

APPENDIX 4

Mohandas Gandhi on Manual Scavenging

The position that I really long for is that of the Bhangi. How sacred is this work of cleanliness! That work can be done only by a Brahmin or by a Bhangi. The Brahmin may do it in his wisdom, the Bhangi in ignorance. I respect, I adore, both of them. If either of the two disappears from Hinduism, Hinduism itself would disappear.

And it is because *seva-dharma* (*seva*-service) is dear to my heart that the Bhangi is dear to me. I may even sit at my meals with a Bhangi on my side, but I do not ask you to align yourselves with them by intercaste dinners and marriages.

— 8 January 1925¹

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It is simply superfluous for me to say anything about untouchability. I have often and often declared that if I am destined not to gain redemption in this very life, it is my aspiration to be born a Bhangi in my next birth. I believe in *varnashram* and in both *janma* and *karma* (birth in a particular caste and fate fixed by actions in past births) associated with it, but I refuse to believe that a Bhangi is a born sinner. I have, on the contrary, seen countless Bhangis who deserve my veneration and many among Brahmins whom it becomes a very difficult task to adore. I shall be able to render more service to Bhangis by being born a Bhangi and be able in addition to make other communities see the light in this matter, than I ever can to Brahmins or recluses by being born a Brahmin. I wish to serve the Bhangis in numerous ways. But I do not wish to advise them to detest and hate

the Brahmin. Hatred, disgust, causes me deep pain. I do wish the uplift of the Bhangis, but do not regard it my duty to teach them to wrest their rights by the way of the West. It is not our *dharma* to gain anything by that method. Whatever is gained by brute-force is not going to last long in this world and I distinctly perceive the advent of that age in the world when it will be impossible to gain anything by means of physical might.

—Navajivan, 11 January 1925²

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Varnashrama and untouchability

Does untouchability in the case of a cobbler or scavenger attach to birth or to occupation? If it attaches to birth, it is hideous and must be rooted out; if it attaches to occupation it may be a sanitary rule of great importance. It is of universal application. A collier, whilst he is engaged in his work, is practically an untouchable. He, himself, refuses to shake the hand extended to him and says: "I am too dirty." But his work finished, he takes his bath, changes his dress, and very properly mixes with the highest in the land. Immediately, therefore, we remove the taint of birth, i.e. the idea of superiority and inferiority attaching to birth, we purify *Varnashrama*. The scavenger's children may remain scavengers without being or feeling degraded, and they will be no more considered untouchables than *Brahmins*. The fault does not, therefore, lie in recognizing the Law of Heredity and transmission of qualities from generation to generation, but it lies with the faulty conception of inequality.

Varnashrama, in my opinion, was not conceived in any narrow spirit. On the contrary, it gave the labourer, the *Shudra*, the same status as the thinker, the *Brahmin*. It provided for the accentuation of merit and elimination of demerit, and it transferred human ambition from the general worldly sphere to the permanent and the spiritual. The aim of the *Brahmin* and the *Shudra* was common—*Moksha*, or self-realization—not realization of fame, riches and power. Later on, this lofty conception of *Varnashrama* became degraded and came

to be identified with mere empty ceremonial and assumption of superiority by some and imposition of degradation upon others. This admission is not a demonstration of the weakness of *Varnashrama* but of human nature which, if it has a tendency under certain circumstances to rise to the highest point, has also a tendency under certain other circumstances to go down to the lowest. What the reformer seeks to do is to end the curse of untouchability and to restore *Varnashrama* to its proper place. Whether *Varnashrama* thus transmuted will survive the reform or not, remains to be seen. It will surely depend upon the new *Brahmin* class that is imperceptibly coming into being, namely, those who are dedicating themselves, body, soul and mind, to service of Hinduism and the country. If they have nothing of worldly ambition, it will be well with Hinduism; if they have, Hinduism, like any other ism, coming into the hands of ambitious men, will perish. But I have an immutable faith in the capacity of Hinduism to purge itself of all impurities from time to time. I do not think that that capacity is now exhausted.

—*Young India*, 13 August 1925³

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The iniquities we, caste-Hindus, have heaped upon you are so many and so horrible, that enough amends cannot be made even if we scraped our own skins and presented you with shoes made from them. I am a non-Brahmin by birth and became a sweeper by action. It is no calamity to be a sweeper. One can become a Bhangi (sweeper) in two ways. Somebody may call me a Bhangi by way of an abuse—as if a sweeper is a burden to society, though he does the very useful work of cleaning latrines and sweeping streets. Or one may call that man a Bhangi whose service of the people reaches its acme. The Bhangi's service is like that of our mothers, but we never call them untouchables. Far from it, the mother is revered as a Goddess worth remembering during our morning prayers. The Bhangi therefore is a true servant of society—with the only difference that he works for earning his bread, while the mother does it in a beneficent spirit. The mother serves the child with love and she gets love in return.

But salary is the return the sweeper gets for his service. Just as we cannot live without mothers, so can we not live without sweepers. That means that by their work they do only their duty to society. Let those who are sweepers among you here know that I can beat the best of them in the excellence of his cleaning work.

To the caste-Hindus I point out only one thing as regards untouchability. I rebuke them, blame them, for observing untouchability which I call a dark spot on Hinduism. As I told you, when I approach the caste-Hindu public I tell it that untouchability is a heinous sin.

But to untouchables themselves I say another thing. You eat putrid flesh, become drunkards, commit adultery and keep yourselves dirty. There is no one present here to bear witness to the strength with which the objectors emphasise these things. Do away with these serious defects. Perhaps nowhere in the world are as many putrid-flesh-eaters as in India. Give up beef, liquor and adultery. An adulterer is just like a beast. But you will protest: 'Do not other people commit the same sins?' I say let them, but I ask you not to do so.

—13 February 1927⁴

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Most honourable occupation

You should know that I am a scavenger myself by choice; and you must take me literally when I tell you that I have cleaned hundreds of *cheris* in my life. Everyone in the *Ashram* which I was conducting—and there were women also in the *Ashram*—had to do this work every day. I call scavenging as one of the most honourable occupations to which mankind is called. I don't consider it an unclean occupation by any means. That you have to handle dirt is true. But that every mother is doing and has to do. But nobody says a mother's occupation is unclean. And yet the scavenger's occupation is considered an unclean occupation. Therefore, I say that those who call themselves caste Hindus commit a sin when they consider

themselves higher than Harijans. I am going up and down the country to convince *Savarna* Hindus that it is a sin to consider themselves superior to or higher than anyone else. But I am trying also to tell fellow-scavengers that, while we may handle dirt, we must be clean ourselves both inwardly and outwardly. After we have done the cleansing, we must cleanse ourselves and put on clean clothes. I know many scavengers eat carrion and beef. Those who are doing this must abstain. Many of them are given to the evil habit of drink. Drink is a bad, filthy, unclean, degrading habit. A man who drinks intoxicating liquor forgets the distinction between wife, mother and sister. I would beseech you to give up all evil habits, and you will at once find that you are accepted as honourable members of society without any stain on you.

—*Harijan*, 19 January 1934⁵

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The Ideal Bhangi

The ideal Bhangi of my conception would be a Brahmin par excellence, possibly even excel him. It is possible to envisage the existence of a Bhangi without a Brahmin. But without the former the latter could not be. It is the Bhangi who enables society to live. A Bhangi does for society what a mother does for her baby. A mother washes her baby of the dirt and insures his health. Even so the Bhangi protects and safeguards the health of the entire community by maintaining sanitation for it. The Brahmin's duty is to look after the sanitation of the soul, the Bhangi's that of the body of society. But there is a difference in practice; the Brahmin generally does not live up to his duty, the Bhangi does, willy-nilly no doubt. Society is sustained by several services. The Bhangi constitutes the foundation of all services.

And yet our woebegone Indian society has branded the Bhangi as a social pariah, set him down at the bottom of the scale, held him fit only to receive kicks and abuse, a creature who must subsist on the leavings of the caste people and dwell on the dung-heap. He is

without a friend, his very name has become a term of reproach. This is shocking. It is perhaps useless to seek the why and wherefore of it. I certainly am unaware of the origin of the inhuman conduct, but I know this much that by looking down upon the Bhangi, we Hindus, have deserved the contempt of the whole world. Our villages have today become seats of dirt and insanitation and the villagers come to an early and untimely death. If only we had given due recognition to the status of the Bhangi as equal to that of a Brahmin as in fact and justice he deserves, our villages today no less than their inhabitants would have looked a picture of cleanliness and order. We would have to a large extent been free from the ravages of a host of diseases which directly spring from our uncleanness and lack of sanitary habits. I therefore make bold to state without any manner of hesitation or doubt that not till the invidious distinction between the Brahmin and the Bhangi is removed will our society enjoy health, prosperity and peace, and be happy.

What qualities should such an honoured servant of society exemplify in his person? In my opinion an ideal Bhangi should have a thorough knowledge of the principles of sanitation. He should know how a right kind of latrine is constructed and the correct way of cleaning it. He should know how to overcome and destroy the odour of excreta and the various disinfectants to render them innocuous. He should likewise know the process of converting night-soil and urine into manure.

But that is not all. My ideal Bhangi would know the quality of night-soil and urine. He would keep a close watch on these and give a timely warning to the individual concerned. Thus he will give a timely notice of the results of his examination of the excreta. That presupposes a scientific knowledge of the requirements of his profession. He would likewise be an authority on the subject of disposal of night-soil in small villages as well as big cities and his advice and guidance in the matter would be sought for and freely given to society. It goes without saying that he would have the usual learning necessary for reaching the standard here laid down for his

profession. Such an ideal Bhangi, while deriving his livelihood from his occupation, would approach it only as a sacred duty. In other words, he would not dream of amassing wealth out of it. He would consider himself responsible for the proper removal and disposal of all the dirt and night-soil within the area which he serves and regard the maintenance of healthy and sanitary condition within the same as the summum bonum of his existence.

—*Harijan*, 28 November 1936⁶

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Sweepers' strike

There are certain matters in which strikes would be wrong. Sweepers' grievances come in this category. My opinion against sweepers' strikes dates back to about 1897 when I was in Durban. A general strike was mooted there, and the question arose as to whether scavengers should join in it. My vote was registered against the proposal. Just as man cannot live without air, so too he cannot exist for long if his home and surroundings are not clean. One or other epidemic is bound to break out, especially when modern drainage is put out of action.... A *Bhangi* may not give up his work even for a day. And there are many other ways open to him for securing justice.

—*Harijan*, 21 April 1946⁷

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Q. What is the poor sweeper to do when everything else fails? Is the *Bhangi* to continue his service on starvation wages, living in dirt and squalor?

A. I claim that in such cases the proper remedy is not a strike, but a notice to the public in general and the employing corporation in particular that the *Bhangis* must give up the sweeping service which consigns those reserved for that service to a life of starvation and all it means. There is a wide distinction between a strike and an entire discontinuation (not suspension) of service. A strike is a temporary measure in expectation of relief. Discontinuance is giving up of a

particular job because there is no expectation of relief. Proper discontinuance presupposes fair notice on the one hand, and prospect of better wages and freedom from squalor and dirt on the other. This will wake up society from its disgraceful slumber, resulting in a proper scavenging of the overgrowth that has smothered public conscience. At a stroke, the *Bhangis* will raise scavenging to a fine art and give it the status it should have had long ago.

—*Harijan*, 23 June 1946⁸

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Someone asked Gandhiji whether the adoption of the flush system was not the means of eradicating untouchability and whether he would oppose it on account of his dislike of machinery. He replied:

“Where there is ample supply of water and modern sanitation can be introduced without any hardship on the poor, I have no objection to it. My opposition to machinery is much misunderstood. I am not opposed to machinery as such. I am opposed to machinery which displaces labour and leaves it idle. Whether the flush system will remove the curse of untouchability is open to grave doubt. This latter has to go from our hearts. It will not disappear through such means as has been suggested. Not until we all become *bhangis* and realize the dignity of the labour of scavenging and latrine-cleaning will untouchability really be exorcized.”

—*Harijan*, 15 September 1946⁹

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You, friends, have not seen the real India and you are not meeting in conference in the midst of real India. Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Lahore—all these are big cities and are, therefore, influenced by the West. If you really want to see India at its best, you have to find it in the humble *Bhangi* homes of the villages. There are 7,00,000 of such villages and 38 crores of people inhabit them.

If some of you see the villages, you will not be fascinated by the sight. You will have to scratch below the dung-heap. I do not

pretend to say that they were ever places of paradise. Today, they are really dung-heaps. They were not like that before. What I speak is not from history, but from what I have seen myself. I have travelled from one end of India to the other, and I have seen the miserable specimens of humanity with lustreless eyes. They are India. In these humble cottages, in the midst of these dung-heaps, are to be found the humble *Bhangis* in whom you find the concentrated essence of wisdom.

—*Harijan*, 20 April 1947¹⁰

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- 1 From the speech made by Gandhi on his election as president of the Kathiawar (Saurashtra) Political Conference held at Bhavanagar on 8 January 1925. From *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, Vol. V. By Mahadev H. Desai, p. 136. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?link=og&book=og0012&id=136&lang=en&file=5842&cat=books>
 - 2 From *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, Vol. V. By Mahadev H. Desai, p. 334. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?link=og&book=og0012&id=334&lang=en&file=6040&cat=book>
 - 3 From *My Varnasharama Dharma* in *Gandhi for 21st Century*, Vol. XII, Ed. Anand T. Hingorani, p. 28. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?id=42&link=bg&book=bg0017&lang=en&cat=books>
 - 4 From *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, Vol. IX. By Mahadev H. Desai, p. 182. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?id=182&link=og&book=og0025&lang=en&cat=books>
 - 5 From *Gandhi for 21st Century*, Vol. XI, Ed. Anand T. Hingorani, p. 76. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?id=135&link=bg&book=bg0018&lang=en&cat=books>
 - 6 Reproduced in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. LXIV, pp. 86-88. Accessed at <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL070>. PDF
 - 7 From *Capital and Labour*, in *Gandhi for 21st Century*, Ed. Anand T. Hingorani, p. 86. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?link=bg&book=bg0058&id=101&lang=en&file=9251&cat=books>
 - 8 From *Capital and Labour*, in *Gandhi for 21st Century*, Ed. Anand T. Hingorani, p. 87. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?link=bg&book=bg0058&id=102&lang=en&file=9252&cat=books>

- 9 From *A Gandhi Anthology*, Book II Compiled by Valji Govindji Desai, p. 58. Accessed at <http://www.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?link=bg&book=bg0014&id=62&lang=en&file=1354&cat=books>
- 10 From an address at the concluding session of the Inter-Asian Relations Conference, Delhi, 2 April 1947, reported in *Harijan*. Accessed at <http://web.mahatma.org.in/books/showbook.jsp?link=bg&book=bg0060&id=138&lang=en&file=9519&cat=books>

APPENDIX 5

B.R. Ambedkar on Manual Scavenging

Gandhism: The Doom of the Untouchables^Φ

Gandhism is a paradox. It stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of the existing political structure of the country. At the same time it seeks to maintain intact a social structure which permits the domination of one class by another on a hereditary basis which means a perpetual domination of one class by another. What is the explanation of this paradox? Is it a part of a strategy by Mr. Gandhi to win the whole-hearted support of the Hindus, orthodox and unorthodox, to the campaign of Swaraj? If it is the latter, can Gandhism be regarded as honest and sincere? Be that as it may, there are two features of Gandhism which are revealing but to which unfortunately no attention has so far been paid. Whether they will make Gandhism more acceptable than Marxism is another matter. But as they do help to distinguish Gandhism from Marxism, it may be well to refer to them.

The first special feature of Gandhism is that its philosophy helps those who have to keep what they have and to prevent those who have not from getting what they have a right to get. No one who examines the Gandhian attitude to strikes, the Gandhian reverence for Caste and the Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship by the rich for the benefit of the poor can deny that this is the upshot of Gandhism.

^Φ Excerpted from *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 9 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 290–93.

Whether this is the calculated result of a deliberate design or whether it is a matter of accident may be open to argument. But the fact remains that Gandhism is the philosophy of the well-to-do and the leisure class.

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

The Hindu sacred law penalized the Shudras (Hindus of the fourth class) from acquiring wealth. It is a law of enforced poverty unknown in any other part of the world. What does Gandhism do? It does not lift the ban. It blesses the Shudra for his moral courage to give up property! It is well worth quoting Mr. Gandhi's own words. Here they are¹ :

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

Another illustration in support is the attitude of Gandhism towards the scavenger. The sacred law of the Hindus lays down that a scavenger's progeny shall live by scavenging. Under Hinduism scavenging was not a matter of choice, it was a matter of forced labour. What does Gandhism do? It seeks to perpetuate this system by praising scavenging as the noblest service to society!! Let me quote Mr. Gandhi: As President of a Conference of the Untouchables, Mr. Gandhi said²:

"I do not want to attain Moksha. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore prayed that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra, but as an Atishudra.

"I love scavenging. In my Ashram, an eighteen year old Brahmin lad is doing the scavenger's work in order to teach the Ashram cleanliness. The lad is no reformer. He was born and bred in orthodoxy. But he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had become also a perfect sweeper, and that if he wanted the Ashram sweeper to do his work well, he must do it himself and set an example.

"You should realise that you are cleaning Hindu Society."

Can there be a worse example of false propaganda than this attempt of Gandhism to perpetuate evils which have been deliberately imposed by one class over another? If Gandhism preached the rule of poverty for all and not merely for the Shudra, the worst that could be said about it is that it is a mistaken idea. But why preach it as good for one class only? Why appeal to the worst of human failings, namely, pride and vanity in order to make him voluntarily accept what on a rational basis he would resent as a cruel discrimination against him? What is the use of telling the scavenger that even a Brahmin is prepared to do scavenging when it is clear that according to Hindu Shastras and Hindu notions even if a Brahmin did scavenging he would never be subject to the disabilities of one who is a born scavenger? For in India a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not. If Gandhism preached that scavenging is a noble profession with the object of inducing those who refuse to engage in it, one could understand it. But why appeal to the scavenger's pride and vanity in order to induce him and him only to keep on to scavenging³ by telling him that scavenging is a noble profession and that he need not be ashamed of it? To preach that poverty is good for the Shudra and for none else, to preach that scavenging is good for the Untouchables and for none else and to make them accept these onerous impositions as voluntary purposes of life, by appeal to their failings is an outrage and a cruel joke on the helpless classes which none but Mr. Gandhi can perpetuate with equanimity and impunity.

In this connection one is reminded of the words of Voltaire who in repudiation of an 'ism' very much like Gandhism said: "Oh! mockery to say to people that the suffering of some brings joy to others and works good to the whole. What solace is it to a dying man to know that from his decaying body a thousand worms will come into life?"

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

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The Revolt of the Untouchables^Φ

If the Untouchables skin and carry the dead animals of the Hindus, it is because the Untouchables have no choice. They are forced to do it. They would be penalised if they refused to do it. The penalty is legal. In some provinces the refusal to do this dirty work is a breach of contract. In other provinces it is a criminal offence involving fines. In provinces like Bombay the Untouchables are village servants. In their capacity as village servants they have to serve the Government as well as the Hindu public. In return for this service they are given lands which they cultivate and on the produce of which they maintain themselves. One of the duties of the Untouchables is to skin and carry the dead animals of the Hindus in the villages. If the Untouchables refuse to perform these duties to the Hindu public, the land which they live on is liable to be confiscated. They have to choose between doing the dirty work or facing starvation.

In Provinces like the United Provinces, refusal to do scavenging by sweepers is made an offence. The United Provinces Municipalities

Φ Excerpted from *Essays on Untouchables and Untouchability: Political* in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 5 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1989), 256–58.

Act II of 1916 contains the following provisions:

Section 201(1).— “Should a sweeper who has a customary right to do the house-scavenging of a house or building (hereinafter called the customary sweeper) fail to perform such scavenging in a proper way, the occupier of the house or building or the board may complain to a Magistrate.”

(2) “The Magistrate receiving such complaint shall hold an inquiry and should it appear to him that the customary sweeper has failed to perform the house-scavenging of the house or building in a proper way or at a reasonable intervals, he may impose upon such a sweeper a fine which may extend to ten rupees, and upon a second or any later conviction in regard to the same house or building, may also direct, the right of the customary sweeper to do the house-scavenging of the house or building to be forfeited and thereupon such right shall be forfeited.”

Exactly similar provision is to be found in Section 165 of the Punjab Municipalities Act of 1911. The Punjab Act is an advance over the U.P. Act, in as much as it provides for punishment of a sweeper who is not a customary sweeper but a contract-sweeper. The Punjab Act adds:

“(3) Should any sweeper (other than a customary sweeper), who is under a contract to do house-scavenging of a house or a building, discontinue to do such house-scavenging without fourteen days’ notice to his employer or without reasonable cause, he shall on conviction be punishable with a fine which may extend to Rs. ten.”

“227. Every order of forfeiture under Section 165 shall be subject to an appeal to the next superior court, but shall not be otherwise open to appeal.”

People may be shocked to read that there exists legal provision which sanctions forced labour. Beyond doubt, this is slavery. The difference between slavery and free labour lies in this. Under slavery a breach of contract of service is an offence which is punishable with fine or imprisonment. Under free labour a breach of contract of

service is only a civil wrong for which the labourer is liable only for damages. Judged in the light of this criterion, scavenging is a legal obligation imposed upon the Untouchables which they cannot escape.

Given these conditions, how can the Untouchables be accused of doing this dirty work voluntarily? The question whether the Untouchables can be accused of having invited the curse of untouchability upon themselves for doing the dirty work of the Hindus is really beside the point. What is important to note is that the Conference of the Untouchables which met in Mahad resolved that no Untouchable shall skin the dead animals of the Hindus, shall carry it or eat the carrion. The object of these resolutions was two-fold. The one object was to foster among the Untouchables self-respect and self-esteem. This was a minor object. The major object was to strike a blow at the Hindu Social Order. The Hindu Social Order is based upon a division of labour which reserves for the Hindus clean and respectable jobs and assigns to the Untouchables dirty and mean jobs and thereby clothes the Hindus with dignity and heaps ignominy upon the Untouchables. The resolution was a revolt against this part of the Hindu Social Order. It aimed at making the Hindus do their dirty jobs themselves.

This is a brief summary of the history of the revolt of the Untouchables against the established order of the Hindus. It originated in Bombay. But it has spread to all parts of India.

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Occupational Origin of Untouchability^Φ

We may now turn to the occupational theory of the origin of Untouchability. According to Mr. Rice, the origin of Untouchability

Φ Excerpted from *The Untouchables: Who were they and why they became Untouchables?* in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 7 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 305–07.

is to be found in the unclean and filthy occupations of the Untouchables. The theory is a very plausible one. But there are certain difficulties in the way of its being accepted as a true explanation of the origin of Untouchability. The filthy and unclean occupations which the Untouchables perform are common to all human societies. In every human society there are people who perform these occupations. Why were such people not treated as Untouchables in other parts of the world? The second question is: Did the Dravidians have a nausea against such callings or against persons engaged in them? On this point, there is no evidence. But we have evidence about the Aryans. That evidence shows that the Aryans were like other people and their notions of purity and impurity did not fundamentally differ from those of other ancient people. One has only to consider the following texts from Narada Smriti to show that the Aryans did not at all mind engaging themselves in filthy occupations. In Chapter V Narada is dealing with the subject matter of breach of contract of service. In this Chapter, there occur the following verses:

1. The sages have distinguished five sorts of attendants according to law. Among these are four sorts of labourers; the slaves (are the fifth category of which there are) fifteen species.
2. A student, an apprentice, a hired servant, and fourthly an official.
3. The sages have declared that the state of dependence is common to all these but their respective position and income depends on their particular caste and occupations.
4. Know that there are two sorts of occupations; pure work and impure work; *impure work is that done by the slaves.* Pure work is that done by labourers.
5. *Sweeping the gateway, the privy, the road and the place for rubbish; shampooing the secret parts of the body; gathering and putting away the leaving of food, ordure and urine.*

6. *And lastly, rubbing the master's limbs when desired; this should be regarded as impure work. All other work besides this is pure.*

25. Thus have the four classes of servants doing pure work been enumerated. All the others who do dirty work are slaves, of whom there are fifteen kinds.⁴

It is clear that impure work was done by the slaves and that the impure work included scavenging. The question that arises is: Who were these slaves? Were they Aryans or non-Aryans? That slavery existed among the Aryans admits of no doubt. An Aryan could be a slave of an Aryan. No matter to what Varna an Aryan belonged he could be a slave. A Kshatriya could be a slave. So could a Vaishya. Even a Brahmin was not immune from the law of slavery. It is when *Chaturvarna* came to be recognized as a law of the land that a change was made in the system of slavery. What this change was can be seen from the following extract from the *Narada Smriti*:

"39. In the inverse order of the (four) castes slavery is not ordained, except where a man violated the duties peculiar to his caste. Slavery (in that respect) is analogous to the condition of a wife."

Yajnavalkya also says that:

"183(2) Slavery is in the descending order of the Varnas and not in the ascending order."

This is explained by Vijnaneswara in his *Mitakshara*, a commentary on Yajnavalkya *Smriti* in the following terms:

"Of the Varna such as the Brahmin and the rest, a state of slavery shall exist in the descending order (*Anulomeyana*). Thus, of a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, and the rest may become a slave; of a Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra; and of a Vaishya, a Shudra; this state of slavery shall operate in the descending order."

The change was a mere reorganisation of slavery and the basis of the principles of graded inequality which is the soul of *Chaturvarna*.

To put it in a concrete form, the new law declared that a Brahmin could have a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and a Shudra as his slave. A Kshatriya could have Kshatriya, a Vaishya and a Shudra as his slave. A Vaishya could have a Vaishya and a Shudra as his slave. A Shudra could have a Shudra only. With all this, the law of slavery remained and all Aryans whether they were Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas or Shudras if they become slaves were subject to it.

Having regard to the duties prescribed for the slaves, this change in the law of slavery does not matter at all. It still means that a Brahmin if he was a slave, a Kshatriya if he was a slave, a Vaishya if he was a slave, did the work of a scavenger. Only a Brahmin would not do scavenging in the house of a Kshatriya, Vaishya or a Shudra. But he would do scavenging in the house of a Brahmin. Similarly, a Kshatriya would do scavenging in the house of a Brahmin and the Kshatriya. Only he would not do in the house of a Vaishya or Shudra and a Vaishya would do scavenging in the house of a Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. Only he would not do it in the house of a Shudra. It is, therefore, obvious that the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas who are admittedly the Aryans did the work of scavengers which is the filthiest of filthy occupations. If scavenging was not loathsome to an Aryan how can it be said that engaging in filthy occupations was the cause of Untouchability. The theory of filthy occupation as an explanation of Untouchability is, therefore, not tenable.

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Conversion of Sunita, the Sweeper^Φ

1. There lived in Rajagraha a scavenger by name Sunita. He earned his living as a road sweeper, sweeping away the rubbish thrown by the householders on the roadside. His was a low and hereditary occupation.

^Φ Excerpted from *Buddha and His Dhamma* in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 11 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1990), 185–86.

2. One day in the early hours of the dawn the Blessed One rose, dressed himself and walked into Rajagraha for alms followed by a large number of Bhikkus.
3. Now Sunita was cleaning the street, collecting scraps, rubbish, and so on into heaps and filling therewith the basket which he carried on a yoke.
4. And when he saw the Master and his train approaching, his heart was filled with joy and awe.
5. Finding no place to hide in on the road, he placed his yoke in a bend in the wall and stood as if stuck to the wall, saluting the Lord with clasped hands.
6. Then the Lord when he had come near, spoke to him in voice divinely sweet, saying: "Sunita! What to you is this wretched mode of living? Can you endure to leave home and come into the Order?"
7. And Sunita, experiencing the rapture of one who has been sprinkled with Ambrosia, said: "If even such as the Exalted One may in this life take Orders, why should I not? May the Exalted One suffer me to come forth."
8. Then the Master said: "Come Bhikku!" And Sunita by that word received sanction and ordination and was invested with bowl and robes.
9. The Master leading him to the Vihar taught him the Dhamma and the Discipline and said, "By the discipline of holy life, restraint and mastery of self, a man becomes holy."
10. When asked how Sunita became so great, the Buddha said, "As on a rubbish-heap on highway cast a lily may grow, fragrant and sweet, so among rubbish-creatures, worldlings blind by insight shines the very Buddha's child."

1 Quoted from *Varna Vyavastha*, p. 51

- 2 *Young India*, 27th April 1921.
- 3 Some of the Provinces of India have laws which make refusal by a scavenger to do scavenging a crime for which he can be tried and punished by a criminal court.
- 4 The fifteen classes of slaves are defined by the Narada Smriti in the following verses:
 - V. 26. One born at (his master's) house; one purchased one received (by gift); one obtained by inheritance; one maintained during a general famine; one pledged by his rightful owner.
 - V. 27. One released from heavy debt; one made captive in fight; one won through a wager; one who has come forward declaring 'I am thine'. An apostate from asceticism; one enslaved for a stipulated period,
 - V. 28. One who has become slave in order to get a maintenance; one enslaved on account of his connection with a female slave; and one self-sold. These are 15 classes of slaves as declared by law.