the pact was known as Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Many appreciated the pact and several criticized it. According to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Mahatma Gandhi called off the Civil Disobedience Movement against the Government and he agreed to attend the second Round Table Conference in London. Lord Willington (1866-1941) became the Governor-General of India nearly about a month after the Gandhi-Irwin pact. Before going to London for attending the Round Table Conference Ambedkar and Gandhi met on 14 August, 1931 at Mani Bhawan in Bombay. But their meeting remained fruitless. Mahatma Gandhi told Dr. Ambedkar that it is surprising that men like you should offer opposition to me and Congress. I am against political separation of the untouchables from the Hindus that would be absolutely, suicidal. Dr. Ambedkar replied and came to know where Mahatma Gandhi stood. The meeting had grim and tense moments and ended in a fiasco. The second Round Table Conference opened in London on September 7, 1931. M.K. Gandhi went along with Madan Mohan Malviya, Sarojini Naidu and others. Speaking in the second Round Table Conference Mahatma Gandhi made it clear to the participants of the Conference that the question of framing a constitution should have precedence over the communal problems. But all his pleas proved in vain. The minority delegates firmly replied that recognition of communal claim was a precondition of everything else.

The Conference was to re-examine and amplify the reports prepared by the federal structure committee and the minorities committee. Ambedkar demanded that power

¹²Ambedkar, Letters to Gaikward.pp.98.99.

¹³Sampla. B.R (2021) Ambedkar: Messiah of the Downtrodden, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, Vol-1,p.141.

should be equally shared by all communities according to their respective exegesis. Ambedkar demanded special representation for depressed classes and he presented to the minorities committee a supplementary Memorandum for his claim. He stressed on separate electorate. The leading representatives of the Muslims, Christians, Europeans and Anglo-Indians jointly submitted a Memorandum. This came to be known as 'minority pact'. Mahatma Gandhi felt enraged on this pact. He said that he would not mind the untouchables being converted to Islam or Christianity and asserted firmly that he would resist political rights of the untouchables with his life. In the Conference Mahatma Gandhi opposed the demands of Dr. Ambedkar vehemently. He adopted the confrontationist approach. But when Mahatma Gandhi confronted Dr. Ambedkar at the Round Table Conference Gandhi's smile faded¹⁴.

The British Premier Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, asked all the members of the minorities committee to sign a requisition authorizing him to settle the communal problems and to pledge themselves to accept the decision, Mahatma Gandhi signed this along with other members. Dr. Ambedkar did not sign his requisition as he believed in the justice of his demands.¹⁵ However the British Government was convinced by the arguments of Dr. Ambedkar for his demands and safeguards necessary for the untouchables.

When Mahatma Gandhi heard that at the suggestion of the Prime Minister, the minorities were about to produce a settlement and that this settlement would have the effect of the untouchables getting the support of the other minorities and particularly of the Muslims, Mahatma Gandhi felt considerably disturbed. He devised a scheme to isolate the Untouchables. For this Mahatma Gandhi planned to buy out Musalmans by giving to the Musalmans their fourteen demands, which Mahatma Gandhi was not in the beginning prepared to agree. When he found the Musalmans were lending their support to the Untouchables, Mahatma Gandhi agreed to them fourteen points on condition that they withdrew their support for the Untouchables. The agreement was actually drafted¹⁶. Thus the second Round Table Conference floundered on the Communal issue and finally adjourned in total deadlock on 1st December, 1931.

The British Prime Minister on 16 August 1932, granted a separate electorate to the untouchables under the Communal Award. Many of Dr. Ambedkar's demands were accepted in the Communal Award. According to the Communal Award, the untouchables should have two votes, one to elect their own separate representative in the provincial assemblies and one to vote with the rest of the population in the general constituencies. The communal award also gave separate electorate to the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Europeans and the Christians.

The Communal Award was the result of this contest. Its great virtue lies in the fact that the Untouchables were recognized in the national life of India and entitled to claim separate political rights. That is the importance of the Communal Award. Our claim was reassured and sustained by the declaration of the Victory made on the 8th August 1940 in which it was made clear that the Muslims and the untouchables were distinct and separate elements in the national life of India and that the British Government will not enforce a Constitution

¹⁴Lelyweld, Joseph, *Great Soul*(2011)pp.214-15.

¹⁵Sampla.B.R (2021) *Ambedkar: Messiah of the Downtrodden*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi. p-138.

¹⁶Jadhav, Narendra (2014) *Ambedkar, Awakening India's Social Conscience*, Konark Publishers, New Delhi.p.167.

which has not the support of the Muslims and the Depressed Classes.¹⁷According to the Communal Award.

1. The Depressed Classes were given the benefit of separate electorate.
2. The Mohammdans, the Europeans, and the Sikhs were to elect their candidates by voting separate Communal electorates.
3. The Muslims were given special concessions in respect of representation on in the provincial legislature where they were in minorities.
4. The award was not subject to modification

The Communal Award was a well-planned strategy of the British government to give another blow to the Indian National unity. It transformed the Indian electorates into Congress of disparate groups. It excited the communal feelings rather than pacified them. It was indeed pity that the joint committee on the Indian constitutional reforms considered this patently undemocratic handiwork of the British Prime Minister as a well-thought out and balanced scheme. When Gandhi returned to India after attending the Round Table Conference he did not forget the issue of the Dalits for political representation. On the day of his arrival in Bombay on 28, December 1931, he addressed to a large crowd at Azad Maidan and he reiterated his firm stand, 'I am not prepared for any concession like reservation of seats etc, to the untouchables because I believe that it would be a perpetuating untouchability' ¹⁸.When the Communal Award was announced Mahatma Gandhi was in Yeravada jail at Poona. It is clear from the fact that on account of a statement that Mahatma Gandhi made in an interview to a newspaper in Rome to the effect of threatening to review his campaign of 'Disobedience' that he was arrested on arrival in India and sent him in jail on January, 4, 1932.

The second Round Table Conference also ended in a stalemate. It created bitterness between Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar felt exasperated and went away with hurt feelings. Gandhi called it, 'the most humiliating day of my life. ' Dr. Ambedkar said acidly 'Mr. Gandhi presents himself as a man of full of humility. But his behavior as the Round Table Conference showed that in the flush of victory Mahatma Gandhi could be very petty minded.¹⁹As Mahatma Gandhi opposed the demands of Dr. Ambedkar. He first wrote to Secretary of State. Then he wrote, on 18 August 1932, a letter to the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald threatening a fast and writing, 'this fast will cease if the British government will revise their decision and withdraw their scheme of representation for the depressed classes. The Prime Minister wrote back on 8th September 1932 to Mahatma Gandhi pointing out that the scheme, the communal decision had not separated the depressed classes from the Hindu Community and nothing wrong had been done. However Mahatma Gandhi continued opposing the untouchables openly. The separation of the depressed classes from the Hindus, as declared by the communal award was set back for Hindu. He was already resolved to resist it with his life. He, therefore, commenced his fast unto death on September 20, 1932 in Yervada Central jail, Poona against this vivisection of the Hindu Society. While announcing the communal award, the Prime Minister announced that, "If the government was satisfied that the communities concerned were mutually agreed upon an alternative scheme, they would be prepared to recommend to the Parliament that the alternative should be substitutes for the provisions

¹⁷Ambedkar, Dr.B.R (2003) Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, Vol-17.p.217.

¹⁸ The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol-54,p.195.

¹⁹Ambedkar, Dr.B.R(2015) What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, Vol-8.p.35.

outlined in the communal award". Hence, the government was prepared to alter if there was generally agreed upon practical solution. Threats to murder Dr Ambedkar were coming from all sides. Ambedkar received regular threats of liquidation. Pressure was mounting on Ambedkar day by day, letters threatening his life came in showers.²⁰

Mahatma Gandhi's health began to deteriorate after a few days, but the government did not care for him. A conference of some prominent leaders like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Madan Mohan Malviya, C.Raja Gopalachari, Dr. M.R. Jayaker, Dr. P.G. Solanki, Dr. B.S. Munje etc. met on September,19,1932 at Birla Hall, Bombay to impress upon Dr. Ambedkar to accept the decisive formula not for the sake of untouchables but to save the life of Mahatma Gandhi. After many deliberations an agreements known as Poona Pact was reached on September 24, 1932. Dr. Ambedkar accepted the pact under the shadow of Mahatma Gandhi's fast. If the pact was not accepted, Mahatma Gandhi's life would not be saved and therefore he accepted the pact.

The following provisions were settled:

1. The Depressed Classes abandoned the separate electorate in favour of joint electorate.
2. One hundred and forty eight seats were reserved for them in different provincial legislatures, instead of 71, which were granted to them under the Communal Award.
3. Eighteen percent of the seats were reserved for them in the central legislature.
4. As regards the system of election to the reserved seats from which election was to be made by the general electorate of the Hindu votes.

Under this electoral reservation, by an agreement called the Poona Pact on 24 September 1932, between Gandhi and Ambedkar, Dalit reserved candidates will be elected by a joint voting of Hindu voters and dalit voters. This was called the joint electorate. Ambedkar said, 'A general electorate is the normal usual form of the electorate, an electorate which comprises of votes of all communities living in an area but are outside the system of separate electorate. It is called a general electorate because it is an electorate in which neither community, nor religion finds any recognition. It is an electorate of the rest i.e other than Muslims, Indian Christians, Europeans and Anglo-Indians. In a general electorate, a voter who is in a separate electorate has a right to vote in or stand for election. Every voter who is on its electoral roll has a right to vote and to stand for election without reference to his cast, creed or community. The result of the election is determined by a simple majority of votes cast.

The depressed classes were to be given fair representation in the local bodies and public services. The Hindu started condemning Ambedkar more. At first the Hindu leaders and the press did not recognize Dr. Ambedkar as the leader of the Depressed Classes. Now they were compelled to recognize his leadership for the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar said, 'If separate electorates to the Mohammedans and the Sikhs did not split up the nation, Hindu Society could be not an immortal person, not the Congress assuming that it is not a malevolent force and is not to have an abiding existence. At the instance of Hindu leaders, Dr. Ambedkar had seen Mahatma Gandhi in the Jail. Dr. Ambedkar said---"Gandhi Ji, You have been very unfair to us". It is always my lot to appear to be unfair", replied Gandhi. "I cannot help it". Dr. Ambedkar explained the whole situation and his viewpoints. Mahatma Gandhi was convinced of the justice of Dr. Ambedkar's demands and replied, "You have my fullest sympathy. I am with you, Doctor, in most of the things you say. But you say you are interested in my life". "Yes, Gandhi Ji, in the hope that if you would devote solely to the cause of my people, you would become our hero too," said Dr. Ambedkar in reply. Dr. Ambedkar was compelled to agree and soften his firm stand. He had to reach agreement

²⁰ Keer, Dhananjay (2005) Ambedkar: Life and Mission, Bombay.p.213.

with Mahatma Gandhi under the Hindu duress to save his life. If Dr. Ambedkar had not agreed to sign the document there would have happened terrible bloodshed in India. The untouchables were totally powerless against the cruel total Hindu domination. The Poona Pact totally overwhelmed the unity of the untouchables; they could no longer stand together as a collective unity. Dr. Ambedkar throughout his life repented at his own decision but he was given no choice in this matter. He was at this point left to stand alone. The British Government left him completely at the mercy of the Hindus.

Dr. Ambedkar had to accept the compromising formula and the dominant impression of the Hindu. Even the British also, accepted the formula which is known as Poona Pact. After signing the Poona Pact, a committee called Hammond Committee, was appointed to demarcate the Constituencies. The committee was to adjust and settle the system for voting the legislature to be set-up under the constitution.

Writing about the fast of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar observed, "This fast upon death was a great gamble on the part of Mr. Gandhi. He perhaps felt that the threats to fast unto death would make me and other depressed classes who were with no just shiver and yield. But he is to clear soon found that he was mistaken and that the untouchables were equally determined to fight to the last for their rights. No one check his own followers was convinced that Mahatma Gandhi's fast had any moral basis and if Gandhi got a second lease of life, he owes it entirely to the generosity and good will shown towards him by the untouchables.

What the foreigners took impression of the Poona Pact between Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, we shall come to know from the lines written below, 'Lord Winterton speaking on the 'Scheduled Castes' Status during the course of the debate, on July 16 on the Independence Bill in the House of Common, that one of the many evils that Mahatma Gandhi had done to India was that he had succeeded in bringing about by the Poona Pact. Had he it not been for his action, these people would have enjoyed a much better franchise than they did today, but Mahatma Gandhi threatened to fast to death, if he again threatened to fast to death after the transfer, it would not be the affair of the British Government. Ambedkar wrote further; I cannot now influence the decision of the constitution making body, but it is a quite clear that under the Poona Pact the scheduled castes did not get a chance of electing their ultimate representatives who would really represent their point of view, said Mr. Butler.

The Poona Pact shaped India's electoral system and the electoral method by which reserved constituencies were defined. It has been argued that Gandhi Ji skewed the electoral method, which made the election of a reserved candidate dependent upon the dominant caste vote. The role of Ambedkar and his brilliant presentations at the three Round Table Conferences gave him wide publicity and popularity. Consequently he emerged as an ardent nationalist. He argued forcefully that the independence from the British rule was a precondition for creating an egalitarian and caste free-society. His vision of nationalism, and anti-caste movement, focused on constructing of the nation of a sound democracy, not merely, a transfer of power to India's. His vision gave a fully modernist thrust. He was a staunch upholder of a democratic and rational society embodying the enlightenment value and encapsulated in the trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity. 'The Poona Pact increased the fixed quota of seats, but also took away the right to 'double vote'. The value of the second vote as a political weapon, was beyond reckoning. Disliked by the caste Hindu and disfavored by the untouchables, the pact was given recognition by both parties and was embodied in the Government of India Act 1935. ²¹ Ambedkar accepted that the

²¹Kuber, W.N (1973) Dr. Ambedkar: Publication Division, Ministry of B.C.

defeat of the Scheduled Caste candidates in general election was due to the voting system of the Poona Pact. He said in an interview, "The Poona Pact must go. It has result in disenfranchising the million untouchables. According to International Law no treaty was final and sacrosanct."²²

Speaking in the Rajya Sabha on 22 September 1953, Ambedkar accepted the Poona Pact as inevitable because it was not possible for him to get more. He said further, "The Poona Pact gave a death blow of the self-reliant movement to the Depressed Classes. He contended that the Congress did not represent the untouchables and demanded abrogation of the Poona Pact signed by him and Gandhi ji demanding the restoration of separate electorate as envisaged in MacDonald's Communal Award."²³

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