

GANDHI

BEHIND *the* MASK

of DIVINITY

G. B. SINGH

 Prometheus Books

59 John Glenn Drive
Amherst, New York 14228-2197

Published 2004 by Prometheus Books

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08 07 06 05 04 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Singh, G. B., 1954-

Gandhi : behind the mask of divinity / G. B. Singh
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-57392-998-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Gandhi, Mahatma, 1869-1948. 2. Statesmen—India—Biography.
3. Nationalists—India—Biography. I. Title.

DS481.G3 S5325 2002

954.03'5'092—dc21

[B]

2002068083

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

**Dawn of the Civil Rights Movement
with
GURU NANAK
(1469-1539)**

*Of a woman are we conceived,
Of a woman we are born,
To a woman are we betrothed and married,
It is a woman who keeps the race going,
Another companion is sought when the life-partner dies,
Through woman are established social ties.
Why should we consider woman cursed and condemned,
When from woman are born leaders and rulers.
From woman alone is born a woman,
Without woman there can be no human birth.
Without woman, O Nanak, only the True One exists.
Be it man or be it woman,
Only those who sing His glory
Are blessed and radiant with His Beauty,
In His Presence and with His grace
They appear with a radiant face.*

—Guru Granth, p. 473

Today, in retrospect, may we proclaim:

*Without women, there wouldn't have been
the American Civil Rights Movement.*

Therefore, this book is dedicated to one who epitomized
the conscience of the American Civil Rights Movement

Miss Ella J. Baker
(1903-1986)

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CASTE:
HINDUISM'S MOST DANGEROUS MYTH

Untouchability is as integral a part of the Hindu faith as anti-Semitism of the Nazi.

—Beverley Nichols
Verdict on India

I remember when Mrs. King and I were in India, we journeyed down one afternoon to the southernmost part of India, the state of Kerala, the city of Trivandrum. That afternoon I was to speak in one of the schools, what we would call high schools in our country, and it was a school attended by and large by students who were the children of former untouchables. . . . The principal introduced me and then as he came to the conclusion of his introduction, he says, "Young people, I would like to present to you a fellow untouchable from the United States of America." And for a moment I was a bit shocked and peeved that I would be referred to as an untouchable. . . . I started thinking about the fact: twenty million of my brothers and sisters were still smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in an affluent society. I started thinking about the fact: these twenty million brothers and sisters were still by

and large housed in rat-infested, unendurable slums in the big cities of our nation, still attending inadequate . . . schools faced with improper recreational facilities. And I said to myself, "Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable."

—Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.
 "Sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church, July 4, 1965"
The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Hinduism is a vast and complex subject. There are countless ways to approach this topic and yet every explanation falls short. Scholars have devoted innumerable years exploring its corridors and have walked away more flustered than when they started. Take the case of a literary giant, Mark Twain, who, on his visit to India in 1896, took the plunge to learn Hinduism's ABCs. Very soon, recognizing the bottomless pit, he dropped the project. The bafflement Westerners experience in connection with Hinduism springs not just from its tremendous size, but also from concepts that the Western mind has difficulty grasping. Take, for example, Percival Spear's attempt at clarification:

Hinduism has been likened to a vast sponge, which absorbs all that enters it without ceasing to be itself. The simile is not quite exact, because Hinduism has shown a remarkable power of assimilating as well as absorbing; the water becomes part of the sponge. Like a sponge it has no very clear outline on its borders and no apparent core at its centre. An approach to Hinduism provides a first lesson in the "otherness" of Hindu ideas from those of Europe. The Western love of definition and neat pigeon-holing receives its first shock, and also its first experience of definition by means of negatives. For a while it is not at all clear what Hinduism is, it is clear that it is not many things with which it may be superficially compared.¹

Definition of Hinduism by means of negatives is striking. No Church! No pope! No bishop! No church council! No one Bible! No history! No beginnings! No ends! Trying to put a score on the number of "Hindu Bibles" is a daunting endeavor. As an example, the field of yoga, which is part of Hinduism, has at least 688 scriptures. Nothing in Hinduism is easy to grasp.

Few scholars have tried to explain the unexplainable by way of its psychic origins pointing the finger to a gross undertaking building a "faith" based on fertile imagination. G. W. F. Hegel, a German scholar, held that "Hindu India had the same characteristics in the spiritual development of man as the mental condition of a man dreaming just before he awakened."² Beverley Nichols, a British scholar, pointed out, "Hinduism is almost indefinable, because it is a hotchpotch

of almost every fear, dream, and delusion which has ever drifted through the tangled shadowy jungle of man's brains."³

Other scholars have used the metaphor of a jungle to explain the mystery of Hinduism. The famous British scholar Sir Charles Eliot said:

As in the jungle every particle of soil seems to put forth its spirit in vegetable life and plants grown on plants, creepers and parasites on their more stalwart brethren, so in India art, commerce, warfare and crime, every human interest and aspiration seek for a manifestation in religion, and since men and women of all classes and occupations, all stages of education and civilization, have contributed to Hinduism, much of it seems low, foolish and even immoral. The jungle is not a park or garden. Whatever can grow in it, does grow. The Brahmans are not gardeners but forest officers.⁴

A few others have tried to depict Hinduism as a "social disease." One famous scholar went on to express Hinduism as a "contagious disease."⁵ Trying to figure out what Hinduism is becomes an endless process. The fact of the matter is, you can overextend your research to "demonstrate" that *it is everything*. Or, you can exhaust yourself and at the end come up with—*it is nothing*. The beauty here is that both are considered accurate. It may drive you insane but to a Hindu it makes sense. A sizable portion of the Hindu "scriptures" is repugnant, only if you set your eyes upon it. My years of scrutinizing Hinduism have convinced me that a profitable angle from which to study and analyze Hinduism is the political angle.

Beverley Nichols experienced a glimpse of this in 1944: "Hinduism in its most extreme and aggressive form is a living and turbulent force. Its voice rises above the roar of the factories and the workshops, it dominates the assemblies of politicians and students."⁶ Yet we lack serious, in-depth studies exclusively devoted to Hinduism from a political angle. My intention is not to turn this chapter into such a study, but to furnish you with a taste of the subject's complexity. The New Age movement has grossly and mindlessly oversimplified Hinduism, at the expense of some of the more meaningful components. However, given any approach to Hinduism, there is one thing you will bump into at almost every step: that is, caste—the spinal cord of Hinduism. Just as the vertebrate column holds the human structure straight, similarly the caste provides the fundamental support to the elusive components of Hinduism. Given Hinduism's intangibility, fluidity, and elusiveness, a Hindu can believe in anything or everything. But he must, come what may, believe in the law of caste—the anchor of the Hindu ship. So then, what is caste?

The word "caste," (like "Hindu") is a derivative from a foreign language. It is derived from a Latin term which signifies purity of breed. The Portuguese used this term first. If one is looking for a way to pigeonhole Hindus, caste provides it. The four major caste groupings are: *Brahmins* (or Brahmans)—the scholars

and intellectuals, those who pass on ancient wisdom to the next generation; *Kshatriyas*—the warriors, defenders of the realm, kings, and so forth; *Vaisyas*—the merchants, traders, and bankers who keep the wheels of society turning; and *Sudras* or *Shudras*—the serfs who perform the agricultural tasks, and what have you. After centuries of fine-tuning, each caste has sprouted many subcastes. The group relegated to the very bottom of the *Sudra* caste are classified as *Untouchables*—whose sole occupation is to empty lavatories, mend shoes, cremate the dead, etc. The Untouchables are classed as such because, if their shadow crosses your path, you are expected to take off your clothes and throw them away. If they were touched, even accidentally, you must perform more rigorous ablutions to clean yourself. The caste laws are very interesting to say the least, and I recommend the prospective student to read further to acquire the proper caste picture. Even more despised are the totemistic castes—a group of people displaced from the higher castes by long distances. Moreover, castes are hereditary. You are born into your caste and there is no escape. Therefore, the pariahs of Hinduism (the Untouchables) have no choice but to produce more pariahs, contributing their fair share to the Hindu pululation (its breeding) bank. The original caste designers also laid the foundations to protect the caste hierarchy through the sophisticated mechanism of the caste system. The system in place exhibited the external and the internal pillars designed to cement the myriad of components of Hinduism. The system ensures no revolution from within or without. Today, the Untouchables comprise roughly 20 percent to 25 percent of the total Hindu population and the *Sudra* caste encompasses about 85 percent of that population. In other words, what we have in the Hindu hierarchy is really a system of apartheid.

The next logical question would be: By what mechanism were people separated into their respective castes or subcastes? There should be a simple answer to that question, but there isn't. There have been many theories purporting to explain the phenomenon of caste and Untouchability. The literature abounds with theories such as: religious theory, tribal theory, social theory, occupational theory, division of labor theory, and the crossing theory. The word for caste in the Hindu vocabulary is *varna*, which actually means "color." What is so unique about caste in Hinduism is that it has always been characterized by *whiteness* and *blackness*, and it is the great pride of the highest caste, the Brahmins, that they have preserved their relative whiteness. After a close examination of the Untouchables, it should come as no surprise that they are black or exhibiting more blackness in color. Collectively, and with few regional exceptions, they are the black people of India. By what process did they end up at the bottom of the Hindu scale? The answer is a simple one, even though there had been attempts by caste Hindus (Gandhi included) to revise history. Many scholars believe that the roots of *varna* are buried in the history of conquest when the physically strong, aggressive Aryan nomads poured into the plains of the Indian subcontinent thousands of years ago:

[Aryans] found [India] occupied by *Adi-Dravidians* and *Dravidians*, a dark-skinned people. . . . Their descendants are the oppressed "low caste" Untouchables of today's India. The Aryans quickly subjugated the natives, . . . and built up another civilisation known as . . . Hindu Civilisation. To perpetuate [their] enslavement . . . Hindu intruders created the diabolical caste system, which excluded the dark-skinned Dravidians from their society and made them serfs. . . . Caste originally was a colour bar in India. . . . Gradually over the centuries it became the foundation of a religiously ordained social fabric for the Hindu people. The four original divisions had multiplied like cancer cells into almost 5,000 sub-castes, 1,836 for the Brahmins alone. Every occupation had its caste, splitting society into a myriad of closed guilds in which a man was condemned by his birth to live, work, marry and die.⁷

It is no coincidence to find similarities between Nazi expressions about the purity of the Aryan race and those expressed by Hindus. We have already read in previous chapters that in South Africa, Gandhi proudly used the term Aryan and the Aryan religion synonymously with Hinduism. Vincent Sheean, one of Gandhi's most famous biographers, has described Swami Vivekananda as one of the "fore-runners of Gandhi," not unlike what John the Baptist was to Jesus. Swami Vivekananda was Gandhi's hero. To Hindus, both Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi are prophets of modern Hinduism. Swami Vivekananda's analyses of caste couldn't have been more pointed. A speech he delivered on February 2, 1900, in Pasadena, California, sheds some light on the Aryan Hindu's attitude to darker-skinned races and on the breathtaking convolutions of the swami's Hindu mind:

There is something in caste, so far as it means blood: such a thing as heredity there is, certainly. Now try to [understand]—why do you not mix your blood with the Negroes, the American Indians? Nature will not allow you. Nature does not allow you to mix your blood with them. There is the unconscious working that saves the race. That was the Aryan's caste. Mind you, I do not say that they are not equal to us. They must have the same privileges and advantages, and everything; but we know that if certain races mix up, they become degraded. With all the strict caste of the Aryan and non-Aryan, that wall was thrown down to a certain extent, and hordes of these outlandish races came in with all their queer superstitions and manners and customs. Think of this: not decency enough to wear clothes, eating carrion, etc. But behind him came his fetish, his human sacrifice, his superstition, his diabolism. He kept it behind, [he remained] decent for a few years. After that he brought all [these] things out in front. And that was degrading to the whole race. And then the blood mixed; [intermarriages] took place with all sorts of unmixable races. The race fell down. But, in the long run, it proved good. If you mix with Negroes and American Indians, surely this civilisation will fall down. But hundreds and hundreds years after, out of this mixture will come a gigantic race once more, stronger than ever; but, for the time being, you have to suffer. The Hindus believe—that is a peculiar belief, I think; and I do not know, I have nothing to say to the con-

trary, I have not found anything to the contrary—they believe there was only one civilised race: the Aryan. Until he gives his blood, no other race can be civilised. No teaching will do. The Aryan gives his blood to a race, and then it becomes civilised. Teaching alone will not do. He would be an example in your country: would you give your blood to the Negro race? Then he would get higher culture.⁸

Once analyzed, caste is nothing less than a euphemism for blood or race. In what manner is that different from Hitler's Aryan Nazism, whose victims were not only the Jews but also the Gypsies and others? In volume 4 of the *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals*, in a section entitled "The Einsatzgruppen Case," there appears a statement by defendant Otto Ohlendorf worth reproducing:

Mr. Heath: On what basis did you kill gypsies, just because they were gypsies? Why were they a threat to the security of the Wehrmacht?

Ohlendorf: It is the same as for the Jews.

Question: Blood?

Answer: I think I can add up from my own knowledge of European history that the Jews actually during wars regularly carried on espionage service on both sides.

Presiding Judge Musmanno: You were asked about gypsies.

Mr. Heath: I was asking you about gypsies, as the Court points out, and not Jews. I would like to ask you now on what basis you determined that every gypsy found in Russia should be executed because of the danger to the German Wehrmacht?

Answer: There was no difference between gypsies and Jews.⁹

Have no doubt, caste is a system of organized slavery, and Hinduism should be looked upon as a system that sanctions racism.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), p. 85
2. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
3. Beverley Nichols, *Verdict on India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), p. 73.
4. Inden, *Imagining India*, p. 86.
5. Francis Yeats-Brown, *Lancer At Large* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1939), p. 213.
6. Nichols, *Verdict on India*, p. 72.

7. Fazlul Huq, *Gandhi: Saint or Sinner* (Bangalore, India: Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1992), p. 67.

8. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1954), vol. 3, pp. 533–34. The Swami and the Mahatma held another date in common. One landed in North America and the other in South Africa in 1893, respectively.

9. Patricia C. Rose, "Don't Forget the Gypsies," *Skeptic* 3, no. 2 (1995): 26.

factors that ignite a born Hindu to rebel against the system. Each individual has to be assessed separately. Ambedkars come neither readymade nor cloned. Similarly, not every caste Hindu will turn into a Gandhi. There are too many variables, subject to change with time, politics, and geography. Gandhi was a product of a variety of Hinduisms and a few alien cultures.

Because of his position, Dr. Ambedkar had a unique insight into Gandhi, especially into what Gandhi was up to when he started to tinker with the caste system. The next chapter replicates what Dr. Ambedkar wrote in 1945, after many years of closely observing the man. I have made slight changes to his text not to alter any meaning but to clarify for the benefit of today's readers. It is dealt with in the context of new terminology—Gandhism—a prescription that our [economic and political professor] Gandhi had charted out the blueprint for the Untouchables. The words caste and class are used interchangeably.

NOTES

1. Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Heart of Aryavarta: A Study of the Psychology of Indian Unrest* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), pp. 5–7.
2. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 316–25.
3. Arthur Koestler, *The Heel of Achilles: Essays 1968–1973* (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 233–73.
4. Eleanor Zelliott, "Gandhi and Ambedkar—A Study in Leadership," in *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, ed. J. Michael Mahar (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), p. 76.

GANDHI'S CASTE IDEOLOGY

Pretty soon we discovered that these people were the untouchables. This caste system had existed for years. . . . Gandhi looked at this system and couldn't stand it. . . . He looked at his people and said, "Now you have selected me, you've asked me to free you from the political domination and the economic exploitation inflicted upon you by Britain, and here you are, trampling over and exploiting seventy million of your brothers." And he decided that he would not ever adjust to that system, and that he would speak against it and stand up against it the rest of his life.

—Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.
The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Allow me to start with Mr. Gandhi's teachings on the social problem. Mr. Gandhi's views on the caste system—which constitutes the main social problem in India—were fully elaborated by him in 1921–22 in a Gujarati journal called *Navajivan*. The article is written in Gujarati language. I give below an English translation of his views as near as possible in his own words. Says Mr. Gandhi:

This chapter adapted from B. R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, 2d ed. (Bombay: Thacker & Co., Ltd., 1946), pp. 275–97.

- (1) I believe that if Hindu Society has been able to stand, it is because it is founded on the caste system.
- (2) The seeds of *Swaraj* are to be founded in the caste system. Different castes are like different sections of military division. Each division is working for the good of the whole. . . .
- (3) A community, which can create the caste system, must be said to possess unique power of organization.
- (4) Caste has a ready-made means for spreading primary education. Each caste can take the responsibility for the education of the children of the caste. Caste has a political basis. It can work as an electorate for a representative body. Caste can perform judicial functions by electing persons to act as judges to decide disputes among members of the same caste. With castes it is easy to raise a defense force by requiring each caste to raise a brigade.
- (5) I believe that interdining or intermarriage is not necessary for promoting national unity. That dining together creates friendship is contrary to experience. If this were true there would have been no war in Europe. . . . Taking food is as dirty an act as answering the call of nature. The only difference is that after answering call of nature we get peace while after eating food we get discomfort. Just as we perform the act of answering the call of nature in seclusion so also the act of taking food must also be done in seclusion.
- (6) In India children of brothers do not intermarry. Do they cease to love because they do not intermarry? Among the *Vaishnavas* many women are so orthodox that they will not eat with members of the family nor will they drink water from a common water pot. Have they no love? The caste system cannot be said to be bad because it does not allow interdining or intermarriage between different castes.
- (7) Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning of such caste restrictions as interdining and intermarriage.
- (8) To destroy caste system and adopt Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation, which is the soul of the caste system. Hereditary principle is an eternal

principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a *Brahmin* if I cannot call him a *Brahmin* for my life. It will be chaos, if every day a *Brahmin* is to be changed into a *Shudra* and a *Shudra* is to be changed into a *Brahmin*.

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

These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the caste system.

In 1922, Mr. Gandhi was a defender of the caste system. Pursuing the inquiry, one comes across a somewhat critical view of the caste system by Mr. Gandhi in the year 1925. This is what Mr. Gandhi said on February 3, 1925:

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

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

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

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

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

- (1) I believe that the divisions into *Varna* are based on birth.
- (2) There is nothing in the *Varna* system, which stands in the way of the *Shudra* acquiring learning or studying military art of offense or defense. Contra it is open to a *Kshatriya* to serve. The *Varna* system is no bar to

him. What the *Varna* system enjoins is that a *Shudra* will not make learning a way of earning a living. Nor will a *Kshatriya* adopt service as a way of earning a living. [Similarly a *Brahmin* may learn the art of war or trade. But he must not make them a way of earning his living. Contra a *Vaishya* may acquire learning or may cultivate the art of war. But he must not make them a way of earning his living.]

- (3) The *Varna* system is connected with the way of earning a living. There is no harm if a person belonging to one *Varna* acquires the knowledge or science and art specialized in by persons belonging to other *Varnas*. But as far as the way of earning his living is concerned he must follow the occupation of the *Varna* to which he belongs which means he must follow the hereditary profession of his forefathers.
- (4) The object of the *Varna* is to prevent competition and class struggle and class war. I believe in the *Varna* system because it fixes the duties and occupations of persons.
- (5) *Varna* means the determination of a man's occupation before he is born.
- (6) In the *Varna* system no man has any liberty to choose his occupation. His occupation is determined for him by heredity.

The social life of Gandhism is either caste or *Varna*. Though it may be difficult to say which, there can be no doubt that the social ideal of Gandhism is not democracy. For, whether one takes for comparison caste or *Varna*, both are fundamentally opposed to democracy. . . .

That Mr. Gandhi changed over from the caste system to the *Varna* system does not make the slightest difference to the charge that Gandhism is opposed to democracy. In the first place, the idea of *Varna* is the parent of the idea of caste. If the idea of caste is a pernicious idea it is entirely because of the viciousness of the idea of *Varna*. Both *Varna* and caste are evil ideas; it matters very little whether one believes in one or the other.

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

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

Do I want to put back the hand of clock of progress? Do I want to replace the mills by hand-spinning and hand-weaving? Do I want to replace the railway by the country-cart? Do I want to destroy machinery altogether? These questions

have been asked by some journalists and public men. My answer is: I would not weep over the disappearance of machinery or consider it a calamity.

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

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

Anyone who has read Mr. Gandhi's booklet on *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule) will know that Mr. Gandhi is against modern civilization. Writing in 1921, Mr. Gandhi said:

The booklet is a severe condemnation of 'modern civilization.' It was written in 1909. My conviction is deeper today than ever. I feel that, if India would discard 'Modern civilization' she can only gain by doing so.

In Mr. Gandhi's view: "Western civilization is the creation of satan."

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

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

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

The ideas that make up Gandhism are just primitive. It is a return to nature, to animal life. The only merit is their simplicity. As there is always large corps of simple people who are attracted by them, such simple ideas do not die, and there is always some simpleton to preach them. There is, however, no doubt that the practical instincts of men—which seldom go wrong—have found them unfruitful. . . .

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

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

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

Gandhism may be well suited to a society, which does not accept democracy as its ideal. A society, which does not believe in democracy, may be indifferent to machinery and the civilization based upon it. But a democratic society cannot. The former may well content itself with a life of leisure and culture for the few and a life of toil and drudgery for the many. But a democratic society must assure a life of leisure and culture to each one of its citizens. If the above analysis is correct then the slogan of a democratic society must be machinery, and more machinery, civilization and more civilization. Under Gandhism, the common man must keep on toiling ceaselessly for a pittance and remain a brute. In short, Gandhism with its call of back to nature means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast mass of the people.

Gandhism insists upon class structure and regards it as a part of society and also the income structure as sacrosanct with the consequent distinctions of rich and poor, high and low, owners and workers, as permanent parts of social organization. From the viewpoint of social consequences, nothing can be more pernicious. . . . It is not enough to say that Gandhism believes in a class structure. Gandhism stands for more than that. A class structure, which is a faded, jejune, effete thing—a mere sentimentality, a mere skeleton, is not what Gandhism wants. It wants class structure to function as a living faith. In this there is nothing to be surprised at. For class structure in Gandhism is not a mere accident, it is its official doctrine.

The idea of trusteeship, which Gandhism proposes as a panacea and by which the rich classes will hold their properties in trust for the poor, is the most

ridiculous part of it. All that one can say about it is that, if anybody else had propounded it, the author would have been laughed at as a silly fool. Gandhi knew well the hard realities of life. He was deceiving the servile classes by telling them that a little dose of moral rearmament to the propertied classes—those that by their insatiable cupidity and indomitable arrogance have made and will always make this world a vale of tears for the toiling millions. Accordingly the rich will recondition them to such an extent that they will be able to withstand the temptation to misuse the tremendous powers, which the class structure gives them over servile classes. . . .

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

Gandhism is a paradox. It stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of the existing political structure of the country. At the same time, it seeks to maintain intact a social structure that permits the domination of one class by another on a hereditary basis, which means a perpetual domination of one caste by another.

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

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

The Hindu sacred law penalized the *Shudras* (belonging to the fourth caste) from acquiring wealth. It is a law of enforced poverty unknown in any other part of the world. What does Gandhism do? It does not lift the impaled ban and it blesses the *Shudra* for his moral courage to give up property. It is as well worth quoting Mr. Gandhi's own words:

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

Another illustration is the attitude of Gandhism towards the scavenger. The sacred law of the Hindus lays down that a scavenger's progeny shall live by scavenging. Under Hinduism scavenging was not a matter of choice, it was a matter of force. What does Gandhism do? It seeks to perpetuate this system by praising scavenging as the noblest service to society! As President of a Conference of the Untouchables, according to Mr. Gandhi:

I do not want to attain *Moksha*. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I endeavor to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore prayed that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, or *Shudra*, but as an *Atishudra*. . . . I love scavenging. In my Ashram, an eighteen-years-old Brahmin lad is doing the scavenger's work in order to teach the Ashram scavenger cleanliness. The lad is no reformer. He was born and bred in orthodoxy. . . . But he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had become also a perfect sweeper, and that, if he wanted the Ashram sweeper to do his work well, he must do it himself and set an example. You should realize that you are cleaning Hindu Society.

Can there be a worse example of false propoganda than this attempt of Gandhism to perpetuate evils, which have been deliberately imposed by one caste over another? If Gandhism preached the rule of poverty for all and not merely for the *Shudra* the worst that could be said about it is that it is mistaken idea. But why preach it as good for one caste only? For in India a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not. If Gandhism preached that scavenging is a noble profession with the object of inducing those who refuse to engage in it, one could understand it. But why appeal to the scavenger's pride and vanity in order to induce him and him only to keep on to scavenging by telling him that scavenging is a noble profession and that he need not be ashamed of it? To preach that poverty is good for the *Shudra* and for none else, to preach that scavenging is good for the Untouchables and for none else and to make them accept these onerous impositions as voluntary purposes of life, by appeal to their failings is an outrage and a cruel joke on the helpless classes which none but Mr. Gandhi can perpetrate with equanimity and impunity.

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

Such is Gandhism. A question is asked: Should Gandhism become the law of the land what would be the destiny of the Untouchables under it? The answers

cannot require much scratching of the brain. How would it compare with the lot of the lowest Hindu? Enough has been said to show what would be his lot, should the Gandhian social order come into being. In so far as the lowest Hindu [totemistic caste] and the Untouchable belong to the same disinherited class, the Untouchable's fate cannot be better. If anything it might easily be worse. . . . The Untouchable will therefore continue to suffer the worst future as he does now. . . .

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

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

Regarding the second question, it is true that Gandhism is prepared to remove the old ban placed by the Hindu *Shastras* on the right of the Untouchables to education and permit them to acquire knowledge and learning. Under Gandhism, the Untouchables may study law, they may study medicine, and they may study engineering or anything else they may fancy. So far so good. But will the Untouchables be free to make use of their knowledge and learning? Will they

have the right to choose their profession? Can they adopt the career of lawyer, doctor or engineer? To these questions the answer, which Gandhism gives, is an emphatic "no." The Untouchables must follow their hereditary professions. That those occupations are unclean is no excuse. That before the occupation became hereditary it was the result of force and not volition does not matter. The argument of Gandhism is that what is once settled is settled forever even if it was wrongly settled. Under Gandhism, the Untouchables are to be eternal scavengers. There is no doubt that the Untouchables would much prefer the orthodox system of Untouchability. A compulsory state of ignorance imposed upon the Untouchables by the Hindu *Shastras* made scavenging bearable. But Gandhism, which compels an educated Untouchable to do scavenging, is nothing short of cruelty. The grace in Gandhism is a curse in its worst form. The virtue of the anti-Untouchability plank in Gandhism is quite illusory. There is no substance in it.

What else is there in Gandhism that the Untouchables can accept as opening a way for their ultimate salvation? Barring this illusory campaign against Untouchability, Gandhism is simply another form of Sanatanism, which is the ancient name for militant orthodox Hinduism. What is there in Gandhism that is not to be found in orthodox Hinduism? There is caste in Hinduism; there is caste in Gandhism. Hinduism believes in the law of hereditary profession, so does Gandhism. Hinduism enjoins cow-worship. So does Gandhism. Hinduism upholds the law of *karma*, predestination of man's condition in this world, so does Gandhism. Hinduism accepts the authority of the *Shastras*. So does Gandhism. Hinduism believes in idols. So does Gandhism. All that Gandhism has done is to find a philosophic justification for Hinduism and its dogmas. Hinduism is bald in the sense that it is just a set of rules that bear on their face the appearance of a crude and cruel system. Gandhism supplies the philosophy, which buffs its surface and gives it the appearance of decency and respectability and so alters it and embellishes it as to make it even more attractive.

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

Gandhists may say that what I have stated applies to the old type of Gandhism. There is a new Gandhism, Gandhism without caste. This has reference to the recent statement of Mr. Gandhi that caste is an anachronism. Reformers were naturally gladdened by this declaration of Mr. Gandhi. And who would not be glad to see

that a man like Mr. Gandhi having such terrible influence over the Hindus? This was after having played the most mischievous part of a social reactionary, after having stood out as the protagonist of the caste system, after having beguiled and befooled the unthinking Hindus with arguments which made no distinction between what is fair and foul should have come out with this recantation. But is this really a matter for jubilation? Does it change the nature of Gandhism? Does it make Gandhism a new and better "ism" than it was before? Those who are carried away by this recantation of Mr. Gandhi, neglect two things. In the first place, all that Mr. Gandhi has said is that caste is an anachronism. He does not say it is an evil. He does not say it is anathema. Mr. Gandhi may be taken to be not in favor of caste. But Mr. Gandhi does not say that he is against the *Varna* system. And what is Mr. Gandhi's *Varna* system? It is simply a new name for the caste system and retains all the worst features of the caste system.

The declaration of Mr. Gandhi cannot be taken to mean any fundamental change in Gandhism. It cannot make Gandhism acceptable to the Untouchables. The Untouchables will still have ground to ask with a: "Good God! Is this man Gandhi our Savior?"¹

NOTE

1. The book from which this chapter was taken was published at the time when Gandhi was alive and, as expected, he should have answered Dr. Ambedkar. Instead, two of Gandhi's disciples wrote the following rebuttals:

- a. C. Rajagopalachari, *Ambedkar Refuted* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1946).
- b. K. Santhanam, *Ambedkar's Attack, A Critical Examination of Dr. Ambedkar's Book: What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (New Delhi: Hindustan Times, 1946).

In both of these refutations, the authors, while trying their best to cast doubts on Dr. Ambedkar and his works, instead end up fortifying his arguments. More recently, another author and a famous Indian journalist (today he is a member of India's cabinet) by the name of Arun Shourie in his book, *Worshipping False Gods: Ambedkar, and the Facts which Have Been Erased* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1997), took upon himself the task of demolishing Dr. Ambedkar's scholarship. While charging like a raging bull in his attempt to knock down Ambedkar, he overextended his weak arguments while relying too heavily on questionable references. At times he employed the tactics of character assassination. In the end, his attempts to rescue Gandhi and Hinduism from Ambedkar's incisive commentary failed.

One day Mahatma Gandhi stood before his people and said: "You are exploiting these untouchables. Even though we are fighting with all that we have of our bodies and our souls to break loose from the bondage of the British Empire, we are exploiting these people and we are taking from them their selfhood and their self-respect." He said, "I will refuse to eat until the leaders of the caste system will come to me with the leaders of the untouchables and say that there will be an end to untouchability and the Hindu temples of India will open their doors to the untouchables." And he refused to eat, and days passed. Finally when Gandhi was about to breathe his last breath, and his body was all but gone, a group from the untouchables and a group from the Brahmin caste came to him and signed a statement that they would no longer adhere to the caste system. The priest of the temple came to him and said, "Now the temples will be opened to the untouchables." That afternoon, untouchables from all over India went into the temples and all of these thousands and millions of people put their arms around the Brahmins and people of other castes. Hundreds of millions of people who had never

touched each other for two thousand years were now singing and praising all together. This was a great contribution that Mahatma Gandhi brought about.

—Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.
The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The myth-making enterprise in India and abroad continues to project Gandhi as a champion of the Untouchables. This paradox has a strange background: Not only did he wish to keep the caste system intact, Gandhi envisioned perpetuating it further, not just in India, but throughout the world. He appealed repeatedly to abolish the practice of Untouchability, but this presents a problem: Untouchability is part and parcel of the caste system. If you are going to have caste, then you had better expect Untouchability, or something akin to it. That much should be clear. If Adolf Hitler had announced a new Nazism without anti-Semitism, we would have been skeptical. If a leader of the old South Africa had announced the simultaneous continuation of apartheid and the liberation of black people, we would have scoffed. But when Gandhi announced the continuance of the caste system and the emancipation of the Untouchables, many swallowed it, especially many American black leaders.

The world has heard plenty of Gandhi's anti-Untouchability pronouncements, but the time has come to ponder his actions. Again, we turn to Ambedkar for help, because he is the only contemporary of Gandhi who left a critical, eyewitness account of what Gandhi did to the black people of India. This is so unique. Take for example Gandhi's involvement in the Zulu rebellion of 1906. Every detail of that conflict we have on paper was authored by Gandhi himself, or he dictated, or his disciples repeated verbatim from Gandhi's own prior written accounts. In other words, there are no independent versions available. We are left to rely solely on Gandhi's own multiple versions. Take the case of racial politics in practice before and after the Boer War. Here also we are relying heavily on Gandhi's original *Indian Opinion* reliable and valid accounts. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to assess. It is the same scenario for those seven years of Satyagraha in South Africa. I wish there were a Negro account of Gandhi's incarceration in South Africa and his encounters there with blacks. No independent Gandhi contemporary has left for us anything of worthiness except for Millie G. Polak. Her account is of minor significance to us because of the specificity of the subject matter, and also because she wrote her book many years later.

In India, the situation would have resembled the South African situation if it had not been for Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar spent his entire adult life confronting Gandhi over the damage Gandhi was inflicting on the poverty-stricken Untouchables. What he had written is valid, methodical, and verifiable.

Gandhi knew what he was up against and consequently channeled his entire

Hindu propaganda machine to out-manuever Ambedkar and the Untouchables. He championed deceptive double-game practices against the Untouchables, leading to the sabotage of their human rights crusade. His multipronged attacks were designed to force them into submission. The underlying strategy was simple: never let the Untouchables get organized; never harm the caste-Hindu interests; never let up on his own propaganda line, which depicted his anti-Untouchability campaign as humanitarian. Any serious observer of Gandhi's campaign to eliminate Untouchability will come to the conclusion that it was marked by inconsistencies and contradictions, calling for serious questions about his real goals.

Gandhi entered actively into Indian politics in 1919. Soon thereafter, he captured the Congress Party, overhauled it, and transformed it to fit modern Hinduism ideology, remarkably similar and suited to his own. In 1921, Gandhi collected a whopping 13.5 million rupees (Rs.) for the *Tilak Swaraj* Fund. Gandhi insisted that there was no possibility of winning *swaraj* (freedom) unless Untouchability was removed. But out of this huge collected amount, a paltry Rs. 43,000 was earmarked to the cause of Untouchables. When his attention was drawn to the inadequacy of this, he simply said that he was busy planning a campaign to win *swaraj*, and that he had no time to spare for the cause of Untouchables.

In February 1922, the Congress Working Committee, under Gandhi's direction, drew up the Bardoli Programme of Constructive Work. Rehabilitation of Untouchables was hailed as an important component of it. A great deal of money was collected and a committee was appointed to work out the details. However, the committee never took action. It was dissolved and the upgrading of the lot of Untouchables was dropped from the Bardoli Programme. Only meager sums of Rs. 500 were allotted to the committee for working expenses only to expire peacefully. There were no shortages of funds. When asked, Gandhi answered in his habitual vague terms. Dr. Ambedkar summed it:

The regrettable part of this tragedy is the realization of the fact how Mr. Gandhi has learned to find uncton in illusions. . . . There is no doubt he likes to create illusions in order to use them as arguments to support his cherished proposition. The reason he has given for not taking personal responsibility for the uplift of the Untouchables furnishes the best evidence of this habit of Mr. Gandhi. . . . But to go to the length of assuring oneself that the Hindus are so overwhelmed with a sense of shame for the inhuman treatment they have accorded to the Untouchables that they dare not fail to abolish untouchability and that there is a band of Hindu Reformers pledged to do nothing but remove untouchability is to conjure an illusion to fool the Untouchables and to fool the world at large. It may be sound logic to argue that what benefits the whole also benefits the part and that one need not confine himself to looking after the part. But to assume that a piece, as separate as the Untouchables, is a part of the Hindu whole is to deceive oneself. Few know what tragedies the Untouchables as well as the country have had to go through on account of the illusions of Mr. Gandhi.¹

To make matters worse, during this Bardoli Programme, Gandhi decided to transfer the "Untouchable uplift" scheme to the hands of *Hindu Mahasabha*—a group known for its fundamentalism. This was similar to asking the Ku Klux Klan to take care of blacks!

In 1929, the Untouchables in the Bombay presidency opened a campaign of Satyagraha against the Hindus in order to establish their civic rights regarding temple entry and taking water from public wells. They hoped to get the blessing of Gandhi, since Satyagraha was Gandhi's own weapon for redressing wrongs. However, Gandhi surprised the Untouchables by issuing a statement condemning their campaign of Satyagraha against the Hindus. The argument urged by Gandhi was very ingenious: he stated that Satyagraha was to be used only against foreigners; it must not be used against one's own kindred or countrymen, and as the Hindus were the kindred and countrymen of the Untouchables, by the rules of Satyagraha, the latter were debarred from using this weapon against the former.

Here is an example of one Satyagraha that occurred in November 1929, reported by Katherine Mayo:

Other Untouchable unions, more boldly assertive, "offered Satyagraha" before Hindu temples, day after day approaching the precincts, to be beaten back with sticks and stones, or barring the entry to the temple with their own bodies stretched upon the earth so that Hindus coming forth from worship must touch them and be defiled. And when one of these demonstrating masses was stayed in its course to be warned that Gandhi would probably condemn its aggressiveness, its spokesman is thus quoted: "We know Mr. Gandhi is against it. But we don't care. We will resume Satyagraha if Mr. Gandhi or God himself is against it."²

It shouldn't surprise us that at one time, post-British Hindu India leaders seriously contemplated declaring Satyagraha unlawful when directed against the government! Also, hardly another surprise, in more recent times, given the unrest and instability, Hindu India is free from Satyagraha.

In order to frame a new constitution of India, the British Government asked various Indian delegates (Gandhi included) to participate in what has been called the Round Table Conference in London in 1931. Untouchables were represented by two members, one of whom was Dr. Ambedkar. The most difficult task rested with the Minorities Committee: to resolve the communal question. To their credit, they finally settled on the pressing issues in what is called the Minorities Pact. This infuriated Gandhi particularly, because the pact recognized Untouchables as a separate political entity. Gandhi sabotaged the pact by using the Moslem card to sidetrack the Untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar wrote:

During the Round Table Conference he told people, "I shall not raise any objection against the demands presented by the representatives of the depressed classes [the Untouchables]." But, as soon as the representatives of the depressed classes pressed their demands, Gandhi quietly forgot about the assurances given

by him. I call it a betrayal of the people belonging to the depressed classes. He went to the Moslems and told them that he would support their fourteen demands if they in turn opposed the demands placed by the representatives of the depressed classes. Even a scoundrel would not have done this. This is only one instance of Gandhi's treachery.³

As a follow-up to the failed settlement, the delegates to the Minorities Committee accepted the proposal of British prime minister Ramsay MacDonald to put in a signed requisition authorizing him to arbitrate and give his decision on the communal issue. Mr. Gandhi, along with the majority of the delegates, signed before returning home.

On August 17, 1932, Prime Minister MacDonald announced his final decisions on the communal question in spite of the fact that Gandhi had earlier resorted to his habitual threats. Gandhi didn't like the communal award because in it the British Government had accepted the Untouchables' claim for special representation. He tried to change the terms of the award and, when that failed, he commenced a "fast unto death" on September 20, as a protest against the grant of separate electorates to the Untouchables. To cut the story short, this fiasco of Gandhi's led to the Poona Pact, which Dr. Ambedkar signed on September 24. Untouchables were worse off under the Poona Pact than under the Prime Minister's award. Ambedkar never pardoned himself for his blunder in submitting to Gandhi's threats.

In a frenetic follow-up to the Poona Pact, Gandhi renamed the Untouchables Harijan, meaning Children of God, and started a weekly paper named *Harijan*. Through this newspaper, Gandhi masterminded a propaganda blitz and published weekly columns of long lists of temples, public wells, and schools thrown open to Untouchables by the Hindus. And then it suddenly ended. As it turned out, the columns were bogus, part of an effort to deceive the world. To comprehend the Poona Pact and its aftereffects, it is better to turn to Beverley Nichols—a famous novelist, musician, playwright, essayist, reporter, and journalist—who on her visit to British India met Dr. Ambedkar, and was not surprised when told by him: "Gandhi is the greatest enemy the untouchables have ever had in India." What did Dr. Ambedkar mean? Ms. Nichols explained it as follows:

We can best explain it by a parallel. Take Ambedkar's remark, and for the word "untouchable" substitute the word "peace." Now imagine that a great champion of peace, like Lord Cecil, said, "Gandhi is the greatest enemy of peace the world has ever had." What would he mean, using these words of the most spectacular pacifist of modern times? He would mean that passive resistance—which is Gandhi's form of pacifism—could only lead to chaos and the eventual triumph of brute force; that to lie down and let people trample on you (which was Gandhi's recipe for dealing with the Japanese) is a temptation to the aggressor rather than an example to the aggressed; and that in order to have peace you must organize, you must be strong, and that you must be prepared to use force.

Mutatis mutandis, that is precisely what Ambedkar meant about the

untouchables. He wanted them to be recognized and he wanted them to be strong. He rightly considered that the best way of gaining his object was by granting them separate electorates; a solid block of 60 million would be in a position to dictate terms to its oppressors.

Gandhi fiercely opposed this scheme. "Give the untouchables separate electorates," he cried, "and you only perpetuate their status for all time." It was a queer argument, and those who were not bemused by the Mahatma's charm considered it a phoney one. They suspected that Gandhi was a little afraid that 60 million untouchables might join up with the 100 million Muslims—as they nearly did—and challenge the dictatorship of the 180 million orthodox Hindus. When such irreverent criticisms were made to him, Gandhi resorted to his usual tactics: he began to fast unto death. (As if that altered the situation by a comma or proved anything but his own obstinacy!) There was a frenzy of excitement, ending in a compromise on the seventh day of the fast. The untouchables still vote in the same constituencies as the caste Hindus, but a substantial number of seats are now reserved for them in the provincial legislatures. It is better than nothing, but it is not nearly so good as it would have been if Gandhi had not interfered.

That is what Doctor Ambedkar meant. And I think that he was right.⁴

Another issue that caught the imagination of American black leaders was that of temple entry. Particularly interesting is the case of Guruvayur Temple. Gandhi gave the impression that he would resort to his ultimate weapon, fasting, to gain entry to this temple for the Untouchables. However, nothing happened and he did not carry out his threat to fast. Then in 1932, Gandhi virtually coerced the governor-general to give his sanction to the introduction of the Temple Entry Bill, authored by Ranga Iyer on behalf of the Congress Party in the Central Legislature. The bill was finally introduced in the Assembly on March 24, 1933, and since the bill proceeded at a snail's pace, the assembly dissolved, which caused Iyer to hold strong opinions against the Congress Party. As fresh elections to the Central Legislature were announced, the Congress Party withdrew its support for the bill as it was referred to the select committee, on the grounds that the bill gave offence to Hindus. Gandhi went so far as to justify the conduct of the Congress Party. Dr. Ambedkar's judgment was categorical:

The Temple Entry, what is one to say of it, except to describe it a strange game of political acrobatics! Mr. Gandhi begins as an opponent of Temple Entry. When the Untouchables put forth a demand for political rights, he changes his position and becomes a supporter of Temple entry. When the Hindus threaten to defeat the Congress in the election, if it pursues the matter to a conclusion, Mr. Gandhi, in order to preserve political power in the hands of the Congress, gives up Temple Entry! Is this sincerity? Does this show conviction? Was the "agony of soul" which Mr. Gandhi spoke of more than a phrase?⁵

In the end, the entire temple entry issue was a sham. On August 17, 1939, B. K. Gaikwad, a low-caste member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly, asked

how many temples in the Bombay presidency had been thrown open to the Untouchables since 1932 when Gandhi started his temple-entry movement. According to the figures given out by a Congress Party minister, the total number of temples thrown open was 142. Of these, 121 were ownerless temples, which were under nobody's care in particular and which nobody used as places of worship. Another peculiar fact was that not a single temple had been thrown open to the Untouchables in Gujarat, Gandhi's home state.

As another outcome of the Poona Pact, in 1933 Gandhi established the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, or the Servants of Untouchables Society, dedicated to the welfare of Harijans and with branches spread all over India. Some people demanded that the institution be handed over to Untouchables and be run by them. Others demanded that Untouchables have representation on the Governing Board. Gandhi flatly refused both on the grounds that the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* was an act of penance on the part of Hindus, so they must do the penance, and contribute money to the cause. From the very outset, the *Sangh* was plagued by an acute lack of funds. The Hindus simply wouldn't give money for Untouchables, though they had showered money on Gandhi for other political purposes. Again, in the words of Dr. Ambedkar:

What does all this show? Does it not show that the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* is a charitable organization only in name, and that its real aim is to ensnare the Untouchables, to make them the camp-followers of the Hindus and the Congress and to scotch any movement by them the aim and object of which are to free themselves from the social, religious, economic and political domination of the Hindus? Is there any wonder if the Untouchables look upon the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* as an abomination, the object of which was to kill them by kindness?⁶

Dr. Khare was a prime minister in the Congress ministry in the Central Provinces of British India. With a view to forming a new cabinet and in full conformity with constitutional practice, Dr. Khare submitted his resignation, and the governor recalled him to form a new ministry (cabinet), which he did. Dr. Khare's new cabinet was different from the old one in one important respect: namely, it included Agnibhoj, an Untouchable. He was a member of the Congress Party, and the Congress Party assembly, and was in many ways better qualified than some other ministers. On July 26, 1938, the Congress Working Committee met in Wardha and passed a resolution condemning Dr. Khare on the grounds that, in tendering the resignation of colleagues in the old ministry, he was guilty of a grave error of judgment, and that, in forming a new ministry, he was guilty of indiscipline. Dr. Khare openly said that according to Gandhi the act of indiscipline lay in the inclusion of an Untouchable in the ministry. Dr. Khare also said that Gandhi told him it was wrong to raise such aspirations and ambitions in Untouchables, and it was such an act of bad judgment that he [Gandhi] would never forgive him [Dr. Khare]. Dr. Khare repeatedly and publicly made these

allegations about Gandhi. Gandhi never responded to them, but Agnibhoj was dropped from the new ministry.

Kavitha is a village in the Ahmedabad district in Gujarat, Gandhi's home state. In 1935, Untouchables of that village demanded that their children be admitted to the common village school along with other Hindu children. The Hindus were enraged and took their revenge by proclaiming a complete social boycott. As a result, the Untouchable boys were thus practically banned from the village school with nobody to help them. This caused despondency among the Untouchables to such an extent that they were thinking of migrating in a body to some other village. A detailed report on this incident was handed to Gandhi in the hope that he would intercede. He read the report and advised Untouchables:

There is no help like self-help. God helps those who help themselves. If the Harijans concerned will carry out their reported resolve to wipe the dust of Kavitha off their feet, they will not only be happy themselves but they will pave the way for others who may be similarly treated. If people migrate in search of employment, how much more should they do so in search of self-respect? I hope that well-wishers of Harijans will help these poor families to vacate inhospitable Kavitha.⁷

Mr. Gandhi advised the Untouchables to migrate elsewhere.

We have already read, in a previous section, Dr. Ambedkar's views of Gandhi's much-touted new economic theory: trusteeship. Margaret Bourke-White, a *Life* magazine photographer and one of the last persons to interview Gandhi before his assassination, did a good job of analyzing this cruel hoax that Gandhi had inflicted on the poor, including Untouchables. According to the theory, Indian tycoons were to act as the people's trustees. When questioned about this, Gandhi explained,

A good trustee is one who discharges his trusteeship faithfully to the letter and in spirit. . . . A trustee does not make a single farthing for himself. A trustee is always entitled to his commission. He will take his commission subject to those for whom he is a trustee—the consent of his guardians—no, I do not mean guardians.⁸

Suddenly, he changed the word "guardians" to "wards" and continued to explain: "If the wards say he must not take more than five rupees a month, he must do this, or hand over the trust."⁹

Mr. Gandhi (and Pyarelal) told Ms. Bourke-White that he had had prior conversations about the trusteeship subject with his main financial benefactor, Mr. G. D. Birla, the richest man in India at the time. It was only after she had interviewed Mr. Birla herself that she realized Gandhi and Birla had never discussed the matter in question, or at least not the way Gandhi propaganda had led her to believe. Of all the tycoons on the horizon, Mr. Birla was Gandhi's closest disciple. In the end, Ms. Bourke-White laid to rest the hoax with a rhetorical question:

If in thirty-two years of intimate association Mr. Birla with his genuine affection and veneration for Gandhi had not absorbed sufficient spiritual strength to be a trustee, where outside this close circle could you hope to find the industrialist, the owner of property, the maharaja, the businessman who would have the spiritual strength for trusteeship?¹⁰

Dr. Ambedkar has been known to refer to Gandhi as: "Number 1 Enemy of the Untouchables" and he said, "Gandhi is the greatest enemy the untouchables have ever had in India." There is ample documentation to conclude that Dr. Ambedkar was right on the mark. With respect to Gandhi's caste ideology, Dr. Ambedkar has called his logic the: "arguments of a cave man" and the "arguments of a madman."

THE PLIGHT OF UNTOUCHABLES TODAY

Writing in 1930, Katherine Mayo recognized the tragedy of the Untouchables:

The Untouchables today are only a vast, unorganized mass of slaves, tragically lacking a Moses to lead them. That, here and there, a group should rebel as they are now doing, is almost a miracle, in view of the mental narcotic with which they have so long been drugged.¹¹

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, their Moses, had come and had gone, leaving the project far from finished. Largely due to his efforts, the Constitution of the Republic of India outlawed Untouchability; however, the caste system remained intact and lawful, making a mockery of the anti-Untouchability clause.

The modern Indian state, with its huge bureaucracy, modern technology and industrialization, and entrenched Hindu ideology, has only strengthened the repression of Untouchables. The rest of the world conveniently thinks of Untouchables as ex-Untouchables, and continues to credit Mahatma Gandhi for this "miracle." But as long as we cherish that false image of Gandhi and his so-called humanitarian association with that of Untouchables, the plight of this group will continue. Human Rights Watch has recently issued a scathing report, *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's "Untouchables,"* that details the scope of the human rights abuses against these *Dalits*, meaning, "the broken."¹²

NOTES

1. B. R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, 2d ed. (Bombay: Thacker & Co., Ltd, 1946), pp. 38-39.
2. Katherine Mayo, "Mahatma Gandhi and India's Untouchables," *Current History* 32 (1930): 870.

3. Fazlul Huq, *Gandhi: Saint or Sinner?* (Bangalore: Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1992), p. 70.
4. Beverley Nichols, *Verdict on India* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944), pp. 37–38.
5. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, p. 125.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 265–66.
8. Margaret Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), pp. 227–28.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
11. Mayo, "Mahatma Gandhi and India's Untouchables," p. 870.
12. Smita Narula, *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's "Untouchables"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999).

PART 7

GANDHI, WHITES, and ETHNIC CLEANSING

In Independent India of the non-violent type, there will be crime but no criminals. They will not be punished. Crime is a disease like any other malady and is a product of the prevalent social system. Therefore, all crime, including murder, will be treated as a disease. Whether such an India will ever come into being is another question.

—Mahatma Gandhi
Search after Sunrise