

Poona Pact

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Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: The topic focuses on the fight led by leaders like Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar for the upliftment of depressed classes. As the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhiji was celebrated in 2019, his views on different issues are important mainly for mains.

Placing it in syllabus: Modern Indian history

Dimensions:

- Round table conferences
- McDonald award
- Poona pact
- Malviya's opposition to Communal award
- Gandhi-Ambedkar differences in approach towards depressed classes

Content:

Round table conferences:

The **three Round Table Conferences (RTC) were organized between 1930 and 1932** by British government towards constitutional reforms in India. During the **1st conference**, a **demand for separate electorates** for the untouchables was put forward by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who represented depressed classes in the conference.

During the **2nd conference**, the British decided to grant a **communal award** for representing minorities in India by **providing for separate electorates for minority communities**. In this conference, INC took part and Mahatma Gandhi was appointed as sole representative of Indian National Congress.

Gandhi and Ambedkar differed on the issue of separate electorates for the untouchables. **Gandhi was against treating untouchables as separate from the Hindu community.** This issue was resolved through the Poona Pact 1932.

McDonald award:

- The Communal Award was made by the British prime minister Ramsay MacDonald on **16 August 1932.**
- It was announced after the failure of the Second RTC.
- The separate electorate was introduced in Government of India Act 1909 for Muslims and extended to Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans by Government of India Act 1919.
- Now the award provided separate representation for the Scheduled Castes.
- The **Scheduled Castes were assigned a number of seats to be filled by election from special constituencies in which scheduled castes could vote.**
- The Award was controversial as it was believed by some to have been brought in by the British to create social divide among the Hindus.

Malviya's opposition to communal award:

- The **Congress Nationalist Party (CNP)** was a political party in British India.
- In protest against the Communal Award, **Madan Mohan Malaviya and Madhav Aney** split away from the Indian National Congress and started CNP in 1934.
- The party contested the 1934 elections to the central legislature and won 12 seats.
- The Congress and the Nationalists together formed the majority in the Central Legislative Assembly.
- **By 1941, it was the main opposition party in the assembly.**

Poona pact:

- It refers to an **agreement between B. R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi** on behalf of depressed classes and upper caste Hindu leaders on the reservation of electoral seats for the depressed classes in the legislature of British India government.
- However, **Gandhi was not involved in signing the pact.**
- It was made on **24 September 1932** at Yerwada Central Jail in Poona, India.
- It was **signed by Ambedkar on behalf of the depressed classes and Madan Mohan Malviya** on behalf of the Upper Caste Hindus as a means to end the fast that Gandhi was undertaking in jail as a protest against the MacDonald communal award.
- They finally agreed upon **147 electoral seats.**

Terms of the pact:

- Seat reservation for the SCs and STs in provincial legislature.
- The STs and SCs would form an electoral college which would elect four candidates for the general electorate.
- The representation of these classes was based on the standards of joint electorates and reserved seats.
- About **19 percent of seats were to be reserved for these classes in the legislature.**
- The **system of election to the panel of candidates in both, Central and Provincial Legislature should come to end in 10 years**, unless it ends on mutual terms.
- In every province, the SCs and STs should be provided with sufficient educational facilities.

Gandhi Ambedkar differences in approach towards depressed classes:

Gandhi, who was opposed to the Communal Award which proposed separate SC electorates, didn't object to similar provisions for Muslims or Sikhs. He 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**. The Poona Pact was an emphatic acceptance by upper-class Hindus that the depressed classes constituted the most discriminated sections of Hindu society.

While **Ambedkar preferred** a *rights-based approach*, **Gandhi's approach was through faith and spirituality**. Gandhi felt that any exploitative relationship could be rectified only when the exploiter had a change of heart. So he worked with upper castes to change their mindset.

Ambedkar wanted the primary election system to terminate automatically after a decade, and reserved seats after 15 further years, conditional on a referendum on the issue among the so-called depressed classes. Gandhi was opposed to it and wanted the referendum after five years.

Ambedkar's reading of caste pivoted on seeing the Dalit question as a political issue and not only a social one as Gandhi did. To him, the idea of citizenship included depressed classes participating in the electoral process with equal voting rights and this was a way to achieve full potential of democracy.

Mould your thought: What is the McDonald's communal award? Following this, why was the Poona pact signed?