

Gandhi's Vision for Indian Society: Theory and Action

The temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability, 1932-1934

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Appendix I:

Glossary

Ahimsa: the avoidance of violence.

Asceticism: a lifestyle characterised by abstinence and dedication to religious and spiritual goals.

Bhagavad Gita: a Hindu traditional text in the Mahabharata describing the duties of man and is viewed as a practical self-contained guide to life.

Bhakti: devotional Hindu worship.

Bhangi: one of the names used for untouchables.

Brahman/Brahmin: a person born into a priestly caste.

Caste-Hindu: used by Gandhi to describe a person born into one of the four varnas or religious castes.

Dalit: a contemporary name used for untouchables.

Darshan: blessing given by a person of religious regard through touch.

Dharma: correct moral or the cosmic order of things.

Gita: Short for Bhagavad Gita.

Harijan: Gandhi's name for untouchables meaning "children of god" signifying that all Hindus are equal under the divine.

Harijan Sevak Sangh: Gandhi's organisation in service of untouchables created in 1933 consisting of caste-Hindus.

Jati: the term for occupational castes.

Karma: an action or deed that leads to a cycle of cause and effect.

Khadi: coarse Indian cotton which was the cornerstone in Gandhi's attempt at economic reform.

Khilafat movement: a movement for the Muslims in India with the aim of retaining the khalif in as religious authority.

Mahabharata: Hindu epic with stories of deities written from around 400 BCE to 300 CE.

Mahatma: Hindi for "great soul" and used about Gandhi and other significant religious persons.

Moksha: the liberation from the cycle of reincarnation where you can find ultimate peace, knowledge and enlightenment.

Non-Brahman: a collective term mainly used about South India about a person who is not a Brahman.

Ramaraj: the "kingdom of Rama" or the "golden age", a time with no hunger, where men and

women were morally righteous and truthful and the area prospered. Gandhi believed India was headed towards a new “golden age” with *swaraj*.

Renouncer: a person who forsakes his earthly connections and wealth and often lives from hand to mouth.

Sanatanist: a person considered an orthodox Hindu who is following the traditional Hindu texts and is regarded for it.

Sangh: the short term for Gandhi’s organisation Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Satyagraha: a term meaning “holding firmly to the truth” and used by Gandhi often connected to non-violence resistance. A satyagrahi was a person who pursued truth and would undergo self-suffering and not allow the infliction of violence on anyone.

Servants of the Untouchables Society: the English translation for Gandhi’s organisation Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Shastra: a Sanskrit term denoting rules, often connected to the Hindu religion.

Shudra: the lowest of the four varnas consisting of servants, farmers, craftsmen and labourers.

Swaraj: “self rule”, used by Gandhi to mean self rule both politically, religiously and socially.

Tapasya: spiritual suffering used by ascetics of a focused effort to achieve a goal.

Untouchables: a collective term for the persons outside of the varna system regarded as ritually polluted.

Upanishads: religious texts in Hinduism written from 500 BCE up to the early middle ages.

Varna: four religious divisions in Hindu society with the brahman or priest, the kshatriya or warriors, the vaishya or merchant and lastly the shudra or servant.

Vedas: sacred writings of Hinduism consisting of Sanskrit literature and some of the oldest texts in Hinduism.

Zamorin: previous kings of Kerala.

Appendix II:

Programme for the Travelling Campaign Against Untouchability¹

It has been found necessary, quite unavoidable, to make a substantial alteration in the order of the programme of Mahatmaji's proposed tour, extending over 9 months—November 1933 to July 1934. After touring in the Central Provinces, where the tour has commenced from today, and after attending the Central Board meeting at Delhi—December 10 to 14—he will go directly to Andhra, and the rest of the Madras Presidency, instead of going up to the Punjab, Sind, etc., and will thereafter work his way to Bengal and Assam and then westward. The new order will, therefore, be as follows : C. P., Delhi, Andhra, Madras City, Mysore States and Malabar District, Cochin and Travancore, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Calcutta, Bengal, Assam, Bihar, U.P., Punjab, Sind and Rajputana, Gujarat and Kathiawar, Bombay City, Maharashtra and Hyderabad Dn., and Karanataka at the end of July 1934.

The dates of the tour in the various provinces and other details are given in the sub-joined table. The details of the tour in each province will be settled and filled up by the Provincial Secretaries in consultation with their Presidents in accordance with detailed instructions already issued. But the four elementary rules to be observed are mentioned below :

- (1) There should be full four hours cessation of public work for meals and correspondence in the middle of the day, preferably from 10.0 a.m. to 2.0 p.m.
- (2) The day's work should not begin earlier than 6.30 a.m. and not [continue] later than 8.0 p.m.
- (3) Railway journey is any day preferable to motor journey, but where the latter is unavoidable, it should not exceed 75 miles in one day.
- (4) Mondays and Tuesdays in every week are non-working days and should be kept free of any travelling or public engagement. To be accurate, the period from 8 p.m. on Sunday to 8 p.m. on Tuesday is reserved, 24 hours for silence and 24 hours for correspondence and other work.

A. V. THAKKAR,
GENERAL SECRETARY,
SERVANTS OF THE UNTOUCHABLES SOCIETY

¹ From the appendices of *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 455-457.

THE PROGRAMME OF GANDHIJI'S HARIJAN TOUR

Two days per week, preferably Monday and Tuesday, will be free from travelling and appointments to give Gandhiji time for correspondence and writing for the *Harijan*. Thus there will be five working days per week so far as the tour programme is concerned.

PROVINCE TOTAL DAYS DATES WORKING

(BOTH DAYS INCLUSIVE) DAYS

C.P. 318th Nov. to 8 Dec. 23

9TH DECEMBER IN TRAIN AND AT JHANSI

Delhi 510th Dec. to 14th Dec. 3

15TH DECEMBER IN TRAIN DELHI TO BEZWADA

Andhra 1416th Dec. to 29th Dec. 10

Madras City 5 30th Dec. to 3rd Jan. 1934 3

Mysore–Malabar 10 4th Jan. to 13th Jan. 8

Cochin–Travancore 7 14th Jan. to 20th Jan. 5

Tamil Nadu 20 21st Jan. to 9th Feb. 10

(INCLUDING 6 DAYS' FULL REST)

10TH FEBRUARY IN TRAIN—MADRAS TO ORISSA

Orissa 711th Feb. to 17th Feb. 5

Bengal 2818th Feb. to 17th March 20

Assam 718th March to 24th March 5

Bihar 1425th March to 7th April 10

U.P. 358th April to 12th May 20

(INCLUDING 7 DAYS' FULL REST)

Punjab 1413th May to 26th May 10

Sind 727th May to 2nd June 5

Rajputana 7 3rd June to 9th June 5

Rest at Ahmedabad 7 10th June to 16th June 0

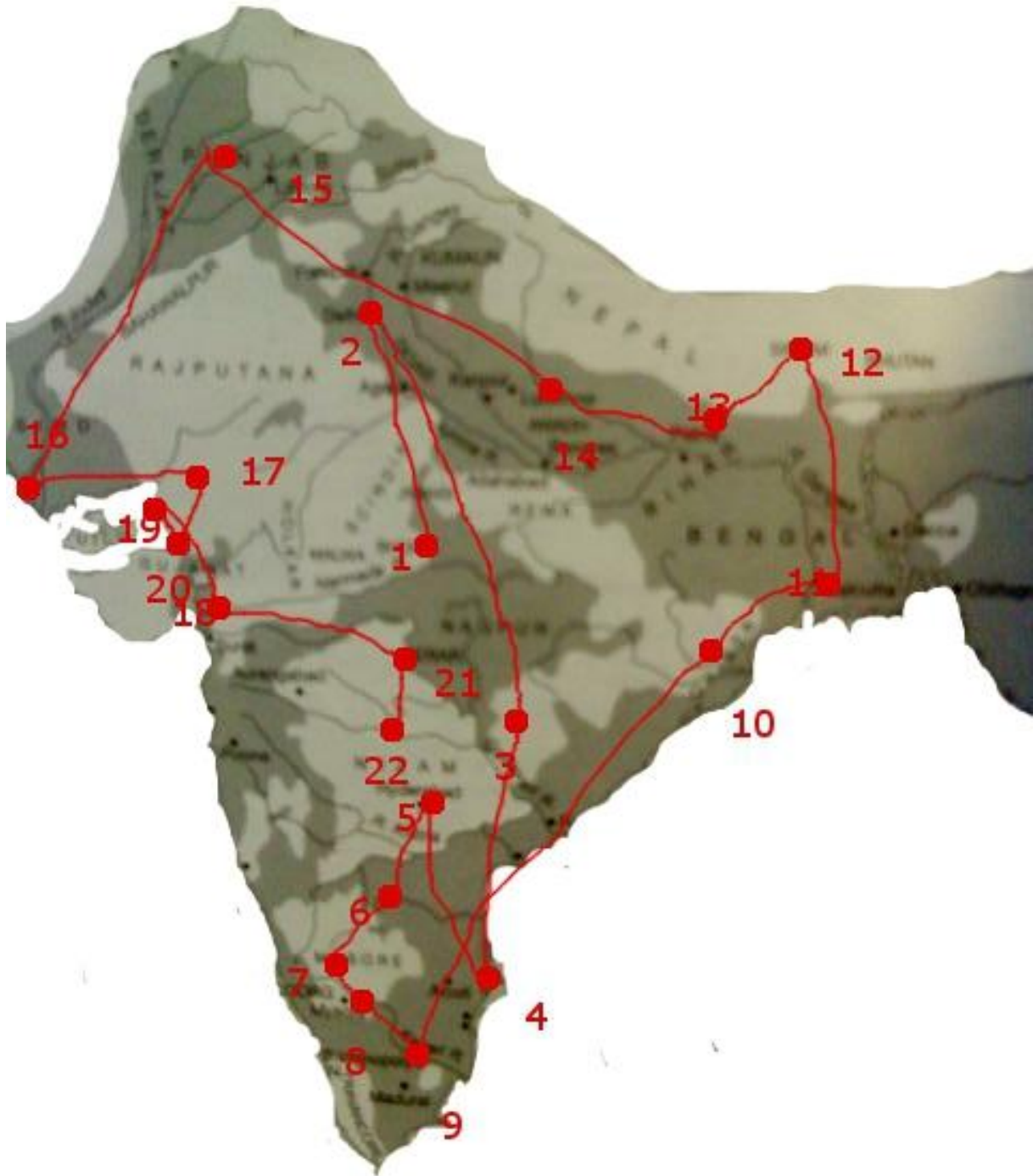
Gujarat–Kathiawar 14 17th June to 30th June 10

Bombay City 7 1st July to 7th July 5

Maharashtra–Hyderabad Dn 17 8th July to 24th July 11

Karnataka 7 25th July to 31st July 5

Appendix III: Map of the Travelling Campaign²



² An approximate map according to his schedule in *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62.

Chapter I: Introduction

i) Thesis and argument

This thesis is concerned with an eighteen-month period in Indian history in which Mohandas K. Gandhi attempted to abolish untouchability and mobilising them in two campaigns, namely the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability. Whereas the temple-entry campaign was solely focused on allowing untouchables into temples, the following travelling campaign against untouchability was focused on providing untouchables with access to temples, schools, wells and roads, in addition to economic opportunities through *khadi*, hand-spun, hand-woven Indian cotton.

The object of my study is twofold: first, I want to map out the two campaigns. The campaigns of 1932 to 1934 were different from previous campaigns in that they were not intended by Gandhi to be connected to nationalist politics. Whereas his previous campaigns in India were focused on external issues connected with the colonial power, the two campaigns of this thesis were concerned with the internal issue of untouchability. Even though Gandhi's life and work has been a subject of scrutiny for decades, I find that the knowledge of the two campaigns is scarce among scholars. To my knowledge, the two campaigns have not been subjected to detailed study.

Second, I want to study Gandhi's methods of mobilisation in the two campaigns. Gandhi had already been the protagonist of several campaigns in India making him known in large parts of the subcontinent as a politician, social worker and religious authority. When the temple-entry campaign was started in 1932, Gandhi had already applied variations of his methods of mobilisation in previous campaigns, methods based on traditional Hindu values. It is my impression that Gandhi had greater success with his methods in the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability than in previous campaigns. I base this impression on the fact that Gandhi had more supporters than previously, he had an extensive organisation, the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, and had several newspapers that provided information to more Indians than earlier.

The argument of my thesis is as follows: Gandhi managed to mobilise a number of people in India. He managed to mobilise even though he was confined to gaol for almost the whole temple-entry campaign. Part of his mobilising power must have come from the fact that he, together with The Indian National Congress, had opposed the colonial power for over a decade through civil disobedience campaigns. This had made Gandhi a famous politician and a symbol of opposition. The remainder of his mobilising power must therefore, I contend,

have come from Gandhi himself and his way of using traditional Hindu values to promote his reform initiatives to Indian society.

This argument is much inspired by the political scientists Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph, who show that Gandhi used traditional symbols and language to “convey new meanings and to reconstitute social action”.³ It is also inspired by the historian Eugene Irschick, who provides examples of how Gandhi was received as a highly religious figure: “For a brief period in 1933 and 1934 Gandhi took on many of the marks of a messianic leader among the untouchables and among other members of the population as well.”⁴

As a furtherance of my argument, I claim that using rhetoric that reflected Hindu traditional values in order to attempt to mobilise Indians led to at least three different responses among participants in the two campaigns: 1) participants followed Gandhi’s instructions and accepted or adapted to his view of Hindu religion and untouchability. 2) Participants followed Gandhi’s instructions but told him they did not understand his religious interpretations. 3) Participants who did not follow all of Gandhi’s instructions and instead followed their own paths.

ii) *Hind Swaraj in Indian campaigns*

Outside of India Gandhi is first and foremost known for his work in politics where he attempted to attain independence from the British Empire by mobilising Indian society.⁵ Inside India he was in addition widely known as an ascetic and moral role model strongly connected to Hinduism, hence the name by which he is known; *Mahatma*, which can be translated as “great soul”.⁶

Gandhi’s vision for Indian society was *swaraj*, meaning “independence” or “self-rule”. In contrast to the political goal of *swaraj* which Congress politicians used as the term for independence from the colonial power, Gandhi added that *swaraj* also included solving what he considered to be the major problems within Indian society. In Gandhi’s opinion, the key to achieving *swaraj* lay in fulfilling three conditions alone, namely “the spinning-wheel, Hindu-Muslim unity and in the removal of untouchability.”⁷ In order to achieve *Swaraj* Indians also had to undergo personal reform, a “change of heart” that would ensure the abolition of

³ Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 2.

⁴ Eugene F Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s* (Madras: Cre-A, 1986), pp. 170-171.

⁵ Harold Coward, “Gandhi, Ambedkar and Untouchability” in Coward, Harold, ed. *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*. (New York: State of New York Press, 2003) p. 1. Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 2-3.

⁶ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, p. vii, 3.

⁷ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 182.

untouchability. Gandhi's first discussion of *swaraj* and its conditions can be found in his only book of political theory *Hind Swaraj*, translated as "Indian self-rule", which was published in 1909 when Gandhi lived in South Africa and later banned by the colonial power.⁸

One obvious objection to my emphasis on *Hind Swaraj* can be that the text was written over two decades before the period with which this thesis is concerned – two decades filled with a plethora of initiatives and campaigns against the colonial power where Gandhi's influence had begun as marginal in 1909, but become highly consequential in 1932. My explanation is that even though parts of *Hind Swaraj* may only have been relevant in the immediate temporal context of which it was written, the conditions for the fulfilment of *swaraj* remained unchanged and paramount to Gandhi. My thesis concerns a period in time in which Gandhi was focused on issues within Hindu society and not against the colonial power. It is therefore essential to see how Gandhi used his vision of *Hind Swaraj* in his campaigns before the period with which this thesis is concerned.

Hind Swaraj was written in the form of a discussion between an "editor" and a "student". As the text was concerned with Indian Independence in every form, discussions were on issues that highlighted differences between India and the colonial power. Gandhi's goal of distinguishing these differences was to show that India could evolve beyond the colonial power: "The tendency of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God."⁹

Gandhi used examples from the colonial power and compared them to his vision for India.¹⁰ One example of this concerns the spinning and weaving of *khadi*, which was central in the travelling campaign against untouchability. Gandhi was dissatisfied with an economy based on money and not sustenance. The former he believed had been initiated wholly by the colonial power. His concern was with the cotton industry: before the colonial power had entered, Indians had used *khadi* or Indian hand-spun cotton to make cloth. The colonial power found *khadi* inadequate and implemented the use of machine-spun cotton, which was distributed to cotton mills. Raw cotton was then exported to England and later imported back to India as a finished product so that Indians were dependent on buying foreign cloth that had originated in their homeland.¹¹

⁸ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. p. 65. Claude Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi – The Life and Afterlife of the Mahatma*. (London: Anthem Press South Asia Studies, 2004) p. 83, 105.

⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 10, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 281.

¹⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 10, pp. 258-9, 279.

¹¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 10, pp. 302-305.

Gandhi's solution was *swadeshi*, the use of things from one's own land. First and foremost in the idea of *swadeshi* was the spinning of *khadi* in private homes as it could become a second income to poor Indians and at the same time prevent the purchase of foreign cloth. This, in turn, would make India less dependent on the colonial power and become one step closer to *swaraj*.¹²

Gandhi used *khadi* as a focal point in many of his campaigns. In 1919 Gandhi encouraged Indian women to spin, and several shops selling only *khadi* cloth were opened in Bombay.¹³ The same year, *Swadeshi Sabha* was started, an organisation with the goal of implementing *swadeshi* on a national level. To achieve this, the production of *khadi* had to be increased dramatically and the importance of *swadeshi* had to be explained to Indians.¹⁴

In 1920, the spinning of *khadi* became part of a non-cooperation programme approved in the Indian National Congress.¹⁵ In both 1920 and 1921 Gandhi travelled around the country to promote the non-cooperation campaign – much like in the travelling campaign against untouchability in 1933. Gandhi's power of mobilisation was considerable, causing crowds to gather wherever he visited. Gandhi and his supporters also established schools that were to follow the principles of *swadeshi* and teach spinning to the poor, but the initiatives were only temporary and the schools did not last.¹⁶

Brown explains that although Gandhi's attempts at non-cooperation did no considerable harm to the colonial power, his means of mobilising Indians through propagating *khadi* as part of *swadeshi* helped gather more Indians around a common goal than previously: the participants were from a wider range of Indian society and Indian-made cloth increased in popularity.¹⁷ Although Gandhi did not emphasize that it was untouchables in specific that were to benefit from *khadi* in the campaigns of the 1920s, he did believe *khadi* to be an economical solution for poor in India. It was this conviction Gandhi carried with him to the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability.

A second aspect of *Hind Swaraj* that was part of the mobilisation in Gandhi's campaign was *satyagraha* or "truth force", often connected to nonviolence, but not synonymous to it. Gandhi believed *satyagraha* to be at the core of traditional Hindu values.

¹² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 10, pp. 303-305. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power* (London: Cambridge at the University Press), p. 45. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 90. Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi*, p. 30.

¹³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 18, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 122-125, 331-332.

¹⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 18, pp. 167-170.

¹⁵ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, pp. 152-155.

¹⁶ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, pp. 160-161.

¹⁷ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 162. Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi*, pp. 30-31.

To make the concept of *satyagraha* more understandable, I find it necessary to explain the background of *satyagraha*: Gandhi's ideal India contained self-sufficient villages where the villagers were interdependent. In these villages, a council solved conflicts and violence was considered inferior to ethics and morality.¹⁸ As an example of where *satyagraha* originated, Gandhi referred to India's tradition of passive resistance: conflicts in the past had been solved by discussing or moving out of the conflicted area.¹⁹ Furthermore, Gandhi believed that morality was a dominant feature in Indian society. Gandhi's *satyagraha* channeled this morality in action towards the colonial power in what he viewed as violations towards Indian society.²⁰ Rudolph and Rudolph state that "*satyagraha* compels adherence to its cause not by mobilizing superior numbers or force but by mobilizing a general recognition in the justice of its cause."²¹ *Satyagraha* was therefore a means for convincing opponents through non-violent means.

In the period before the two campaigns from 1932 to 1934 there were several examples of Gandhi's implementation of *satyagraha*. The campaign in which *satyagraha* received the greatest attention, however, was a civil disobedience campaign that started in 1930 and ended as the temple-entry campaign began. Gandhi and the Indian National Congress had demanded the removal of the salt tax – a tax Indians had in common despite their other differences.²² The refusal led to a national civil disobedience campaign in which Gandhi and the Indian National Congress encouraged boycott, demonstrations and the illegal production of salt – all with the goal of abolishing the tax without resorting to violence.²³

Gandhi propagated *swaraj* among Indians together with an entourage in a month-long march in western India. His entourage was a group of supporters that came from different geographical locations within India. They had different religious views and came from different social backgrounds.²⁴ Brown explains that "the salt *satyagraha* affected virtually every province, though obviously in some areas for geographical reasons there was little opportunity for this except token gestures."²⁵ This, together with large media coverage, made the campaign the most comprehensive in Indian history to that point.²⁶

¹⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 10, pp. 280-281.

¹⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 10, pp. 280, 291-292, 294, 296.

²⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 10, p. 294, 296.

²¹ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, pp. 29-30.

²² Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 235. Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928-1934*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 88-89, 92-93.

²³ Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 90-91, 94-95, 100.

²⁴ Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 100-101, 103-106.

²⁵ Brown, *Prisoner of Hope*, p. 240.

²⁶ Brown, *Prisoner of Hope*, p. 242.

Rudolph and Rudolph explain that “neither constitutional petition and protests nor violent acts of resistance and terrorism had been able to command popular support or unite nationalist leaders. *Satyagraha* did both.”²⁷

There is agreement among historians that parts of the population – including members of the Indian National Congress – were skeptical of Gandhi’s methods and that his methods got more attention where Gandhi himself was present. It is still important to point out that the campaigns mobilised Indians to a larger degree in the civil disobedience campaign than previously. Evidence of the magnitude of the campaign is that the colonial power granted demands made by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress in the campaign, the most important being the abolition of the salt tax. Larger and more varied groups of the population participated in the campaign and the participants saw that Gandhi’s methods in the campaign had an effect on the colonial power.²⁸

iii) Sources

My main source in this thesis is the *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* (hereafter abbreviated as *MGCW*) which contains over fifty thousand texts, in ninety eight volumes. The texts consist of letters written by Gandhi, articles published by Gandhi in newspapers like *The Hindu* and Gandhi’s own newspapers the *Harijan*, *Navijan* and *Young India*. In addition, the *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* also consists of interviews and speeches given by Gandhi throughout his career.

Although the *Complete Works* contains most of Gandhi’s written work, one problem arises when using it as a source: there are informational gaps in the texts, and then particularly in his letters. The compilation only contains letters written by Gandhi but not letters written to him. Therefore, it is only revealed what Gandhi asked or replied to when he himself used abstracts from letters he had received.

To use an example from the temple-entry campaign, Gandhi was on two occasions asked how many temples had been opened to untouchables in the campaign – both in private letters. In one of the letters dated February 5 1933, one month after the national temple-entry initiative had begun, Gandhi stated both the number of temples opened and the general method in which they were to be opened:

²⁷ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, p. 30.

²⁸ Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi*, p. 158. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 109, 111, 118, 123. Baird, “The Convergence of Distinct Worlds” in Coward, Harold, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 24-26, 33. Brown, *Prisoner of Hope*, pp. 249-250.

I have your letter for which I thank you. Let me first of all set your mind at ease by telling you that no temple is to be opened to the Harijans except by the consent of the overwhelming majority of those who are at present entitled to offer worship at the respective temples. Therefore, there never will be any cause for desertion. Nor, so far as I know, are temples already opened—and there are no fewer than 500 temples opened—deserted by the ordinary temple-goers except a few.²⁹

There is no reference to where Gandhi got the information from, where the temples that had been opened were or exactly how they had been opened, only a vague reference to the number of temples opened and the method used in the campaign. There are few other sources available on the temple-entry campaign even after several thorough searches on the internet in article archives such as Jstor, in bookshops and in libraries.

When it comes to Gandhi's rhetoric and methods of mobilisation, the *Complete Works* does not provide sufficient material for discerning specific effects on Indian society. Gandhi used concepts such as *varna*, *satyagraha* and also *ramaraj*³⁰ in speeches, interviews and letters where he explained how these concepts were to aid the campaigns, Indian society and, ultimately, *swaraj*. It is difficult to see what effects the rhetoric had on participants in the campaigns, however. This is due to the general weakness of the *Complete Works*, namely that the few responses presented have been selected by Gandhi as means to serve a specific goal. I therefore have to rely on other sources that state the success of Gandhi's rhetoric in previous campaigns.³¹

One advantage of information in the travelling campaign against untouchability is that Gandhi himself travelled around to villages and wrote of them in letters and articles. It is thereby possible to get an insight into Gandhi's impression of villages. As in the temple-entry campaign, the informational gap is found in the responses from Gandhi's organisation the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and other volunteers, who also travelled to villages. It is possible to find examples of what was done in the villages Gandhi and his followers visited in the *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, but the number of examples is limited.

My other main sources can be divided into two categories, namely sources concerned with Gandhi and sources concerned with untouchables. The historian Judith M. Brown has written mostly of Gandhi's role as a political figure in both South Africa and India. I have

²⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 200-201.

³⁰ "Golden age", a concept that shall be explained in the chapter on the travelling campaign against untouchability.

³¹ Rudolph and Rudolph state the success of *satyagraha* in the civil disobedience campaign, which was started in 1930.

used Brown's insight into Gandhi's relation to untouchables and also background information on the Gandhian campaigns. Brown has written three books on Gandhi, namely *Gandhi's Rise to Power*, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience* and *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. The books cover most of Gandhi's life and focus on his political career because, as Brown explains it: "his significance for his contemporaries and to some extent for later generations lay in his role as a political leader and innovator, and because he realized that he could only publicize and implement his ideals through political involvement."³²

Although covering Gandhi and his career, Brown's information on the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability is limited. In fact, in the book that covers the period of the temple-entry campaign, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, it is difficult to find mention of the temple-entry campaign at all. *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* covers the period of both campaigns. There, the information concerning the two campaigns counts only eight pages.³³ Brown is as a consequence not an authoritative source on the actual campaigns.

The historian Harold Coward has compiled critiques of Gandhi, critiques ranging from political figures to religious groups. In my thesis, Coward has contributed an insight into what contemporaries thought of Gandhi, his political career and religious views. Coward explains that his book *Indian Critiques of Gandhi* is an attempt to give a "sustained study in his [Gandhi's] engagement of other major figures in the Indian Independence movement who were often his critics."³⁴ Especially helpful are Coward's critique by Jawaharlal Nehru, first prime minister of independent India, in which Gandhi's view of modernity versus tradition and Gandhi's use of religion in politics is discussed. The second helpful critique is that of Bhim Rao Ambedkar, untouchable leader, and contributor to the Indian constitution, in which Gandhi's view of untouchability and relationship to untouchables is discussed.

Rudolph and Rudolph discuss Gandhi's use of traditional rhetoric for modern use in his campaigns in their book *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*. They provide an insight into both Gandhi's religious background and initiatives and also Gandhi's political style, which was a return to traditional modes: "When Gandhi pursued the political goal of *swaraj* ("self rule"), he meant to teach himself and Indians that only those who could rule themselves – in the sense of self-restraint – could rule themselves – in the sense of controlling

³² Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928-1934*, p. ix.

³³ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, pp. 268-275.

³⁴ Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, p. 1.

their political universe.”³⁵ They also explain that “his political effectiveness arose in part from the belief of those who observed his career that his self-control did indeed endow him with extraordinary power.”³⁶ Rudolph and Rudolph thereby show the complexity of Gandhi and his methods, which is very useful for this thesis.

Irschick provides knowledge on how the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability were carried out in areas of South India in his book *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*. Irschick relates information on how Gandhi was received and perceived by Indians, what was done by the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (Gandhi’s organisation for the abolition of untouchability) in the campaigns and other activities in Tamil South India at the time of the two campaigns.

Lastly, the historian Chinna Rao Yagati provides examples from Central India of the two campaigns in his book *Dalits’ Struggle for Identity*. Yagati’s book is mainly on untouchable movements in the period before Indian independence. The aid for my thesis lies in the information on how Gandhi and his organisation were received among untouchables. It also provides information on local activities by and for untouchables at the time of the Gandhian campaigns.

iv) Terminology

Names for groups within the Indian caste system have varied with geographical location and time. I have chosen to use the term “untouchable” to describe the group of Hindus outside of the religious *varna* system – a system based on purity and pollution. The *varna* system, contains *Brahmans* or priests, *Kshatriyas* who are traditionally warriors or the nobility, *Vaishyas* or merchants and *Shudras* or servants. Untouchability in India is complex. The percentage of untouchables compared to the total population varies from state to state as does the treatment of untouchables. Both the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability were highly connected to Hindu religion. I therefore find it only logical to use “untouchables” to describe the group.

I have not overlooked the fact that Gandhi himself called untouchables *Harijans* after he had coined the name in 1933. My reason for not using Gandhi’s name for untouchables is that I would like to avoid confusion. Besides being the name of Gandhi’s own newspaper, the term has in some cases been used to describe groupings within the untouchables and not the whole group. I could also have used a newer term for the group, namely “dalit”. I do not use

³⁵ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, pp. 94-95.

³⁶ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, p. 95.

the term because it seems to me that “untouchable” better describes the predicament the group was in, namely that they were religiously and socially impure.

As with the term “untouchable”, I use the term “caste Hindu” to describe Hindus who are not untouchable. I use “caste Hindu” mainly because Gandhi used the term constantly throughout the two campaigns. Gandhi used “caste” to describe the four religious divisions or *varnas* in Hinduism. The term must not be confused with occupational castes or *jati*, of which there are over several thousand in India.

Chapter II: The Temple-Entry Campaign

Temple-entry is a spiritual act, transforming the whole society by one single act of admission. It will electrify into a new life the whole of the Harijan population, and it will purify Hinduism as no single act that I can think of can do.³⁷ – Mohandas K. Gandhi in January 1933.

I Introduction

When the period for this thesis began in the autumn of 1932, Mohandas Gandhi was in gaol for civil disobedience against the colonial power. There he planned and propagated a fast until death with the intent of opening a temple in Guruvayur in Kerala for untouchables.³⁸ This fast was abandoned for a new fast in 1933 which, in contrast to his planned fast in 1932, was extended to regard all temples in India and thereby made a national campaign for untouchables.³⁹ Both Indian and international press covered Gandhi's fasting period and, as we shall see, he wrote a large number of articles and letters both about his reasons for fasting and the goals by undertaking it.

Gandhi made it clear early in 1933 that untouchables' access to temples was the key for untouchability in India as a whole to be eradicated: if untouchability became obsolete, Gandhi was convinced that other problems within the Indian society, including economical, political and social problems, would solve themselves.⁴⁰ For Gandhi, the fast was a small sacrifice that provided a shift in focus in India from civil disobedience to promoting the situation of the untouchables, though first and foremost in a religious context. The civil disobedience campaigns of the 1920s and early 1930s had gathered the country's population around a common political centre, namely Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, in an attempt to extricate itself from the colonial power. The campaigns of 1932 to 1934, however, focused on society itself and created both unity and opposition within it.⁴¹

In this chapter I am going to look at Gandhi's emphasis on religion in his vision for the Indian society, exemplified mainly by the campaign for untouchables' access to temples. First, I will present Gandhi's view on religion, access to temples and the untouchables in

³⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 103.

³⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 326.

³⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 389. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 203.

⁴⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 89, 98.

⁴¹ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 240, 242, 263. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 57, p. 97.

Hindu religion – expressed through articles, letters and speeches from the period. Second, I will see Gandhi's views put into action in the temple-entry campaign by using both correspondence between Gandhi and his followers and newspaper articles – mostly found in the *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*. I will discuss the religious aspect of Gandhi's vision in an attempt to show how Gandhi mobilised Indian society for a common cause. This shall be done by reviewing and using critiques refuted by Gandhi himself and critiques posed by historians and anthropologists.

In continuance of my object to show how Gandhi mobilised Indians, this chapter will support my argument that Gandhi mobilised through using traditional Hindu rhetoric familiar to Indians. I attempt to show that although Gandhi had mobilised Indians in previous campaigns together with the Indian National Congress, a great part of his mobilisation skills lay in his personal importance and rhetoric. As a continuance of my argument, I will also attempt to show through the information available that Gandhi's methods of mobilisation caused several different responses among the active participants. Some active participants followed Gandhi's instructions and accepted his religious interpretations. Others did not understand his views but followed them anyway and yet other participants misinterpreted Gandhi's instructions and adapted them to what they believed to be the core of the campaign.

II Gandhi's Religious vision for India

i) Gandhi's interpretation of religion

Religion played a significant role in Gandhi's campaigns. His first Indian campaign was in defence of Indian Muslims in the *Khilafat*-movement and his subsequent campaigns in the early 1920s and 1930s all had elements connected to the Hindu religion: Gandhi used fasting as a means to get attention for a cause. He believed fasting to be a way of showing courage or to suffer pain without retaliation. Gandhi became an ascetic, which he thought would enhance both bodily and spiritual power. As part of being an ascetic, Gandhi promoted and encouraged the idea of renunciation, a life in celibacy and self-restraint connected to Hindu revival movements and social reform movements.⁴²

Gandhi believed that it was paramount to address the issues within his own religion Hinduism and repair them as he viewed his religion as one of several branches of religion that interconnected in India.⁴³ His definition of being a Hindu was "one who believes in God,

⁴² Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922*, p. 190, 194. Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, p. 31, 42-43, 55. Markovits, p. 32

⁴³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 64.

immortality and transmigration of the soul, *karma* and *moksha*, who tries to practice truth and non-violence and acts according to *varnasharma*, the division of society into distinct groups with their own roles.”⁴⁴ He thereby had a specific notion of what a Hindu was and what his duties were.

Rudolph and Rudolph add that Gandhi used traditional ideals and transformed them for modern purposes. Gandhi became connected to the *bhakti*-tradition, a tradition familiar to Indians based on a devotional teacher communicating through familiar symbols and local languages. *Bhakti* was known as a path to religious experience and salvation and the devotee associated with the lower castes.⁴⁵ The anthropologist C. J. Fuller adds that the ascetic renouncer enjoys a special position in Hindu society as the exemplar of a supreme religious ideal. Ordinary householders typically “treat him as a spiritual preeminent and may seek his assistance in their own religious life or even in other, more worldly manners.”⁴⁶ The well-regarded and powerful renouncer is treated as a man in a high position, ranking higher than Brahmins who can be both in a powerful position and be wealthy.⁴⁷

According to the historian Shahid Amin in his article “Gandhi as Mahatma” the parts of rural India Gandhi visited in the early 1920s (the Gorakhpur region in what is now Uttar Pradesh in particular) were more affected by his religiosity than his politics: the people were more interested in receiving Gandhi’s *darshan* or blessings and thought of him as a saint first, not a politician or a social worker.⁴⁸ Supported by this and the well-known fact that Gandhi had an ever-increasing number of followers, we can deduct that Gandhi was important as a religious figure (as well as a politician and social worker) in Indian society, which must have been a decisive factor in his mobilisation.

Politicians in the Indian National Congress, including leading personalities as Jawaharlal Nehru, commented on Gandhi’s use of religion in a political context. The historian Harold Coward explains that Nehru characterized Gandhi as essentially a man of religion. Furthermore, Gandhi referred to himself as a Hindu at the very depths of his being. But Gandhi’s conception of religion as well as his Hinduism “had nothing to do with any dogma or custom or ritual. Rather, it revolved around his firm belief in the moral law, which he calls

⁴⁴ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 196.

⁴⁵ Rudolph and Rudolph *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, pp. 3-5.

⁴⁶ C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 16-17.

⁴⁷ Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁸ Shahid Amin “Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Easter UP, 1921-2” in Guha, Ranajit, ed. *Subaltern Studies III*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 9, 18, 29.

the Law of Truth or Love.”⁴⁹ From this we can deduce that there was a conception of Gandhi’s religious views deviating from that of others: he believed that Hinduism had a creed while others did not. This deduction can also aid in explaining why there were different responses among Gandhi’s followers in the campaign.

It is therefore important that we discern what Gandhi’s views were and how they were expressed. To do this we will first look at Gandhi’s concept of religion – mainly supported by his correspondence and speeches. Second, we will explore what was done with Gandhi’s views – mainly how his views were reflected in the temple-entry campaign.

ii) *Religious texts*

Gandhi’s emphasis on religion was nothing unique to the Indian subcontinent which had spawned Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism and religious movements such as the *bhakti* or devotional movement, a movement in the 19th century that had inspired Gandhi in his efforts towards the untouchables.⁵⁰

When Gandhi referred to Hinduism, he often quoted from several books or texts considered as religious authorities. The most important of these were the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* (hereafter referred to as the *Gita*) which were written in a times-span from around 1500 BCE to 100 CE.⁵¹ The *Gita*, which Gandhi followed wholeheartedly, is known for being a guide to Hindu theology and for presenting moral guidelines in life.⁵² The ideal devotee is one who “prefers solitude, who eats meagre food, who has under perfect control thought, speech and action, who is intent on meditation, who is free always from attachments.”⁵³

By focusing of the ascetic ideal of Hinduism, there were many aspects of the religion commonly known and accepted by the general Hindu community Gandhi did not adhere to: he separated between what he saw as the original texts of Hinduism and what he believed to be sections added to the original texts and thereby influenced by time, culture and moral conviction. His reasons for following the *Gita* were that he believed that it contained the essence of all that Hindu Scriptures had to teach, and therefore

Nothing that is inconsistent with the main theme of the *Gita* is Shastra, no matter where it is found printed...Nothing that is inconsistent with the universally accepted first

⁴⁹ Robert T. Baird “The Convergence of Distinct Worlds”, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Jayant Lele, ed. *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movement*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), p. 15, 29.

⁵¹ Kim Knott, *Hinduism a Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 5-7, 14-16.

⁵² Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, pp. 53-54. Knott, *Hinduism a Very Short Introduction*, p. 9, 15.

⁵³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 217.

principles of morality has for me the authority of the Shastras. They are designed not to supersede, but to sustain the first principles, and the *Gita* is all-sufficing for me, because it not only conforms to the first principles, but gives you reasons for adherence to them at any cost.⁵⁴

As follows, his belief was that anything diverging from what he believed to be the message of the *Gita*, stated many times as being that of “oneness of life” with no superior and no inferior, had falsely been added and degraded Hinduism.⁵⁵

Fuller writes that it is normal to distinguish between two aspects of Hinduism, namely popular Hinduism and textual Hinduism. Whereas the concepts and ideas contained in Hindu texts are vital to popular Hinduism, Fuller explains that “themes central in the scriptures are not always central in ordinary peoples’ beliefs and practices.”⁵⁶ This does not mean, however, that popular Hinduism is degenerate textual Hinduism but a complex system of belief and practice.⁵⁷

Gandhi discussed Hindu texts and was criticised by his interpretation of them in newspaper articles, letters and in meetings. The aspect of textual Hinduism was therefore prominent in describing and discussing the campaign, which also aids in understanding why some of the active participants either did not understand Gandhi or chose to ignore religious aspects of Gandhi’s instructions.

iii) Untouchability

Brown explains that

His [Gandhi’s] primary social concern at the time was the problem of untouchability, the rejection of a whole group of the poorest and most menial in society as a result of Hindu ideas of hierarchy, and purity and pollution. Now, as he travelled widely, he saw in harsh practice the power of this social division, and the poverty and degradation it caused.⁵⁸

Gandhi wanted to remove untouchability as he saw it as an evil imposed by man, not by any divine authority. The word “untouchable” of course, refers to the aspect of Hinduism

⁵⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, pp. 329-330. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 9. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 339-340.

⁵⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 137. Harold Coward, “Gandhi, Ambedkar and Untouchability” in Coward, Harold, ed., *Indian Critiques of Gandhi* (New York: State of New York Press, 2003), p. 56.

⁵⁶ Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁷ Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 205.

known as “pollution”. Coming into physical contact with untouchables, who numbered between 40 and 60 million individuals in 1940, polluted a Hindu of a higher rank.⁵⁹

There were others working for the abolition of untouchability, among them the untouchable leader Bhim Rao Ambedkar, who wanted reform.⁶⁰ Where Gandhi differed from the other abolitionists was the method used to reach this goal. For Gandhi, religion was at the core of the untouchability problem. It was Hinduism that had created untouchability, it was the Hindus that had acted upon these divisions within society, and it was therefore the Hindus that had to remove the taint on Hinduism.⁶¹ To provide the untouchables with a more positive connotation, Gandhi gave the group a new name, namely *Harijan* meaning “Children of God”, in an attempt to make caste Hindus see that they were all equal under God.⁶²

Apart from giving the untouchables a new name, Gandhi also published several texts in which he gave his interpretation of Hinduism and untouchability. According to Gandhi’s interpretation of the religious books, he or she had to fill at least one of three criteria used to classify untouchables; 1) the person had to be born as an untouchable due to a mixed caste heritage, 2) the person had to be guilty of either working with impure elements such as refuse, blood, excrements or death or not being a vegetarian, 3) a person who was in a polluted state.⁶³ Gandhi’s belief was that the first criterion did not apply to Indians in the 1930s, since there was no evidence of untouchables ever having been direct results of mixed marriages between higher and lower castes.⁶⁴ As to the second and third criteria, Gandhi believed that untouchables – who by this definition could be anyone in contact with impure elements regardless of caste – could perform purifying rituals to rid themselves of internal impurity and become vegetarians. A bath and a change of clothes would suffice for external impurities.⁶⁵ “Untouchability by birth cannot exist today in connection with a class. In connection with individuals, it is practically impossible of detection.”⁶⁶ According to Gandhi’s interpretation, no person who followed the rules of cleanliness in Hinduism was an “untouchable”.

⁵⁹Kolenda, Pauline, *Caste, Cult and Heirarchy*, (New Delhi: Hans Raj Gupta & Sons, 1981), pp. 22-23. Ambedkar, B. R. *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2006), p.6. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 225.

⁶⁰ Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, pp. 56-57.

⁶¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 118. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, pp. 2-3, 311.

⁶² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 211.

⁶³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 353. Kolenda, Pauline, *Caste in Contemporary India: Beyond Organic Solidarity*, (California: The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company Inc., 1978), p. 35.

Michael Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 110-111.

⁶⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, pp. 353-354.

⁶⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 354.

⁶⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 355.

Accordingly, temples should not be closed to a section of society, but open to every one who followed the Hindu religious guidelines.⁶⁷

Gandhi wanted to abolish untouchability, but instead of insisting on abolishing the caste system in which untouchability was created and practiced, Gandhi wanted to incorporate untouchables in the servant or *Shudra* caste. Untouchables themselves would have to be uplifted by clean caste-Hindus, who would have a change of heart when Gandhi enlightened them about the wrongs they had committed.⁶⁸ This was not all, however; Gandhi wanted the caste system to *only* consist of the *Shudra* caste. His reason for suggesting this was that “Whilst we can all serve and hence be called Shudras, we do not all possess learning nor do we possess divine knowledge. Therefore it would be untruthful to regard ourselves as Brahmins.”⁶⁹ This view was contrary to centuries of practice and shows that Gandhi used rhetoric that contained familiar terms but, especially in the case of *varna*, had an inherent different meaning. Although Gandhi gained support for the eradication of untouchability through his campaign, he faced opposition to his interpretations and focus on religion – even among his own active participants.

iv) The temple

When Gandhi spoke of Hindu worship he usually spoke of temples. Gandhi believed that the temple was in the core of everyday life for millions of Hindus, whether they be caste Hindus or untouchables. His vision therefore was of equal access to temples in a system with no high and no low. The caste Hindus would see that they had treated the untouchables badly by excluding them and welcome them into a common religious arena, the temple.⁷⁰ Gandhi first mentioned the idea of temple-entry in 1921. It was to be the concrete representation of the abstract idea of abolishing untouchability. Gandhi’s goal was equality among Hindus, which would, in turn, take India one step closer to *swaraj*. One way of achieving equality was taking steps that would enable untouchables to become equals. Gandhi did not believe that India was ready for a temple-entry effort in 1921, however, and appealed to people that they should instead focus on opening wells until the time was right.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, pp. 354-355.

⁶⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 180, 218, 335. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 275, 290. Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability – Fighting the Caste System*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 48, 51. Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, pp. 32-33.

⁶⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 336.

⁷⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 29, 98, 492, 510.

⁷¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 24 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 308-309.

In the travelling campaign it was not an option (although it was suggested by several supporters) to build separate temples for untouchables and caste-Hindus since this, in Gandhi's view, would not create religious equality or acceptance. What was acceptable, however, was restricted access inside the temple and restricted hours in which the untouchables could enter.⁷² Interestingly, the compromise of separate temples for untouchables was not as easily dismissed in the travelling campaign against untouchability one year later – but that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In addition to viewing the temple as the centre for acceptance for Hindus, Gandhi also wrote an article in *The Hindu* of what a perfect temple was. The perfect temple would be one where the priest was a devoted man of God who had the least of needs and personal ties. His sole concern would be the welfare of his people. The temple would have to be accessible to the untouchables and other poor in clean surroundings and without discrimination. Around the temple there would be a school, a dispensary, a library and a guesthouse – all under the administration of the temple.⁷³

v) *Were Gandhi's religious views known?*

As mentioned in Amin's article, Gandhi was perceived as a religious figure wherever he went in what is now Uttar Pradesh in 1920 and 1921. But what is also interesting is that it was not well known what Gandhi's views actually were: Amin makes it clear that Gandhi was considered as being “projections of the existing patterns of popular beliefs about the ‘worship of the worthies’ in rural north India. Gandhi satisfied the signs of saintliness.”⁷⁴ Gandhi must have supported this at some level because he did not protest the use of the name “Mahatma”.

There were also other ways in which Gandhi marked his connection to Hindu tradition. He reinvented the traditional Hindu view of courage into *satyagraha*, which he used in all of his campaigns. He also supported issues like cow-protection and the Hindu caste system – though in an idealised form.⁷⁵ The name *Harijan* itself was symbolic: by renaming untouchables, Gandhi conveyed that the group had god-given rights on the same level as other Hindus, thereby showing his view that Hindus were all on an equal level.⁷⁶ By dressing as an

⁷² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 440, 443. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 423, 491.

⁷³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 25-27.

⁷⁴ Amin, “Gandhi as Mahatma”, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, pp. 94-95. Miller, “Indian Muslim Critiques of Gandhi” in Coward, Harold, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 206-207. Anthony Parel, “Symbolism in Gandhian Politics” in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Dec. 1969), pp.522-524.

⁷⁶ Parel, “Symbolism in Gandhian Politics”, pp. 524-525.

untouchable, he communicated that he associated himself as part of the group, which again promoted his view of the caste system and asceticism. Some of Gandhi's views were as a consequence visually apparent to Indian society, but Gandhi's own interpretation of the symbols was not apparent to the same degree. The symbols could, however, help illiterates place Gandhi in a context without having read any of his texts and thereby procuring him more supporters.⁷⁷

What had changed in the early 1930s was that the mass media was much more involved in Gandhi's campaigns. Gandhi began publishing his own newspaper in 1933 named *Harijan*, which, in contrast to his previous two published newspapers, was wholly focused on unity within India and distributed in English, Hindi and Gujarati.⁷⁸ In addition, texts and interviews were also published in other Indian newspapers such as *The Hindu*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Bombay Chronicles*. This meant that Gandhi's ideas were spread over a much larger area than previously, making it easier both to understand what Gandhi's views were and to criticise them. The criticisms ranged from Gandhi being too religious to not being religious enough and came from many layers of society.

One reservation has to be made, however: the number of illiterates in India at the time of the temple-entry campaign was very high. Although Gandhi had the opportunity to spread his views to more Indians than in earlier campaigns, the scope of Indians was still largely dependent on literate Indians.

vi) Opposition

A group within orthodox Hindu community called *sanatanists* showed their opposition to Gandhi's religious views through the media and demonstrations. Gandhi defined *sanatanists* as a devoted following of the four holy books of Hinduism and highly regarded in the Hindu community. The *sanatanists* claimed that Gandhi was a renegade influenced by Christianity and Islam and that his actions were more equal to that of an atheist than of a Hindu: "I solemnly warn you that you do not appear to be acting as a God-fearing Hindu; and although you may succeed in forcing the entry of the untouchables into our temples all honest sanatanists will always regard your act as a sacrilegious deed becoming an atheist."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Parel, "Symbolism in Gandhian Politics", p. 525. Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, pp. 39-40.

⁷⁸ Coward, "Gandhi, Ambedkar and Untouchability", pp. 52-53.

⁷⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 417.

Ironically, Gandhi himself was a self-proclaimed *sanatanist*, with the reservation of only adhering to the message of the *Gita*.⁸⁰ The group claimed that Gandhi was distorting Hinduism by promoting his views and campaigning for the untouchables.⁸¹ In their view, Gandhi was not religious enough. Gandhi, however, insisted that the issue between him and the *sanatanists* was based on a misunderstanding:

Those who claim to be sanatanists have put themselves in a state of rage as if I was about to violate all that is good in Hinduism, and they have rendered themselves incapable, first, of understanding what I am after, and then, of knowing what they are attacking. I can safely say that no two letters from among the mass of letters I am receiving from sanatanists have agreed about the definition of untouchability. They either swear at me or enter into argument that has no bearing on the subject. All this cannot be good for sanatan dharma. The correspondence I am having is to me a painful sign of decadence of Hinduism.⁸²

Gandhi thereby pointed out that there were differences among *sanatanists* of what their differences with Gandhi were and how they viewed untouchables. According to other correspondence, however, the *sanatanists* did not deny that untouchables had been wronged. As Gandhi presented it, *sanatanists* just did not want to include untouchables with caste Hindus, nor share temples with them:

Almost every letter that I have received from the sanatanists makes these startling admissions:

1. We admit that there is much to be done for the amelioration of the condition of the Harijans;
2. We admit that many caste Hindus are ill-treating the Harijans;
3. We admit that their children should receive education and that they should have better quarters to live in;
4. We admit that they should have proper arrangement for bathing and drawing water for them-selves;
5. We admit that they should have full political rights;
6. We admit that they should have ample facilities for worship and
7. We admit that they should have all the civic rights that the others have.

⁸⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 362.

⁸¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 329.

⁸² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 225.

But, say these Sanatanists, “we must not be compelled to touch them or associate with them, especially whilst they are in their present condition.”⁸³

Sanatanists, according to their correspondence with Gandhi and publications in newspapers, did not oppose the attempt of untouchables to obtain civil rights. From this and other letters, their problem was simply that they did not want themselves or the temples they attended to become impure. Untouchables could, in their opinion, have their own temples and do their worship there without polluting anyone.⁸⁴ This was contrary to Gandhi’s view of religion: It was the caste-Hindus who had imposed the cruelties and restrictions on the untouchables, and it was therefore they who had to cleanse themselves by accepting untouchables into their temples.⁸⁵

A possible solution to the problem of impurity was promoted by Gandhi: since untouchables were to be integrated as temple-goers they had to become pure. If untouchables purified themselves by conforming to the rules of the temple (normally cleanliness included prayer, outwardly hygienic cleanliness and becoming a vegetarian), a purification ceremony could be held for temple-goers before they entered the temple. By so doing, no one would be untouchable or impure and thereby defile the temple.⁸⁶ *Sanatanists* caused trouble Gandhi and his followers in Guruvayur, in the nation-wide temple-entry campaign and also later in the anti-untouchability tour of 1933-1934. He did not convince them as a group of his religious vision for the Indian society.

There were other important groups within Indian society that did not understand or opposed Gandhi’s religious vision. Though there was support for the initiatives made by Gandhi, untouchables did not understand him. Many untouchables considered themselves separate from caste Hindus and as a minority together with Muslims, Buddhists and Christians. Before the temple-entry campaign had begun, Gandhi had single-handedly halted a new law allowing untouchables separate electorates claiming that untouchables should stay as part of the Hindu community, causing uproar among untouchable groups in India.⁸⁷ The electoral right was viewed by untouchables, including Ambedkar, as a step in the process of removing untouchability and gaining rights equal to that of caste-Hindus.⁸⁸

⁸³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 129, 351, 357.

⁸⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, pp. 129-130.

⁸⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 398, 423-424.

⁸⁷ Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, p. 50. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 249-250. Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt, *The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*. (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2004), pp. 20-21.

⁸⁸ Bhim Rao Ambedkar, *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, pp. 13-17.

In contrast to Gandhi's view, Ambedkar and his followers believed that untouchability had to be abolished by giving untouchables the same opportunities as caste-Hindus politically, economically and socially. By gaining civil rights, the caste-system could no longer hold the untouchables down – they would be protected by the law.⁸⁹ Gandhi's belief, on the other hand, was that having civil rights would mean little if the system by which the untouchables had been downtrodden had not been reformed. In Gandhi's view, it was the caste Hindus who had to abolish untouchability and reinvent themselves because of their cruelty towards the untouchables.⁹⁰

Ambedkar questioned Gandhi's intentions towards the untouchables by asking "how can they believe him to be their friend when he wishes to retain caste and abolish untouchability, it being quite clear that untouchability is only an extended form of caste and that therefore without abolition of caste there is no hope of abolition of untouchability?"⁹¹ For Ambedkar, Gandhi's religious vision did not include what was best for the untouchables, namely equal civil rights, but sought to retain the caste-system – a system Ambedkar believed had to be eradicated.⁹²

We have already seen that Gandhi wanted to retain the caste-system, yet without the distinctions of high and low. Another important point with Gandhi's view of religion is that he claimed that it was universalistic. Gandhi himself interpreted his religious views in this way:

My Hinduism is all-inclusive. It is not anti-Mussalman, anti-Christian or anti-anyother-religion. But it is pro-Mussalman, pro-Christian and pro-every other-living faith in the world. To me, Hinduism is but one branch from the same parent trunk, whose roots and whose quality we judge only by the collective strength and quality of the different branches put together, and if I take care of the Hindu branch on which I am sitting and which sustains me surely I am taking care also of the sister branches.⁹³

It was of no consequence to him that there were millions of Indians – a large number of them untouchables – who were of other faiths than Hinduism. Every religion was tied together to one universal truth.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ambedkar, *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, pp. 9-13. Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, pp. 56-57.

⁹⁰ Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, pp. 54-55. Patankar and Omvedt, *The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*, p. 21. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2006), pp. 13-14. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 164.

⁹¹ Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, p. 22.

⁹² Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, p. 41.

⁹³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 72.

⁹⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 88, 72.

The anthropologist F. G. Bailey explains that Gandhi believed that Truth cannot be imposed; it cannot be the product of power and political action; its provenance can only be an inner sense of morality; Everyman must be his own controller – literally so, in the concept of swaraj. When Everyman, whatever be his ‘sectarian’ religion (to use Gandhi’s term) – Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Parsi, Christian, Jew, or whatever else – comes freely to know and accept Truth, the problem of violence and disorder has been solved.⁹⁵

Gandhi believed that the search for truth was a common denominator for all religions. Focusing on the untouchables and their access to temples was not done in an attempt to exclude parts of Indian society, but merely fixing one of the religious branches of India so that the tree could become whole again. Gandhi thereby attempted to gather Indian society by relating that issues within Hinduism affected other religions as well.

III The Campaign

i) From Guruvayur to all of India

There were many, including co-workers, prominent politicians and religious groups, who voiced their scepticism when Gandhi in 1932 announced that he would forfeit a civil disobedience-campaign and concentrate on opening one temple, namely Guruvayur in Kerala, to untouchables.⁹⁶ Shifting from a campaign for the Indian people against the colonial power to a campaign with a religious motive focusing on the internal issues created polarisations in Indian society.

The difference between the earlier campaigns and the temple-entry campaign was that while the previous campaigns all had signs of religiosity, they were first and foremost political and were arranged by Gandhi in cooperation with the Indian National Congress. The temple-entry movement, in opposition to this, was private in the sense that it was based on Gandhi’s personal interpretation of religion and put into motion by Gandhi and his associates – with no official political backing.⁹⁷

The temple-entry movement began with Mr Kelappan, an associate of Gandhi devoted to the promotion of untouchables, asking Gandhi to join him in a fast to force open the

⁹⁵ F. G. Bailey, *God-Botherers and other True-Believers: Gandhi, Hitler and the Religious Right*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 42.

⁹⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, pp. 361-362.

⁹⁷ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, pp. 152-155. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928-1934*, p. 109, 111, 118, 123. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 58, p. 146. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*, Volume 59, p. 383.

Guruvayur temple in Kerala to untouchables in September 1932.⁹⁸ Taking over the project, Gandhi postponed Kelappan's fast by three months – to January 1933 – stating that he had not given sufficient warning of his fast: according to Gandhi the people involved, both temple-goers, protesters and untouchables, had to be given more information and be able to act on this information before any fasting was to be undertaken.⁹⁹ Kelappan, on the other hand, believed that the ten month *Satyagraha* that had started in 1930 should have been warning enough: “I believe my fast has roused the public and if continued will shortly bring the fight to victory. In my opinion, my stopping the fast would set back the movement.”¹⁰⁰ With public discussions in the media, much of it owed to Gandhi's interest in the temple being expressed in the newspapers, Kelappan had to submit to Gandhi's wishes and postpone the fast. By asking Gandhi to participate, Kelappan had to postpone his fast – and ultimately abandon it – but what he gained was national attention and the catalyst for the whole temple-entry movement.¹⁰¹

What was done in the three months before the scheduled fast? First, Gandhi's newspaper *Harijan* and others were used for the spreading of Gandhi's view on untouchability and the intention of opening the temple in Guruvayur to many parts of the subcontinent.¹⁰² Although Gandhi was in gaol, the *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* shows that he corresponded with religious and political leaders, gave interviews to regional, national and international newspapers and published both his own views and critiques of them.

Second, Gandhi's organisation *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (Servants of the Untouchables' Society) and other supporters around the country began spreading information on temple-entry and the abolition of untouchability on a local level in an attempt to open other temples for untouchables.¹⁰³ The organisation created its own constitution stating the goals of the organisation and the organisational structure. The object of the organisation was “the eradication by truthful and non-violent means of untouchability in Hindu society.”¹⁰⁴ In furtherance of the object, it was to establish contact with caste Hindus in every part of India and explain the cruelty of untouchability and the distortion of Hinduism.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 125. 127.

⁹⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 131.

¹⁰⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 131.

¹⁰¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 158.

¹⁰² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 114, 202, 400.

¹⁰³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 429, 451-452. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 473-475. Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 473.

¹⁰⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 474.

The organisation itself was to be managed by a Central Board, with annual meetings, and a president re-elected every three years. The Central Board was to appoint leaders of regional branches of the *Sangh* who – in turn – could select members to its own Provincial Board. The Provincial Board had the liberty to organise meetings as often as necessary, with the minimum limit of once every three months.¹⁰⁶ The funds of both the Central and Provincial Boards were to be collected from caste-Hindus and utilised in the campaign for the betterment of the untouchables. Every member of the organisation had to sign a form vowing not to treat untouchables as inferior. Untouchables were welcome in the organisation, but they had to sign another version of the oath where they swore to follow the constitution of the *Sangh* and do its bidding.¹⁰⁷

Gandhi had insisted that “the fast will be only to open that temple [Guruvayur] and no other”¹⁰⁸, but that his attention to one temple did not mean that “no other effort should be made about opening the other temples.”¹⁰⁹ Guruvayur, therefore, became the model for a temple-entry movement which gained importance not only through the media, but also by the local initiative by Gandhi’s supporters which enabled Hindus to personally connect to the campaign.

Third, Gandhi’s organisation went to Guruvayur to gather support for temple-entry and to collect information from the temple-goers there about the situation and of the campaign.¹¹⁰ Pressure increased in Guruvayur as reports of other temples being opened started flowing in by the end of January. The first report was short and precise, stating that “Koteshwaram Mahadev temple near Kuzithurai in South Travancore was opened to the Harijans.”¹¹¹

Wanting results, Gandhi organised a referendum to be held in Guruvayur on the temple-entry issue. Because, “even if people all over the country were in favour of the entry of the untouchables into the temple of Guruvayur and the actual temple-goers to the Guruvayur Temple opposed it, he would abide by the decision of the Guruvayur people themselves.”¹¹² He was not the first to think of a referendum, however, and results of several different referendums surfaced with varying results.¹¹³ As to the people who claimed that a referendum would show that caste-Hindus were against temple-entry by untouchables, Gandhi

¹⁰⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 474, 477.

¹⁰⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 476-478.

¹⁰⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 475.

¹⁰⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 386.

¹¹⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 447

¹¹¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 150.

¹¹² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 69.

¹¹³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 70.

insisted that “these correspondents have given me no proof in support of their opinion, whereas others say that they have actually taken referendum after their own fashion and found it to be in favour of temple-entry by Harijans.”¹¹⁴ Holding a referendum that would convince the sceptics that untouchables indeed were accepted by the temple-goers was not an easy task.

To ensure that the results of the referendum would be irrefutable, Gandhi set strict limitations to who could vote and in what way: only caste-Hindus who actually went to the temple and lived within a ten mile radius could vote. The voters had to sign their names, state their occupation, age and sex in front of witnesses so that the opposition could have no point on which to quarrel.¹¹⁵ The referendum was completed and won in December, but not without difficulty. Before the referendum was taken, Gandhi had already contemplated undergoing a fast of “penance and purification”.¹¹⁶ He had also had made it clear that if the temple-goers voted against him, he would postpone his fast with the belief that Indian society was not yet ready for the campaign.¹¹⁷ This meant that Gandhi was going to fast if the referendum was won. Because of Gandhi’s personal importance to India, his supporters were afraid that people would vote against Gandhi and the campaign in an effort to stop Gandhi from suffering by undertaking the fast.¹¹⁸

What he did not highlight was the fact that the referendum was not of any consequence to either the voters or the untouchables. “The principal use of Guruvayur referendum is for the satisfaction of my own conscience. I want to be quite clear that the majority of those who live in the neighbourhood of Guruvayur are in favour of temple-entry by Harijans.”¹¹⁹ The majority in the referendum was fifty five per cent, which technically proved that a majority of caste-Hindus in fact was for the temple-entry campaign.¹²⁰ But what difference could the Guruvayur referendum make? It had been personally initiated by Gandhi, was based on religious grounds and Gandhi had no authority to act on the result in a legal context. As a result, the emphasis shifted from focusing only on Guruvayur to include all public temples in India. After reflecting on the campaign and the difficulties he and his supporters had to overcome, Gandhi’s fast was indefinitely postponed in spite of his previous statements.¹²¹

Connecting the referendum to Gandhi’s goal of gathering Indian society, it is possible to see that although the referendum did not have any legal effect on the opening of the temple

¹¹⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 69.

¹¹⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 44, 62, 78.

¹¹⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 286.

¹¹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 129, 281.

¹¹⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 190.

¹¹⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 281.

¹²⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, pp. 308-309.

¹²¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 347.

in Guruvayur, it had the possibility of being a psychological one. Showing Indians in other parts of the subcontinent that the majority in Guruvayur were for temple-entry could encourage Indians who were in doubt about Gandhi and his campaign to act or support him.

ii) Opposition

What is important to understand, is that Gandhi and his associates were facing problems on many levels: Religiously, there were many who claimed that untouchability was an integral part of Hindu religion and that untouchables were unclean and would contaminate temples and those in them if admitted.¹²² *Sanatanists* expressed their belief that Gandhi was set on destroying Hinduism. Gandhi received articles published by *sanatanists* in which they attempted to prove to Indians that Gandhi was bent on destruction: “Many of them are distortions, some of them are half-quotations, and some are so contrary to what I have written as to amount to libel.”¹²³ In one instance, an article stated that Gandhi thought the Hindu texts to be rubbish and thereby showed disregard for Hinduism:

I have not had many occasions to speak or write about the *Mahabharata*, and when I did write about it I compared it to a diamond mine, whereas I compared the *Gita* to a diamond chest [...] at the present moment, for sanatanists, whether they are big men or small men, any stone is good enough to fling at me.¹²⁴

In another example, excerpts from Gandhi’s writings were published in Gujarat and North India stating that “the Shastras are the production of hypocrites” and “I regard a Bhangi [untouchable] to be superior to a Brahman.”¹²⁵ Gandhi’s impression was that the *sanatanists* tried to make him the embodiment of everything anti-Hindu in an effort to protect their idea of Hinduism and prevent temple-entry.¹²⁶

Legally, there were not any laws that secured untouchables’ rights in connection to temples. There were, however, regional laws interpreted to mean that certain castes could not enter temples: in the Bengal Census report of 1931, high-ranking caste-Hindus claimed that a law from 1809 made it illegal for untouchable castes to enter – but what was omitted was that a law from 1840 had repealed it in its entirety.¹²⁷ Gandhi was under local pressure from the *Zamorin* of Calicut, the trustee of temples in the area and descendant of Kerala royalty. While

¹²² Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*, p. 48, 51. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, pp. 118-119.

¹²³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 388.

¹²⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 150.

¹²⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 375.

¹²⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 375-376.

¹²⁷ Jatindra Mohon Datta, “Further Inaccuracies in the Bengal and Calcutta Census Reports of 1931” in *The Indian Journal of Statistics (1933-1960)*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1942, p. 327.

expressing sympathy for the cause, the *Zamorin* referred to legal issues that would prevent untouchables from entering the Guruvayur temple, and thereby halting the campaign.¹²⁸

Nationally, Gandhi was still affiliated with the Indian National Congress. Because of his earlier campaigns, people associated Gandhi with politics and had difficulties understanding his fast based on a religious issue.¹²⁹ Although Gandhi expressed that “those who think that temple-entry has anything to do with Congress politics are wholly mistaken,”¹³⁰ the National Congress still supported both the anti-untouchability campaign and the temple-entry movement. There were forces within the Indian National Congress, including Jawaharlal Nehru, who believed that politics should stay secular and not include religious aspects such as fasting. This view did not gain much momentum in the general population at the time, and the National Congress began suggesting bills where untouchables could enter temples legally.¹³¹

Connecting Gandhi’s history of affiliation to the Indian National Congress to the temple-entry campaign, it is not difficult to see that some participants still had the impression that Gandhi was connected to national politics. After all, Gandhi had been the protagonist in a number of campaigns together with the Indian National Congress – including a civil disobedience campaign started in 1930 and ended before the beginning of the temple-entry campaign.¹³²

Dr. P. Subbaroyan was a politician who suggested such a bill in the Madras Legislative Assembly in November of 1932. Its aim was “to empower the Hindu residents in any locality to secure an alteration by a majority vote in the established practice regarding the admission of untouchables in the local temple”¹³³ The bill did not become a law, however, after several orthodox Hindu organisations and the *Sanatanists* claimed that politics and religion should be separated and that the Madras Legislative Assembly had no authority to pass a law on religious matters. They considered it a “breach of neutrality” in politics. The same organisations insisted, in contradiction with Gandhi’s view, that temple-entry had nothing to do with the uplifting of the untouchables.¹³⁴ To make their point clear, caste-Hindus with connections to orthodox Hindu organizations later arranged a Temple Defence

¹²⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 158, 394.

¹²⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 384.

¹³⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 383.

¹³¹ Baird, “The Convergence of Distinct Worlds”, pp. 22-23.

¹³² Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, pp. 90-91, 94-95, 100.

¹³³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 129.

¹³⁴ Yagati, *Dalits’ Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad 1900-1950*, (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2003), p. 161. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 307, 309, 313-314.

Day in Madras where they protested against legislative interference in religious matters.¹³⁵ Dr. Subbaroyan's Bill together with the Madras Bill, which we are going to look into in the next problem section, were decisive in the campaign for temple-entry.

iii) Temple-entry across India

With the new year of 1933, Gandhi and his associates widened the scope of the campaign. There were now two goals for the campaign: the first was to open as many temples as possible to Untouchables, and the second was convincing untouchables to conform to the common requisites of temple-entry.¹³⁶ Access to all temples was self-explanatory in that it was a logical continuation of the campaign for opening the Guruvayur-temple, but there was one thing that has to be taken into consideration before continuing with the campaign: temples were not uniform.

The temple in Guruvayur was a public temple, open to caste-Hindus in the community. A private temple, on the other hand, was built by one person or group and therefore the owners could select who could and could not enter the temple.¹³⁷ No potential law could affect the private temples. If the owner wanted untouchables to enter the temple, not law could prevent him. If the owner did not want them to enter, a law could not force him to do so.¹³⁸ With the public temples, a law positive to temple-entry would have to be followed. But since there was no such law, taking a referendum or convincing caste-Hindus that untouchables had equal right to enter temples could change the environ, but could not get untouchables into other temples.¹³⁹ As a consequence, the temple-entry campaign was mainly focused on opening private temples all over India.¹⁴⁰

As to the second goal of having untouchables conform to the religious rules of the temples, Gandhi and his followers were in favour of the untouchables being accepted into temples on the pre-existing conditions. Since, as we have seen earlier, Gandhi believed that there was no such thing as untouchability by birth, every Hindu could rid himself of impurity. Purity could be achieved by not consuming beef or carrion, to take daily absolutions and to

¹³⁵ Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, pp. 191-192.

¹³⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 379, 398.

¹³⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 202, 222, 334.

¹³⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 347. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p.184.

¹³⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 47, 304-305. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 20, 303.

¹⁴⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 423-424.

wear clean clothes.¹⁴¹ Gandhi proclaimed that untouchables should accept the views of caste-Hindus and convince them of the right to temple-entry through conformity and adaptation:

If you are polluted by my presence or by my touch, I am quite prepared to consent to a separate period being reserved for you to offer worship by yourselves and give you the same credit for sincerity that I claim for myself. You are as much entitled to worship in the temple as I think I am. Therefore you offer worship in your time, and I shall offer worship, along with the reformers, during the period reserved for us, and since by tradition you have been taught to think that the efficacy of the idol is diminished by my entering the portals of the temple gate, though I do not believe in it myself, let the priest perform the purification ceremony.¹⁴²

Gandhi and his followers, the main component being the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* with its provincial branches, therefore propagated cleanliness, sending reformers – including a large number of students – to different towns and villages. This meant that the focus was no longer only on the temples, but on how the lives of the untouchables would have to change in order to gain access to them.¹⁴³

In January of 1933, Gandhi was still in gaol where he gathered information on the progress of the temple-entry campaign. Reports from supporters all over India were flowing in telling of open temples and the purification of untouchables. By the end of January, Gandhi estimated that no less than five hundred temples had been opened up to untouchables.¹⁴⁴

Politically, there was a new bill presented to the legislative assembly of the Madras Presidency called the Madras Bill. It contained several of Gandhi's suggestions, such as organising a referendum in every temple the untouchables wanted to enter, thereby letting the majority decide.¹⁴⁵ Untouchability from birth was also to be abolished, giving untouchables the same rights in the use of public facilities like wells, roads and schools. The fact that temples were closed to untouchables was described in the draft text as a "social disability imposed by custom" that had to be removed by Hindu leaders where the opinion was ripe.¹⁴⁶

The passing of the Madras Bill was of such importance to Gandhi that in early February he proclaimed that in addition to the two goals of the temple-entry movement, the bill would be added as a third goal. Gandhi believed that "if the Bills are not passed, it is

¹⁴¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 398.

¹⁴² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, pp. 430-431.

¹⁴³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 398, *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p.177.

¹⁴⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 442, *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 201.

¹⁴⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 129.

¹⁴⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 94-97. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 267.

obvious that the central part of the reform will be hung up almost indefinitely.”¹⁴⁷ Meetings were to be held all over the country urging the Government of India to provide all facilities in their power for the consideration of the Bill and appealing to the members of the House not to obstruct it. Their appeal should be that the Bill did not interfere with anybody’s private faith and that it would be liberating because it would provide Hindu conscience with “complete freedom of action regarding untouchability.”¹⁴⁸ The Madras Bill was regarded as a modification of Dr. Subbaroyan’s bill, but they both suffered the same fate. Though it did not become a law, it proved that Gandhi and his followers believed a law would help them and that there was political sympathy for the religious temple-entry movement.¹⁴⁹

The newspaper *Harijan* had had an essential role in publishing articles in favour of the opening of the temple in Guruvayur in addition to spreading Gandhi’s views. With the new national temple-entry movement, *Harijan* was given an even larger role as Gandhi’s mouthpiece. In addition to the English, Hindi and Gujarati versions of the paper, arrangements were made to publish the newspaper in Bengali, Marathi and Tamil –thereby not only covering larger areas of the country geographically, but also larger parts of the literate population.¹⁵⁰ But there was one hiccup: although the newspaper was published in larger areas, the newspaper had problems being spread in the south of India. The reformers in northern India, therefore, could get more information on the campaign in other corners of the subcontinent.¹⁵¹

Another attempt to make the removal of untouchability known was made by Gandhi in April, namely the proclamation of Harijan Day. Harijan Day was supposed to be a day with greater dedication, prayer and intensive work for the cause – arranged once every month or every six weeks. In places where work for the untouchables was not possible, the day should be spent collecting money for the untouchable cause.¹⁵²

The day was topped by Gandhi announcing a twenty one-day fast on behalf of untouchables, believing that the campaign alone was not going to remove untouchability:

It will not be eradicated by money, external organization and even political power for Harijans, though all these three are necessary. But to be effective, they must follow or at

¹⁴⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 231.

¹⁴⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, pp. 176-177.

¹⁴⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 95.

¹⁵⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 377.

¹⁵¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 231.

¹⁵² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 309, 376, 446.

least accompany inward wealth, inward organization and inward power, in other words, self-purification.¹⁵³

The fast provided the climax of the temple-entry movement. Not only did Gandhi fast for three consecutive weeks, but he also stopped writing articles or doing interviews. The fact that Gandhi did not communicate also causes an informational gap in the temple-entry campaign. The information on his actual fast, therefore, is scarce.

Gandhi had stated earlier in the campaign that supporters were dependent on the information given in the press. By his fasting, the campaign was no longer run by Gandhi himself, but by his organisation and all of its regional branches.¹⁵⁴ Before undertaking the fast, Gandhi wrote of what he hoped it would result in an increased interest in the Harijan cause and that the *Sanatanists* and reformers would unite for one common goal, namely the abolition of untouchability.¹⁵⁵

There was yet another reason for undertaking the fast. It was not only the focus of the organisation that was beginning to falter, but also that of the whole campaign. Reading Gandhi's articles in the newspapers makes the temple-entry campaign seem uniform with one common goal. This was not the case: studying the different private letters between Gandhi and his supporters, we discover that a deviation had occurred in South India and then mainly areas that now consist of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

One very important point here is that the caste-system worked differently in the south of India compared to other areas. While Gandhi's temple-entry campaign centred on getting untouchables into the temples and becoming accepted by the four *varnas*, the social and religious restrictions of the south were linked to being either Brahman or non-Brahman.¹⁵⁶ The high caste non-Brahmans never equated themselves with untouchables. Instead, they advised untouchables to get rid of their stigmatised identity themselves. Historically, it had been Brahmans that had been of service to the untouchables and not the other caste-Hindus.¹⁵⁷

Logically, the temple-entry campaign would not fit into the social context of South India as it had in North India. Gandhi had calculated that ninety per cent of the population in the south could be called untouchables as they had many of the same restrictions.¹⁵⁸ His explanation for this was that "untouchability works nowhere so cruelly as in the South. That

¹⁵³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 38.

¹⁵⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 135.

¹⁵⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 207.

¹⁵⁷ Uma Ramaswami, "The Belief System of the Non-Brahmin Movement in India: the Andhra Case" in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 296-297.

¹⁵⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 207, 474.

in the South all the non-Brahmans are not classed as untouchables has a historical reason. But in its working it is the same, whether you call them untouchables or not.”¹⁵⁹ Since he regarded the non-Brahmans as untouchables, Gandhi’s religious vision could be put into motion in the south as well as the rest of the subcontinent. In addition, Gandhi’s belief in equality and the removal of ’high’ and ’low’ was just as imperative in the south as elsewhere.

Even though Gandhi showed that he preferred uniformity in the temple-entry movement - and claimed that the campaign was against untouchability and not Brahmanism - it adapted somewhat to the social and religious conditions of the south.¹⁶⁰ In the south, the focus of the reformers was not on caste-Hindus (which were the majority in the rest of India), but on the Brahmans (a minority consisting only of 3 per cent of the total population).¹⁶¹ A letter sent from a distressed reformer in Bengal said that

The anti-untouchability movement in certain parts of the country has degenerated into a vile and violent propaganda against Brahminism and all that it stands for. Misleading half-truths and deliberate untruths are being assiduously circulated in order to lower the Brahmans as a class in the estimation of the general public.¹⁶²

Gandhi spoke in favour of Brahmanism, calling it unadulterated wisdom. He even insisted that if Brahmanism faltered, Hinduism would falter with it and eventually die.¹⁶³

Reports from Gandhi’s supporters in the south stated that a split in the temple-entry movement would come if Gandhi did not intervene:

My reading of the situation in Cochin and Travancore is that there will be a most unhappy split if temple-entry for Harijans is your next step, unless people are convinced that the *tapasya* [personal endeavor or discipline] you have performed has endowed you with the power to understand our temples. Even non-caste Hindus are not convinced that you are completing the work of Shri Narayana Guru, because he built them separate temples. I humbly beg you to visit personally a temple or two in Kerala with Malaviyaji, if possible.¹⁶⁴

The threat of a split shows that Gandhi did not have total control over the campaign. Although the split never occurred because the campaign ended, the fact is that Gandhi refused to act because his organisation to his knowledge did not have anything to do with the

¹⁵⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 336.

¹⁶⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 217.

¹⁶¹ Ramaswami, “The Belief System of the Non-Brahmin Movement in India: the Andhra Case”, p. 291.

¹⁶² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 147.

¹⁶³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, pp. 147-148.

¹⁶⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, pp. 285-286.

deviation in the campaign.¹⁶⁵ His advice was for the educated people of the south to spread his view of Hinduism and rid the area of the evils keeping Hindus out of the temples.¹⁶⁶ The example of South India shows that there were weak points in the temple-entry campaign which were not mended. It also shows that participants had difficulties in following Gandhi's instructions even if they were convinced of his religious views because of Gandhi's emphasis on a uniform campaign.

When Gandhi returned after the twenty one-day fast, the temple-entry campaign ebbed out in favour of an all-encompassing campaign for the eradication of untouchability. Plans were made for Gandhi's travelling campaign and the question of opening the temple in Guruvayur and other temples suddenly seemed to be in the background and no longer imperative.¹⁶⁷ What had happened? To understand this, we have to recognise the problems facing Gandhi and his supporters in the campaign. But first we are going to look at some examples of the temple-entry campaign in India and see how Gandhi's vision affected them. This will also help highlight problems with the campaign.

iv) Regional examples of the campaign

Movements for the advancement of untouchables had emerged in different parts of India in the late nineteenth century. The anthropologist Mason Olcott tells of one group that benefited from Gandhi's campaign was untouchables in Travancore, Malabar and South Kanara. They had gathered around a religious leader named Sri Narayana Guruswami, who had created his own version of Hinduism. Followers had built their own temples and had their own priests, but were still tightly connected to the Hindu religion.¹⁶⁸ When the campaigns for the opening of the Guruvayur temple began, the religious group was not only barred from entering the temple, but they were in addition forced to stay three hundred feet away from it. Olcott reported in 1944 that Gandhi's campaign had a profound effect on the untouchable group, and that "as a result of the passive resistance and suffering of nationalist Hindus, the state temples of Travancore were opened to all cleanly dressed Hindus. Temples in the Madras Presidency have also been thrown open."¹⁶⁹ According to Olcott's example, Gandhi's campaign was significant in that the group had gone from religious exclusion to inclusion in temples.

¹⁶⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, pp. 147-148.

¹⁶⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 286.

¹⁶⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 353-354, 401.

¹⁶⁸ Mason Olcott, "The Caste System of India" in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 9, No. 6 (Dec., 1944), pp. 653-654.

¹⁶⁹ Olcott, "The Caste System of India", p. 653.

The historian Chinna Rao Yagati, on the other hand, describes Gandhi's campaigns as both inspirational and destructive. In what is now Andhra and Hyderabad, the Adi-Andhra movement, an organisation with a largely rural base and consisting mainly of untouchables, had worked for the rights of untouchables all through the 1920s.¹⁷⁰ With the Gandhian temple-entry campaign and the spread of the organisation *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, untouchables who had been active in the Adi-Andhra movement joined the *Sangh* in the hopes of it having a greater impact on society. The engagement in the *Sangh* was increased enormously when Gandhi personally propagated for the organisation and collected funds for it in 1933.¹⁷¹ The branch was financed by the central organisation and the work for opening temples, and in the same process opening wells and cleaning untouchable localities. This was profitable in the way that they began gaining access to public facilities, but there was one crucial problem: the branch was headed by caste-Hindus.

During the campaign, local newspapers reported that several temples in the area had been open to untouchables. Yagati explains that they were all unsuccessful attempts at temple-entry and that they were of no consequence: In some cases where temples had been "thrown open", the untouchables were in fact not allowed to enter the temples themselves, but were only allowed to stand by the gate. In other cases, local caste-Hindus had wanted untouchables to enter the temples, only to be barred from entry by the local priests. In yet other cases, there were so-called "purification" ceremonies for the untouchables with the purpose of making them acceptable for temple-entry.¹⁷²

Although Gandhi and his organisation helped promote the untouchable cause, "caste-Hindu hegemony in the *Sangh* failed to persuade most of their brethren to follow Gandhian ideals in letter and in spirit".¹⁷³ In addition, untouchables – who in the 1920s had participated in several campaigns for the betterment of the untouchables – could not get leading positions in Gandhi's organisation due to the fact that they themselves were untouchables. With more help on a national level, the untouchables were forced to stop leading campaigns and let the caste-Hindus help them.¹⁷⁴ Yagati claims that in a local untouchable community in Andhra they expressed that Gandhi might have had the interest of uplifting the untouchables, but that all caste-Hindus did not share his vision for Indian society. They believed the temple-entry

¹⁷⁰ Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁷¹ Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, p. 160.

¹⁷² Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, pp. 162-163.

¹⁷³ Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, p.162.

¹⁷⁴ Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, pp. 159-162.

campaign to be “more symbolic than real”¹⁷⁵ and that “caste-Hindu hegemony in the *Sangh* failed to persuade caste-Hindus to ‘change their hearts’ and work sincerely for social equality.” As a consequence, the temple-entry campaign did not gather much support among the untouchables of the area.¹⁷⁶

v) Campaign challenges

One thing to have in mind is that India is a large country, and it was even more so in the 1930s. For a national campaign to cover the whole area was unrealistic when we take into consideration both the lack of roads, vehicles and the fact that there were several hundred thousand villages. There was of course an extensive railway system, but although this made more areas available than ever before, it still did not cover large parts of the subcontinent – this also because the colonial power built the railroad with the thought of transporting goods between the bigger cities.¹⁷⁷ Taking that into consideration, it is logical that the cities of India were more involved in the temple-entry campaign than the villages. Firstly, a large part of Gandhi’s followers came from the cities. This was because it was in the cities that Gandhi’s newspapers were sold, it was there that the branches of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* were located and the cities also had a higher rate of literacy.¹⁷⁸ Gandhi had wanted every village to have its own board that organised help for the untouchables, but that was an impossible task due to the number of villages compared to the number of Gandhian supporters.¹⁷⁹

In the summer of 1933 several problems were surfacing. Accusations were published that his organisation did not spend all the funds on the untouchables, but instead spent it on self-promotion or pocketing them.¹⁸⁰ Gandhi’s response was an instruction of how the funds were to be spent and thereby avoid misunderstandings. No more than 20 per cent was to be spent on administration and the remainder on propaganda and work for the untouchables.¹⁸¹ He also published a strict warning to his leaders, saying “let us always remember that severe critics are watching us. If we do everything in a religious spirit, without any reward, our work is bound to tell.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ Yagati, *Dalits’ Struggle for Identity*, p. 162.

¹⁷⁶ Yagati, *Dalits’ Struggle for Identity*, pp. 161-163.

¹⁷⁷ Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) p. 260, 262-264. ¹⁷⁷ Gunnell Cederlöf, *Bonds Lost: Subordination, Conflict and Mobilisation in Rural South India c. 1900-1970*, (Delhi: Rajkamal Electric Press, 1997), p. 3.

¹⁷⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, pp. 244-245.

¹⁷⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 422, 433.

¹⁸⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 430. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, pp. 405-406, 439. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, pp. 90-91, 202-203.

¹⁸¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, pp. 202-203.

¹⁸² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 203.

Investigation into the matter still proves that there were elements that took advantage of the association with the movement. The historian Eugene Irschick explains that

Many of them [politicians] genuinely wanted to change society. Others found that they could become useful and powerful mediators between various government bodies and untouchables... Whatever the specific motives, Congress leaders could stand forth as social champions, and claim the responsibility for the effects of these changes in the position of untouchables.¹⁸³

Although some politicians participated in the campaign sharing Gandhi's need for changing the Indian society, there were politicians who gained from the campaign. Irschick tells of a politician in what is now Tamil Nadu named T.S.S. Rajan. He was known for using his untouchable work as the basis for his widening contacts in the area, where he won the 1934 election to the Delhi Legislative Assembly.¹⁸⁴

Another example of such behavior is told by Yagati. He tells of two provincial leaders of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, one a Brahman politician and the other a prominent caste-Hindu reformer. They both worked eagerly for the untouchables' access to temples in different parts of India. Simultaneously, however, they were preventing untouchables from entering temples in their own areas by warning both temple-leaders of their activity and having the police contain the untouchables within their own neighbourhood – in addition to making threats of boycotting them if they tried to enter temples forcibly.¹⁸⁵ Irschick and Yagati thereby provide examples that can be connected to the argument that there were participants in the campaign that did not follow all of Gandhi's instructions and instead followed their own goals.

Irschick adds that the relationship between untouchables and caste-Hindu landlords in Tamil Nadu continued to be bad for the next half century and that there were massive conversions to Islam in the area as a result of inequality. But, although the campaign did not alter the relationship between them, it aided in the process.¹⁸⁶ Irschick also found evidence that suggested that the opening of temples for untouchables was in large part not necessarily dependent on the force of feeling among the untouchables or their leaders, but on the factional alignments of those in control of access to temples. He therefore concluded that the effort for temple-entry in Tamil Nadu was not due to an ideal that the untouchables should gain

¹⁸³ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, (Madras: Cre-A, 1986), pp. 162-163.

¹⁸⁴ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p. 164.

¹⁸⁵ Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, pp. 163-165.

¹⁸⁶ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p. 259.

entrance to temples, but rather based on pragmatism where individuals knew how to take advantage of the ideology itself.¹⁸⁷

There was another important problem with the campaign: people supporting Gandhi's campaign were suffering, mostly from isolation or boycott. The most popular ways of boycotting the reformers were performed by Brahmans: they simply refused to perform services in the villages the reformers visited, including burials and marriages, to make it clear that they were against the campaign.¹⁸⁸ In other cases, the castes to which the reformers belonged boycotted them and their families.¹⁸⁹ In yet other cases, untouchables were boycotted. Caste Hindus would not accept their services, which meant that untouchables would suffer economically from the campaign.¹⁹⁰ Physical abuse of the untouchables who were in favour of temple-entrance was also a common occurrence.¹⁹¹

Gandhi's response was that reformers had to suffer the consequences of the boycott for the cause.¹⁹² He had one exception to this rule, however. In cases where untouchables were suffering over a long period of time from the campaign, the reformers would have to leave the area in question, believing that it was a sign that the area was not ripe for reform.¹⁹³ The reformers were met with a lot of local resistance, as is obvious through the examples. Yet, they could leave the affected areas if too many local issues prevented them from working for the untouchables.

Because of the sheer size of the temple-entry campaign, it must have been difficult for Gandhi to lead a uniform campaign with one common goal. As we have seen with the examples of the temple-entry campaign, variations in the campaign occurred. Gandhi's organisation, however, can be said to have had too much uniformity. There was much malcontent with the fact that untouchables did not have important leading positions in the campaign or in the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*.¹⁹⁴ The problem was one of perception: Gandhi believed wholeheartedly that caste-Hindus should have to pay for the sin of untouchability, and one of the ways of doing this was through joining his organisation and devoting oneself to the untouchable cause. The name of his organisation in English is *Servants of the Untouchables Society*. He believed the organisation to be of servants of untouchables, not

¹⁸⁷ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, pp. 259-260.

¹⁸⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 432, 435.

¹⁸⁹ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p. 164

¹⁹⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 368, 386, 400.

¹⁹¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, pp. 448-449. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 387.

¹⁹² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 433. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 465.

¹⁹³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 58, p. 282. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 401.

¹⁹⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, pp. 400-401.

leaders in any way. In his view, untouchables should be advisors to the organisation, because why should the untouchables pay for the sin of untouchability?¹⁹⁵

The untouchable view on this matter varied from being supportive of Gandhi and his campaign to being against it, but one common denominator was that the untouchables did not understand why they could not help bring about reform themselves. In their view, having caste Hindus fighting for their right to temple-entry made them feel helpless and – once again – in an inferior position to the caste Hindus.¹⁹⁶ There was even a conference for untouchables in what is now Rajasthan in March of 1933 where they afterwards sent a letter to Gandhi suggesting that he surrender the campaign to the untouchables and let them rise up on their own accord.¹⁹⁷

Ambedkar was a strong defender of the untouchables improving their own condition without the control of caste-Hindus. He believed that untouchables were “no more than beggars – mere recipients of charity”¹⁹⁸ under Gandhi’s organisation. By having caste-Hindus leading the movement, Ambedkar believed that untouchables would view the organisation as a foreign body set up by caste Hindus with ulterior motives.¹⁹⁹ His solution to the untouchability problem was not that they be allowed into temples by caste Hindus or have a caste Hindu organisation guide them to enter the temples. In stead he believed that the solution was equal civic rights for all Indians and attempting to protect these civic rights.²⁰⁰

Ambedkar together with many untouchables had no faith in the temple-entry campaign. But the decisive factor in the campaign was not Gandhi himself, but those whom he entrusted to help in the fight against untouchability. We saw in the example of Yagati that many untouchables joined Gandhi’s organisation but at the same time were aware of the fact that everyone did not share Gandhi’s beliefs. Ambedkar believed that trusting caste Hindus to spread Gandhi’s beliefs was a mistake because caste Hindus only viewed the campaign as a fad.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 59, p. 476. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 42. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, pp. 242-244.

¹⁹⁶ Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, pp. 41-42.

¹⁹⁸ Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, p. 14.

¹⁹⁹ Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, pp. 14-15.

²⁰⁰ Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, pp. 15-16.

²⁰¹ Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, pp. 24-25.

IV Summary

The Guruvayur temple still remains closed to the untouchables but Mr. Gandhi has not fulfilled his vow on going on fast. Surprising as it may be, he has done nothing to get the temple declared open to the untouchables although it is now thirteen years since he took the vow.²⁰² – B. R. Ambedkar in 1945.

Ambedkar remarks on a very important point: the temple-entry campaign started with the Guruvayur temple and expanded until it covered the Indian subcontinent. New events like a *Harijan* day, fasts, the increase in newspapers, and the expansion of Gandhi's organisation for the abolition of untouchability took the attention away from the humble beginnings of the campaign. What happened to the Guruvayur temple? It was still closed to the untouchables in 1945, thirteen years after Gandhi vowed to get the untouchables into it. The temple still is closed to untouchables and is that the temple is still an arena for controversy.²⁰³

In this chapter I have tried to describe Gandhi's religious vision for the Indian society by discussing his religious views and how he put his vision into motion. There were consequential differences between Gandhi and others in the Indian society, both when it came to religious views and the question of untouchability. Gandhi had a massive following, both because of his previous political campaigns and because of his status as a Mahatma, despite the differences he had with others.

I have also shown that the effects of the campaign varied due to regional differences in religious and social tradition, but also due to availability to the reformers. Irschick writes that "work on the behalf of untouchables had little or no effect on the lives of the untouchables. However, it had a dramatic effect on the fortunes of those who participated in the movement as leaders."²⁰⁴ In Irschick's opinion, the temple-entry movement did not have a notable effect for untouchables. The anthropologist Michael Moffatt, however, relates that in 1939, the larger temples in Tamil Nadu were opened to the untouchables by law. But Moffatt explains that this fact did not mean that untouchables could enter the temples.²⁰⁵ When he wrote his book *An Untouchable Community in South India* in 1979, forty years after the law was passed, there had been a development with regard to untouchables and temples. An untouchable source said that it would not have been possible for him to have gone to a temple

²⁰² Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, p. 13.

²⁰³ R. Krishnakumar, "No to non-Hindus" in *Frontline: India's National Magazine*, Vol. 24, No. 12, Jun. 16-29, 2007.

²⁰⁴ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p. 164.

²⁰⁵ Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, pp.224-225.

served by a Brahmin several generations ago, but that now “times have changed and only money for the Puja service matters to the priests.”²⁰⁶

If the actual temple-entry movement did not in fact lead to the opening of temples nationwide, it did lead to more sympathy towards the untouchable cause and also opened the doors to other attempts at gaining temple-entry in India. There is however one thing we can conclude, and that is that there were many people who were skeptic about the Gandhian temple-entry campaign, to his vision and his way of achieving it. We can also conclude that the attention on temple-entry gained momentum with Gandhi’s participation – whether that be due to his own personal importance or that people actually believed in his religious vision for the Indian society.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, pp. 225-226.

²⁰⁷ Markovits, *The Un-Gandhian Gandhi*, p. 158. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 109, 111, 118, 123. Baird, “The Convergence of Distinct Worlds”, pp. 24-26, 33. Brown, *Prisoner of Hope*, pp. 249-250.

Chapter III: The Travelling Campaign against Untouchability

The work of removal of untouchability is not merely a social or economic reform whose extent can be measured by so much social amenities or economic relief provided in so much time. Its goal is to touch the hearts of the millions of Hindus who honestly believe in the present-day untouchability as a God-made institution, as old as the human race itself.²⁰⁸ – Mohandas K. Gandhi.

I Introduction

When Mahatma Gandhi started his travelling campaign against untouchability in November 1933 he had, together with his organisation the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, already made people in large parts of the subcontinent aware through the temple-entry campaign of the activity mobilised on behalf of untouchables. During the temple-entry campaign Gandhi had spent most of the time in gaol, from where he mobilised and instructed his followers and the literate public through his newspaper *Harijan*. The travelling campaign against untouchability, however, was remarkably different. In addition to spreading his ideas through the newspaper Gandhi and a small entourage visited cities and villages in different parts of India. Over a period of nine months, from November 1933 to August 1934, his group gained supporters and initiated reform through direct contact with the populous.

The most important issue in the travelling campaign was, as in the campaign for temple-entry, “the uplifting” of untouchables. As explained in the previous chapter, Gandhi did not only want to remove untouchability but include these castes in the *Shudra* or servant *varna*. At the same time, he wanted the *varna* system to be a system of equals under God with no high or no low.²⁰⁹ The ultimate goal of the campaign, therefore, was to rid untouchables of obstacles standing in their way of becoming equals.

Irschick adds that Gandhi’s intention with the travelling campaign was also to incorporate India both territorially and socially. This was accomplished in two ways: first, personally travelling around India would create closer ties to his followers in the places he visited –and in addition create opportunities to gather more followers. Second, collecting

²⁰⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 221.

²⁰⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 57, p. 180, 218, 335. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 275, 290. Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability – Fighting the Caste System*, p. 48, 51. Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India*, pp. 32-33.

funds for untouchables both locally and nationally could create a feeling of community by having a common cause.²¹⁰

The efforts in the travelling campaign against untouchability were divided into two main branches: first, there was Gandhi and his entourage who travelled around India in the attempt to remove untouchability. Second, there were supporters in the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and other groups of volunteers who travelled to villages around India independent from Gandhi and his travelling route – but dependent on instructions given through the organisation and the *Harijan*.

As this chapter is on Gandhi's travelling campaign against untouchability, a campaign that was mainly carried out in villages around India, it is important to discern Gandhi's views on rural India, specifically village life. As to the actual campaign, Gandhi spoke of common concerns and acted upon them. In contrast to the structure of the chapter on the temple-entry campaign, I find it necessary to divide the campaign into themes according to the main concerns. This will be done in an effort to make the campaign explicable and also to avoid repetitiveness as Gandhi had a tendency to talk of the same concerns wherever he went in India.

The object of this chapter is to show how Gandhi mobilised Indians through using rhetoric connected to traditional Hindu values. I will explain the most essential of these rhetorical means and also document the responses from participants on Gandhi's mobilising methods and thereby attempt to see the significance of these methods. This will, in turn, support my argument that Gandhi mobilised Indians through a combination of his techniques developed in previous campaigns and his personal influence. Furthermore, the information provided will show that Gandhi attempted to mobilise Indians in spite of the fact that parts of his following either did not understand him or had their own agendas in their participation in the campaign.

II Gandhi's Social Vision

i) Village India

Gandhi is well known for his opposition to values he believed were brought into India by the colonial power. He was strictly opposed to increasing urbanisation and emphasis on material goods, and believed that traditional Indian society consisted of self-supporting villages, a

²¹⁰ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, pp. 165-166.

condition preferable and natural in India.²¹¹ Brown explains that Gandhi believed that villages were the essence of the Indian way of life representing equality and peaceful neighbourliness, an equilibrium disturbed by the spread of the Western influence. This belief, says Brown, is present in much of his social and political programme.²¹²

In 1910, Gandhi wrote in *Hind Swaraj* that

The Indian village has for centuries remained a bulwark against political disorder, and the home of the simple domestic and social virtues. No wonder, therefore, that philosophers and historians have always dwelt lovingly on this ancient institution which is the natural social unit and the best type of rural life: self-contained, industrious, peace-loving, conservative in the best sense of the word.²¹³

Idealising the village as a social unit was not unique in India or the rest of the world. Gandhi was inspired by utopians such as Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin and was convinced that they, like him, believed that the lives of the lowest in society or the workers of the soil were the lives worth living.²¹⁴ During the civil disobedience campaigns of the 1920s, Gandhi translated Ruskin to Gujarati and distributed the work in meetings. As a result, both Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and Ruskin's books were banned by the colonial regime.²¹⁵ Gandhi continued spreading his view of village life and emphasised village reform in the travelling campaign against untouchability. That did not mean that Gandhi's reform was exclusive to villages alone.

Gandhi differentiated between villages and towns or cities in his campaigning. While the campaign in the cities was to concentrate on supplying funds for untouchables by collecting money and subscriptions to the *Harijan* through meetings and house to house canvassing, campaigning in the villages was more difficult.²¹⁶ Gandhi's ultimate goal was for every Indian to be equal and share every service in the villages such as temples, wells, schools and clothes. Gandhi's supporters reported, however, that working in the villages was difficult because they were outnumbered by resisting caste Hindus. A compromise he had not accepted in the campaign for temple-entry was therefore made: there would be room for the creation of separate temples, wells and schools for the untouchables. Gandhi saw the compromise as one step towards equality and his ultimate goal. It gave, in Gandhi's opinion, his organisation and

²¹¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 10, pp. 258-9, 279. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 54 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 247.

²¹² Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 88.

²¹³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 10, p. 315.

²¹⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 43 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 5. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 44 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 313-314.

²¹⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 44, pp. 435-436.

²¹⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 245.

reform workers an advantage as it would be easier to compromise first and change the hearts of caste-Hindus later.²¹⁷

An additional advantage was also that separate structures could create more supporters among orthodox Hindus because they did not have to associate with untouchables. As I showed in the chapter on the temple-entry campaign, protests against untouchables entering temples were often concerned with temple-goers becoming polluted by untouchables. Based on the information presented in both the *MGCW* and other relevant sources, my impression is that Gandhi compromised based on his experience with the temple-entry campaign. In stead of leaping towards equality, it had to be achieved one step at a time.

While Gandhi idealised village society, Coward explains that untouchables – with Ambedkar in the lead – saw villages as places where the social strata of *varnas* were thriving: untouchables were forced to live in separate quarters, often in the outskirts of a village, so as not to pollute caste Hindus. Untouchables had in addition restrictions on movement, apparel, houses, occupation and the acquisition of land.²¹⁸ Ambedkar insisted that “in this traditional village structure, the law is made by the Touchables and the Untouchables have no choice but to accept it and obey. Untouchables have no rights or equality, they can only ask for mercy and be content with what is offered.”²¹⁹ Gandhi’s suggestion of preserving village society was unacceptable to Ambedkar and other untouchables. In their view, untouchables would there remain the subjects of tyranny and oppression. The village system would have to be reformed in order to protect untouchables from abuse.²²⁰

According to this, Ambedkar did not view Gandhi’s initiatives in the villages as reform but as prevention of reform. Ambedkar’s solution was government control of the villages. First, untouchables should be moved from the outskirts of a village and form a separate village away from and independent of other castes. Second, the government should provide land that could be cultivated by untouchables.²²¹ This would enable untouchables to extract themselves from the close-knit association to the caste Hindus in the same village. As Ambedkar explained,

India is admittedly a land of villages and so long as the village system provides an easy method of marking out the Untouchable, the Untouchable has no escape from Untouchability. It is the village system which perpetuates Untouchability and the

²¹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 244, 267.

²¹⁸ Coward “Gandhi, Ambedkar and Untouchability”, p. 41-42.

²¹⁹ Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, p, 43.

²²⁰ Bhim Rao Ambedkar, *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, pp. 8-9.

²²¹ Ambedkar, *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, pp. 8-9.

Untouchables therefore demand that it should be broken and the Untouchables, who are as a matter of fact socially separate should be made separately geographically and territorially also, and be grouped into separate villages exclusively of Untouchables in which the distinction of the high and low and of Touchable and Untouchable will find no place.²²²

One important aspect of Ambedkar's opposition to Gandhi's idealisation of rural India must be mentioned: Ambedkar believed that villages were the place for traditional abuse of untouchables, but he did not discuss the treatment of untouchables in the larger cities on the subcontinent. Coward asserts that the social division between touchable and untouchable was rigid in the modern towns as in the villages, and Pauline Kolenda provides examples that strengthen his claim.²²³ Kolenda explains that in the cities a caste or kin-community helped each other materially and emotionally through providing housing, work and a social base.²²⁴ A caste thereby excluded other castes of kin-communities and retained a pattern of social stratification. However, Kolenda shows that there were changes in urban areas in the 1970s, decades after the travelling campaign. There, rules of purity and impurity were not as strong in public as in villages: "Hindu men are not much concerned with pollution from contact with lower-caste persons in city-streets, in buses or trains, in office, factory or shop. Traditional customs, including rules of purity and pollution, may be followed in the home; but they are largely ignored at work."²²⁵

Though Gandhi idealised the village, he too wanted reform. But, in contradiction to Ambedkar, Gandhi wanted not to modernise the village but to reinstitute what he referred to as a "golden age", a concept he used as part of his rhetoric for explaining his ideal Indian society. On several occasions Gandhi tried to explain his view of the period he called *Satya Yuga* (the age of truth) and what made it desirable. In 1919, he defined the age as the time when "men and women in India spontaneously and automatically spoke only the truth. Women in those days maintained their chastity. In those days even when men and women got together, they did not have lustful thoughts in their minds. That is how things were in the *Satya Yuga* or the Golden Age."²²⁶ In 1925 Gandhi claimed that in the golden age there were no semi-starved millions in the country²²⁷

²²² Ambedkar, *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, p. 19.

²²³ Coward, *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, pp. 43-44.

²²⁴ Pauline Kolenda, *Caste, Cult and Hierarchy*, p. 74, 81.

²²⁵ Kolenda, *Caste, Cult and Hierarchy*, p. 82.

²²⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 19 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 15.

²²⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 32 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 266-267.

Gandhi knew that the idea that there had actually been a “golden age” in India was disputed by historians at the time, among others. According to Gandhi, historians claimed that the age was purely a figment of imagination made up by the minds of poets. Although Gandhi said it was difficult to prove when the period had been and what it had contained, he insisted that such a period had existed: “We had our golden age. We are certainly coming to another cycle which will lead to another golden age.”²²⁸ By following Gandhi’s goals in the campaigns, goals he believed derived from a “golden age”, the Indian population would once again experience an age with no distinction between high and low.²²⁹

The concept of a time called “the golden age”, *Satya Yuga* or *Ramaraj* (the kingdom of Rama) was a well known concept in popular Hinduism. The historian Rosalind O’Hanlon explains that the concept of a “golden age” was to be found among other places in popular poems from the 18th century whose purpose was to defend the Hindu religion from the depredations of the Muslims. A contrast to current India, the “golden age” was a period where the gods were respected, where ascetics performed great feats of penance, ordinary men followed their path of *dharma* or duty, great leaders rose in times of danger and the land itself prospered.²³⁰

Referring to a “golden age” had the potential of aiding the campaign. Connecting familiar concepts to the campaign could make it easier for Hindus in general to relate to Gandhi and his goals and, as a consequence, support the campaign. Although it is difficult to discern the exact effect of using the concept of a “golden age” due to the lack of information in the *MGCW*, Rudolph and Rudolph’s insight into how the method of *satyagraha* effected the civil disobedience campaign in 1931 is important. As written in the introduction of this thesis, Gandhi’s use of *satyagraha* there commanded more popular support and united more national leaders than any other means.²³¹ It is therefore logical that the same line of rhetoric would bring increased support in the travelling campaign against untouchability as well.

Claiming that a “golden age” had existed and that removing untouchability would bring forth a new age of truth was met with opposition even among Gandhi’s supporters. Coward explains that Jawaharlal Nehru, who was to become the first leader of independent India, generally did not like Gandhi’s focus on religion in either politics or his social

²²⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 32, p. 266.

²²⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 32, p. 267. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 39 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 370. Bailey, *God-Botherers and other True-Believers: Hitler, Gandhi and the Religious Right*, pp. 151-152.

²³⁰ Rosalind O’Hanlon *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Phule and low caste protests in nineteenth-century western India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 179-181.

²³¹ Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, p. 30.

campaigns.²³² To him, Gandhi was more focused on the traditional past than the modern present, but that he used a rhetoric that therefore was familiar to the people: “Even some of Gandhi’s phrases sometimes jarred upon me – thus his frequent reference to *Ramaraj* as a golden age which was to return. But I was powerless to intervene, and I consoled myself with the thought that Gandhiji used the words because they were well known and understood by the masses.”²³³ Referring to a previous age of truth was familiar to large parts of the Indian public, something Nehru believed Gandhi used to his advantage. The advantage was of course that in a time with much poverty and injustice, referring to an age where everything was better and promising its return could create greater support.

Nehru’s impression also provides an example of Gandhi’s power of mobilisation. Nehru was sceptical about Gandhi’s methods of mobilisation, in particular his use of religion. However, in spite of their disagreement, Nehru did not protest against Gandhi or his focus. In fact, Coward explains that Nehru supported Gandhi throughout the travelling campaign.²³⁴

ii) Economic reform in the villages

In the decade before the travelling campaign, Gandhi had promoted his view that *khadi* or Indian hand-spun and hand-woven cotton would solve many problems in villages.²³⁵ First, *khadi* was Indian cotton and not imported as other kinds of cotton and it was therefore available to a larger part of the Indian society. Second, spinning cloth and distributing it would provide a second income that was needed in villages, where wages were low and villagers could be without work for up to one third of the year.²³⁶ Third, *khadi* would eliminate the need for cotton mills and foreign goods in the villages. Fourth, wearing *khadi* would mean that there would not be large differences in clothing among villagers. If everyone in addition kept to the rules of religious cleanliness, there would be no outward difference between an untouchable and someone of a higher caste.²³⁷ In 1934 Gandhi exclaimed that his view of *khadi* had not changed since he had first tried to implement the spinning of *khadi* in 1919. On the contrary, he was even more dedicated to promoting *khadi* and claimed that “*khadi* is the only solution for the deep and deepening distress of the untouchables.”²³⁸

²³² Baird, “The Convergence of Distinct Worlds”, pp. 22-23. Rudolph and Rudolph, *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma*, pp. 3-4.

²³³ Baird, “The Convergence of Distinct Worlds”, p. 22.

²³⁴ Baird, “The Convergence of Distinct Worlds”, pp. 22-23.

²³⁵ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 181. Brown, *Gandhi’s Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922*, p. 45.

²³⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 282.

²³⁷ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 203.

²³⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 123.

Khadi has been said by, among others, Brown to be Gandhi's attempt at an economic reform in India. Brown explains that in contrast to other leading figures such as Ambedkar, Gandhi wanted to avoid the organisation of labour and class struggle as seen in Europe. He wanted to solve the problems in India with solutions originating on the subcontinent.²³⁹

Khadi was one of these solutions along with temple-entry for untouchables. The main reason for Gandhi's emphasis on spinning was that it was universally applicable in all of India. This part of his rhetoric could therefore appeal to more Indians than could temple-entry, for instance.²⁴⁰ In addition to the positive aspects of *khadi* such as its availability and universal applicability together with the prospect of having an additional income, the spinning of *khadi* lessened the gap between rich and poor in some areas. Gandhi believed that the spinning *khadi* privately could give a small profit to a family or a village, but working in mills provided only limited earnings for a limited number of workers. The profit in the cotton industry lay only in the hands of a handful of people, making them much richer off the labours of others. The spinning of *khadi* was completely different, creating only differences when it came to how much cotton a family or village could produce and sell.²⁴¹

Even though *khadi* was one way of improving a family or a village economically, the historian Lisa Trivedi explains that the cloth was not cheaper than mill-spun cloth in general, because of the volume mills could produce in a shorter time.²⁴² How could the average person afford to buy *khadi* when it was more expensive than other clothes? Trivedi's impression is that Gandhi and his followers never really faced this criticism but rather focused on how to teach poor villagers how to spin their own clothes.²⁴³ In Gandhi's view, since the profit of *khadi* went to the poor, as opposed to mill cloth profit, *khadi* was worth the expense.²⁴⁴

Brown reveals that many Congress politicians had a vision for India that differed from that of Gandhi's. They wanted for India to "hold its own as a modern, industrialized nation."²⁴⁵ The thought was that other countries exploited countries that were not industrialised. India therefore had to develop industry in order to be independent and self-sufficient.²⁴⁶

²³⁹ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 205-206.

²⁴⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 213.

²⁴¹ Anthony Parel, "Symbolism in Gandhian Politics", pp. 517-519.

²⁴² Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 24.

²⁴³ Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, pp. 24-25.

²⁴⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 120-121.

²⁴⁵ Judith M. Brown, "The Mahatma and Modern India" in *Modern Asia Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Gandhi Centenary Number (1969), p. 327.

²⁴⁶ Brown, "The Mahatma and Modern India", pp. 327-328.

The priority in Gandhi's economic vision was, according to Brown, the creation of a non-violent society. Such a society could only exist with a rural economy because it eschewed exploitation – and exploitation led to violence. Becoming industrialised to Gandhi meant that the country moved away from traditional values and opened up to exploitation and dependence. Although the economic vision for India differed between Gandhi and other congress politicians, the common goal was that both sides wanted an economically strong and independent India.²⁴⁷

Viewing the spinning of *khadi* in connection to one of Gandhi's overall goals of the campaign, namely mobilisation of Indian society, it is possible to see why emphasis was put on *khadi*. Firstly, it was an Indian product in a time when large parts of the subcontinent were under foreign control by the colonial power. Secondly, *khadi* provided an additional opportunity to an income or means to make one's own clothes. Finally, *khadi* could be applied in all of India and was therefore a common denominator that could help Indians connect beyond local communities. *Khadi* could be related to Indians independent of religious or social differences, and therefore had the potential of increasing the number of Gandhi's supporters.

In 1934, Gandhi's focus was on the internal issues of the Indian society, which explains why *khadi* acquired an even greater role than previously. Efforts to implement spinning and the use of *khadi* were on a grander scale than earlier. Also, as a result of Gandhi's popularity and his many supporters, more Indians had access to information on *khadi* than in the campaigns of the 1920s.

iii) Educational reform in the villages

Gandhi's experience with education had begun long before the travelling campaign against untouchability. In South Africa he had started a school where the emphasis was on physical labour in education.²⁴⁸ Gandhi's first attempt at educational reform in India came in Champaran in 1919. There, Gandhi and a handful of volunteers started schools in five neighbouring villages. The teacher was not only an educator but also a social worker: first, hygiene and sanitation had to be taught and implemented among the pupils. Second, the pupils were taught the alphabet and numbers.²⁴⁹ During the day, the pupils consisted of the children in the village. At night, adults of both sexes attended school and were taught medical

²⁴⁷ Brown, "The Mahatma and Modern India", pp. 326-327.

²⁴⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 11 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), pp. 76-77.

²⁴⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, pp. 149-150.

aid in addition to hygiene and reading. The teachers also visited different quarters of the villages and cleaned them together with the villagers. The example of Champaran was not successful in the long run. Soon after Gandhi and his volunteers left the area, the initiative ceased to be.²⁵⁰

Gandhi's efforts in Champaran were in 1919. In the campaign against untouchability 15 years later, however, with more experience and having seen more of the Indian subcontinent, Gandhi had added curricula to a reform of village education. Subjects such as history, geography and arithmetic should be taught in addition to handicrafts and the spinning of cotton cloth.²⁵¹ Gandhi also had specific instructions as to what should be taught in the different subjects. He wanted the education to become Indian. It was Gandhi's impression that education in India was British, not Indian: school books were imported and not adapted to the needs of Indian children, and especially not untouchable Indian children. Teachers should therefore adapt to the needs of the individual villages and be a caring parent for the pupils.²⁵²

The reform of education in Indian villages in the campaign worked on all levels: British books were to be substituted by tutoring based on the needs of villagers. This often meant that the vocabulary was that which was relevant to them, words they used on a daily basis. Arithmetic was based on the daily need of the pupil, such as how to count earnings or houses in the village, and the history was mostly current. The basic use of the subject was taught first and then expanded. Local personalities and events were taught first, regional second and then national history.²⁵³ Spinning and other physical labour was a means to teach pupils the advantages of learning a trade, making their own clothes and also the possibility of an additional income.²⁵⁴

Gandhi's attempt at educational reform in the travelling campaign against untouchability had consequences in the aftermath of the campaign: upon his return to politics in 1937 Gandhi's proposal for educational reform was put forward in seven provinces. The demand was first and foremost for compulsory free education for all children, emphasising that all children were equal and therefore had equal rights.²⁵⁵ As Mujeeb notes, school was "to be an integral part of its social and economic environment, and learning a realistic

²⁵⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, pp. 150-152.

²⁵¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 60, p. 151. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 150-151.

²⁵² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 242-243.

²⁵³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 150-151.

²⁵⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 152.

²⁵⁵ M. Mujeeb, "Indian Education: Retrospect and Prospect" in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep., 1953), p. 217.

participation in the economic and cultural activities of the community.”²⁵⁶ Manual labour was to be central in the education, teaching children cooperation and self-realisation. The idea was that a blend of vocation and aptitude would create a greater sense of personal worth and dignity and in addition deepen reverence for cultural and moral values.²⁵⁷

III Initiatives and Reforms

i) The travelling campaign

In the four months between the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability Gandhi published a number of articles on his expectations of untouchables and his supporters. His instructions were detailed and contained everything from hygienic ways of working with impure elements such as blood or excrement to the construction of anti-untouchability branches of his organisation.²⁵⁸ This, in turn, would aid Gandhi’s overall goal, namely making untouchables religiously and socially pure so that untouchability could become abolished:

If you bestir yourselves, if you shed your unclean habits, if you reform your way of living, irrespective of what the high-caste Hindus do, I assure you their superiority of birth will automatically disappear. Superiority consists in clean and pure living and I assure you that in spite of your unclean occupations you can live cleaner and purer lives than the rest of us.²⁵⁹

To caste-Hindus Gandhi wrote that they should give up the sin of untouchability and treat untouchable groups as part of Hindu society, affording them citizens’ rights. Untouchables should be allowed to use resources such as wells, roads and public transport, attend schools and enter temples. Conventions prohibiting marriage and meals with them would according to Gandhi have to remain.²⁶⁰ All caste Hindus should therefore atone for the sin of untouchability and do whatever they could to rid India of untouchability whether it be joining Gandhi’s campaign or treating untouchables in their vicinity as one of them.²⁶¹ Gandhi thereby drew attention to the goal of the campaign and appealed for mobilisation among caste-Hindus before the actual campaign had begun.

Going through with the campaign against untouchability was challenging, according to the information available. Apart from the logistics of the campaign, deciding where to go and

²⁵⁶ Mujeeb, “Indian Education: Retrospect and Prospect”, p. 218.

²⁵⁷ Mujeeb, “Indian Education: Retrospect and Prospect”, pp. 218-219.

²⁵⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, pp. 243-244.

²⁵⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 61, p. 243.

²⁶⁰ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 206.

²⁶¹ Coward “Gandhi, Ambedkar and Untouchability”, pp. 56-57.

how to get there, there was a constant threat of imprisonment to Gandhi and his followers. In several places, as in what is now Uttar Pradesh, Gandhi was warned before entering that he would be arrested if he encouraged civil disobedience. The effect of the threat was inconsequential to Gandhi himself. He did, however, warn his followers, who included high-standing Congressmen that they should prepare for imprisonment, because “this movement, if it is to become universal, must be able to continue even if every Congressman is in jail or it must perish.”²⁶² Volunteers in the campaign came among other places from universities and the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. Though they experienced protests and faced difficulties when trying to reform villages according to Gandhi’s ideals, the scope of the campaign was enormous as it covered large parts of the subcontinent.

The actual campaign began on November 8, 1933 in the city of Wardha in the Central Provinces. There Gandhi established a base where all letters and articles were to be sent and further distributed, so that he could communicate widely no matter where he was. In addition, Gandhi believed that the location itself was significant in that it was the geographical centre of India, thereby signalling his goal of connecting Indian society.²⁶³

From Wardha, Gandhi and his entourage travelled mainly by rail to different parts of India. The route consisted of the following:²⁶⁴ from Wardha they travelled to Delhi and spent four days there attending a conference. From Delhi, the journey led to the Madras Presidency, where Gandhi and his entourage spent the second half of December. They left for Madras (Chennai) in the end of December, and journeyed to Mysore and Malabar from there. In the middle of January, they travelled to Cochin in Travancore (which consists of parts of modern Kerala). By the end of January, they again travelled to the northern Madras Presidency. The second half of February and the first half of March was spent in Bengal, including Calcutta (Kolkata), and from there to Assam in the north-east of India. After one week in Assam, the campaign moved west to Bihar and the North-Western Provinces (modern Uttar Pradesh), where Gandhi would spend April and the first week of May. The rest of May was spent in Punjab and Sind, followed by Rajaputana (Rajasthan) and Gujarat in June. The travelling campaign ended with the journey to Bombay (Mumbai), Maharashtra and Hyderabad, thereby travelling back towards the centre of India and completing his nine-month tour.²⁶⁵

²⁶² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 162.

²⁶³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 133-135.

²⁶⁴ For the complete map of the campaign, see appendix.

²⁶⁵ For complete list of areas Gandhi visited, see appendix.

ii) *Temple-entry and sanatanists*

When the travelling campaign against untouchability began, temple-entry was one of the most discussed topics of Gandhi's vision for Indian society. As the campaign progressed, however, temple-entry lost ground to other areas of concern such as *khadi*, educational reform and, not the least, to the earthquake in Bihar in January of 1934. In the beginning of the campaign emphasis was put on opening temples in the places Gandhi visited. This is known from statements such as "A fine temple near Wardha was thrown open to Harijans,"²⁶⁶ "I performed the opening [in Raipur near Delhi] with God as witness. The Harijans had cheerfully come in large numbers,"²⁶⁷ and "Gandhiji then declared open to Harijans two temples [in Mudunuru in Central India]."²⁶⁸

It is difficult to discern whether these temple-openings were results only of pressure from Gandhi's appearance or if they were inspired by Gandhi's appeal on behalf of untouchables – thereby being part of the group of participants who believed in and followed Gandhi's instructions. During the campaign, however, Gandhi received complaints from both his supporters and others. They stated that in some cases there was massive pressure from the local *Harijan Sevak Sangh* to open temples. Defending himself from the accusations, Gandhi insisted that "I will not be guilty of being party to the opening of a single temple under coercion. But I do want temples to be opened where public opinion is absolutely and clearly ripe for the opening of those temples."²⁶⁹

Stating that he only wanted temples to be opened where the opinion was ripe may have inspired participants to force the time to be right. Gandhi claimed that there was little opposition to untouchables' entry to temples in the travelling campaign.²⁷⁰ As the campaign continued, Gandhi also stated that protests against temple-entry were receding in number compared to the protests in the previous temple-entry campaign.²⁷¹

Gandhi expressed in the beginning of the campaign that his experience while travelling was that "wherever I have gone and opened temples to Harijans, I have done so in the presence of thousands of caste Hindus and with their consent: the thousands of caste Hindus who were most concerned about the temple said, 'We want the temples to be

²⁶⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 139.

²⁶⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 222.

²⁶⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 293.

²⁶⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 416.

²⁷⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 381.

²⁷¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 161-162. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 141.

opened.”²⁷² Gandhi therefore insisted that ordinary caste-Hindus were ready to recognise untouchables as equals, helped by the campaign and his efforts.²⁷³ His statements together with the information provided shows that there were a large number of people who – if they did not actively participate – were interested in Gandhi and his initiatives in the campaign. The example also shows that Gandhi had an interest in reproducing successful interactions with Indians. Propagating the success of initiatives in the campaign would have a positive effect as it could inspire more Indians to participate.

Having limited respect – it would seem – for diversity in Hindu worship, Gandhi treated temples as though they were uniform. Upon entering the state of Mysore, Gandhi and his followers visited Sirsi, where local temples had been opened to the untouchables. In contrast to other places in India, Gandhi did just *not* want temple-entry in Sirsi and instead demanded change. In the form of worship, Gandhi’s criterion for temple-entry was that everyone should adhere to the rules of spiritual cleanliness, including becoming vegetarian and avoiding impure elements. In Sirsi, however, temple-worship included animal sacrifice. This meant that untouchables would be involved in the slaughter of animals, which was unacceptable to Gandhi. Instead of sacrificing animals, Gandhi’s speech concluded that “One can please God only by self-sacrifice and self-denial. He [Gandhi], therefore, hoped that the trustees of the temple would take a strong line and put an end to the evil practice in question.”²⁷⁴ Gandhi wanted the temples to follow the same principles and not deviate from what he believed to be true religion. This could be an attempt to unify Hindus through participation in worship in the ideal temple.

Gandhi met with opposition during the campaign. In connection with temple-entry, this opposition was often posed by *sanatanist* or orthodox Hindus. The ways in which they opposed him varied, but often it was by demonstrating or physically trying to hinder Gandhi from reaching his destination. In Deoli in the Central Provinces, Gandhi and his entourage were in procession to open a temple for the untouchables, but as they drew close, *sanatanists* blocked the entry so that no one could enter. In addition they warned Gandhi that he should stop the campaign, even though it had only just begun, because the campaign would create dissension in Hindu society.²⁷⁵

The clash between Gandhi and his reformers and *sanatanists* was much discussed both in meetings held by Gandhi and in letters between Gandhi, *sanatanists* and troubled

²⁷² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 163.

²⁷³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 143.

²⁷⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 238-239.

²⁷⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp.157-158.

reformers. A letter from Bengal in February of 1934 described the situation as a strain in the campaign against untouchability – and also a hindrance in actually helping untouchables. The letter described the situation as being threefold, which is also the impression of the reader of *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works*: On the one hand there was Gandhi and his reformers wanting temple-entry and making it a priority equal or even superior to improving the economic and educational situation of untouchables, all done in an attempt to reform Hinduism. On the other hand, there were the *sanatanists* and other orthodox Hindus who did everything in their power to prevent the destruction of Hinduism by prohibiting untouchables from entering temples. In the middle were untouchables, not being allowed into temples.²⁷⁶

Even though *sanatanists* tried to hinder the temple-entry, they were not necessarily against the betterment of untouchables. While in Karur on his way to Orissa, Gandhi was told that *sanatanists* there did want to help untouchables and had made several initiatives with local untouchables. As local *sanatanists* presented it, their problem was not with untouchables themselves but with their entering the temples.²⁷⁷ In fact, there were those who called themselves liberal *sanatanists* who wanted the temple-entry issue to be dropped so that resources could be gathered for promoting the “material, moral, educational and spiritual welfare of Harijans in consonance with the tradition of Hindu religion, so that the Harijans may become the equals of *savarnas* in every respect and there will not be any curse of untouchability, if they are treated as our kith and kin.”²⁷⁸

The solution of separate temples was proposed from both reformers and *sanatanists* in the end of February in 1934. Accepting separate temples can be seen as a shift in tactics for Gandhi: as I showed in the chapter on the temple-entry movement, Gandhi had refused building separate facilities for untouchables due to his conviction that separation would not lead to acceptance or equality. The compromise shows that Gandhi stubborn, but willing to compromise when mobilising for the travelling campaign.

Gandhi’s logic was that untouchables would then be able to enter temples without offending *sanatanists*, and *sanatanists* would have their own temples and be secure in the thought that untouchables could not defile their place of worship.²⁷⁹ If Gandhi was right and the majority of caste-Hindus was for untouchables’ temple-entry, the result would be that only a minority of temples would be reserved for *sanatanists* and therefore a majority of temples would be open to untouchables. In addition, the solution would result in a strengthened focus

²⁷⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 203-204.

²⁷⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 189-190, 203.

²⁷⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 204-205.

²⁷⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 205.

on the other issues on the campaign where opposition was not as strong as with temple-entry.²⁸⁰ Having separate temples was in accordance with Gandhi's overall goal of mobilising Indian society. Even though untouchables would gain access to temples, separate temples would decrease opposition and thereby increase the number of supporters in the campaign.

Another issue that appeared during the emphasis on temple-entry was the desire of many untouchables not to enter temples, but to better their own situation economically. Gandhi wrote an article in *The Hindu* where he juxtaposed temple-entry with economic uplift. There he wrote of the protests he had received from both *sanatanists* and untouchables concerning the focus on temple-entry. "Some of the Harijans say, 'We do not want temple-entry; do not build temples, but use all you receive for economic uplift.' Some sanatanists say, 'Give up the temple-entry question altogether. You are hurting our feelings by forcing Harijans into temples.'"²⁸¹ Gandhi's reply was that even though there was disagreement on the temple-entry issue, the protesters were now a minority and would have to comply with the majority.

As mentioned in the introduction, India in the early 1930s was facing severe economical problems due to the Depression and a lack of rainfall. Economic uplift, therefore, may have seemed like a more immediate need than religious initiatives such as temple-entry. As it turned out, the information available shows a tendency towards focusing more on economical and educational reform as the campaign continued. This was particularly the case after the earthquake in Bihar in January of 1934, which affected thousand of Indians and made the need for economic uplift paramount.

iii) Reformers and volunteers

As I mentioned earlier, there were other groups involved in the campaign besides Gandhi and his entourage. First and foremost, there was the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* with its local and regional branches, other local organisations in cooperation with the *Sangh*, and volunteers recruited mainly among students. The assignment of Gandhi's active supporters lay first and foremost in the villages. The reasons for this were thus: first of all, 95 per cent of the Indian population lived in villages. Second, Gandhi insisted that untouchability would be more difficult to abolish in villages and, third, poverty in villages made improvements there essential and would create attention to the campaign.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 204-206.

²⁸¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 288.

²⁸² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 64 (Bangalore: Vishna-Shanti Media, 2008), p. 50.

Gandhi published specific instructions on how the campaign was going to be carried out. The *Harijan Sevak Sangh*

should send its best workers to the villages and there do twofold work – serve the Harijans and the *savarnas* – the former, by procuring for the young and the old educational facilities, clean water-supply, admission to temples, betterment of economic condition, removal of bad habits, e.g., carrion-eating, eating and drinking intoxicating drugs and drinks, and inducing hygienic habits; and the latter, by establishing friendly contact with them and securing their co-operation to the extent they would be prepared to give it.²⁸³

As to the funding of the work, Gandhi collected money in every locality he visited and also accepted donations from around the country. Irschick reports that Gandhi collected a total of 800,000 rupees in the campaign.²⁸⁴ The funds were in form of money and also valuables that were sold to the highest bidder. When he was in Bangalore in January of 1934, Gandhi stated that “at every place people come in large crowds and give me purses, jewellery, etc.”²⁸⁵

One of the largest arenas on the travelling tour was women’s conferences where Gandhi collected jewellery from caste-Hindu women who wanted to repent. The logic behind women giving jewellery was simple: a woman rarely had cash, but normally the jewellery on her body belonged to her and not her husband, father or master. Giving jewellery was therefore a personal sacrifice and, in Gandhi’s view, a sign of repentance.²⁸⁶ Gandhi also fervently believed that “in this country of semi-starvation of millions and insufficient nutrition of practically eighty percent of the people, the wearing of jewellery is an offence to the eye.”²⁸⁷

One example of a typical appeal comes from Madras in December of 1933:

Ladies have parted willingly with their jewellery, some with their rings, others with their bangles and necklaces and so on and I invite you to do likewise, but on this understanding, that the jewellery you may part with is not to be replaced and that you should consider the giving as a privilege in connection with the Harijan movement.²⁸⁸

Gandhi used the common factor of jewellery to appeal to women, thereby connecting them to the campaign.

²⁸³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 64, pp. 50-51.

²⁸⁴ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p. 167.

²⁸⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 401.

²⁸⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 316, 356.

²⁸⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 315.

²⁸⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 308.

Gandhi had strict guidelines as to how the money collected was to be spent. First of all, seventy five per cent of local donations should go to aid untouchables in the vicinity, the rest to be distributed where needed. As a consequence, people in the locality could see that collecting funds could have an immediate effect in their local environment at the same time as knowingly contributing to the overall goal of abolishing untouchability. The *Sangh*, which was responsible for distributing the money, were not allowed to spend anything on either administration or propaganda work. Volunteers, known as reform workers, were not sponsored economically by Gandhi or his organisation and were mostly dependent on their own funds. The money collected by Gandhi and his followers during the campaign therefore wholly went to digging wells, building schools, supplying the equipment and giving away scholarships so that untouchables could get a higher education.²⁸⁹

One example in the travelling campaign against untouchability comes from Vannivalasi in Bengal. There, reform workers had been employed for months in the service of untouchables. The village had more untouchables than caste-Hindus, the ratio being 185 untouchables to 125 caste-Hindus. Before they had begun their work, according to Gandhi, the condition in the village was as follows: almost all grown men were drinking alcohol, thieving was common and the villagers had bad hygiene. In addition, neither caste-Hindus nor untouchables were literate.²⁹⁰ In the course of six months, reform workers had made considerable changes touching both villagers and the village itself. The reform workers first held meetings where they instructed villagers in the rules of hygiene. Then, the houses of untouchables were cleaned and new houses built for homeless tribesmen who had settled in the village. Roads were built, meat-eating was kept to a minimum, latrines were built outside the village, and schooling of the villagers had begun.²⁹¹

The village of Vannivalasi was used by Gandhi as an example of a model village, a village where everything had been done in accordance with Gandhi's instructions. Another success in the campaign can be found in the city of Bombay. There, the local *Sangh* had accomplished several of Gandhi's goals: It had provided scholarships for local untouchables and also accommodation for nearly 200 untouchable families in the city.²⁹² These examples of progress do not imply that every attempt at reform went as planned. It does explain,

²⁸⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 276. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 190, 387.

²⁹⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 215.

²⁹¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 216.

²⁹² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 64, p. 65.

however, that Gandhi was interested in portraying the overall campaign as successful and therefore reproduced examples in favour of his ideas of reform.

Venturing outside of the *MGCW* there are few examples of how Gandhi was received by people in the travelling campaign. Irschick provides one of these examples, namely from Tamil south India. He explains that when Gandhi visited the area, he was met with a larger crowd than ever before and that “for a brief period in 1933 and 1934 Gandhi took on many of the marks of a messianic leader among the untouchables and among other members of the population as well.”²⁹³ According to Irschick, people flocked around Gandhi to get his *darshan* or blessing. He also brought to the area an ideal of a political ascetic who was accessible to the people. Irschick also explains that untouchables benefited from Gandhi’s visit – at the same time as local political leaders benefited from their connection to him.²⁹⁴ Irschick thereby shows that Gandhi and the travelling campaign affected the area when he was there and that Gandhi was considered a religious and moral role model.

Information reproduced by Gandhi in the *MGCW* shows that his organisation and other volunteers did not always attract popular support: in a number of villages where untouchables had made attempts at using public wells, entering temples or adhering to rules of cleanliness, they had been met with opposition in different ways. Gandhi got reports that in several villages both reform workers and untouchables were boycotted by the caste-Hindus. Boycotting untouchables meant that they could not perform work in connection to caste-Hindus or receive payment and were therefore suffering more than before.²⁹⁵

Other reports stated that untouchables who followed the instructions of the *Sangh* were not only boycotted but were also beaten by caste-Hindus for acting out of their own social strata. The *MGCW* provides two examples of this, the first from the village of Kutch in northern India. There, a reform worker had walked along the main road together with several untouchable children. The situation ended badly when local caste-Hindus beat up both the children and the reform worker.²⁹⁶ The second example comes from Gujarat where a reform worker was drinking water from a well beside a public road. Villagers mistook him for being an untouchable and beat him severely. Gandhi insisted that since the villagers thought the reform worker was an untouchable, they had showed their stance towards untouchability. They therefore had to have a change of heart and be convinced that their action was a sinful

²⁹³ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, pp. 170-171.

²⁹⁴ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, pp. 166-167.

²⁹⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 64, pp. 60, 292-293.

²⁹⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 123.

one.²⁹⁷ Gandhi's examples show that Gandhi not only published successful attempts in his newspaper in the travelling campaign. Previously explaining that work on behalf of untouchables in villages was difficult, providing examples that showed what reformers could expect could be of benefit to Gandhi and the campaign.

Other difficulties in villages mentioned in the *MGCW* were the lack of funds in some areas, insufficient numbers of reform workers to enforce Gandhi's instructions or the lack of support from villagers – making reform work more complicated and slower than anticipated.²⁹⁸

There are few examples of village reform work in the travelling campaign against untouchability, especially outside of the compilation of Gandhi's writings. Yagati provides one of them: the provincial *Sangh* in what is now Andhra Pradesh had established forty-one night schools, eleven day schools and nineteen hostels for untouchables in the area and in addition administered several scholarships.²⁹⁹ Although the numbers may look impressive, reality was different. The provincial *sangh* followed Gandhi's instructions by building schools and hostels for untouchables using funds collected in the campaign. Untouchables in the area, who were supposed to benefit from the new facilities, did not get the opportunity to do so. Yagati explains that in one of the new schools: "nearly a hundred boys lived in its hostel, about half of them were Brahmans, and the remaining were from powerful non-Brahman communities. There were only three or four Dalit [untouchable] students, who were housed in a separate shed."³⁰⁰ Untouchables were as a result underrepresented in one of the schools built for them. Yagati's example provides an insight into how attempts at reform in villages could go askew. Such was the hostility to untouchable education, other misuses of campaign-built facilities are highly likely.

Although Gandhi provided detailed instructions to both the *Sangh* and reform workers, he still received complaints from around the country. One such complaint stated that not all the reform workers had the interest of untouchables at heart, but in stead were "seeking its [the campaign's] shelter in order to satisfy other ambitions."³⁰¹ Gandhi's response to the complaints was that it was a difficult task to keep all of the reformers in line due to the sheer scale of the campaign. One suggestion had been that all reform workers should go through fasts of purification before starting their work for untouchables. How the fasts were going to

²⁹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 64, p. 60, 71.

²⁹⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 151. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 172, 384, 506.

²⁹⁹ Yagati, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, p. 87.

³⁰⁰ Yagati *Dalits' Struggle for Identity*, p. 88.

³⁰¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 215.

be orchestrated, however, was not known.³⁰² What was certain to Gandhi was that “unless we have a fair number of such servants throughout the length and breadth of India, we will never succeed in changing the hearts of millions of human beings.”³⁰³ Being aware of the need of a large number of reform workers for the campaign does not mean that he accepted that some of the reform workers had joined the campaign with selfish motives: “There can be no room for selfishness, hypocrisy, untruth and violence in such a movement. As a religious movement it ought to touch the hearts of Harijans and *savarnas* alike.”³⁰⁴

Although they worked for the Gandhian campaign, there were several meetings between reform workers and Gandhi that showed they did not share his views when it came to religion or the campaign. In Cuddapah in the Presidency of Madras, reform workers confronted Gandhi on his views on *varna*. Gandhi claimed, as he did many times, that abolishing untouchability would equalise the different *varnas* and make Hinduism what it was supposed to be: equality without the distinction of high and low.³⁰⁵ The response from the reform workers was that “nobody gives the meaning you give to *varna*.”³⁰⁶ The reform workers thereby expressed one of the problems with Gandhi’s religious views: he used traditional terms like *varna* to describe *his* ideal version of the caste system, not as others used the terms.

Gandhi believed that no restrictions could be put on anyone, because in religion an untouchable who performed his or her duty was equal to any other caste Hindu who performed his or her duty. In Gandhi’s view, *varna* was a division of duties similar to that of *jati* or occupational castes. He claimed that his interpretation of the word *varna* was a natural evolution of it.³⁰⁷ The response from the reform workers was that “surely, the *varna* that you describe exists only in your imagination! What we see around us is the solid fact of hundreds of castes, each claiming to be higher than some other.”³⁰⁸ Spreading the ideas of Gandhi therefore proved difficult, as not all reform workers saw society as Gandhi saw it. They did not take part in Gandhi’s vision and the returning “golden age”. It is therefore not difficult to understand why many reform workers tried to relate to the practical work in the villages – it was the easiest aspect to comprehend in the campaign.

³⁰² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 215-216.

³⁰³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 216.

³⁰⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 292.

³⁰⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 376.

³⁰⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 377.

³⁰⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 376-377.

³⁰⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 377.

The example of reform workers who did not understand Gandhi's religious interpretation can be related to my argument that Gandhi attempted to mobilise Indians by using traditional means, sometimes in spite of the fact that he was not understood or misinterpreted. Although the reform workers in the example above stated that they did not understand him, they were still connected to Gandhi and the overall campaign goal of abolishing untouchability.

A related issue that arose between Gandhi and the reform workers was whether or not Gandhi's religious principles in the campaign should be highlighted. There were some reform workers who believed that the work of building schools, digging wells and promoting *khadi* was important in itself without referring to Hindu religion or traditional texts, especially since some of the reform workers did not agree with Gandhi's interpretations.³⁰⁹ In the village of Thuravur in Mysore state workers had collected funds and helped untouchables in the area. The workers had not, however, followed Gandhi's instructions. Gandhi wrote that: "they had not thought of the religious nature of the programme, they had not thought of the reparation to be made to the Harijans."³¹⁰ Gandhi confronted them and concluded that the workers had misunderstood the campaign entirely and were in fact not supporters of the cause. Reforming the caste system and showing repentance should be at the core of being a reform worker in the campaign. Gandhi believed that in prioritising work without the religious aspect of the campaign would undermine the goals of the campaign.³¹¹

Gandhi had on several occasions stated that the travelling campaign against untouchability was purely a religious campaign, as had been the temple-entry campaign. And it was therefore paramount that the connection between religion and the campaign be made and that the reform workers performed their tasks accordingly: "The central point in the untouchability movement is the removal of social and religious injustice towards those who, being regarded as untouchables, are debarred from public utilities and spiritual comfort within the religion to which they belong."³¹²

Other reform workers saw the campaigns as a continuation of the civil disobedience campaign – a campaign that began in 1930 and was mainly a political campaign against the colonial power. They accused Gandhi of having an ulterior motive in the campaign, namely strengthening civil disobedience, and thereby using reform workers for political and not

³⁰⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 217.

³¹⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 5.

³¹¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 4-5.

³¹² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 217.

religious or social means.³¹³ Gandhi explained that although he had not changed his views on civil disobedience, the travelling campaign was not connected to politics but was a religious revival.³¹⁴

The different examples provided show that there were disagreements between Gandhi and the participants in the travelling campaign against untouchability. They also provide an insight into the different perceptions of the campaign among reform workers. While there were examples of reform workers following Gandhi's instructions, some reform workers prioritised social work in villages that could lead to economic uplift or political gain – and thereby only partially followed Gandhi's instructions.

iv) Untouchables

Economic reform in the villages in the form of *khadi* was one of the aspects of the campaign where untouchables could help themselves advance economically, according to Gandhi.³¹⁵ In February of 1934 Gandhi gave instructions on how to implement the spinning and use of *khadi*. First, the knowledge of spinning had to be spread to the villages by the *Sangh* and other reform workers. Second, the *khadi* surplus should be sold in their own and neighbouring villages so that the profit of the sale could go wholly to the spinners. Sending cloth to other regions required both extra cost and time, which would only hurt the profit of the spinners and therefore the poor who needed the profits the most.³¹⁶

According to Gandhi, one example of the introduction of the spinning wheel and *khadi* can be found in the Central Provenance, namely Anantpur. A village of approximately nine hundred, the inhabitants were only occupied four months of the year and had hardly any supplementary occupation. In a time-span of four years, four reform workers taught the villagers how to spin and weave, selling the surplus of their labour to neighbouring villages and at the same time making their village self-sufficient. The spinning of *khadi* also bettered the lives of the villagers in other aspects: the reform workers refused to teach villagers who drank alcohol. As a consequence the alcohol consumption in the village went down considerably as spinning became more popular. The cottage industry also spread to seventeen neighbouring villages making the spinning of *khadi* a local success.³¹⁷

³¹³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 296.

³¹⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 296.

³¹⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 120-121.

³¹⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 179, 446.

³¹⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 282-283.

Spreading the concept of *khadi* and printing successful results does not mean that reforming the village economy was an easy task. Gandhi was aware of the fact that success could in many cases be only temporary. In the early 1920s Gandhi had started schools for the spinning of *khadi* in Bihar. While Gandhi and his supporters were in Bihar the school was a success, but when they departed and the campaign faded the school closed down.³¹⁸ In the travelling campaign against untouchability, therefore, attempts were made to establish *khadi* as a cottage industry in the village and make it a permanent feature. The reformers had to create a bond between the different people who worked in the process of creating cloth made of hand-spun cotton. At the same time the reformers had to persuade the *khadi*-workers to cooperate when selling the cloth in the area and not attempt for a larger profit in the cities – all in an attempt to make the village or cluster of villages self-sufficient.³¹⁹

Even though *khadi* was first and foremost meant for untouchables and other poor in Indian villages, it was the *Sangh* and reform workers connected to Gandhi – who were themselves not untouchables – who spread the knowledge of spinning and taught the untouchables. Although *khadi* helped many untouchables and made them part of the campaign, it was not initiated by untouchables but by caste-Hindus.³²⁰

One of the major grievances that Gandhi faced was the fact that untouchables did not themselves have leading positions in the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. As discussed in the chapter on the temple-entry campaign, Gandhi believed that caste-Hindus had to have leading positions in the *Sangh* as repentance for their sin of observing untouchability. His interpretation, however, was not understood by untouchables, something which can be seen in the travelling campaign. In Rajahmundry, close to Madras, Gandhi met a deputation of untouchables who believed that the *Sangh* both should consist of and be managed by them. After hearing the organisation's goal of caste-Hindu repentance, the deputation asked that an advisory committee be appointed to assist the *Sangh*. Then, at least, untouchables could help the campaign directly.³²¹ Gandhi supported sending suggestions and supporting the organisation, but he argued that an advisory board could create favouritism and even sectionalism among the untouchables and create suggestions based on sectional needs.³²²

Although Gandhi did not want the goals of the *Sangh* to be compromised by untouchable groups, he did have a solution: “What you have to do is to enable and help them

³¹⁸ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, pp. 111-112.

³¹⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 445-446, 470.

³²⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 84.

³²¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 340-341.

³²² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 341.

to discharge their obligations; that is to say, you can tell them how they can discharge their obligation, you can tell them what in your opinion will satisfy the great body of Harijans.”³²³ He did not want the untouchables to participate in the organisation, but rather to inspire it. To Gandhi it did not make any sense that untouchables should have leading positions in the *Sangh*. After all, it was not the untouchables that had to repent. Comparing the caste-Hindus to debtors and untouchables to creditors, Gandhi insisted that it was not the creditors that owed anything. It was the debtors that had to initiate a down payment and the creditors’ responsibility to overlook the transactions.³²⁴

Based on his discussion in Rajahmundry, Gandhi later in the campaign proposed that instead of having one advisory committee to the *Sangh*, an alternative would be that every local and regional branch of the organisation should have an advisory committee consisting of untouchables only. Gandhi’s plan was that the committee would have to be independent from the organisation but at the same time cooperate with them. Its function was to suggest direction to the local *Sangh* – although Gandhi did not instruct the *Sangh* to follow the suggestions – and also to awaken the local untouchables to the fact that they were equal to caste-Hindus and had the right to the same privileges as them.³²⁵

Connecting the example of Rajahmundry to the argument of Gandhi’s ability to mobilise, it is possible to view Gandhi’s compromise as a way of creating more supporters and at the same time subdue opposition. Untouchables did not have any real power in the *Sangh* but they could, according to this example, participate in the campaign under the direction of Gandhi. Tactically, connecting untouchables to his organisation could hinder increased opposition against Gandhi or the campaign.

Another complaint among untouchables was based on the fact that Gandhi and reform workers were building separate wells and schools for them and at the same time speaking of untouchables being equal to caste-Hindus. The argument was that having separate wells and schools would separate untouchables from caste-Hindus even more than earlier or even enhance the differences between them.³²⁶ Gandhi, on the other hand, had witnessed untouchables in different parts of India with no schools and drinking water from the same container as dogs and cattle.³²⁷ Gandhi viewed separate wells and schools as an intermediate on the way to equality: “It is not to keep you segregated that the schools are being opened and

³²³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 340.

³²⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 340. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 420.

³²⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 420-421. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 64, p. 199.

³²⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 281.

³²⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 281-282.

wells are being dug for you. All this is being done because I cannot bear to see you get no water at all.”³²⁸ Separate wells and schools were therefore necessary, in Gandhi’s view, because it could take time before caste-Hindus would reform and accept untouchables as equals.

As with the suggestion of separate temples, separate wells and schools would logically not be as provocative as uniting untouchables with caste Hindus in these facilities. The initiative could also result in greater support for Gandhi and the campaign due to the fact that the solution did not provoke as many people as the alternative and new facilities were being built.

During the campaign Gandhi faced critiques from untouchables that they did not want his help or follow what they called the “Gandhian creed”, meaning the campaign with Gandhi’s initiatives in the villages combined with his religious views.³²⁹ An investigation had been done by a Mr. Acharya in Bombay where he had found out that ninety-five per cent of the untouchables asked were not in agreement with the campaign.³³⁰ Even though the scope of the investigation is not known, it did show that untouchables could be sceptical to the campaign. As to the “Gandhian creed”, Gandhi himself did not believe that untouchables were against the goals of the campaign because his goals were universally beneficial to all untouchables:

I am engaged in giving Harijans clean water. I am engaged in giving them facilities for education. I am engaged in finding accommodation for them in public caravanserais where they cannot get it. I am engaged in weaning them from drink and carrion. Do they not like all these? I am engaged in teaching them the elementary rules of hygiene. Do they not want it? I am engaged in telling them what the fundamentals of Hinduism are and in having public temples thrown open to them.³³¹

Even though Gandhi did not believe that untouchables were against the campaign – which he based on the fact he perceived untouchables as overjoyed by the improvements while on tour – the emphasis was on caste-Hindus to reform, not on the untouchables to approve. Approval would come naturally when the caste-Hindus had changed at heart.³³²

The information provided shows that although Gandhi emphasised the participation of caste Hindus in the leadership of his organisation in the campaign, he did adapt somewhat to

³²⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 281.

³²⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 295.

³³⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 295.

³³¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, pp. 295-296.

³³² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 62, p. 296.

demands of untouchables when offering them advisory positions to the *Sangh*. The information also shows that there were sceptics among untouchables who did not want Gandhi's help. Whether this was because Gandhi wanted to help them together with caste-Hindus or that Gandhi used traditional Hindu rhetoric as basis for his initiative is not completely clear. What is clear, however, is that there was opposition to Gandhi and his campaign, namely opposition based on objections as to why only caste-Hindus were to initiate reform in villages and why religion had to be at the core of the campaign.

v) *Diversion in the campaign*

Though there were hiccoughs in the campaign in the form of misunderstandings, deviations and protests, the one event that weakened the travelling campaign against untouchability was the earthquake that afflicted larger areas of Bihar in January 1934. The earthquake weakened the campaign due to the fact that participants shifted their attention to relief work in afflicted areas. Although Gandhi interlinked the campaign with relief work in Bihar, his attention was divided between the two for the remainder of the campaign. Ultimately, this led Gandhi to end the travelling campaign against untouchability in favour of doing relief work among untouchables in Bihar and surrounding areas in August of 1934.

The Nepal-Bihar earthquake of 1934 caused damage in an area of about three hundred kilometres in radius and killed over seven thousand people in India, according to government numbers.³³³ Gandhi, however, operated with numbers much larger, at around twenty five thousand.³³⁴ What Gandhi based his numbers on is uncertain, but the fact is that the destruction was severe, leaving thousands of people homeless and destitute. One of the largest earthquakes on the subcontinent in the twentieth century, it counted eight points four on the Richter's scale.³³⁵ Gandhi's first priority with regards to Bihar was to collect money and to send relief workers to the area. He was convinced that the reason for the earthquake was a divine one, namely "chastisement for the great sin we have committed and are still committing against those whom we describe as untouchables."³³⁶ He thereby connected the earthquake to his ongoing campaign against untouchability.

³³³ Sudhir K. Jain, "Indian Earthquakes: An Overview" in *The Indian Concrete Journal*, (Vol. 72, No. 11, November 1998), pp. 3-4.

³³⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 291-292.

³³⁵ Jain, "Indian Earthquakes: An Overview", pp. 3-4. *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 45.

³³⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 40, 43.

Irschick reveals that in December of 1933, days before the earthquake, Gandhi warned that “unless untouchability was removed there would be divine retribution.”³³⁷ In the following weeks several natural happenings occurred in addition to the Bihar earthquake. According to Irschick there were smaller earthquakes in Quetta and Peshawar in the Northwest and also a lack of rain in parts of the subcontinent. Natural occurrences convinced the popular mind that there in fact was a connection between them and untouchability.³³⁸

Immediately after the earthquake Gandhi explained that a “tremendous responsibility rests both upon the Government and the unofficial agency as to how reconstruction is to be undertaken. And as both are working in co-operation for this purpose, it ought not to be difficult to rebuild Bihar on human and sanitary lines.”³³⁹ Assisting in the rebuilding of Bihar, Gandhi started a Central Relief Committee that would organise funds and distribute relief workers to afflicted areas.³⁴⁰ Gandhi cooperated with the government on relief work, but their cooperation was one of different priorities. While Gandhi and his relief workers helped digging wells and instructing villagers on the spinning of *khadi*, the government and its relief workers prioritised the building of houses and the distribution of land.³⁴¹ He thereby implemented different aspects of the travelling campaign in relief work and adapted them to the situation, which can be seen as an attempt at combining the two.

The resources required in the relief work were enormous. The government estimated that over 500,000 acres were under earthquake sand and therefore had to be reclaimed. In addition to cost, the inhabitants were unable to work the land and could therefore not live off it.³⁴² Gandhi exclaimed in an interview to *The Hindu* that “I am unable to say how many lakhs will be required to ensure just sufficient supply of water for thirsty men and cattle, let alone the supply of food, medical necessities and house accommodation, temporary or semi-permanent.”³⁴³ Gandhi therefore found it necessary to divert his efforts to Bihar. Merely recruiting reform workers from the travelling campaign and cooperating with relief workers hired by the government would not be sufficient. Every able-bodied man in Bihar should participate in rebuilding the area under the supervision of reformers – and at the same time be informed of the rules of cleanliness.³⁴⁴

³³⁷ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, p. 170.

³³⁸ Irschick, *Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s*, pp. 170-171.

³³⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 82.

³⁴⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 275, 280.

³⁴¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 298-299.

³⁴² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 290, 362-363.

³⁴³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 361.

³⁴⁴ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 129, 377, 411.

When the campaign had started, Gandhi had planned to devote himself wholly to the aid of untouchables. With the earthquake, however, Gandhi's attention was divided into helping untouchables all over India in addition to every Indian in Bihar despite religious views or social standing.³⁴⁵ This reflected upon the campaign in several ways. On the one hand, the earthquake became the focal point of the subcontinent where everyone could help their fellow Indians no matter what other problems were facing them.³⁴⁶ On January 28, the first of several Bihar relief days was arranged where everyone was expected to think of the situation in Bihar, repent their sins and collect funds to be sent to the afflicted areas.³⁴⁷

The earthquake in Bihar was also used as a focal point in Gandhi's speeches, a common denominator that every Indian could relate to:

Let us, in the face of this calamity, forget the distinction between Hindus and Mussalmans as well as between Indians and Englishmen. And the same principle should impel us to cooperation between the Government and the people and, therefore, it is our duty to offer our respectful co-operation to Government in the prosecution of the common object.³⁴⁸

Referring to the situation in Bihar in addition to the aspects of the campaign meant that funds that could have been donated to the untouchables in the local community were now being sent to Bihar. This is not to say that Gandhi mixed the funds for untouchables together with the relief fund for Bihar, but rather that he appealed to the locals to donate equally to the two causes. In addition, it was easier to collect funds to Bihar because the cause was not controversial in the same way as the campaign against untouchability.³⁴⁹

The earthquake in Bihar had yet another effect on the travelling campaign against untouchability: Gandhi spent more time in the afflicted areas in Bihar and, as a result, less time in other areas he had planned to visit.³⁵⁰ Upon his arrival Gandhi distributed instructions on how relief workers were to perform their work in the area. The instructions coincided with the rules of reform workers in the travelling campaign such as sanitation, the minimalisation of expense and looking away from the distinctions of "high" and "low".³⁵¹ The information provided shows that the overall goal of abolishing untouchability was not abandoned even though Gandhi diverted his attention from the villages in the campaign to relief and rebuilding in Bihar.

³⁴⁵ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 38-39, 41. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 274.

³⁴⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 42-44, 53.

³⁴⁷ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 53-54.

³⁴⁸ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 291.

³⁴⁹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 38-40, 43.

³⁵⁰ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 228-229, 306.

³⁵¹ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 310.

Gandhi was criticised for organising relief work that was clearly in favour of untouchables and neglected others who suffered from the earthquake. Gandhi stated that his method of relief work was beginning where he believed the need was greatest. The first priority was the rebuilding of villages and procuring clean water to the untouchables, which Gandhi believed helped those in most need of relief. Therefore, not all of the people in Bihar could be helped at first – leaving groups feeling neglected by Gandhi and his relief workers.³⁵²

One difference between the work in the travelling campaign against untouchability and the relief work in Bihar is that Gandhi's untouchable campaign was dominant in its field whereas the relief effort was not. As I have shown in both this chapter and in the chapter on the temple-entry campaign, there were other initiatives made for the aid of untouchables and the abolition of untouchability. Gandhi's campaigns, however, were on a much grander scale than other initiatives. In the relief effort in Bihar, however, Gandhi and his organisation were juxtaposed with another great force, namely the colonial power. The colonial power had sent relief workers and soldiers to Bihar to help immediately after the catastrophe. The difference between the two major contributors was that while Gandhi focused on aspects in continuation of the travelling campaign, the colonial power focused on reconstruction. Efforts were going on all over the country to help the victims of the earthquake with Gandhi and his supporters being one of several major contributors.³⁵³

It is difficult to know whether the earthquake in Bihar alone ended the travelling campaign. It is also uncertain if an internal catastrophe aided the campaign and gave it more support than it otherwise would have gotten. From the time when the earthquake caused devastation in January in 1934 until the travelling campaign ended in August the same year, Gandhi still visited villages in India when not in Bihar. However, the attention towards Bihar increased, causing the travelling campaign to suffer.

IV Summary

Once the travelling campaign against untouchability had come to an end in August of 1934, interviews with Gandhi in the *MGCW*, there was uncertainty about what Gandhi's next project was going to be. The travelling campaign had been a continuation of the temple-entry campaign. It was therefore not strange that Gandhi once again had changed his focus within the same cause, namely the cause of helping the untouchables. In stead of organising a

³⁵² *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 340-341.

³⁵³ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, pp. 82, 137, 150-151.

campaign on a national level, Gandhi performed work by himself in villages, first and foremost in the afflicted areas of Bihar:

When people wondered whether his new focus of work meant the end of his Harijan campaign, Gandhi immediately insisted that village work was a natural consequence and complement of his earlier work for untouchables, for they were the poorest and most despised of India's people; they in particular would benefit from better food in the villages, a cleaner environment, and more work.³⁵⁴

As with the development from the temple-entry campaign to the travelling campaign, the new development included aspects from the travelling campaign such as *khadi*, constructive work, educational change and untouchable upliftment. By focusing on villages, first in Bihar and later in other parts of India, Gandhi believed that he could change hearts of caste-Hindus one by one.³⁵⁵

In this chapter I have shown that the travelling campaign against untouchability was a campaign arranged and orchestrated by Gandhi which encompassed several hundred villages in the subcontinent. Gandhi attempted to mobilise Indians through transforming traditional Hindu ideas and applying them in his campaigns. Gandhi attracted supporters in spite of the fact that some of them did not understand his religious views or his emphasis on using religious aspects in the campaign. Other active supporters emphasised the social aspects and ignored the religious ones. The priority in the campaign lay in villages where Gandhi wanted to recreate a "golden age" or *Ramaraj*. He was going to achieve this through changing the hearts of caste Hindus so that they would repent and accept untouchables as equals. Gandhi initiated several reforms in the villages through his organisation and other volunteers, who were all given specific instructions on their participation.

I have shown that there were a number of initiatives put in motion so that transition to acceptance would be easier. Gandhi continued his attempt at implementing temple-entry for untouchables in public temples. He tried to establish the production of *khadi* as a common cottage industry that would be of advantage to the poor, thereby wanting economic reform. In addition, Gandhi started schools with subjects related to the pupils and provided scholarships for untouchables in educational reform.

At the core of Gandhi's reforms in the campaign were his religious convictions. Gandhi expressed that "this movement is a religious movement, and everywhere people are

³⁵⁴ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 298.

³⁵⁵ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 297.

recognizing it now.”³⁵⁶ Gandhi expected his reformers to follow his instructions which included guidelines on how to make untouchables adhere to the religious rules of cleanliness. It was also the role of religion that created the most fervent opposition and misunderstandings among both caste-Hindus and untouchables. *Sanatanists* believed Gandhi was corrupting Hinduism and not saving it. Untouchables did not understand why caste-Hindus were solely responsible for lifting up untouchables when they wanted to help themselves.

Nevertheless, there were people who benefited from the campaign. Temples with equal access were opened in areas around India – although, according to the information available equal access seems to have been temporary. The spinning of *khadi* helped whole villages economically, at least as long as the campaign lasted. Educational reform provided untouchables with an education adapted to their needs. Last, but not least, the infrastructure in a number of villages was improved (roads, wells, temples, renovation and the cleaning of untouchable quarters) which must have been significant in the immediate temporal context.

³⁵⁶ *Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works* Volume 63, p. 80.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

All India, or most of it, stared reverently at the Mahatma and expected him to perform miracle after miracle and put an end to untouchability and get *swaraj* and so on – and did precious little itself! And Gandhiji did not encourage others to think; his insistence was only on purity and sacrifice.³⁵⁷ – Jawaharlal Nehru

The period of the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability can be seen as a hiatus in Gandhi's effort against the colonial power. The two campaigns differ from other campaigns orchestrated by Gandhi in that they were more religious and personal in nature. Instead of focusing on an external adversary, the focus in the two campaigns of 1932 to 1934 was on the abolition of untouchability, a deep-rooted internal issue which, in Gandhi's view, required caste-Hindus to undergo reform – both personally and religiously.³⁵⁸

In this thesis I have provided an overview of the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability, two campaigns that have not to my knowledge been wholly mapped out by scholars. This has been done in the attempt to study Gandhi's methods of mobilisation in the two campaigns. I have shown that Gandhi's methods were based on traditional Hindu values and ideals that were familiar to Indians and thereby increased the potential of popular support. What I have also shown through both the *MGCW* and Rudolph and Rudolph is that Gandhi's religious interpretation varied from that of popular Hinduism which, as a result, meant that Gandhi interpreted traditional Hindu values differently as well.

The argument of my thesis has been that Gandhi attempted to mobilise Indians even though he was incarcerated for most of the temple-entry campaign. Although Gandhi did not attempt mobilisation single-handedly, he provided detailed instructions to his organisation, the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, which he expected to be followed. Gandhi's mobilising power came in part from his association to nationalist politics and in part from Gandhi himself. I have attempted to prove this through interviews, articles and correspondence between Gandhi and his followers in the *MGCW* and through other studies. Amin, Irschick and Rudolph and Rudolph write of Gandhi perceived and received as a religious figure surrounded by Indians wanting his *darshan* and listening to his speeches when he was not in gaol. Coward and

³⁵⁷ Bailey, *God-Botherers and other True-Believers: Gandhi, Hitler and the Religious Right*, p. 154.

³⁵⁸ Coward, "Gandhi, Ambedkar and Untouchability", pp. 56-57. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 206.

Brown write that Gandhi was still connected to politics. A number of Indians saw the campaigns as a continuance of the civil disobedience campaign and Congress politicians such as Nehru supported Gandhi in his efforts.

Using rhetoric that reflected traditional Hindu values lead to at least three noticeable responses among participants in the two campaigns. First, I have attempted to show that there were participants who followed Gandhi's instructions and accepted his interpretation of Hindu religion (or at least claimed to). Gandhi reproduced letters received by his followers in the *MGCW* and used them as examples in the two campaigns. Some of the examples were of successes with temple-entry, *khadi* or educational reform. Others were of opposition against participants in the form of demonstrations, beatings or lack of cooperation. I take into consideration that Gandhi reproduced examples that served his purpose of increasing the support for the campaigns. Nevertheless, the examples provided in my thesis show that there were participants who followed Gandhi's instructions.

Second, I have attempted to show that there were participants who followed Gandhi's instructions with the reservation that they did not understand his religious interpretations. Examples I provided from the *MGCW* show that participants corresponded with Gandhi and spoke to him about his religious views. In some cases, participants said they would follow him only because of his previous political involvement. In other cases, participants stated that they disregarded the religious aspect of the two campaigns either because they did not understand or did not want to use Gandhi's interpretation. The examples provide an insight into Gandhi's power of mobilisation in that Indians followed Gandhi and participated in the two campaigns even though they did not completely agree with him or his religious interpretations.

Third, I have attempted to show that there were participants who did not follow all of Gandhi's instructions and instead followed their own paths. The examples I have provided in this thesis have come from the *MGCW* and also Brown, Irschick and Yagati. They show that there were participants who focused wholly on the social aspect of the two campaigns. There were also participants who attempted to force Indians to reform – which was the opposite of Gandhi's vision of caste-Hindus' "change of hearts". There were also participants who took advantage of their connection to the Gandhian campaigns in order to gain popular support. Although Gandhi was strictly against deviation from his instructions it is obvious, according to material presented in this thesis, that Gandhi did not have control over every element in the two campaigns.

Brown explains that Gandhi's campaigns were dependent on local interests and that he thereby attracted participants who did not have the same goals as Gandhi but took advantage of his popularity and mobilisational power. This was an inherent risk in the two campaigns due to the fact that Gandhi was dependent on local intermediaries in order to gain support.³⁵⁹

The overall structure of the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability seemed uniform through Gandhi's emphasis on detailed instructions given to his organisation the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and other participants. My thesis shows that uniformity was only on the surface. There were variations within the campaigns in spite of detailed instructions from Gandhi, which reflects the complexity of the campaigns as well as complexity of Indian society. Although Gandhi applied his rhetoric and ideals universally in the campaigns, it is my belief that he did not take local or regional variations into consideration. One example of this can be found in the chapter on temple-entry where the campaign had turned from being focused on caste-Hindu reform to being a movement against brahmans. In short, the social structure in the south was different, namely one of brahmans and non-brahmans. Focusing on including untouchables with caste-Hindus did not have the same meaning in South India, where untouchables were already among non-brahmans. Consequentially, a variation in the campaign occurred.

Although the overall goal of the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability was the same, namely the abolition of untouchability, there was a shift in priorities as to how the abolition of untouchability was to be accomplished. The focus in the temple-entry campaign was religious, namely on untouchables' entry into temples. Specifically, Gandhi used rhetoric based on traditional Hindu values in the attempt to reform caste-Hindus so that they would accept untouchables as equals. What was also inherent in the temple-entry campaign was that there was to be no compromise in untouchables' entry into temples. Caste-Hindus had to be reformed and untouchables accepted into Hindu temples as their equals.

Gandhi wanted untouchables to enter temples, which led to opposition against him and the campaign, particularly from *sanatanist* Hindus. As I have shown in my thesis, it was *sanatanists'* conviction that untouchables were religiously and socially impure and would therefore defile temples by entering them. It was in this connection that the suggestion of building separate temples for untouchables surfaced. Gandhi refused to compromise on the grounds that separate temples would not reform caste-Hindus. In the travelling campaign

³⁵⁹ Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928-1934*, pp. 384-385.

against untouchability, however, Gandhi agreed to compromise both when it came to building separate temples and other facilities. At the same time, weeks after the start of the travelling campaign against untouchability, the religious aspect of the campaign was toned down. This can be seen as a shift in Gandhi's tactics of mobilisation: Gandhi's religious interpretation and temple-entry attracted more opposition than other aspects of the campaigns. Emphasising other aspects of the campaign thereby increased the potential of more supporters. Although Gandhi did not state that there was a shift in tactics, the acceptance of compromise and the fact that temple-entry was barely mentioned in the travelling campaign against untouchability provides a strong indication that there was a shift in his priorities.

As an additional point, it is interesting to see that although Gandhi did not mobilise India as a whole, initiatives from the two campaigns had repercussions on a political level. Brown explains that aspects of Gandhi's initiated educational reform, such as compulsory free schooling with emphasis on manual training, was approved by a committee in the Indian National Congress. The reform was, according to Brown, hindered by the outbreak of the War in 1939.³⁶⁰ As to the overall goal, namely the abolition of untouchability, Brown explains that "there are few signs of change as a direct reflection of Gandhi's work. Certainly his growing hostility to caste as he found it in India and his abhorrence of untouchability were significant in moulding the Congress mind."³⁶¹ It is not for me to say whether or not the two campaigns of 1932 to 1934 lead to any monumental decision on untouchability in Indian politics. What I can say, however, is that the two campaigns brought forth a debate on the complex issue of untouchability, which until that point had been only marginal.

³⁶⁰ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 302.

³⁶¹ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, p. 390.

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