

## From Millions to Fractions

### I

What is the total population of the Untouchables of India? This is bound to be the first question that a person who cares to know anything about them is sure to ask. It is now easy to answer this question. For the Census of India taken in 1931 gives it as 50 millions. While it is possible now to give more or less exact figures of the Untouchable population in India it was not possible to do so for a long time.

This was due to various causes. Firstly untouchability is not a legal term. There is no exact legal definition of untouchability whereby it could be possible to define who is an Untouchable and who is not. Untouchability is a social concept which has become embodied in a custom and as custom varies so does untouchability. Consequently there is always some difficulty in the way of ascertaining the population of the Untouchables with mathematical exactitude. Secondly, there has always been serious opposition raised by high caste Hindus to the enumeration by caste in the Census Report. They have insisted on the omission of the question regarding caste from the schedules and the suppression of the classification of the population by caste and tribe. A proposal to this effect was made in connection with the 1901 Census mainly on the ground that the distribution of various castes and tribes in the population changed at large intervals and that it was not necessary to obtain figures at each decennial enumeration.

These grounds of objection did not have any effect on the Census Commissioner. In the opinion of the Census Commissioner enumeration by caste was important and necessary. It was argued by the Census Commissioner that:

Whatever view may be taken of the advantages or disadvantages of caste as a social institution, it is impossible to conceive of any useful discussion of the population questions in India in which caste would not be an important element. Caste is still 'the foundation of the Indian social fabric,' and the record of caste is still 'the best guide to the changes in the various social strata in the Indian Society'. Every Hindu (using the term in its most elastic sense) is born into a caste and his caste determines his religious, social, economic and domestic life from the cradle to the grave. In western countries the major factors which determine the different strata of society, viz, wealth, education and vocation are fluid and catholic and tend to modify the rigidity of birth and hereditary position. In India spiritual and social community and traditional occupation override all other factors. Thus, where in censuses of western countries, an economic or occupational grouping of the population affords a basis for the combination of demographic statistics, the corresponding basis in the case of the Indian population is the distinction of religion and caste. Whatever view may be taken of caste as a national and social institution, it is useless to ignore it, and so long as caste continues to be used as one of the distinguishing features of an individual's official and social identity, it cannot be claimed that a decennial enumeration helps to perpetuate an undesirable institution.

The objections to the enumeration by castes in the Census were urged with greater force on the occasion of the Census of 1911 when the special questionnaire containing ten tests was issued for the purpose of grouping together castes which satisfied those tests. There was no doubt that those tests were such as would mark off the Depressed Classes from the Caste Hindus. It was feared by the Caste Hindus that this circular was the result of the Muslim Memorial to the Secretary of State and its aim was to separate the Depressed Classes from the Hindus and thereby to reduce the strength of the Hindu Community and its importance.

This agitation bore no fruit and the objection of separately enumerating in the Census Report those castes which satisfied those ten tests was carried out. The agitation however did not die out. It again cropped up at the Census of 1920. At this time, effort was made to put forth the objection to the caste return in a formal manner. A resolution was tabled in the Imperial Legislative

Council in 1920 attacking the caste inquiry on the grounds (a) that it was undesirable to recognize and perpetuate, by official action, the system of caste differentiation and (b) that in any case the returns were inaccurate and worthless, since the lower castes took the opportunity of passing themselves as belonging to groups of higher status. If this resolution had been carried, it would not have been possible to know the population of the Untouchables. Fortunately, owing to the absence of the mover, the resolution was not discussed and the Census Commissioner of 1921 remained free to carry out his inquiries in the usual manner.

Thirdly, no attempt was made for a separate enumeration of the Untouchables by any of the Census Commissioners previous to the year 1911. The first general Census of India was taken in the year 1881. Beyond listing the different castes and creeds and adding up their numbers so as to arrive at the total figure of the population of India, the Census of 1881 did nothing. It made no attempt to classify the different Hindu castes either into higher and lower or Touchable and Untouchable. The second general Census of India was taken in the year 1891. It was at this census that an attempt to classify the population on the basis of caste and race and grade was made by the Census Commissioner for the first time.

The third general Census of India was taken in 1901. At this census a new principle of classification was adopted namely 'Classification by social precedence as recognized by native public opinion.' For a society like Hindu society which does not recognize equality and whose social system is a system of gradation of higher and lower, this principle was the most appropriate one. Nothing can present a more intelligible picture of the social life and grouping of that large proportion of the people of India which is organized admittedly or tacitly on the basis of caste as this principle of social precedence.

## II

The first attempt of a definite and deliberate kind to ascertain the population of the Untouchables was made by the Census Commissioner in 1911.

The period immediately preceding the Census of 1911 was a period during which the Morley-Minto Reforms were in incubation. It was a period when the Mohammedans of India had started

their agitation for adequate representation in the legislatures by separate electorates. As a part of their propaganda, the Mohammedans waited upon Lord Morley, the then Secretary of State for India in Council, in deputation and presented him a Memorial on 27 January 1909.<sup>248</sup>

Whether there was any connection between what the Muslim deputation had urged in their memorial regarding the Untouchables in 1907 and the idea of the Census Commissioner four years after to make a separate enumeration of the Untouchables, is a matter on which nothing definite can be said. It is possible that what the Census Commissioner proposed to do in 1911 was only a culmination of the ways adopted by his predecessors in the matter of the demographic study of the population. Be that as it may, there was a great uproar on the part of the Hindus when the Census Commissioner announced his plan of separate enumeration of the Untouchables. It was said that this attempt of the Census Commissioner was the result of a conspiracy between the Musalmans and the British Government to divide and weaken the Hindu Community. It was alleged that what was behind this move was not a genuine desire to know the population of the Untouchables but the desire to break up the solidarity of the Hindu Community by separating the Untouchables from the Touchables. Many protest meetings were held all over the country by the Hindus and condemned in the strongest terms this plan of the Census Commissioner.

The commissioner of Census however undaunted by this storm of protest decided to carry out his plan. The procedure adopted by him for a separate enumeration of the Untouchables was of course a novel one. The Census Superintendents for different Provinces were instructed by the Census Commissioner to make separate enumeration of castes and tribes classed as Hindus but who did not conform to certain standards or who were subject to certain disabilities.

Under these tests the Census Superintendents made a separate enumeration of castes and tribes who (1) denied the supremacy of the Brahmins, (2) did not receive the Mantra from Brahmana or other recognized Hindu Guru, (3) denied the authority of the *Vedas*, (4) did not worship the great Hindu Gods, (5) were not served by good Brahmanas, (6) have no Brahman priests at all, (7) have no access to the interior of the ordinary Hindu temple,

(8) cause pollution, (9) bury their dead and (10) eat beef and do not revere the cow.

The investigation conducted by the Census Commissioner left no room for guessing. For he found as a fact what the population of the Untouchables was. The table below gives the population of the Untouchables, province by province, as found by the Census Commissioner of 1911.<sup>a</sup>

Province	Total population in million	Population of Depressed Classes in million	Total Seats	Seats for the Depressed Classes
Madras	39.8	6.3	120	2
Bombay	19.5	0.6	113	1
Bengal	45.0	9.9	127	1
United Provinces	47.0	10.1	120	1
Punjab	19.5	1.7	85	—
Bihar and Orissa	32.4	9.3	100	1
Central Provinces	12.0	3.7	72	1
Assam	6.0	0.3	54	—
	221.2	41.9	791	7

An outsider might not realize the significance and the bearing of these tests. They might ask what all this got to do with untouchability. But he will realize the significance and the bearing on the question of ascertaining the population of the Untouchables. As has been said there is no legal definition of untouchability and there cannot be any. Untouchability does not express itself through the hair of the head or the colour of the skin. It is not a matter of blood. Untouchability expresses itself in modes of treatment and observance of certain practices. An Untouchable is a person who is treated in a certain way by the Hindus and who follows certain practices which are different from the Hindus. There are definite ways in which the Hindus treat the Untouchables in social matters. There are definite practices which are observed by the Untouchables. That

<sup>a</sup> This Table is reprinted from Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings & Speeches, vol. 2: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, p. 364. It is not recorded in the MS—Ed.

being so the only method of ascertaining who are Untouchables is to adopt their ways and practices as the criteria and find out the communities which are subject to them. There is no other way. If the outsider bears this in mind, he will understand that even though the tests prescribed by the Census Commissioner do not show any colour of Untouchability, they are in fact the hallmarks of Untouchability. That being so, there can be no manner of doubt that the procedure was proper and the tests were correct. Consequently it can be truly said, the results of this investigation were valuable and the figures obtained were accurate as far they can be in a matter of this sort.

### III

The findings of the Census Commissioner of 1911 regarding the total population of the Untouchables were confirmed by the Census Commissioner of 1921.

The Census Commissioner of 1921 also made an investigation to ascertain the population of the Untouchables. In this Report Part I para 1931 the Census Commissioner observed:

It has been usual in recent years to speak of certain section of the community as 'depressed classes'. So far as I am aware, the term has no final definition nor is it certain exactly whom it covers. In the Quinquennial Review on the Progress of Education from 1912/17 (Chapter XVIII paragraph 505)—the depressed classes are specifically dealt with from the point of view of Educational assistance and progress and in Appendix XIII to that Report a list of the castes and tribes constituting this section of the Community is given. The total population classed according to these lists as depressed amounted to 31 million persons or 19 per cent of the Hindu and Tribal population of British India. There is undoubtedly some danger in giving offence by making in a public report social distinction which may be deemed invidious; but in view of the lists already prepared and the fact that the 'Depressed Classes' have, especially in South India, attained a class consciousness and a class organization, are served by special missions, 'raised' by philanthropic societies and officially represented in the Legislative Assemblies, it certainly seems advisable to face the facts and to attempt to obtain some statistical estimate of their numbers. I therefore asked Provincial Superintendents to let me have an estimate based on census figures of the approximate strength of the castes who were usually included in the category of 'depressed'.

I received lists of some sort from all provinces and states except the United provinces, where extreme delicacy of official sentiment shrank

from facing the task of attempting even a rough estimate. The figures given are not based on exactly uniform criteria, as a different view is taken of the position of the same groups in different parts of India, and I have had in some cases to modify the estimates on the basis of the figures in the educational report and of information from the 1911 reports and tables. They are also subject to the general defect, which has already been explained, that the total strength of any caste is not recorded. The marginal statement gives however a rough estimate of the *minimum* members which may be considered to form the 'depressed classes' of the Hindu community. The total of these provincial figures adds up to about 53 millions. This, however, must be taken as a low and conservative estimate since it does not include (1) the full strength of the castes and tribes concerned and (2) the tribal aborigines more recently absorbed in Hinduism, many of whom are considered impure. We may confidently place the numbers of these depressed classes all of whom are considered impure, at something between 55 and 60 millions in India proper.

At the time when the reforms which subsequently became embodied in the Act of 1919 were being discussed, the authors of the Montague-Chelmsford Report clearly recognized the problem of the Untouchables and the authors pledged themselves to make the best arrangement for their representation in the Legislatures. But the Committee that was appointed under the chairmanship of Lord Southborough to devise the franchise and the electoral system ignored them altogether. The Government of India did not approve of this attitude and made the following comments:

They (Untouchables) are one fifth of the total population and have not been represented at all in the Morley-Minto Councils. The Committees' report mentions them (Untouchables) twice, but only to explain that in the absence of satisfactory electorates they have been provided for by nomination. It does not discuss the position of these people, or their capacity for looking after themselves. Nor does it explain the amount of nomination which it suggests for them... The measure of representation which they propose... suggested that one fifth of the entire population of British India should be allotted seven seats out of practically eight hundred. It is true that in all the Councils there will be roughly speaking a one-sixth proportion of officials who may be expected to bear in mind the interests of the (Untouchables); but that arrangement is not, in our opinion, what the Report on reforms aims at. The authors stated that the (Untouchables) also should learn lessons of self protection. It is surely fanciful to hope that this result can be expected from including a single member of the community in an assembly where there are sixty or seventy

caste Hindus. To make good the principles of the Report we must treat the outcastes more generously.

The government recommended that the seats allotted to the Untouchables by the Committee should be doubled. Accordingly in place of seven they were given fourteen seats. It will be seen that the generosity of the Government of India when put into practice did not amount to much. It certainly did not do to the Untouchables the justice that was their due.

Then came the inquiry by the Simon Commission which was appointed by the British Parliament in 1929 to examine the working of the Reforms introduced by the Government of India Act of 1919 and to suggest further reforms.

Among the problems that were not properly settled in 1919, was the problem of the Untouchables, which was bound to loom large before the Simon Commission. Quite unexpectedly the problem received a special emphasis at the hands of the late Lord Birkenhead who was then the Secretary of State for India. In a speech which he made on<sup>b</sup>... just before the appointment of the Simon Commission he said—(*Left blank in the MS—Ed.*).

Naturally the problem became a special task of the Simon Commission. Although the problem as presented was one of providing representation—and in that sense a political problem at the bottom it was a problem, of ascertaining the population of the Untouchables. Because unless the population was ascertained the extent of representation in the legislature could not be settled.

The Simon Commission had therefore to make a searching inquiry into the population of the Untouchables. It called upon the various provincial governments to furnish returns showing the numbers of untouchables residing in their area and it is well known that the provincial governments took special care in preparing these returns. There can therefore be no question regarding the accuracy of the figure of the total population of the untouchables.

#### IV

It is thus clear that the population of the Untouchables has been estimated to be somewhere about 50 millions. That this is the

<sup>b</sup> Date not cited in the MS—Ed.

population of the Untouchables had been found by the Census Commissioner of 1911 and confirmed by the Census Commissioner of 1921 and by the Simon Commission in 1929. This fact was never challenged by any Hindu during the twenty years it stood on the record. Indeed in so far as the Hindu view could be gauged from the reports of the different Committees appointed by the Provincial and Central Legislatures to cooperate with the Simon Commission, there can be no doubt that they accepted this figure without any demur.

Suddenly however in 1932, when the Lothian Committee came and began its investigation, the Hindus adopted a challenging mood and refused to accept this figure as the correct one. In some provinces the Hindus went to the length of denying that there were any Untouchables there at all. This episode reveals the mentality of the Hindus and as such deserves to be told in some details.

The Lothian Committee was appointed in consequence of the recommendations made by the Franchise Sub-Committee of the Indian Round Table Conference. The Committee toured the whole of India, visited all the Provinces except Central Provinces and Assam. To aid the Committee, there were constituted in each Province by the provincial government, Provincial Committees comprising, so far as possible, spokesmen of the various schools of thought and of the various political interests existing in each province. These Provincial Committees were in the main composed of members of the Provincial Councils with non-officials as Chairmen. With a view to concentrating discussion, the Indian Franchise Committee issued a questionnaire covering the field included in its terms of reference. The procedure laid down by the Franchise Committee was that Provincial Governments should formulate their own views on the points raised in the questionnaire and discuss them with the Committee and that the Provincial Committees who were regarded as the authoritative advisers should independently formulate their views and should at their discretion conduct a preliminary examination of witnesses on the basis of their written statements. The Report of the Indian Franchise Committee was therefore a thorough piece of work based upon detailed investigation.

The letter of instruction sent by the Prime Minister to Lord Lothian as Chairman of the Indian Franchise Committee and

which constituted the terms of reference of the Committee contained the following observation:

It is evident from the discussions which have occurred in various connections in the (Indian Round Table) Conference that the new constitution must make adequate provision for the representation of the depressed classes and that the method of representation by nomination is no longer regarded as appropriate. As you are aware, there is a difference of opinion whether the system of separate electorates should be instituted for the depressed classes and your committee's investigation should contribute towards the decision of this question by indicating the extent to which the depressed classes would be likely, through such general extension of the Franchise as you may recommend, to secure the right to vote in ordinary electorates. On the other hand, should it be decided eventually to constitute separate electorates for the depressed classes, either generally or in those Provinces in which they form a distinct and separate element in the population, your Committee's inquiry into the general problem of extending the franchise should place you in possession of facts which would facilitate the devising of a method of separate representation for the depressed classes.

Accordingly in the questionnaire that was issued by the Indian Franchise Committee there was included the following Question:

What communities would you include as belonging to Depressed Classes? Would you include classes other than Untouchables, and if so which?

I was a member of the Indian Franchise Committee. When I became a member of the Committee, I was aware that the principal question on which I should have to give battle with the Caste Hindus was the question of joint versus separate electorates for the Untouchables. I knew, that in the Indian Franchise Committee, the odds would be heavily against them. I was to be the only representative of the Untouchables in the Committee as against half a dozen of the Caste Hindus. Against such an unequal fight I had prepared myself. Before accepting membership of the Indian Franchise Committee, I had stipulated that the decision of the question whether the Untouchables should have joint or separate electorates should not form part of the terms of reference to the Committee. This was accepted and the question was excluded from the purview of the Indian Franchise Committee. I had therefore no fear of being out voted on this issue in the Committee—a strategy for which the Hindu Members of the Committee did not forgive me. But there

arose another problem of which I had not the faintest idea. I mean the problem of numbers. The problem of numbers having been examined between 1911 to 1929 by four different authorities, who found that the population of Untouchables was somewhere about 50 millions, I did not feel that there would be any contest over this issue before the Indian Franchise Committee.

Strange as it may appear the issue of numbers was fought out most bitterly and acrimoniously before the Indian Franchise Committee. Committee after Committee and witness after witness came forward to deny the existence of the Untouchables. It was an astounding phenomenon with which I was confronted. It would be impossible to refer to the statement of individual witnesses who came forward to deny the existence of such a class as the Untouchables. It would be enough if I illustrate my point by referring to the views of the Provincial Franchise Committees and their members relating to the question of the population of the Untouchables.

## PUNJAB

### *Opinion of the Punjab Government*

The Punjab Government is of opinion that the enfranchisement of the tenant will give the vote to a considerable number of the Depressed Classes and to that extent will give them influence in the election of representatives to the Council.<sup>c</sup>

As regards the Depressed Classes, the Punjab Government has no reason to depart from the view which it has already expressed in para 25 of the Memorandum containing the opinions of the official members of the Government on the recommendations of the Indian Statutory Commission, that these classes are not a pressing problem in the Punjab and will get some representation as tenants.<sup>d</sup>

### *Opinion of the Punjab Provincial Franchise Committee*

K. B. Din Mahomed and Mr Hansraj (who represented the Untouchables on the Committee) held that, while there are no depressed classes among

<sup>c</sup> Memorandum by the Punjab Government to Indian Franchise Committee, IFC, vol. III, p. 29.

<sup>d</sup> Supplementary Memorandum by the Punjab Government, IFC, vol. III, p. 29.

the Musalmans, there exist depressed classes among the Hindus and Sikhs... Their total number being 1,310,709. Mr Hansraj considers this list incomplete.

They held that provision should be made for separate representation by treating the depressed classes as a separate community. Mr Nazir Husain, Rai Bahadur Chaudhri Chhotu Ram, Mr Own Roberts, K. B. Muhammad Hayat, Mr Qureshi, Mr Chatterji, Sardar Bhuta Singh and Pandit Nanak Chand held that it is impossible to say that there are depressed classes in the Punjab in the sense that any person by reason of his religion suffers any diminution of civic rights... The Chairman, Pandit Nanak Chand and Sardar Bhuta Singh are of opinion that the depressed classes do not exist in the sense in which they exist in Southern India, and that, while there are in the villages certain classes who occupy a very definitely inferior economic and social position, it is not possible to differentiate the Hindu leather worker or Chamar who is claimed as a depressed class from the Musalman leather worker or Mochi who no one alleges belongs to a separate class.<sup>e</sup>

It will thus be seen that the Punjab Provincial Government avoided to answer the question. The Punjab Provincial Committee by a majority denied that there existed a class such as depressed or untouchable.

## UNITED PROVINCES

### *Opinion of the Provincial Franchise Committee*

The United Provinces Franchise Committee is of opinion that only those classes should be called 'depressed' which are untouchable. Judged by this test, the problem of untouchability is non-existent in these provinces except in the case of Bhangis, Doms and Dhanuks, whose total population, including those sections which are touchable is only 582,000.<sup>f</sup>

Babu Ram Sahai, a member of the United Provinces Provincial Franchise Committee representing the Untouchable classes, in his minute of dissent gave the numbers<sup>g</sup> of the Untouchables in UP as 11,435,417. Rai Sahib Babu Ramcharan, another member of the United Provinces Provincial Franchise Committee representing the Depressed Classes in his minute of dissent gave the numbers<sup>h</sup> of the Depressed Classes in UP as 20 millions.

<sup>e</sup> Memorandum by the Punjab Franchise Committee, IFC, vol. III, p. 35.

<sup>f</sup> IFC; vol. III, p. 398.

<sup>g</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

<sup>h</sup> IFC; vol. III, p. 285.

The Government of the United Provinces reported<sup>i</sup> that the maximum estimate amounts to 17 million persons; the minimum something less than one million. In its opinion the least number was 6,773,814.

### BENGAL

The Bengal Provincial Franchise Committee in its first Report<sup>j</sup> said The Committee could come to no decision on this question and resolved to put it back for consideration along with the Central Committee.

In its final Report the same Committee said:

According to the criterion laid down viz, untouchability and unapproachability, as these terms are understood in other parts of India, the Committee considers that, except Bhumalis only, there is no such class in Bengal.<sup>k</sup>

Mr Mullick who was a representative of the Depressed Classes on the Bengal provincial Franchise Committee in his minute of dissent gave a list of 86 castes as belonging to the Untouchable Classes.

### BIHAR AND ORISSA

The population of the Depressed Classes in Bihar and Orissa according to the Census of 1911 was 9,300,000<sup>l</sup> and according to the Census of 1921 was 8,000,000.<sup>m</sup>

But the Bihar and Orissa Provincial Franchise Committee in its provincial memorandum<sup>n</sup> observed—

It is difficult to give an exhaustive list of the castes or sects who come under the definition of Depressed Classes. The only classes which can be called depressed are *Mushahars*, *Dusadhs*, *Chamars*, *Doms* and *Mehtars*. Their number is not sufficiently large to justify their being grouped in a separate electoral roll. The problem of Depressed Classes is not so acute in Bihar as in Bombay or South India. The Committee considers that there is no need for special representation of the Depressed Classes.

<sup>i</sup> Ibid., pp. 297-8.

<sup>j</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>k</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>l</sup> Quoted from *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches*, vol. 2, p. 437—

Ed.

<sup>m</sup> Ibid., p. 431—Ed.

<sup>n</sup> IFC, vol. III, p. 129

The same Committee in its final report<sup>o</sup> said:

The classes which are commonly regarded as Untouchables are Chamar, Dusadh, Dom, Halalkhor, Hari, Mochi, Mushahar, Pan Pasi.... The majority of the Committee, however consider that there is no need for special representation as the Depressed Classes as their grievances are not so acute here as in Bombay or South India.

Why did the Hindus suddenly turn to reduce the population of the Untouchables from millions to fractions? The figure of 50 millions had stood on the record from 1911. It had not been questioned by anyone. How is it that in 1932 the Hindus made so determined an effort without any regard to the means to challenge the accuracy of this figure?

The answer is simple. Up to 1932 the Untouchables had no political importance. Although they were outside the pale of Hindu society which recognizes only four classes, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, yet for political purposes they were reckoned as part of the Hindu society. So that for political purposes such as representation in the Legislature etc., the question of the population of the Untouchables was of no consequence. Up to 1932 the political question was one of division of seats in the Legislature between Hindus and Musalmans only and as there was no question of the seats that came to the lot of the Hindus being partitioned between the Touchables and the Untouchables and as the whole share went to the Touchables they did not care to inquire what the population of the Untouchables was. By 1932 the situation had completely altered. The question of partition was no longer a question between Hindus and Musalmans. The Untouchables had begun to claim that there should not only be a partition between the Hindus and Musalmans but that the share allotted to the Hindus should be further partitioned and the share of the Untouchables given to them to be enjoyed by them exclusively. This claim to separation was recognized and the Untouchables were allowed to be represented by members of their own class at the Indian Round Table Conference. Not only was the separate existence of the Untouchables thus recognized but the Minorities Sub-Committee of the Indian Round Table Conference had accepted the principle that under the new Constitution the Depressed Classes should be given representation in all Legislatures

<sup>o</sup> IFC, vol. III, p. 188.

in proportion to their population. It is thus that the population of the Untouchables became a subject of importance. The less the population of the Untouchables the greater the share of the political representation that would go to the Touchable Hindus. This will explain why the Touchables who before 1932 did not care to quarrel over the question of the population of the Untouchables, after 1932 began denying the very existence of such a class as Untouchables.

The ostensible grounds urged by the Hindus before the Lothian Committee for reducing the population of the Untouchables were two. One was that the figures given by the Census Commissioner were for Depressed Classes and not for Untouchables and that Depressed Classes included other classes besides Untouchables. The second ground urged by them was that, the definition of the word should be uniform throughout all India and should be applied in all Provinces in determining the population of the Untouchables. In other words they objected to a local test of untouchability.

The first contention was absolutely untrue. The term Depressed Classes was used as a synonym for Untouchables and the term Depressed Classes was used instead of the term Untouchables because the latter, it was felt, would give offence to the people meant to be included under the term. That, it was used to denote only the Untouchables and it did not include the Aborigines or the Criminal Tribes was made clear in the debate that took place in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1916 on the Resolution moved by the Honourable Mr Dadabhoy. The second contention of the caste Hindus was that the test of untouchability should be uniform. The object of putting forth this contention was to reduce the number of Untouchables. It is well known that there are variations in the forms which untouchability assumes in different parts of India. In some parts of India, Untouchables are unseeables i.e. they cause pollution if they come within the sight of a Touchable Hindu. In some parts Untouchables are unapproachables i.e. they cause pollution if they come within a certain distance of a Touchable Hindu. Of these unapproachables there are two classes. There is a class of unapproachables who cannot come within a certain fixed distance of a Touchable Hindu. There is another class of unapproachables who cannot come so near a Hindu as to let his shadow fall upon him. In some parts of India an Untouchable is not unseeable or unapproachable. It is only his

physical contact which causes pollution. In some parts an Untouchable is one who is not allowed to touch water or food. In some parts an Untouchable is one who is not allowed to enter a temple. With these variations it is clear, that if unseeability was taken as the only test of untouchability, then the unapproachables would have to be excluded from the category of Untouchables. If unapproachability was taken as a test, then those whose touch only caused pollution will have to be excluded from the category of Untouchables. If causing pollution by touch be taken as a test, then those whose disability is that they are not allowed to touch water or food or those whose only disability is that they are not allowed to enter the temple, shall have to be excluded. This is what the Hindus wanted to do. By insisting upon a uniform test they wanted to eliminate certain classes from the category of Untouchables and thereby reduce the population of the Untouchables. Obviously their point of view was fallacious. Untouchability is an outward expression of the inner repulsion which a Hindu feels towards a certain person. The form which this repulsion takes is comparatively a matter of small moment. The form merely indicates the degree of repulsion. Wherever there is repulsion there is untouchability. This simple truth the Hindu knew.

But they kept on insisting upon uniformity of test because they wanted somehow to reduce the population of the Untouchables and to appropriate to themselves a larger share of political representation.

## VI

This struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables constituted undoubtedly the main episode. But within this episode there was another which, though of a smaller character, was yet full of significance. It was the struggle between the Backward Classes and the Untouchables. The representatives of the Backward Classes contended that the category known as Depressed Classes should not only include Untouchables in the strict sense of that term but should also include those classes which are economically and educationally backward. The object of those that wanted, that not only the Untouchables but also those who are educationally and economically backward shall also be given separate representation, was a laudable one. In putting forth this contention they were not



asking for anything that was new. Under the reformed constitution that came into operation in 1920, the right of the economically and educationally backward communities was recognized in the two provinces of India, namely, Bombay and Madras. In Bombay the Marathas and allied castes and in Madras the non-Brahmins were given separate representation on the only ground that they were economically and educationally backward. It was feared that if special representation was not given to those communities, they would be politically suppressed by the minority of high caste Hindus such as Brahmins and allied castes. There are many communities in other provinces who are in the same position and who need special political representation to prevent their being suppressed by the higher castes. It was therefore perfectly proper for the representatives of the Backward Classes from the Hindus to have claimed special representation for themselves.<sup>P</sup> If their point of view had been accepted the total number of Depressed classes would have swelled to enormous proportions. But they received no support either from the Untouchables or from the high caste Hindus. The Hindus were opposed to the move which was calculated to increase the population of the Depressed classes. The Untouchables did not want to be included in their category any class of people who were not really Untouchables. The proper course for these backward communities was to have asked to make a division of Touchable Hindus into advanced and backward and to have claimed separate representation for the Backward. In that effort the Untouchables would have supported them. But they did not agree to this and persisted in being included among the Depressed Classes largely because they thought that this was easier

<sup>P</sup> The necessity for making such provisions for the Backward Classes in UP from which this demand mainly came was amply demonstrated by what the government of UP said in its Memorandum to the Simon Commission. Regarding the composition of the UP Legislature it said—'In the Province as a whole the four leading Hindu Castes, Brahman, Thakur, Vaishya and Kayastha form 21.5 per cent of the total Hindu population, but these four castes have supplied no less than 93 per cent of the Hindu Members of Council. The Jats, with 1.8 per cent of the population, have contributed another 5 per cent to the Hindu membership; and all the millions included in the multitude of other Hindu Castes, including the real agricultural castes, though they amount to over 76 per cent of the Hindu population have only succeeded in supplying 2 per cent of the representation', p. 560.

way of securing their object. But as the Untouchables opposed this, the backward communities turned and joined the Hindus in denying the existence of Untouchables, more vehemently than the Hindus.

In this struggle between the Touchables and Untouchables the latter did not get any support from the Mohammedans. It will be noticed that in the Punjab Provincial Franchise Committee, only one Mahomedan supported the representative of the Untouchables in his assertion that there are in the Punjab communities which are treated as Untouchables. The rest of the Mohammedans members of the Committee did not join. In Bengal the Hindu and the Mohammedans members of the Bengal Provincial Franchise Committee agreed not to express any view on the matter. It is rather strange that the Mohammedans should have kept mum. It was in their interest that the Untouchables should be recognized as a separate political community. This separation between the Touchables and the Untouchables was to their benefit. Why did they not help the Untouchables in this struggle for numbers? There were two reasons why the Mohammedans took this attitude. In the first place the Mohammedans were asking for more than their population ratio of representation. They were asking for what in Indian political parlance is known as weightage. They knew that their weightage must involve a loss to the Hindus and the only question was which section of the Hindus should bear the loss. The Touchable Hindus would not mind the weightage if it could be granted without reducing their share. How to do this was the problem and the only way out of it was to reduce the share of the Untouchables. To reduce the share meant to reduce the population. This is one reason why the Mahomedans did not help the Untouchables in this struggle for numbers. The second reason why the Mohammedans did not help the Untouchables was the fear of exposure by the Hindus. Although Islam is the one religion which can transcend race and colour and unite diverse people into a compact brotherhood, yet Islam in India has not succeeded in uprooting caste from among the Indian Musalmans. Caste feeling among the Musalmans is not so virulent as it is among the Hindus. But the fact is that it exists. That this caste feeling among the Musalmans leads to social gradation, a feature of the Muslim community in India, has been noticed by all those who have had an occasion to study the subject.

These facts are quite well known to the Hindus and they were quite prepared to cite them against the Muslims if the Muslims went too far in helping the Untouchables in this struggle for numbers and thereby bringing about a diminution of the seats for Caste Hindus in the Legislature. The Mahomedans knew their own weak points. They did not wish to give an excuse to the Hindus to rake up the social divisions among the Musalmans and thought that their interest would be best served by their taking a non-partisan attitude.

The Untouchables were thus left to themselves to fight for their numbers. But even they could not be depended upon to muster for the cause. When the Hindus found that they could not succeed in reducing the number of the Untouchables, they tried to mislead the Untouchables. They began telling the Untouchables that the government was making a list of the Untouchable communities and it was wrong to have a community's name entered in such list because it would perpetuate untouchability. Acting on this advice, many communities which were actually an Untouchable community would send a petition stating that it was not classed as Untouchable and should not be listed. Much effort had to be made to induce such communities to withdraw such petitions by informing them that the real purpose was to estimate their numbers in order to fix their seats in the Legislature.

Fortunately for all, this struggle is now over and the controversy is closed and the population of the Untouchables can never be open to dispute. The Untouchables are now statutorily defined. Who are Untouchables is laid down by a schedule to the Government of India Act 1935 which describes them as Scheduled Castes. But the struggle reveals a trait of Hindu character. If the Untouchables make no noise, the Hindu feels no shame for their condition and is quite indifferent as to their numbers. Whether they are thousands or millions of them, he does not care to bother. But if the Untouchables rise and ask for recognition, he is prepared to deny their existence, repudiate his responsibility and refuse to share his power without feeling any compunction or remorse.

## The Untouchables and the Pax Britannica

Caste and Untouchability are the two great social evils in India. Caste has disabled the whole Hindu society. Untouchability has suppressed a large class of people. And yet the British Government has completely ignored the two evils. One may search in vain the Indian Code to find any law dealing with caste or with untouchability. It is true that caste and untouchability are social matters. They will vanish when people will begin to inter-dine and inter-marry. Law cannot compel a person to dine with another. It is true, law cannot compel a person to marry with another. But it is also true that law can prohibit a caste from preventing a person from marrying a person outside his caste. Caste continues because a caste can conspire to punish its members if they break the rules of caste by declaring a social boycott against him. It would have been perfectly possible to have enacted a law declaring such social boycott to be a crime. Again in the matter of Untouchability the disabilities are not merely social. They are fundamentally civic. Inability to get admission to school, to be able to take water from a public well, to be able to get into a public conveyance, to be able to get into public service, are all civic disabilities. It was the duty of the British Government to legislate at least to the extent necessary to protect their civic rights. It was possible to do so. A short Enactment on the lines of Caste Disabilities Removal Act would have been sufficient. Yet the British Government has gone on as though these two evils did not exist at all. Indeed it is most extraordinary thing to note that although Legislative Bodies were

established in India in 1861 and have been passing laws on every social questions and discussing public questions, yet except on two occasions the Untouchables were not even mentioned. The first occasion on which they were mentioned was in 1916, when one Parsi gentleman Sir Maneckji Dadabhoy moved the following Resolution in the Central Legislature:<sup>249</sup>

That this Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that measures be devised with the help, if necessary, of a small representative committee of officials and non-officials for an amelioration in the moral, material and educational condition of what are known as the Depressed Classes, and that, as a preliminary step the Local Government and Administrations be invited to formulate schemes with due regard to local conditions.

There was no sympathy to this resolution. The Hindu members of the Legislature were angry with the mover for his having brought such a subject before the Legislature.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya said:

Sir, it seems rather ungracious to say so, but a sense of the dignity of the proceedings of this Council compels me to utter a protest against the manner in which sometimes subjects are brought before it for consideration...

In moving the Resolution the object of which I may at once say, has my whole-hearted support, my friend, the Hon'ble Mr Dadabhoy, went out of his way to make remarks against the Hindu community which, I think, he ought to have avoided... I am not here to defend everything Hindu that exists. I am not here to apologize for the many prejudices or superstitions, which I am sadly conscious are to be found among one portion or another of our community. But it is not the Hindu community alone which finds it difficult to get rid of prejudices... Without meaning the smallest disrespect, I would instance the case of the marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister Bill... We Hindus have got some much worse prejudices to fight against... But I do not think it is within the province of a member of this Council either to lecture to the Hindus present here or to those outside as to the socio-religious disabilities among themselves which they might fight against and remove. I think the province of Members of this Council is limited to dealing with matters of legislation or other administrative matters which may properly be taken up by the Government. As has been already pointed out, the Government have, in pursuance of a wise and liberal policy, laid it down that they shall not interfere in matters of a religious or socio-religious character, and accusations of the character in question ought, therefore, to be avoided

there... I do not wish to descent into a disputation as to the merits of the imputations or the justification for the general observations that have been made... And yet, if I do not, I am left in the position that I have heard without protest remarks showing that the Hindu Community from one end of the country to the other was guilty of all that my friend, the Hon'ble Mover of the Resolution, has suggested... I am conscious that we Hindus have many prejudices to fight against and conquer; but I submit that this is not the place to tell us of them.

Even a social reformer like Sir Surendranath Bannerjee was not happy. He said:

... I regret very much that my Hon'ble friend the Mover of this Resolution went somewhat out of his way to level (I do not think he did it intentionally) an attack against the Hindu Community. He must bear in mind that we are the inheritors of past traditions, of a civilization as ancient as the world. That civilization undoubtedly had its defects, but that civilization in the morning of the world was the guarantee for law and order and social stability. In the past it afforded consolation to millions. We are trying to evolve a national system in conformity with our present environments, but we cannot push aside all those things which have come down to us from the past. We reverence the venerable fabric which has been built up by our ancestors. We notice their defects, and we are anxious to get rid of them gradually and steadily, not by any revolutionary movement, but the slow, steady process of evolution. My friend must have a little sympathy with us; he must extend to us the hand of generosity in our efforts to deal with the problems. My Hon'ble friend suggests that Government should take measures... We welcome the action of Government in a matter of this kind, but after all, if you analyse the situation, it is a social problem, and the British Government, very properly, as I think, in conformity with its ancient traditions, holds aloof from all interference with social questions.

Government can do a great by way of education, a great deal by helping forward the industrial movement among the Depressed classes. But the vital problem, the problem of problems, is one of social uplifting, and there the Government can only afford to be a benevolent spectator. It may sympathize with our efforts, but it cannot actively participate in them...

The Hon'ble Mr Dadabhoy had to defend himself. In his reply he said:

Sir, I find myself in a very peculiar and unfortunate position. There are two parties in this Council, and they are both on the defensive on this occasion. My justification for bringing in this Resolution, if any

justification were needed, is to be found in the unenthusiastic and half hearted support which I have received from my non-official colleagues. It was no pleasure, I assure you, Sir, to me to bring in this Resolution. If I could possibly have avoided it, I would have very cheerfully and very willingly done so. This is the sixth year of the life of this Reformed Council, as Hon'ble Members are aware, and the second term is now approaching expiration. During the major portion of that time—the five years that I have been on this Council—I anticipated that the champions of public liberty, public spirit and public enterprise and culture—men like my friends the Hon'ble Surendra Nath Bannerjee or the Honourable Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya—would take the trouble of moving a Resolution to this effect. I waited all this time to see if one of these enthusiastic members would bring in a Resolution for the amelioration of the Depressed Classes, but when I found that none of them had taken up the matter—though at times this matter is discussed even in the Congress Pandal in a certain manner; when I found that it was not taken up in this Council.... I, as a Parsee, representing a Hindu constituency thought it my duty to bring this matter for public discussion in this Council.

The government naturally felt relieved by this quarrel. Resting behind the moral support of the Hindu members of the Legislature for covering up their delinquency, Sir Reginald Craddock speaking on behalf of the government disposed of the Resolution.

Why did the British Government leave the Untouchables in the cold without any care or attention?

The explanation for so criminal a neglect was furnished by Sir Reginald Craddock. In replying on behalf of the Government of India on the Resolution moved by Sir Maneckji Dadabhoy in the Imperial legislative Council in 1916, he stated what the position of the British Government took with regard to the Untouchables in the following terms:

With regard to them (i.e. the Untouchables) the difficulty is not that Government does not recognize them, but that until the habits and prejudices of centuries are removed, the hands of their neighbours must necessarily press upon them... you must remember that these people live mostly in villages and very often in the back lane of towns, and that their neighbours have not yet come under these broad and liberal minded influences. Therefore, as many speakers have indicated, the problem in dealing with this question is more social and religious than purely administrative.

I know myself of many difficulties in the matter of schools. There are many places where the Mahar boys will not be allowed into the school; they may be allowed in the Verandah and get only a small part of the

master's attention there, or they may be entirely excluded. But it is only gradually that the difficulty can be met. I have constantly dealt with this very problem on the spot. I have reasoned with people; I have said to them: There are tax payers like yourselves, either let them come into the school, or if you wish to indulge in your own prejudices—they may be reasonable prejudices, as you consider them—but if you wish to indulge them, should you not contribute something in order that these boys may have a school of their own? In that what some of the better people have come forward to help in the matter of wells, and schools for the low castes; they have assisted, and the difficulties have been got over. But of course it is a matter which must take time, and Government itself cannot use compulsion. They go rather near to it sometimes for example, in travelling by railway: and when petitions are presented in Court. But they cannot ensure that these people shall always be well-treated in their offices. Very often, I think, some of these classes refrain from seeking service they might otherwise wish to secure, because their neighbours are not likely to treat them warmly. Although the Hon'ble mover described the statement made by the Government of Bombay as a 'magnificent *non-possumus*', I think that it very accurately describes what the real difficulties of the situation are. Even though Government is willing to help in every way these unfortunate people, yet it remains true that 'the position of these castes and tribes in the future depends partly on their own selves, and partly those more favoured Indian Communities, which by extending the hand of human comradeship or hardening their hearts and averting their faces, have it in their power to elevate or to degrade them.'

That Sir, I think, represents very truly and accurately the position of affairs as regards these Depressed Classes.

The same attitude was reiterated in 1928 when the resolution of Mr Jayakar was discussed in the Central Legislative Assembly. Mr Bajpai speaking on behalf of the Government said:

...it is not by increasing the number of special schools or by providing special facilities that you are going to solve this problem (of the Untouchables)... You will solve this problem only by a quickening and broadening the spirit of all sections of the community towards the so-called depressed classes.

Leaving the problem to be solved by the quickening of the consciences of the Hindus, the British Government just neglected the Untouchables and believed that as a Government they were not called upon to do anything to help to improve the lot of the Untouchables. How did the British justify this neglect of so helpless and so downtrodden a class of their subjects as the Untouchables?

The answer is very clear. They did it by taking the view that the evil of Untouchability was not of their making. They argued that if they did not deal with the evil of Untouchability, they are not to be blamed for it because the system did not originate with them. This was clearly enunciated by the Government of Bombay in 1856. In June 1856 a petition was submitted on behalf of a Mahar boy to the Government of Bombay complaining that though willing to pay the usual schooling fee he had been denied admission to the Dharwar Government School. In disposing of the application, the Government of Bombay thought the matter so important that it issued a Resolution dated 21 July 1856 of which the following is the full text:

1. The question discussed in the correspondence is one of very great practical difficulty.

2. There can be no doubt that the Mahar petitioner has abstract justice on his side; and Government trust that the prejudices which at present prevent him from availing himself of existing means of education in Dharwar may be ere long removed.

3. But Government are obliged to keep in mind that to interfere with the prejudices of ages in a summary manner, for the sake of one or few individuals, would probably do a great damage to the cause of education. *The disadvantage under which the petitioner is not one which has originated with the Government, and it is one which Government cannot summarily remove by interfering in his favour, as he begs them to do.*

This is of course an easy view of the duties of a government. It is not a responsible view. It is certainly not a view which a civilized government would take. A government which is afraid to govern is not a government. It is only a corporation formed to collect taxes. The British Government undoubtedly meant to be more than a mere tax gathering machinery. It claimed to be a civilized government. Then why did it not act to prevent wrong and injustice? Was it because it had no power or was it because it was afraid to use them or was it because it felt that there was nothing wrong in the social and religious system of India?

The answer is that it had the power, the amplest power. It did not use it because for a part of the period it did not think that there was anything wrong in the social system of the Hindus and during the period when it became convinced that things were wrong it was overpowered by sense of fear.

People wanted freedom political, economic and social. This the British Government declined to create:

As a result of this, so far as the moral and social life of the people was concerned, the change of Government by the Moghuls to a Government by the British was only a change of rulers rather than a change of system. Owing to the adoption of the principle of non-interference partly by preference and partly by necessity by the British 'the natives of India found themselves under a Government distinguished in no vital respect from those under which they had toiled and worshipped, lived and died through all their weary and forgotten history. From a political standpoint, the change was but the replacement of one despotism by another. It accepted the arrangements as it found them<sup>a</sup> and preserved them faithfully in the manner of the Chinese tailor who, when given an old coat as a pattern, produced with pride an exact replica, rents, patches and all.'<sup>b</sup>

This policy of non-intervention though understandable, was so far as the Untouchables were concerned, mistaken in its conception and disastrous in its consequences. It may be granted that Untouchables can only be lifted up by the Hindus recognizing his human rights and him as a human being as correct. But that does not dispose of the matter. Question remains how is this recognition of his rights as a human being to be secured. There are only two ways of helping to realize this object. One way is to make him worthy of respect and the other is to punish those who disrespect him and deny him his rights. The first way involves the duty to educate him and to place him in positions of authority. The other way involves social reform by making recognition of Untouchability a penal offence. Neither of this the British Government was prepared to do. It would not give the Untouchables any preferential treatment in public service. It would not undertake to reform Hindu society. The result was that Untouchable has remained what he was before the British, namely an Untouchable. He was a citizen but he was not given the rights of a citizen. He paid taxes out of which schools were maintained but his children could not be admitted into those schools. He paid taxes out of which wells were built but he had no right to take water from

<sup>a</sup> The poll tax has been continued in Burma simply because it was found to exist there on the day of conquest.

<sup>b</sup> Bernard Houghton, *Bureaucratic Government, A Study in Indian Polity*, Madras, G. A. Natesan, 1921.

them. He paid taxes out of which roads were built. But he has no right to use them. He paid taxes for the upkeep of the state. But he himself was not entitled to hold offices in the state. He was a subject but not a citizen. The Untouchable stood most in need of education and supply of water. He stood mostly in need of office to protect himself. Owing to his poverty he should have been exempted from all taxes. All this was reversed. The Untouchable was taxed to pay for the education of the touchable. The Untouchable was taxed to pay for the water supply of the touchable. The Untouchable was taxed to pay for the salary of the touchables in office.

What good has British conquest done to the Untouchables? In education, nothing; in service, nothing; in status, nothing. There is one thing in which they have gained and that is equality in the eye of the law. There is of course nothing special in it because equality before law is common to all. There is of course nothing tangible in it because those who hold office often prostitute their position and deny to the Untouchables the benefit of this rule. With all this, the principle of equality before law has been of special benefit to the Untouchables for the simple reason that they never had it before the days of the British. The Law of Manu did not recognize the principle of equality. Inequality was the soul of the Law of Manu. It pervaded all walks of life, all social relationships and all departments of state. It had fouled the air and the Untouchables were simply smothered. The principle of equality before law has served as a great disinfectant. It has cleansed the air and the Untouchable is permitted to breathe the air of freedom. This is a real gain to the Untouchables and having regard to the ancient past it is no small gain.

## An Anti-Untouchability Agenda

The writer in the *Indian Social Reformer* pleads that Untouchables should be associated with the management of the Sangh.<sup>250</sup> His statement might lead people to believe that Untouchables were never represented on the Central Board of the Sangh. That would be a mistake. The correct position is that when the Sangh was started, prominent Untouchables in substantial numbers were on the Central Board of the Sangh. The statement issued by Mr Birla and Mr Thakkar on 3 November 1932 gives the names of those who were constituting the Central Board. It was announced that:

The Central Board has been constituted with the following organizing members:

Sjt. G. D. Birla, Delhi and Calcutta; Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Bombay; Sir Lallubhai Samaldas, Bombay; Dr B. R. Ambedkar, Bombay; Sheth Ambalal Sarabhai, Ahmedabad; Dr B. C. Roy, Calcutta; Lala Shri Ram, Delhi; Rao Bahadur M. C. Raja, Madras; Dr T. S. S. Rajan, Trichinopoly; Rao Bahadur Srinivasan, Madras; Mr A. V. Thakkar, General Secretary, Delhi.

It will be seen that out of 8 members 3 were drawn from the Untouchables. After my retirement from the Board, the other two, namely, Rao Bahadur M. C. Raja and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan also retired. I do not know the reasons why they dissociated themselves from the Sangh.

It is right and proper that I should state the reasons why I severed my connection with the Sangh. After the Poona Pact I proceeded in a spirit of forget and forgive. I accepted the *bona fides* of Mr Gandhi as I was asked to do by many of his friends. It was in that spirit that I accepted a place on the Central Board of the