

Gandhiji's movement
to remove their
disabilities. gandhiji's
campaign



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Gandhiji's Appeal to the Conscience of the People: Gandhiji believed in the four-fold division of the Hindu society into four varnas.

He regarded untouchables as Shudras and not as the Panchamas or fifth Varna or Avarna. Hence he sincerely felt the need for bringing about a basic change in the caste structure by uplifting the untouchables and not by abolishing the caste as such. He appealed to the conscience of the people to realise the historical necessity of accommodating the " Harijans" by providing them a rightful place in the society. Gandhiji had much compassion for the Harijans.

He said: " I do not want to be reborn. But if I am to be born, I would like to be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows and sufferings." He was of the opinion that the practice of untouchability was a moral crime. He said that " if untouchability is not wrong, then nothing in the world is wrong." He believed that a change of heart on the part of the Hindus was essential to enable the social and cultural assimilation of Harijans. He was very much moved by their social distress and started a nationwide movement to remove their disabilities.

Gandhiji's Campaign against Untouchability: Gandhiji who regarded untouchability as a blot on Hinduism wanted to do away with it completely. He wrote in 1920 "... Without the removal of the taint [of untouchability], " Swaraj" is a meaningless term." He even felt that the foreign domination of our country was the result of our exploitation of almost one-sixth of our own people in the name of religion. He advocated positive means for the uplift of Harijans.

He addressed various public meetings reposing doctrines of Harijan welfare. He led several processions of Harijans with other upper caste people and made them participate in "poojas, bhajans, keerthans and puranas". He believed that opportunities of education and temple entry would reduce social inequalities between Harijans and caste Hindus.

He launched movements for cleaning Harijan residential areas, for digging wells for them and for similar other beneficial things. Gandhiji wrote in "Young India" in April 1925. "Temples, public wells and public schools must be open to the untouchables equally with caste Hindus." He started two journals, 'Harijan' and 'Young India' through which he advocated his ideas. He started an ashram where people of all castes and creeds could come and stay without any differences. Gandhiji served the "Harijan Sevak Sangha" started by the social reformer Takkar Bapa in the year 1932 for working out the religious and social welfare of the Harijans. The organisation opened schools and dispensaries in various places and arranged for free educational facilities and scholarships for Harijan children. Political Role of Gandhiji: As a much respected political leader of the masses, Gandhiji could never ignore the tasks of the removal of untouchability and upliftment of Harijans.

Gandhiji entered the Indian freedom struggle in 1919. From 1920 onwards, under the leadership of Gandhiji the Indian National Congress became committed to get the independence on the one hand and to the removal of untouchability on the other. In 1920 itself, he declared that "Untouchability cannot be given a secondary place in the programme" of Congress.

Gandhiji's Protest against the Proposal of Separate Electorate for Harijans:

Gandhiji was very much against the British policy of "divide and rule". He <https://assignbuster.com/gandhijis-movement-to-remove-their-disabilities-gandhijis-campaign/>

condemned the British policy of separating the Harijans from the rest of the Hindu. Hence he protested against the proposal of creating separate electorate for the Harijans. He said to Ambedkar who was in favour of the proposal, that "the political separation of the untouchables from the Hindus would be suicidal to the nation." Gandhiji declared at the Minorities Committee of the Second Round Table Conference in London [1932] that "we do not want the untouchables to be classified as a separate class.

Sikhs may remain such in perpetuity, so many Muslims and Christians. Will the untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity? I would rather feel that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived. I will resist it with my life." 1

Impact of Gandhiji's "fast-Unto-Death" Satyagraha: In spite of Gandhiji's protest, the British Prime Minister decided to grant separate seats for the depressed classes and the right of double vote in which they could elect their own representatives and also vote in which they could elect their own representatives and also vote in general elections. In protest against this "communal award" Gandhiji decided to stage the fast unto death satyagraha. This declaration of Gandhiji opened the eyes of the whole country towards the problem of untouchables. In 1932 the Harijan Sevak Sangh was formed and its Conference at Bombay pledged that the right to use the public roads, wells etc. would be given statutory recognition when the Swaraj Parliament met.

This pledge was stressed by Gandhiji in 1932 when he said, "There could be no rest...until untouchability becomes a thing of the past." The Harijan movement gained strength throughout the country. Gandhi went on an all-

India tour to collect huge sums of money for this programme.

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Gandhiji Commits Congress for the Removal of Untouchability: At the behest of Gandhiji and the Congress, all the Congress candidates who contested elections in 1937 had pledged themselves to the removal of untouchability. An early as in 1931 itself at the Karachi Session of the Congress at the behest of Gandhiji, a resolution was adopted. It declared, " all the citizens are equal before law irrespective of caste, creed or sex." In 1938, the Removal of the Civil Disabilities Act was passed by the Madras Legislature which provided that no Harijan shall be disabled from any social or public amenity.

In the same year, it also passed the Malabar Temple Entry Act which threw open the temples in Malabar. In 1939, the temple of Madurai was opened to the Harijans. Thus Gandhiji's fast and his Harijan movement released tremendous forces throughout the country, which led to the removal of some of the disabilities of the Harijans. Gandhiji's personal involvement in the Harijan welfare activities: Gandhiji was not just a preacher.

He practised what he preached. He could win the hearts of millions of Harijans because of his sincere approach to solve their problems. Gandhiji lived with the Harijans and shared their distress by indicating in them the ideas of better social adjustment with the rest of the Indian community. He advocated equal opportunities of education and intermingling of Harijan students with those of the upper castes. He fought for various legal protections against several kinds of injustices done to them.

He adopted a Harijan child and set an example for others to emulate. As a result of his sincere efforts and strong recommendations, untouchability was

declared illegal under the Indian Constitution. At his behest an opportunity was given to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, leader of the depressed classes, to join the Central Cabinet and to be the chief architect of the Indian Constitution.

Gandhiji's Proposals for Harijan Welfare Gandhiji's proposals for Harijan welfare include the following: 1. Those who claim themselves to be the servants of Harijan must serve the Harijans with all the dedication.

2. Awareness must be created among the Harijans regarding cleanliness, sanitation and health. 3. The practice of carrying human waste on head must be stopped. 4. They should be persuaded to drop their habit of eating carrion and dead animals. 5.

Practice of untouchability must be immediately stopped by all. 6. Harijans must be provided with drinking water facility. 7. Good houses at low cost but with enough provision for lighting and ventilation must be built for Harijans.

8. Harijan children must be made to go to school and even adult education programme should be introduced.

9. Harijans must be persuaded to drop their habit of drinking alcohol. 10. Harijans must be allowed to enter all the public places and to draw water from the wells.

11. There should be no bar for the entry of Harijans to temples. 12. " Harijan Day" should be observed by all at least one day in a year. Ambedkar and Gandhiji who fought against the problem of untouchability and served to promote the welfare of " untouchables" are not alive today. Their followers are, however, continuing their work. Untouchability has not yet become " the

thing of the past". The removal of untouchability requires a basic transformation in the general attitude towards it.

Gandhiji was right when he wrote in his letter to Thakkar Bapa: " The salvation of the depressed class will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus." The country is awaiting such a revolution.