

Poona Pact

In 1932 Mahatma Gandhi and Dr BR Ambedkar came to an agreement on behalf of lower caste Hindus, Dalits, and oppressed classes regarding the seat reservations for them in the British Assembly. The Poona pact was signed on 24th September 1932 in the Yerwada Central Jail.

- **Poona pact 1932** was the pact signed between the Hindu leaders to safeguard the Dalit interests. Hindus in vast numbers spoke up to defend their rights.
- This agreement is also the outcome of the communal award of 4th August 1932. Early in the 20th century, there was a lot of conflict between various sectarian interests and the Indian government structure.
- Following several discussions and consultations, the British government accepted a proposal given by Hindu leaders.
- The scheduled caste or impoverished Hindu classes wanted to reserve their seats in the legislature under this Poona pact.
- A prominent Dalit activist named Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar also endorsed this idea. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was the one who opposed the injustice experienced by the Dalit group. But many national figures like Mahatma Gandhi put forward a different strategy.
- He suggested that the oppressed classes shall be given special seats in the national and provincial assemblies.
- By 1930 Bhimrao Ambedkar had established himself as the National figurehead for the poor and working-class people. And also in the first round table conference, he spoke on the behalf of the class.
- As a result the proposition eventually became a significant element in the political landscape of India.
- The Poona pact signed by Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar on behalf of upper-class Hindu readers and the underprivileged Hindu class called for the reservation of seats for the underprivileged in British India's legislature.
- For the under-represented group in society 71 seats in the central legislature were set aside.

History Of Poona Pact

Ramsay McDonald issued a communal award on 16th August 1932 which established a separate electorate for Muslims, Anglo Indians, Christians, and Europeans who have their roots in India. Basically, The Poona Pact was based on demands for a joint electorate. It is important to know its roots and hence, we should know the history of the Poona Pact.

- On August 16 1932 British Prime Minister Ramsay McDonald proclaimed a communal award that established separate electorates for marginalized sections of India along with Europeans, Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, and Indian Christians.

- The 1932 communal prize was founded on the concept of different electorates, which the British government had previously attempted to implement through the Indian Council Act 1909 and the Government of India Act 1919.
- For the purpose of choosing a candidate for the legislative assembly, only residents of these sections were eligible to vote. The unique electorate system allocated a specific number of members in the legislature to each municipality.
- Mahatma Gandhi vigorously opposed the communal award because he believed that it was part of British imperialists' ongoing strategy to divide Indians into several small groups and weaken the national movements.
- Ambedkar supported the concept of awards ever since the beginning because he believed that political initiatives like having a separate electorate may aid in uplifting the underprivileged section of society.
- A compromise was made in the form of the Poona pact by Mahatma Gandhiji and Bhim Rao Ambedkar after a series of discussions that resulted in the abolition of a distinct electorate for the downtrodden classes.

Provisions Of Poona Pact

The Poona pact altered the political history of India and the fate of the nation's millions of Dalits. Before signing the pact B.R. Ambedkar was highly in favor of a separate electorate whereas Mahatma Gandhi was completely against it. Several incidents took place in between for which the following are some of the provisions of the Poona pact-

- Dr. Ambedkar supported the concept of a separate electorate for the marginalized section. He displayed his agreement for a separate electorate at the first Round table conference where he was present as the representative of Dalits.
- On the contrary, Mahatma Gandhi was extremely against the idea of a separate electorate. For showing his disagreement with this concept laid down by Prime Minister Ramsay McDonald, he went on fasting in Yerwada jail in Poona.
- Due to popular pressure to terminate the fast to death, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and Gandhi signed the Poona pact which established reserved seats in the provincial legislature for the backward classes, with elections conducted through combined electorates.
- Gandhi was opposed to this proposal because he did not want untouchables to be considered beyond the bounds of Hinduism.
- Certain seats in the provincial legislature would be set aside for the poor. The number of seats was determined by the total number of provincial councils.
- The provinces were allocated 30 seats in Madras, 8 seats in Punjab, 14 seats in Bombay with Sindh, 20 seats in Central provinces, 18 seats in Bihar and Orissa, 46 in Bengal, 7 seats in Assam, and 20 seats in United provinces. Hence, overall there were 147 reserved seats.
- There would be an electoral college that would be made up of eligible members of backward classes for each of these seats. These electoral classes can choose

a group of depressed classes. These candidates would be elected with a single vote. The four candidates with the most votes would be elected.

- As a result of being able to vote under both the general electorate and backward classes, these individuals received a double vote.
- The same approach of the combined electorate and reserved seats was to be implemented in the central legislature.
- 19% of the seats in the central legislature would be set aside for the members of backward classes.
- Unless both parties choose to end this earliest, this system would last for 10 years.
- By all the necessary means fair representation of the oppressed classes would be assured.
- No one would face caste based discrimination while applying for municipal office or hiring into the public sector.
- The education of backward classes people would be assisted with some specific amount from the educational grant in each province.

Significance Of Poona Pact

When the Poona pact was signed, it opened the doors to equal representation of all the sections of the society in the British Assembly. Hence, the significance of the Poona pact is very important in Indian history as it helped in securing the rights and upliftment of dalits after independence.

- Bhimrao Ambedkar agreed to have candidates from the impoverished class chosen by a combined electorate as a part of a settlement he made with Mahatma Gandhi.
- In addition to this 147 seats in the legislature (which is nearly twice as many as the communal award) were set aside for the downtrodden classes.
- Furthermore, the Poona pact ensured that disadvantaged groups were fairly represented in public services while giving a share of grants for their education to maintain their progress.
- The Poona pact was a resounding admission by higher-class Hindus that the impoverished class was the most unfairly treated group in India.
- It was also decided that strict action needed to be taken immediately to provide political support for the underprivileged section of society.
- For the moral elevation of the impoverished classes, the contract held the entire nation morally liable.
- The Poona pact's concessions served as the foundation for the greatest affirmative action program in history, which was ultimately implemented in independent India and included reservations in government positions, the public sector, and educational institutions.
- Above all, it was the first time in the history of India that the alliance turned the downtrodden classes into a powerful political force.

Impact of Poona Pact On Dalits

Dalits, who were considered the most affected and backward section of society, ever since independence. But as soon as the poona pact was implemented, it was unsuccessful despite granting them political rights. Hence, it led to many clashes among each other. Let's see what was the impact of the Poona pacts on dalits.

- The Poona pact attempted to emancipate the oppressed classes but it fell short of its purpose while giving political rights to them.
- As a result, it gave rise to a number of issues while allowing the old Hindu social structure to persist.
- In fact, this pact turned the underprivileged section into political pawns that Hindu caste organizations could employ to their advantage.
- The depressed class was left out with no leader because the genuine class spokesmen were powerless to stand up to the stooges selected and sponsored by Hindu caste groups.
- The upshot was that the impoverished classes were compelled to accept the status quo in the domains of politics, ideologies, and cultures, and were unable to establish Independent and sincere leadership to challenge the Brahmanical system.
- So it can be said that the Poona pact prevented the creation of the kind of society that had values for equality, liberty, justice, and fraternity.
- It refused to acknowledge the Dalits as separate elements of the country preempting the rights and protections for directs in the constitution of independent India.

Impact Of Poona Pact On Depressed Classes

Through the Poona pact caste-based Hindu organizations could employ the downtrodden section as political props. As a result of the actual representatives of the classes being powerless against the stooges selected and backed by caste Hindu groups, it left the depressed classes without a leader.

- The main goal of the Poona pact was to increase the number of seats for the poor in turn for their consent to the continued existence of a combined electorate.
- In order to elect a panel for 4 candidates from the oppressed classes to the reserved seat, an electoral college made up of all operated class members who were enrolled on the general electoral roll in a constituency was referred to as a joint electorate. This election was conducted using the single-vote method.
- The general electorate would choose four candidates for each of the reserved seats who received the most votes in the primary election.
- The disadvantaged class would be given a portion of the seats allotted to the broader non-Muslim voters.

- The downtrodden classes would get proper representation in the Civil Services as approved by congress. Resulting which the backward class people deciding to adhere to the joint electorate idea.
- Seats were set aside from the ordinary Muslim seats in the provincial legislatures for the depressed class. There were 36 in Madras, 30 seats in Bengal, 7 seats in Assam, 20 seats in United provinces, 20 seats in Central provinces, 18 seats in Bihar and Orissa, 15 seats in Bombay, and Sindh, and 8 seats in Punjab.
- According to the working committee of the All India scheduled caste Federation, the shared electorate system preventive schedule caste from elected authentic and effective members to legislatures, and the most recent elections were held under the Government of India 1935 Act.

