

# DALIT VOICE

[The Voice of The Persecuted Minorities]

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## GANDHI VS. AMBEDKAR

Gandhi, dead or alive, is kept in the news because India's Ruling Class feels that he serves its class and caste interests. And now 35 years after his death and almost forgotten except on officially sponsored yearly rituals and when the value system for which Gandhi stood is crumbling, the Ruling Class is trying to resurrect Gandhi through a multi-million rupee film. Because, the Ruling Class survives only on Gandhism. We want to make it clear that we have nothing against the Ruling Class calling him *Mahatma*. Who are we to object? Those who have been benefitted by him have every right to sing his praise. Just as we concede their right, they must give us also the right to to assess this "Father of the nation." Mrs. Savita Ambedkar said at Kolar that "she had great respect for the *Rastropita* though he had not done anything to dalits. Gandhi had come in the way of the happiness and benefits of dalits." (*Indian Express, Feb. 18*) This middle-class Messiah had a role to play and he played it well. Just as the people get the govt. they deserve, the society also throws up the leader it deserves. The India of the 20th century—the dark age—perhaps deserved only a leader like him. Already a renowned historian like R. C.

Mozumdar has said that Gandhi was "history's magnificent failure." History has already pronounced its verdict on Gandhi. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, India's greatest son after the Buddha; has called him "a successful humbug." And said: "If a man with a god's name on his tongue and a sword under his armpit deserved the appellation of a Mahatma, then Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a Mahatma." Therefore, it is no surprise that dalits in many parts of India consider him their Enemy No. 1. But was he at least an honest enemy? "Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone. But the Untouchables have remained as Untouchables," said Ambedkar. Because, of the 21 "fasts-unto-death" that he staged, there was not one single that he undertook for the sake of Untouchables—re-named *Harijans* by him. And yet the Ruling Class with the Press at its command successfully painted him as the one who removed untouchability from

India ! Can there be a greater falsehood than this? He might not have fasted for Untouchables but he did go on hunger strike against them. And this was described by the Ruling Class as Gandhi's "Epic Fast" (1932) that culminated in the historic Poona Pact which Ambedkar described as "nothing but a declaration of war by Mr. Gandhi against the Untouchables." If the Untouchables are today living under a system of slavery unparalleled in the whole world, the ignoble Poona Pact gave it the official seal. India's Press has been also tomtoming that Gandhi worked for the temple entry of *Harijans*. There can't be a bigger bluff than this. The Guruvayur temple, which was just in the news, had already exposed this yet another Gandhian humbug as early as 1938. The person who exposed it was a Brahmin leader from Malabar - Ranga Iyer. When Kelappan went on fast to secure entry of Untouchables to this temple, it was Gandhi who opposed it and Ranga Iyer, who brought a motion in then Madras Assembly, spoke about it with great regret. All these are on record. (*Ambedkar; Gandhi and Gandhism*, Bheem Patrika publication - page 106-118). The pity of it is that this man, who was advertised as the champion of the Untouchables and Muslims, turned out to be their Enemy No. 1 by these very sections. Subsequent events have fully proved it. What a tragedy ! How soon the myth got exploded. History is no respecter of personalities. And the *Gandhi* film by a sheer coincidence portrays exactly this very Gandhi. Look, today it is the very Muslims and dalits who are voicing the protest against the *Gandhi* film that has already won many

awards & has attracted crowds for months in the West & the chief actor, Ben Kingsley, as Gandhi is declared the best actor of the year. But the film has sorely disappointed and angered the dalits and Muslims. Top officials of the Govt., the Prime Minister, who have seen the premiere of the film, failed to tell the director Richard Attenborough, on the absolute need to include the tremendous incidents leading to the Epic Fast of Gandhi over the famous Communal Award announced by the British Premier, Sir Ramsay MacDonald, on Aug. 17, 1932. The Award, inter alia, provided for separate electorates for Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Europeans and the dalits. Ambedkar was mainly responsible for securing separate electorate for dalits. Earlier (March 11, 1932), Gandhi had warned the British at the Second Round Table Conference in London, that he would resist with his life the grant of separate electorates to the dalits, for, in his opinion, "it would create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. He added, "I do not mind the Depressed Classes, if they so desire being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages." Is it not clear from this that Gandhi was more interested in Hinduism than in the dalits? In a statement made on Sep. 19, 1932 on Gandhi's threatened fast, Ambedkar said, "Gandhi chooses to let everybody else except the Depressed Classes retain separate electorates given to them. If the nation is not going to be split up

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## RELIGIO-CULTURAL REVOLUTION LAUNCHED IN KERALA

(A. M. A., Bangalore)

We welcome the bold and imaginative step taken by the Kerala Harijan Federation in organizing a protest march from Trivandrum to the historic Krishna temple at Guruvayur to join the Brahmin feeding of the temple on Feb. 13. This has exposed the hypocrisy of the advocates of Hindu unity. Hindu never fail to claim the Untouchables and backward classes to be an integral part of the Hindu community. What kind of a community is it, if the Untouchables can't be seated with them in a public meal served at the temple? Some newspapers like the *Indian Express* are trying to make out a case that the exclusion of Untouchables is an age-old religious ritual and not an instance of discrimination against them. We sympathize with these naive educators. They fail to see that practices such as the exclusive feeding of Brahmins in the "sacred" precincts of the temple as part of the worship, the exclusive rights of the Brahmins to act as priests are the social instruments through which caste consciousness is maintained in the society and transmitted from generation to generation. They are in other words the "carriers" of caste consciousness, devices sacralized in the name of religion by the hierarchical feudal society presided over by the Brahmin priest. The question is, therefore, can the constitutional vision of an egalitarian and just society tolerate such anti-constitutional practices in the name of religion? Do they realize that the total failure to eradicate caste-consciousness, the great curse of our society, even after 32 years of our Republican life is very much due to the unwillingness on the part of the higher castes to get rid of similar religio-cultural practices? As long as in our religio-cultural life practices and habits, "carriers" of caste consciousness remain, any talk of fighting caste and communalism on the part of our political and religious leaders betray the stuff they are made of. The protest march organized by the Harijan Federation led by Kalfara Sukamaram will be the beginning of a religio-cultural revolution in Kerala. The first Guruvayur setyagraha led by Kelappen with the support of the great Dalit leader like Ambedkar and Ayyankali etc aroused hopes of such a revolution which was scuttled by Gandhi under the garb of *Ramarajya* which turned out to be nothing but cultural subordination of dalits to Brahmin customs and practices. You cannot build the edifice of social equality with the cultural bricks and religious mortars of the feudal hierachical society. The religion of today has to take appropriate cultural forms and practices if it has to meaningfully coexist and not to act as a counter-force against the aspirations of the oppressed and marginalised people. Some people have advocated abolition of the public exclusive feeding of Brahmins and suggested in its place private feeding of one Brahmin as part of the ritual since the codes laid down by Adi Sankara stipulates that the *naivedyam* be offered to God Krishna only after a share of it is given to a Brahmin. The practice, they say, is based on the supposition that the Brahmin is a representative of the god. Is it not more in tune with the times to consider a poor Untouchable as representative of the God? In any case how can he be

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## GANDHI, AMBEDKAR & PERIYAR-- A STUDY

(Prof. M. K. Subramanian, Erode- TN)

*The term "Untouchables" is applied to a wide range of outcaste groups in India. The Govt. calls them Harijans or SCs. From centuries they had been doing certain traditional duties involving polluting activities. Some of the Untouchables were concerned*

with removing of dead cattle or tanning their hides. They ate the flesh of cattle & pigs, subjected to many social restrictions, segregated outside village limits, forbidden to enter temples, denied schooling, barred to draw water from wells. They cannot wear upper garments or footwear, cannot touch higher castes. Social cruelties and oppression of Untouchables are limitless and unimaginable. J. H. Hutton says a Nayar might safely approach a Brahmin within a few feet but could not touch him without defiling him. The presence of Tiya toddy-tapper was enough to pollute a Brahmin at a distance of 36 paces, and that of a Pulayan at no less than 96 paces. At Triunelveli, there was a caste whose occupation was to wash the clothes of the Untouchables. This caste was condemned to remain as the unseables and thus to live a nocturnal existence. These Untouchables and unseables, who had suffered for ages social, even spatial immobility and suppression at the hands of the Hindus are, of course, clubbed in Hinduism and also called Hindus, but alas! socially betrayed, injured, condemned and outlawed. Social reformers have given only a compromise formula to eradicate untouchability. Their approach is reformist. They never advocated the abolition of caste as a prerequisite to remove untouchability. They don't question the sacred authority of the Shastras & Puranas which perpetuate and protect the caste and untouchability. The social reformers advo-

cated, after all, the removal of caste differences only, not the total and unconditional abolition of caste. To this class of social reformers belongs Gandhi, who said untouchability is not sanctioned by religion, but a device of Satan. Gandhi cites the example of his mother who became untouchable temporarily every time she handled unclean things and hence had to cleanse herself by bathing. So, his argument is that such untouchability as is recognised by religion is by its very nature transitory- easily removable and referable to the deed, not the doer. He condemns the practice of untouchability but not the institution. He defends Varnashrama as a healthy division of work based on birth. Caste is purely a question of duty. In support, he quotes the Gita. He even vindicates Manu smriti as being not responsible for the practice of untouchability. He did not want to antagonise the upper caste Hindus. In spite of Gandhi's compromising technique the Hindu orthodoxy did not spare his life mission. From the soft-peddling Gandhism to the revolutionary approach of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Periyar EVR. Ambedkar was born of an Untouchable. He was denied the opportunity of studying Sanskrit. But later he mastered it. He burnt the Manu Smriti publicly in 1927. He never agreed with Gandhi. He abhorred the use of the term Harijan and hence moved a Bill in the Bombay Legislative Assembly to withdraw the term from official use. Ambedkar was

always strong in his views like Periyar. He was determined to regain rights only by struggle. In one conference, exactly like Periyar, Ambedkar rebuked and ridiculed his people in order to arouse them to action. He said: "The appearance of Tulasi leaves around your neck will not relieve you from the clutches of the money-lenders. Because you sing the songs of Ramayan, you do not get a concession in rent from landlord". In an article, he was brutally atheistic and argued in a down-to-earth fashion. He wrote: "You must abolish your slavery by yourselves. Don't depend for its abolition upon God or superman. Pilgrimages cannot give salvation". Thus the writings, speeches and dialogues of Ambedkar were as frank and fiery as Periyar's. To fulfil his vow not to die a Hindu, he embraced Buddhism in 1956 along with 6 lakhs Untouchables in spite of Periyar's persuasion to fight from within, not leaving Hinduism. Ambedkar did not realise that conversion to Buddhism could not be a remedy to untouchability. Periyar was an atheist and a social revolutionary. In his school days, he moved with low-caste boys much against the advice of his parents and teachers. With self-acquired knowledge in Vedas, Shastras and Puranas, he questioned their authority and sanctity. He attacked tradition, orthodoxy and superstitions. He turned his heavy artillery against religion, god and scriptures. His conviction was that untouchability cannot be removed unless the Varnashrama Dharma, Hinduism, faith in a multitude of gods and Brahmanism are abolished. He advocated atheistic and social revolution. According to Periyar, the sudras & panchamas should fight against Varnashrama and Hinduism for the

removal of social stigma attached to their birth. Human dignity, that is, self-respect for man, was Periyar's message. In a series of Self-Respect Conferences since 1929, a call was given to the sudras and panchamas to refuse to practice religion and shastras which were responsible for Varnashrama. He conducted a series of depressed classes conferences. The self-respect movement and later Dravida Kazagam brought under the single banner lakhs of sudras and panchamas. His leadership in Vaikom satyagraha forced the authorities to permit Untouchables in Vaikom streets. He advocated the abolition of caste through proportional communal representation in all walks of life. Due to his relentless struggle, the first amendment to the Constitution guaranteed reservation for the backward classes. His campaign against caste boards in restaurants, burning the portraits of Rama and breaking the idol of Vigneswara were demonstrative of social and atheistic revolution. He conducted a conference at Madras in 1973 for starting an agitation to amend the Constitution so that caste could be abolished in law and also for providing opportunities for the sudras and panchamas to become temple archakas. This is a message and mission of Periyar; yet to be fulfilled. □

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## KANYA KUMARI HEADING FOR ANOTHER EXPLOSION

(Our correspondent)

Madras: The RSS-built Vivekananda Rock Memorial will soon prove to be yet another reason for anti-Christian violence on the southern tip of India. Last year, the RSS in league with the Hindu police of the TN gunned down six poor Christian fishermen in the Kanyakumari dt. and this year the RSS has already started the rehearsal at Nagercoil. The Rock Memorial and the Vivekananda Centre are the nerve centre of the RSS. The local fishermen had opposed this memorial at the very stage of construction. RSS has brought hundreds of Marwar youths from North India and it is these people who are doing all the mischief whipping up anti-Christian hatred among the poor backward class Hindus, mostly Nadars. Following last year's bloody incidents and unable to contain the RSS influence, the State Govt. has rightly decided to build a bridge to the Rock Memorial. But the RSS with the help of rich temple leaders has been opposing this decision. Meanwhile, the Rock Memorial has created all sorts of problems to poor fishermen who are deprived of their livelihood because of the silting on coastal strip. Hotels & tourists have also made the area congested. The whole scenic beauty is gone. Formerly, Christians, Muslims and even foreigners used to visit this land's end to enjoy the nature's beauty but now the RSS volunteers manning the area do not allow any non-Hindus. Even dalits are being prevented. Fishermen have suffered permanent damage. Even the nearby church has suffered a lot. In view of this never-ending controversy over the Memorial, which

is responsible for the police-firing and deaths of many Christians, the heavy RSS concentration in the area, the fears expressed by the Dravida Kazagam, Left parties and many secular-minded Hindus, why not the State govt appoint a judicial commission to examine the shifting of all the paraphernalia three miles away, even as it should immediately start building the bridge to the Memorial? Or will the MGR Govt. yield to RSS?

(Contd. from page 3)

positively excluded to the benefit of well-fed Brahmins by the same people who condescendingly called him *Harijan*—son of god? The basic question is whether the high caste Hindus, their Mathadipatis and priests are prepared to cleanse their religion of feudal, hierarchical and superstitious practices and conform to the constitutional vision of man and society. They cannot any more hood wink the dalits. If they claim us as part of the Hindu society let them from Feb. 13th feed a dalit in the place of a Brahmin in reparation for the sins committed against them in the past. The other solution would be to disown us and (we are not Hindus) leave us free to follow our own traditions & counsels. Perhaps it would help us to unite among ourselves as we are freed from the institutional and cultural chains of Hinduism. What one fails to understand is that the very Mathadipatis, swamis and their followers who are eager to avail themselves of the benefit of modern civilisation in their work-life, homes and religious practices are averse to change discriminatory and humiliating social practices in the name of religion.

# U.S. CONCERN OVER TORTURE OF INDIA'S UNTOUCHABLES

*R. Chakrapani, the Washington correspondent of the Hindu, quoting (Feb. 2) from the US Administration's report to the Congress on the state of human rights in India says: "The report takes the view that govt. efforts to improve the position of scheduled castes & tribes have so far met with only moderate success. Tribal groups & Harijans continue to constitute a large proportion of India's poorest of the poor & inequality of treatment or opportunities available to these groups contribute to a major impediment in India's social development."* Very mild words indeed. He also speaks about the widespread police atrocities on Untouchables. The report was made public on Feb. 8. Already the US Ambassador to the UNO, Mrs. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, has raised the issue of Untouchables in the UNO & had criticised India for denying human rights to such a vast population. Surprisingly, the Indian Press, which makes much of the "denial" of the freedom of the Press by the Indian Govt., did not report her speech. As the guardian of the Hindu interests, the Press thought it fit to resort to blackout. Nothing inconvenient to the Hindus is reported in the Indian Press. The Untouchables demonstration led by Dr. Laxmi Berwa before the White House in Washington was blacked out for this very same reason. Many dalits living abroad and inside India have written us letters congratulating the US Govt. & Mrs. Kirkpatrick in particular for bringing such a grave issue to the notice of the world forum. The UNO can now instruct its Human Rights Commission to send a team to India to probe the whole thing. The Indian Govt. & its Ruling Class will

do their best to prevent such an exposure by taking shelter under the constitutional provision abolishing untouchability. Foreigners & their Govts. are often deceived by this argument. TCA Rangachari, a Brahmin working as the first secretary of the Indian Mission to the UNO, while replying to Kirkpatrick had resorted to the very same trick of citing the Constitution. True, the Constitution has abolished untouchability. But has the Govt. taken any step to implement this provision? None. The Govt. of India's Home Ministry has an official called the Scheduled Caste Commissioner who publishes his annual report which is debated yearly in Parliament. In this very column we have reviewed these reports. What do these reports of the Govt. itself say? Whom is Rangachari fooling? In the Indian Parliament the Govt. admits of the large scale atrocities on Untouchables. We have the report of the London-based Minority Rights Group (DV Jan. 1-15). There are any number of reports available with the impartial sources. The Ruling Class often defends itself saying that the issue of Indian Untouchables is an internal problem of India. But the UN Human Rights covenant has made it clear that no denial of human rights can be treated as an internal problem of that country. We too have been voicing the opinion of India's dalits, its vast persecuted minorities that

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## Letters to Editor :

Gulam Sarwar, Ex-Minister, Patna : Many thanks for publishing the Indian League for Minorities declaration.

R. A. Sindgikar, advocate, Bijapur : The Urdu daily from Bangalore, *Salat* (Feb. 2) said that Neil Armstrong, the first man to set foot on the moon, embraced Islam in US. Is this true? We are very proud of DV which is uniting the dalits, minorities & OBCs. DV needs to be circulated widely through libraries. We congratulate Mrs. Ambedkar for blessing this unity of all minorities by saying that the anti-national RSS is aiming at building up a Brahmin Raj in India.

Mhd. Zafrulla Rahmanai, Madurai : RSS is fast spreading in TN. After the Mee-nakshipuram conference, it is holding a dalit bonded labourers meet at Vellore. Deoras spoke at Virudhunagar on Jan. 26. The time has now come for the DV to make its Voice louder & stronger. In Madurai, we are forming a DV Readers Forum.

H. Shabestari, Dhanbad : DV is one of the rare journals speaking the truth. All the minorities must unite—be they dalits, OBCs, Sikhs, Muslims or Christians. This is exactly what the RSS is trying to prevent by engineering riots between dalits & Muslims. Therefore, DV has a great responsibility to enlighten the dalits about their real enemy.

P. M. Subhash, Kottayam : A friend told me about the DV. I am very proud to read it & thank you for awakening our people.

Bheemsevak, Ratnagiri, Maharashtra : N. T. Rama Rao has promised to the people of AP that he would bring "Rama

Rajya." But he didn't mention the treatment he would give to Ekalavyas who offered their thumb as *Guru Dakshina* to the Brahmin Drona.

Prof. P. Srinivasan, Chidambaram, TN : DV is doing a great service by awakening dalits. It needs our all-round support.

Durai Anbalagan, Dalit Panthers, Bombay : DV is helping us to know different dalits all over India & outside. It is the only journal for dalits. It was able to rope in so many eminent people & hence we are very proud of DV.

Prof. J. S. Bandukwala, Baroda : I have been receiving DV & your other publications. Congratulations for your bold attempts. In particular, you deserve all praise for stressing the need for the unity of all backward classes, especially the dalits & minorities. Unfortunately, the trend towards clashes between the dalits & minorities, as witnessed at Meerut & here, is most dangerous. I have stood strongly for the closest unity between the two. In 1981, my efforts to protect our dalit comrades during the anti-reservation agitation, led to my house being ransacked by Hindus. In Dec. 82, a number of dalits joined with me in dharna to protest the continuous communal riots here. I am proud that 4 dalit brothers & a sister joined me in jail. With proper leadership and unity, dalits, minorities and tribes can rule India. When will that day dawn?

Parameswaran, Cochin : The Kerala dalits were defeated and humiliated by the Brahmins controlling the Guruvayur temple, the "spiritual capital of Kerala, when they went there on Feb. 13. They could't achieve what they wanted. And once again the Brahmins had the upper-

hand. Because the "god" is with the Brahmin. No, the Brahmin is the "living god." What the dalit jata wanted was to partake the food reserved by the temple only to the Brahmins. This food called the *Uchcha puja naivedyam* is not being given even to higher caste Hindus like the Nairs or even the Amabalvasis (Nambisan or Marar) who served this temple in various capacities, not to speak of the Untouchables who are not Hindus at all as per the Hindu religion. Only the four *varnas* come under Hindus. Since the Untouchables are outside these four *varnas*, they are called the outcastes. Therefore, the temple authorities refused to serve this particular food to the dalits. Not even Chief Minister Karunakaran, who was present at the temple on Feb. 13 and had food with the dalits, could do anything. He said he was powerless. Before the Hindu gods, even the Govt. is powerless. The newspapers, however, misled the readers saying that *Harijans* ate with Brahmins." This was a false interpretation. The jata was meant to eat the particular food mentioned above. But this was denied. Hence dalits have been cheated, humiliated. Hence I call upon our dalit comrades all over India not to go to Hindu temples and also refuse to call themselves Hindus.

T. K. Narayanan, Trivandrum: The very term dalit has become a source of self-respect and inspiration to us. Apart from your brilliant editorial, the article (Feb. 1-15) about the Hindus in US is a revealing one. The very breath, brain and inner thread of a Hindu is his caste. He can't get rid of it. Inequality is in-born in a Hindu. He has been taught to be proud of the Brahmin's thread that

earns him free meals in temples. The Guruvayur incident is the latest example of such a false pride.

Dr. Aruna Arasuko, Trichy, TN: This is with ref. to the letter of V. Veeraswamy (Oct. 1-15, 1982). He has listed the atrocities of Hindus on we dalits. He used the term "caste" Hindus to separate them from Brahmins. It is highly erroneous and against the findings of Ambedkar. If Brahmins are not caste Hindus does Veeraswamy mean to say that they are casteless Hindus? Ambedkar said "caste is religion." According to Veeraswamy "Brahmins are not the enemies of outcastes." What are the reasons for the Puliangudi murders by RSS? The reasons are the repeated resolutions passed by the Viswa Hindu Parishad, Hindu Munnani, Oppressed Class Employees Assn. criticising the reservation of jobs to dalits. The "Gujarat caste war" and the Marathwada massacre of dalits are due to the organisations led by Brahmins. The key role played by the Brahmins in religious matters, the process of Sanskritization or Brahminization on the social sphere and all the top positions occupied by Brahmins prove the domination of Brahmins. Further, no Brahmin is voicing against the atrocities of Hindus on dalits when they are so vociferous in criticising every other form of atrocity in other parts of the world including their own mother cow. His statement that DK is a "caste" Hindu party is a total lie and mischievous too. The only social movement of India directed against Hinduism is the DK. A "caste" Hindu organisation dare not "insult" Rama. Breaking the elephant-headed god's idol, burning *Manu Smriti*, attacking basic Hindu tenets amply proves that DK is anti-Hindu. □

## Corruption Charges Against Top RSS leader

The controversial former Chief Minister of MP during the Janata regime & a top RSS leader, V. K. Saklecha, has been chargesheeted for serious offences of corruption. The Hindu press is doing its best to twist the whole thing by saying the Cong. Govt. is deliberately trying to victimise him. But RSS sources privately admit that much of the records were given to the police by insiders only because of the rift in the State RSS. Saklecha, now MLA, was first made a minister in 1977 & promoted CM in 1978. According to the chargesheet, Saklecha & his family had opened 28 bank accounts during his tenure as Minister and Chief Minister. Earlier they had only eight. As many as 29 long-term fixed deposit accounts involving a sum of Rs. 7,22,500 were opened and national development bonds worth Rs. 1,22,500 also bought. The family also bought shares of 26 companies worth Rs. 5,50,478, set up two industrial units in the Noida complex and invested Rs. 1,75,000 in commercial flats in Delhi. Saklecha also paid a capitation fee of Rs. 12,000 for his son's admission to an engineering college in Karnataka.

The investigating agency said in a statement that it had collected over 5,000 documents and had interviewed over 500 witnesses in support of its case. (PTI & UNI.)

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it should be treated as an international problem. Human rights & minority groups the world over should take up this issue and save the vast impounded dalits of India. □

## D.V. Readers Forum launched

Trivandrum: DV Readers Forum was inaugurated here on Jan. 29 by T. H. P. Chentharassery, the noted Dalit writer of Kerala. The meeting, was attended by dalits of different walks of life. Dr. M. Vasu, MBBS, of the Trivandrum Medical College Hospital, was elected convener of the Forum. It was decided that the Forum should meet every Saturday evening to discuss the different issues raised in the DV & also to brief DV of the problems facing the Kerala dalits & other persecuted minorities. Also decided to form the Dalit Sahitya Akademy unit here to plan out a Malayalam edition of the DV, just as the Tamil edition (*Dalit Kural*) published from Madras by R. Elumalai of the Dalit Cultural Front. Chentharassery stressed the need to hold small camps of dalit writers here, Kottayam, Ernakulam etc. C. Madhavan of the AG's office said DV has created State-wide interest among dalits & persecuted minorities & hence all of them must approach the convener (Dr. M. Vasu, Medical College Hospital, Trivandrum-695 011). The following studies were suggested: Ambedkarism & its revolutionary import, dalit history of India, scientific basis of culture & dalit life, *dalitism* & existing Indian ideologies, Dalitstan vs. Hindustan. Those outside Kerala could also contribute to this research. Madhavan made a firm plea that dalits must be enabled to swim across centuries of cultural deprivation culminating in Dalitastan. Dalits of Coimbatore were congratulated for launching the first DV Readers Forum & speakers desired that similar forums should be started in other cities of India. □

by separate electorates given to the Muslims and the Sikhs, the Hindu society cannot be said to be split up by separate electorates if the Depressed Classes are given the same. His conscience is not aroused if the nation is split by the arrangements of special electorates for classes and communities other than Depressed Classes. But Gandhi's ways of thinking are strange. I am prepared to consider any proposal of Gandhi. I, however, trust that Gandhi will not drive me to the necessity of making a choice between his life and the rights of my people, for, I can never consent to deliver my people bound hand and foot to the caste Hindus for generations to come". Most Hindu leaders, including Dr. Moonje, President of the Hindu Mahasabha & founder of the RSS, reconciled themselves to the provisions of the Communal Award, there being no alternative. But Gandhi alone was determined to deny separate electorates to the dalits. And the propaganda is that Gandhi was the champion of *Harijans*. Gandhi started his fast on Sept. 20, 1932 as a prisoner in the Yerwada Jail, Poona. Immediately a furious campaign was started against Ambedkar by the Hindu leaders and the Brahmin Press to force him to agree to the abolition of separate electorate. In turn, Ambedkar said: "As I had the privilege of representing the Untouchables at the RTC, it was assumed that the assent of the Untouchables would not be valid unless I was a party to it. The surprising fact is that my position as the leader of the Untouchables of India was not only not questioned by the Cong-

ress, but it was accepted as a fact. All eyes naturally turned to me as the man of the moment or rather as the villain of the piece". The claims of Gandhi and the Congress to represent the Untouchables vanished into thin air and Ambedkar stood out on the Indian scene as the only man to stop Gandhi's fast or as some people said Gandhi's blackmail. At the meeting of the Hindu leaders held at Poona, Madan Mohan Malaviya presiding, Ambedkar was asked to speak first for resolving the issue. Ambedkar said calmly that "it was very proper that every man should try to save the precious life of Gandhi, but in the absence of any alternative proposal from Gandhi, there seemed to be no way out. But one thing is decided. To save Gandhi's life, I would not be a party to any proposal that would be against the interests of my people". The Hindu leaders expressed shock. Jawaharlal Nehru, who was then in the Allahabad jail, was tormented by the thought of Gandhi's possible death. He wrote to his daughter, "I am shaken up completely and I know not what to do. My little world in which he has occupied such a big place, shakes and totters, and there seems to be darkness and emptiness everywhere....Shall I not see him again? And whom shall I go to when I am in doubt and require wise counsel, or am afflicted and in sorrow and need loving comfort? What shall we all do when our beloved chief who inspired us and led us has gone?" Gandhi offered reservation of seats for the dalits under a joint electorate with the Hindus. Ambedkar asked for larger number of seats than that announced by the British Govt. if it is to be joint electorate and

## GANDHI VS. DR. AMBEDKAR

a referendum after 20 years. While the Hindu leaders were higgie-haggle for small increases in the quantum of seats, Ambedkar finally insisted on representation according to population both in the Central & State Legislatures. The negotiating leaders were very reluctant to agree to this principle, but Gandhi had no objection to give the dalits any number of seats so long as they were not separated politically from the rest of the Hindus. The final figure was settled at 148 as against 71 in the Communal Award and the Poona Pact was signed on the Sept. 24th, the 5th day of the fast. Gandhi ended the fast on the 26th after the Pact was accepted by the British. The Pact was signed on behalf of the dalits by Ambedkar, and on behalf of the Hindus by Malaviya. The other signatories were M. R. Jayakar, Tej Bahadur Sapru, C. Rajagopalachari, M. C. Raja, Devdas Gandhi, Biswas, Rao Bahadur Srinivasan, Rajbhoj & others. The Pact has long been regarded as one extracted from the Untouchables under force, coercion and spiritual duress. It was a Pact more to save Gandhi than to serve the Untouchables. Anyway, the Poona Pact is part & parcel of not only Gandhi's political life, but part of Indian history and the future of Indian constitutional law and the fate of Untouchables were centred on Dr. Ambedkar's signature. Any life of Gandhi would be incomplete without the great incidents leading to the Poona Pact. *Ambedkar not only saved Gandhi's life, but also his own, for, the Hindus would have butchered Ambedkar & many others if Gandhi had died in this crisis.* Apart

from the eminent Hindu leaders pleading with Ambedkar for concessions to save Gandhi's life, there was Devdas Gandhi, last son of Gandhi and son-in-law of C. Rajagopalachari, who "with tears in his eyes, described the condition of his father to Ambedkar and entreated him not to hold over the agreement by pressing for a referendum", which, however, was finally dropped by Ambedkar. It was also reported that Kasturba, wife of Gandhi, begged Ambedkar to save her *mangalya* by saving her husband from certain death. But alas the Gandhi film is silent on this !!! The Poona Pact is a vital part of Gandhi's life. He had made abolition of untouchability a great concern for him as the freedom of India. He had asserted that if freedom for India does not also mean freedom from untouchability, he would rather not have freedom at all. In the context of the blatant omission of Ambedkar from the *Gandhi* film, it is interesting & shocking to note that Jawaharlal Nehru, in his book, *Discovery Of India*, written in Ahmednagar prison in 1944, has not said a word about Ambedkar or the Poona Pact. When scores of Muslim, British and Christian characters figure in the book, Ambedkar, who had played such a large part in the making of the 1935 Act and safeguarding the interests of the dalits has been completely omitted. If Sir Richard had consulted books such as these also, there is no wonder he treated Ambedkar as of no importance. We dalits are very much perturbed over this gross omission. We consider the blackout as a grave insult to our leader and saviour, a contempt to the problems of the Untouchables and a travesty of truth and history. Therefore, we protest against this film.

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