



A Research Review on the Socio-Religious Approach of the Harijan Movement

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Abstract: *In response to the problems experienced by India's Dalit population, the Congress Party's top brass launched the Harijan Movement (1932–1934). The Indian National Congress began its effort to elevate the Downtrodden Classes after persuading the Dalit leadership to support the Poona Pact. Their goal was to establish political supremacy over the larger Depressed Classes of India, who were not yet mobilised enough to accept and support their genuine leadership. The first stage of the Harijan Movement's methodical implementation focused on institutional and intellectual endeavours to gain Congress's support for the Depressed Classes. Activities pertaining to promotion and advocacy made up the second part of the Congress. According to Mahatma Gandhi's socio-religious interpretation of Hindu scriptures, the concept of untouchability does not have any support within Hinduism. Those working to change Caste Hinduism, Gandhi said, should be deeply devout and do it with a spirit of devotion. They were called Harijan Sevaks. He argued that people of non-Hindu religion could not carry out such endeavours successfully and was so opposed to their participation. Gandhi was also supportive of the Caste Hindu reformers' gradual shift in attitude towards the Downtrodden Classes, which they achieved by nonviolent and patient measures. He thought that for the most part, the anti-untouchability campaign would change the minds and hearts of Caste Hindus towards Harijans. Additionally, he warned against using improper language while dealing with traditional Sanatanists and those who are unwilling to adapt, and he stressed the importance of gently and thoughtfully influencing public opinion in their favour. The plan also included convincing the upper-caste Hindus to let the lower-caste people use their temples, schools, and wells. But if the Hindus of the Caste objected, then they should have their own temples built. Both inter-caste marriage and feasting, Gandhi made clear, should be entirely up to the discretion of the individuals involved. Finally, the strategy assured the Downtrodden Classes that the newly-freed Indian constitution will do away with the sin of untouchability entirely. There is agreement that any future constitution must include the abolition of untouchability, as Mahatma Gandhi himself said. To sum up, the leadership of the Congress Party did its utmost to appease and satisfy the Depressed Classes and the Caste Hindus.*

Keywords: *Harijan Movement, Depressed Classes, Harijans, Indian National Congress.*

Content:

The Harijan Movement (1932-1934) was initiated by the leadership of the Congress Party in alignment with their socio-religious perspective on the issues faced by the Dalit community. Following their triumph over the Dalit leadership, which advocated for a political strategy, by convincing them to endorse the Poona Pact, the Indian National Congress initiated a comprehensive campaign aimed at the advancement of the Depressed Classes. This endeavour was motivated by their desire to assert political dominance over the broader Depressed Classes of India, who, until that point, had not been sufficiently mobilised to recognise and endorse their authentic leadership. Throughout the Harijan Movement, the leadership of the Congress Party implemented their socio-religious strategy to address the issue on a substantial scale. It is important to note, however, that Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and the socialist faction within the Congress placed minimal significance on the Swadeshi and Harijan movements. Mahatma Gandhi himself made it clear that only those Congressmen who were too feeble to seek detention or had lost faith in civil disobedience should join the Harijan Movement and forbade its use to strengthen the political activities of the Congress for its hold on the people. A strategy has been developed for the implementation of this approach. Initially, a systematic approach was implemented. The initial phase of the program aimed to implement ideological and institutional efforts designed to secure the Congress's support for the Depressed Classes. The second segment of the Congress encompassed both advocacy and promotional initiatives. Ideologically, the framework of the Harijan Movement was entirely aligned with the socio-religious perspective of the Indian National Congress, a viewpoint that was notably articulated by Mahatma Gandhi. This approach, first and foremost, emphasized that untouchability lacks any endorsement within Hinduism and its sacred texts. Mahatma observed that the Manusmriti and analogous texts, as presented to us, appear to differ significantly from their original versions. What I have articulated regarding untouchability is that there exists no endorsement in the Shastras for the practice of untouchability as it is currently understood. Furthermore, the approach characterised the efforts against untouchability as an internal religious issue exclusively pertaining to the Hindu community. Mahatma Gandhi advised the Caste Hindu reformers, whom he referred to as Harijan Sevaks, that their efforts should be fundamentally religious in nature and conducted with a spirit of devotion.

Just as Hindus cannot successfully initiate religious change inside the Christian and Muslim communities, he voiced his objection to the participation of non-Hindus in this quest, claiming that such endeavours cannot be carried out by those outside the Hindu religion. In his third point, he maintained that the Caste Hindu reformers' calm and patient methods led to a shift in attitude towards the Depressed Classes. According to Mahatma Gandhi, when the anti-untouchability campaign is aimed at the general public, it mainly involves a shift in the attitudes and sentiments of Caste Hindus towards Harijans. Most Hindus of the Caste caste don't have to change their habits to help the Harijans. Additionally, he stressed to the reformers how important it was to win over the people by using the gentlest and most thoughtful means possible. He warned the reformers not to use foul language while dealing with traditional Sanatanists and those who were unwilling to change. He had the opinion that the Sanatanist may be converted by sincere and remorseful reformers. The plan's fourth tenet was for the Caste Hindus to open their temples, schools, and wells to the Depressed Classes. It is necessary to build separate temples, etc., for the Caste Hindus in areas where

they refuse to agree to this. He made the distinction between inter-caste feasting and inter-caste marriage, saying that the former was a question of personal preference. Like inter-caste marriage, he made it clear that inter-caste eating is not part of the anti-untouchability campaign. Lastly, the strategy assured the Downtrodden Classes that untouchability would be completely eradicated in the constitution of a free India. No future constitution can avoid repeating Mahatma Gandhi's belief that the elimination of untouchability must be a central provision. To sum up, the Congress leadership did its utmost to appease and satisfy the Depressed Classes and the Caste Hindus. In extremely moving terms, Mahatma Gandhi expressed his position on the matter: "I feel like the wife whom her many spouses profess to reject because the impoverished woman cannot gratify all her rulers and masters, though the faithful wife is staunch in her loyalty." To sum up, according to the socio-religious view, the Caste Hindus should be the ones who back the Dalit cause. While Mahatma Gandhi did not take up the Dalit cause out of a desire for favours but rather a desire to serve, he did mention this on occasion. But the person up there wouldn't agree. They believed that the so-called service spirit revealed patronage as it mirrored the feelings of sympathy and kindness towards the Downtrodden. It is to be borne in mind that the larger concerns surrounding the problem—namely, land tenancy and political and economic empowerment—had zero bearing on the value of service. The only thing it meant for the downtrodden classes was that temples and the like could open.

In his address to the press following the conclusion of his hunger strike on September 25, 1932, which articulated his forthcoming initiatives for the Depressed Classes, he committed to adopting the term "Harijan." He expressed his intention to refer to them as "Harijanas" henceforth and assured them of his utmost dedication to advocating for their interests. Subsequent to this, he initiated his campaign against untouchability, adhering to his socioreligious methodology, and concurrently started to employ the new appellation extensively. It is important to note that a new term, introduced and adopted by Mahatma Gandhi, was met with considerable disapproval from both Orthodox Hindus and the Depressed Classes. Nevertheless, the Mahatma remained unresponsive to their objections regarding this new designation.

It is important to highlight the Dalit perspective on the Harijan term dispute. Congress leadership's unwavering adherence to the name "Harijan" indicates their dedication to approaching the matter from a socio-religious angle. After the Depressed Classes were renamed, the Congress Party's top brass launched a strategy effort that matched their stance: the All India Anti-Untouchability League. All of the members of this group were strictly non-political Hindus from the Caste system. A total of three name changes—"Servants of Untouchables Society," "Harijan Seva Sangh," and "Harijan Sevak Sangh"—followed. Additionally, the institution was obligated to uphold the basic ideas and goals of generosity and compassion. The organization's charter makes it clear that it will work to improve the spiritual, social, and material conditions of Harijans. The establishment of a new weekly periodical called Harijan was the third strategic move made by the Congress leadership during the Harijan Movement, in keeping with their socio-religious viewpoint. After Mahatma Gandhi was imprisoned in January 1932, the magazine "Young India" was later stopped publishing. After much deliberation, he has decided to rebrand his journal as "Harijan" in an effort to raise awareness of his Harijan Movement. On February 11, 1933, in Poona, the first edition of Harijan was published. He had also set up shop in Poona with his 'Servants of Untouchables Society,' an organisation for the

Downtrodden Classes. For its first release, 1000 copies were made available. The position of first editor was filled by R. V. Shastri.

Mahatma Gandhi asked notable Indians, including Dr. Ambedkar, to send him notes to include in this magazine before it was out. The first issue of the monthly magazine had a message from Dr. Ambedkar. The pariah status is a direct result of the caste system, as Dr. Ambedkar explained to Mahatma Gandhi and the general public in his remark; the core problem was not untouchability per se, but the caste system. Outcasts will always be a part of any system that uses categories. Dr. Ambedkar's remarks were an attack on Mahatma Gandhi's view of caste and Varna as positive social structures. On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi never wavered from his technique. One way to look at untouchability is as an unpleasant growth that grows on people as a result of the caste system. Just as it would be foolish to remove a person's bodily parts because of an ugly growth, it would be foolish to remove the caste system because of the outcasts. The weekly publication of the Harijan persisted under all conditions. In keeping with Gandhiji's wishes, it presented itself as a strictly socioreligious weekly and addressed solely issues pertaining to untouchability.

The last issue of this publication was released in March 1958. During this whole time, the weekly maintained its Gandhian stance on the matter and solidified its association with Mahatma Gandhi as a political journal. Mahadev Desai took over as editor on April 13, 1935. Its headquarters were subsequently moved to Madras. The Individual Satyagraha campaign came to a halt in 1940. But it began to reappear from the Navjivan Press in Ahmedabad on January 18, 1942. Your letter seems to be missing some important details. Could you kindly provide the paragraph you would want me to paraphrase? I would be more than pleased to help you. The British government put a stop to publishing the publication on August 21, 1942. After the restriction was lifted on January 10, 1946, the monthly was restarted on February 10, 1946, and Pyarelal remained editor-in-chief until February 22, 1948. K. G. Mashruwala and Maganbhai P. Desai followed as editors until March 1956, when the magazine stopped being published. The weekly journal was published in other Indian languages, not just English. The weekly, which was published in Hindi and had its last issue on February 23, 1933, was called Harijan Sevak. Like the English version, it was quite large. Viyogi Hari was its first editor. The Hindustan Times Press began publishing the weekly in Delhi. With Satis Chander Dasgupta at the helm as editor, the Bengali version had its Calcutta debut on February 28, 1933. The weekly also had Tamil, Marathi, and Gujarati vernacular versions.

Regardless of the underlying motivation, Mahatma Gandhi commenced his penance fast on May 8, 1933. He was accompanied by numerous adherents throughout the country. He corresponded with Vinobha Bhave, asserting that an uninterrupted series of such fasts must be sustained until the complete eradication of untouchability is achieved. He pointed out in the Harijan, If my corporeal cell does not survive the twenty-one-day fast, the reader must conclude that it was ineffective for this or any other service. Shortly after the commencement of the Penance fast, the British Government granted his release from incarceration, citing the nature and purpose of the fast he was undertaking, as well as the mindset he exhibited. They were assured that Mahatma would inevitably succumb during this prolonged fast. The outcomes of the penance fast, however, were exceedingly favourable. By this fast, Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in awakening and appealing to the Caste Hindu conscience. Numerous caste Hindus adhered to his

example by participating in fasting. Others began to recognise that their transgressions had contributed to their negative attitudes towards the Depressed Classes and subsequently committed themselves to the work for Harijans. Numerous temples and similar establishments were made accessible to the Depressed Classes by their efforts. The Depressed Classes themselves became very emotional, feeling very much obliged to the Mahatma for his compassion. This was the aspiration of the Mahatma: Victory in both scenarios, whether the outcome is favourable or unfavourable.

The Harijan Tour was the concluding and, unsurprisingly, most important strategic move made by the Congress leadership during the Harijan Movement. With the goal of spreading his approach among the common Castemen and Outcastes of the country, Mahatma Gandhi embarked on his most ambitious journey to date, touring the remote and interior parts of the country continuously for up to nine months, from 7 November, 1932, to 21 July, 1934. On this journey, Mahatmaji spoke strongly against untouchability and did everything in his power to provide members of the oppressed classes entry to public spaces, especially temples. Along the way, he established a Harijan Purse Fund to support the fledgling Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Mahatma Gandhi has conducted numerous experiments in addition to the Harijan Purse Fund. By appealing to their emotions and often associating with them, he made significant contributions to the cause of the Depressed Classes. Meeting Harijans everywhere and including visits to Harijan quarters in the itinerary were two of Mahatmaji's top priorities before he set out on his journey. Throughout his journey, he extended invitations to the Depressed Classes and dedicated several temples to them. However, the majority of the Dalits were opposed to the temple entrance attempts since they would lead to widespread violence and atrocities committed by Caste Hindus. As a consequence, they asked him to focus on improving their economic situation instead. Temple entrance can only aid such economic growth, Mahatmaji said, silencing them. After gaining access to the temple, all doors to economic improvement must automatically open to Harijans just as they do to everyone else. While on the Harijan Tour, Mahatma Gandhi saw firsthand the plight of the downtrodden. In reference to their situation in Harijan, he made the following observation: The Harijans were said to subsist on the undigested grains extracted from bovine manure due to a lack of labour opportunities and, more importantly, because they were untouchable, which prevented them from accessing equal employment opportunities. While touring a hamlet in the Bhangi sector of the Bhal Gujrat district, I saw that animal dung was spread out for drying on every surface. I was informed that after the excrement had dried, they would take out the undigested and partially chewed grains, wash them, dry them, and then grind them into a powder that they would use to make chapatis.

Caste Hindus were to undergo a genuine conversion as a result of the Harijan Propaganda, which aimed to remind them of their transgressions against the Depressed Classes and their duty to help the oppressed. In order to guarantee the Caste Hindu Reformers' service (i.e., charitable endeavours) to the Depressed Classes, the propaganda was mostly focused on them. On the other hand, the Depressed Classes were also implicated in the propaganda. For Mahatma Gandhi, the Harijan Propaganda was an all-out campaign to dispel the concept of "untouchability" by various means such as public lectures, leaflets, social gatherings, propaganda, etc. Following the Poona Pact's completion, Mahatma Gandhi fulfilled his pledge to the Depressed Classes by devoting himself completely and

sincerely to the Dalit cause. In order to facilitate his interviews and letters, the authorities granted him exceptional prison privileges during his fast-unto-death. However, the authorities cut off these services after he broke the fast. For the sake of fighting untouchability, Mahatma Gandhi asked the government to keep these services running. After the government turned him down for such services, he stopped responding to letters about untouchability and started refusing special diet food on November 1, 1932. He was ultimately granted all the facilities he needed to perform untouchability work by the government. As a result, the Mahatma's remarks on untouchability began to surface in the media. His Harijan Movement, which he launched with vehement anti-untouchability rhetoric, began at this time. The Guruvayur Satyagraha, on the other hand, was a local Congress reformer in Malabar (Kerala) named K. Kelappan's effort to get admission for the Depressed Classes to the Krishna Temple at Guruvayur. Mahatma Gandhi was a supporter of this effort. The Kerala Provincial Congress Committee chose to begin a Temple Entry Satyagraha on November 1, 1931, as a result of Kelappan's efforts. However, on November 1, 1931, the Satyagrahis attempted to enter the temple. The Orthodox, angered by the Zamorin of Calicut, the temple trustee, assaulted them. Despite the obvious invitation from the Depressed Classes, the Zamorin steadfastly refused to open the temple to them. He justified his decision by referring to Section 40 of the Hindu Religious Endowment Act, which stated that the trustee had no authority to interfere with the established practices of the temples under his care.

On 20 September 1932, the same day that Mahatma Gandhi began his fast-unto-death, Mr. K. Kelappan began his fast in protest, laying in the sun in front of the temple, until the Zamorin consented to his ideas in behalf of the Depressed Classes. The Satyagraha, however, persisted. The humiliation and aggravation were too much for the Zamorin, so he begged Mahatma Gandhi to ask Kelappan to temporarily break his fast. In response to Mahatma Gandhi's email about Zamorin's allegedly injured Orthodox conscience, Kelappan emphasised that the issue of hurting the pride and emotions of thousands of downtrodden brothers was much more pressing and significant. Now the Mahatma attempted to tell him, "You are bound to consult me," and on September 30, 1932, he strongly advised him to break the fast. In response to Mahatma Gandhi's warning that breaking his fast might slow down the movement, Kelappan reluctantly decided to do so on October 1, 1932, for a period of three months. After that, Mahatma Gandhi instructed the Zamorin by wire transfer to take action and overcome any obstacles, legal or otherwise. He informed the Zamorin that he had taken it upon himself to ensure that the Depressed Classes might enter the temple, even going so far as to share the fast with Kelappan, because Mr. Kelappan had paused his fast at his suggestion.

Shortly after, Mahatma Gandhi changed his mind and promised not to fast if a vote was held in Ponni-Taluk—the town where the temple was located—and the results revealed that most people were against opening the temple to the downtrodden. It has been brought to light that he was approached with the concept of a referendum by some Sanatanist journalists, who said that a valid poll would provide a resounding rejection of such an admission. While the majority of templegoers may support the reformers, Mahatma Gandhi himself denied the notion in a speech he made on November 20, 1932, when he announced his decision to fast, saying that Zamorin held the key to the temple. It is possible that Mahatmaji gave the referendum idea some thought after this comment came out, and he promptly agreed to hold the vote.

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