

AMBEDKAR AND THE POONA PACT

Relevant for: null | Topic: National Movement (1919-1939) Era of Mass Nationalism

In late September 1932, B.R. Ambedkar negotiated the Poona Pact with Mahatma Gandhi. The background to the Poona Pact was the Communal Award of August 1932, which, among other things, reserved 71 seats in the central legislature for the depressed classes. Gandhi, who was opposed to the Communal Award, saw it as a British attempt to split Hindus, and began a fast unto death to have it repealed.

In a settlement negotiated with Gandhi, Ambedkar agreed for depressed class candidates to be elected by a joint electorate. However, on his insistence, slightly over twice as many seats (147) were reserved for the depressed classes in the legislature than what had been allotted under the Communal Award. In addition, the Poona Pact assured a fair representation of the depressed classes in the public services while earmarking a portion of the educational grant for their uplift.

The Poona Pact was an emphatic acceptance by upper-class Hindus that the depressed classes constituted the most discriminated sections of Hindu society. It was also conceded that something concrete had to be done to give them a political voice as well as a leg-up to lift them from a backwardness they could not otherwise overcome.

The concessions agreed to in the Poona Pact were precursors to the world's largest affirmative programme launched much later in independent India. A slew of measures were initiated later to uplift Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Despite what Ambedkar had achieved for the depressed classes through the Poona Pact, there were carpers.

Perry Anderson and Arundhati Roy argued that Gandhi through his fast coerced Ambedkar into the Poona Pact. Ambedkar, however, was hardly the person to bend to someone else's will. As he observed in a talk years later, he was clear he would not "tolerate anyone on whose will and consent settlement depends, to stand on dignity and play the Grand Moghul."

It is also highly unlikely that an erudite and sharp person like Ambedkar would not have weighed the consequences of not signing the Poona Pact. It would also not have been lost on him that Muhammad Ali Jinnah, with the Muslims of India strongly backing him, was watching and waiting to take advantage of the evolving situation.

The Poona Pact had several positive outcomes for Ambedkar. It emphatically sealed his leadership of the depressed classes across India. He made the entire country, and not just the Congress Party, morally responsible for the uplift of the depressed classes. Most of all he succeeded in making the depressed classes a formidable political force for the first time in history.

As a practical man Ambedkar was not looking for the perfect solution. As he remarked in a 1943 address to mark the 101st birthday celebrations of Mahadev Govind Ranade, all he wanted was "a settlement of some sort"; that he was not "prepared to wait for an ideal settlement". It is very much in this spirit that he affixed his signature to the Poona Pact saving Gandhi's life as well as that of the Congress Party's while giving a big voice to the depressed classes.

On the 129th year of his birth on April 14 this year, we would do well to remember Ambedkar as much for the Poona Pact as we do for the Constitution he helped conjure. Without the former, the latter would never have been.

Uday Balakrishnan teaches at the Indian Institute of Science Bengaluru

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Register to The Hindu for free and get unlimited access for 30 days.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

Why you should pay for quality journalism - [Click to know more](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

To continue enjoying The Hindu, You can turn off your ad blocker or Subscribe to The Hindu.

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com