

1. Ambedkar and the Poona Pact

Context:

- 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.

Brief Background:

- In 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was opposed to the Communal Award, saw it as a British attempt to split Hindus, and began a fast unto death to have it repealed.
- **Poona-pact: Fair Representation**
- 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 also gives 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.

Positive Outcomes of Poona Pact:

- 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.

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- Most of all he succeeded in making the depressed classes a formidable political force for the first time in history.
 - 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.

Source: The Hindu

