

THE UNTOUCHABLES AND THE PAX BRITANNICA

[The Manuscript consisting of 123 typed pages is a presentation of the case of neglect of the Depressed Classes by the British Government which did not admit them as members of the Armed Forces. The manuscript, of which the first page is missing, was prepared by Dr. Ambedkar during his stay for the Round Table Conferences in London according to his Marathi biographer Mr. C. B. Khairmode. The MS. is printed herein as it was found—ed.]

*of the American Continent the objective of his voyage was reach India. Even this voyage of Columbus was not a sudden venture. It was a part of a plan of exploration of a sea route to India which he had received its first impetus from Prince Henry of Portugal, who was greatly interested in it and who in his reign of 42 years (1418—1460) helped it in every possible way.

What was the necessity for this quest for a direct sea route from Europe to India which impelled the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English to come out of their seclusion. The coming of the English to India was not an adventure of a singular race. It was a concerted effort and there was so much eagerness on the part of each European nation that within this concert there was a competition for reaching India first. Because the Portuguese came first it does not follow that the rest were idle or indifferent. The English and the Dutch were under the belief that there was a shorter route to India than that of the Cape of Good Hope and their delay in their coming to India was due to the fact that they were busy in finding out its possibilities. The French, though last to arrive, were second only to the Portuguese, their first voyage being to Sumatra in 1529.

What was the origin of this eagerness to reach the Indies? Why did the Portuguese, Spaniards, English, French and Dutch vie with one another in centuries of strenuous effort to find a sea route to India. The object was to obtain luxuries and particularly spices—chillies, cloves, nutings etc., which could be had only from India and the East.

This seems rather strange—that all this run should be for spices. But the fact is that spices did play a very important part in this expansion of Europe.

How much spices were used and appreciated by the European peoples in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can be seen, from the following data collected by Prof. Cheyney ¹:

“One of the chief luxuries of the Middle Ages was the edible spices. Wines and ale were constantly used spiced with various condiments. In Sir Thopa’s forest grew *“notemuge to putte in ale”*.”

* First page containing the earlier portions of this MS is missing. The title of this essay also is nowhere found. The present title is given from the typed outline in the custody of People’s Education Society, Bombay—ed.

“Froissart has the king’s guests led to the “palace, where wine and spices were set before them”. The dowry of a Marseilles girl, in 1224, makes mention of “mace, ginger, cardamom and galangale.”

“When John Ball wished to draw a contrast between the lot of the lords and the peasants, he said, “They have wines, spices and fine bread, when we have only rye and the refuse of the straw,”. When old Latiner was being bound to the stake he handed nutmegs to his friends as keepsakes.

“Pepper, the most common and at the same time the most valued of these spices, was frequently treated as a gift of payment instead of money. “Matilda de Chaucer is in the gift of the king, and her land is worth £8,2*d.*, and 1 pound of pepper and 1 pound of cinnamon and 1 ounce of silk”, reads a chance record in an old English survey. The amount of these spices demanded and consumed was astonishing. Venetian galleys Genoese varricks, and other vessels of the Mediterranean brought many a cargo of them westward, and they were sold in fairs and markets every where. “Pepper-sack” was a derisive and yet not unappreciative epithy applied by German robber-barons to the merchants, who they plundered as they passed down the Rhine. For years the Venetians had a contract to buy from the Sultan of Egypt annually 420,000 pounds of pepper. One of the first vessels to make its way to India brought home 210,000 pounds. A fine of 200,000 pounds of pepper was imposed upon one petty prince of India by the Portuguese in 1520. In romances and chronicles, in cook-books, trades-lists, and customs-tariffs spices are mentioned with a frequency and consideration known in modern times.”

Why were spices so necessary to the European peoples of those days? One answer is taste. “The monotonous diet, the coarse food, the unskilful cookery of mediaeval Europe had all their deficiencies covered by a charitable mantle of Oriental seasoning.”¹ While it was a matter of taste for all it was a matter of necessity for the poor. The poor needed spices. In ancient times when food was scarce and the productivity of man in the absence of machinery was very low, man could not afford to waste or throw away food as being stale. Whatever was left over or was not necessary for immediate consumption had to be preserved. Spices are the best preservatives. It was because of this as also for reasons of taste that spices were in mediaeval Europe in such universal demand.

¹ Cheyney. *Ibid*, p. 10.

Another question is why was a direct sea route necessary for these European nations to reach India and to obtain spices. Before the European nations discovered the sea route to India via the Cape of Good Hope there were in existence three well established land routes by which these luxuries and spices used to reach Europe and known as the Northern, the Middle and the Southern routes.

The Northern route lay between the Far-East and the West, extending from the inland provinces of China westward across the great desert of Gobi, south of the Celestial mountains to Lake Lop then passing through a series of ancient cities, Khotan, Yarkand, Kashgar, Samaro and Bokhara, till it finally reached the region of the Caspian Sea. This main northern route was joined by others which crossed the passes of the Himalayas and the Hindookush, and brought into a United Stream, the products of India and China. A journey of eighty to a hundred days over desert, mountain, and steppes lay by this route between the Chinese wall and the Caspian. From still farther north in China a parallel road to this passed to the north of the desert and the mountains and by way of Lake Balkash, to the same ancient and populous land lying to the east of the Caspian Sea. Here the caravan routes again divided. Some led to the south-westward, where they united with the more central routes described above and eventually reached the Black Sea and the Mediterranean through Asia Minor and Syria. Others passed by land around the northern coast of the Caspian, or crossed it, reaching a further stage at Astrakhan. From Astrakhan the way led on by the Volga and on rivers, till its terminus was at last reached on the Black Sea at Tana near the mouth of the Don, or at Kaffa in the Crimea.

The Middle route lay through Mesopotamia and Syria to the Levant. Ships from India crept along the Asiatic shore to the Persian Gulf, and sold their costly freights in the marts of Chaldea or the lower Euphrates. A line of trading cities extending along its shores from Ormuz near the mouth of the gulf to Bassorah at its head served as ports of call for the vessels which carried this

merchandise. Several of these coast cities were also termini of caravan routes entering them from eastward, forming a net-work which united the various provinces of Persia and reached through the passes of Afghanistan into northern India. From the head of the Persian Gulf one branch of this route went up the line of the Tigris to Bagdad. From this point goods were taken by caravan through Kurdistan to Tabriz, the great northern capital of Persia, and thence westward either to the Black Sea or to Layas on the Mediterranean. Another branch was followed by the trains of camels which made their way from Bassorah along the tracks through the desert which spread like fan to the westward, till they reached the Syrian cities of Aleppo, Antioch, and Damascus. They finally reached the Mediterranean coast at Laodicea, Tripoli, Beirut, or Jaffa, while some goods were carried even as far south as Alexandria.

The southern route was a sea route in all except its very latest stages. It lay through the Red Sea and brought the products of India and the Far East by sea to Egypt, whence they passed to Europe from the mouths of the Nile.

The land routes were devious and dangerous. They were insecure and transportation over them was difficult and expensive. Robbers plundered the merchants and Governments taxed them beyond measure. Of the two land routes the Northern was not a highway to the same extent as the middle one was. With its deadly camel journey of alternate shows and torried wastes, rendered it available only for articles of small bulk. It never attained the importance of the Middle route. Even this Middle or Indo-Syrian route was not always open. It was blocked twice. Once between 632—651 A. D. when the Saracen Arabs under the conquering impulse of Islam seized the countries of this Indo-Syrian route. For a second time it was blocked during the crusades in the 11th Century. The southern route which was for most part a sea route was equally unsafe. "The storms of the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters were destructive to vast numbers of the frail vessels of the East; piracy vied with storms in

its destructiveness; and port dues were still higher than those of inland marts.”¹ But as Prof. Cheyney observed, “With all these impediments, Eastern products, nevertheless, arrived at the Mediterranean in considerable quantities”² and were available to the European merchants.

When these land routes existed why did there arise the necessity for a sea route? The answer is the Turkish and Mongol upheaval in further Asia which overthrew the Saracenic culture and ruined the trade with Europe. This upheaval was a new force. It first came into operation when about 1038 the selfwill Turks burst upon Persia. Two centuries later the Mongols poured over Asia under Chengizkhan. In 1258, the Mongols captured Bagdad. In 1403 Timur captured Syria. In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks. This upheaval of the Turks and the Mongols completely blocked the two land routes. The Southern route was the only route that was open for some time. But even that was blocked when Egypt was conquered by the Turks in 1516.

Two factors are responsible for bringing the European Nations to India. First spices. Second the blockade of the old overland Trade routes by the Turks and the Mongols. It is these factors which drove the European nations to search for a sea route to India and which they ultimately found.

Having come to trade with the East Indies, these Europeans remained there to conquer it. That evidently resulted in a struggle for supremacy. The struggle between the English and the Portuguese and the Dutch on the other hand was for commercial supremacy. The theatre of the struggle between the English and the Portuguese was India and the Persian Gulf and ended in favour of the British in 1612, so far as India was concerned and in 1622 so far as the Persian Gulf was concerned. From 1622 India and the Persian Gulf lay open to England and the Portuguese ceased to be any menace to development of English trade and commerce. The theatre of the struggle between the English

1. Cheyney *Ibid*, p. (not mentioned in MS.—ed.)

2. *Ibid*, p.

and the Dutch lay in Malaya Archipelego. It was decided against the English in 1823 by what is called the Mascaere of Amboyana whereby the English receded to India and left the Dutch to enjoy exclusively the trade with the Malaya Archipelego. The struggle between the English and the French was a mighty struggle. The theatre of this struggle was India proper. The object of this struggle was political sovereignty and not commerce. The French had established themselves in the South and the East. So far as Southern India is concerned the conflict began in 1744 and ended in 1760 at the battle of Wandiwash where the French were completely vanquished. So far as Eastern India is concerned the struggle was a single battle in 1757—the battle of Plassey in which French lost along with the Nawab whom they supported as against the English. With the elimination of the French, the English alone were left to be the rulers of India.

*

*

*

But how was the conquest of India received by the people of India?

*

*

*

From a certain point of view the conquest of India by the British was an accident. As an accident it has come to be regarded as a part of destiny. In this sense Lord Curzon was justified when he said—

(Quotation not given in the MS.—ed.)

What have they done for the people of India ? This is too large a question. Many volumes having been written on it, is unnecessary for me to add to what has already been said. I am reducing the question to a narrow compass and ask what have the British done for the Untouchables ? What did the British do when they became rulers to emancipate and elevate the Untouchables ? There are many heads in relation to which this question may be raised. But I propose to it Public Service, Education and Social Reform.

* * * These stars indicate the blank space left in the MS.—ed

II

What did the British Government do to secure to the Untouchables adequate representation in the Public Services of the Country ?

I will take the Army first. To understand and appreciate the fate that has befallen the Untouchables it is necessary to ask what is it that enabled the British to conquer India ?

The conquest of India is an extraordinary event. And this is for two reasons.

The countries which were suddenly thrown open to the European nations at the end of the fifteenth century fall into three classes. Vasco Da Gama threw open countries in which for the most part thickly populated and which were governed by ancient, extensive and well organised states existed. In the second category fell countries discovered by Columbus in which the population was small and the state was of a very rudimentary character. The third category consisted of countries discovered by.....They were just empty areas with no population at all. India fell in the first of these three categories. This is one reason why the conquest of India must be said to be an extraordinary event.

The second reason why the conquest of India is an extraordinary event is the period during which this conquest has taken place. When was India conquered? India was conquered between 1757 and 1818.

In the year 1757 there was fought a battle between the forces of the East India Company and the Army of Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal. The British forces were victorious. It is known in history as the battle of Plassey and it is as a result of this battle that the British for the first time made territorial conquest in India. The last battle which completed the territorial conquest was fought in 1818. It is known as the battle of Koregaon. This was the battle which destroyed the Maratha Empire and established in its place the British Empire in India. Thus the Conquest of India by the British took place during 1757 and 1818. What was the state of affairs in Europe during this very period and what was

the position of the English people ? This period was one of great turmoil in Europe. It was a period of Napoleonic wars the last of which was fought in 1815 at Waterloo. In these wars England was no idle spectator. It was deeply involved in these wars. It was at the head of all the European States which had formed an alliance to crush Napoleon and the French Revolution. In this grim struggle the English nation wanted every penny, every man, every ship and every gun for its own safety. It could spare nothing for the East India Company which was operating in a theatre far removed from the home base. Not only could they spare nothing to help the East India Company but they actually borrowed men, money and ships from the East India Company to fight Napoleon in the European War thereat. The following date from Macpherson gives an idea as to how much the East India Company had to contribute to the English nation for the support of the wars in Europe.

It is during this period when the English people were wholly occupied in Europe in a deadly struggle with Napoleon and when they could not assist the East India Company in any way that India was conquered. It is this which makes the conquest such an extraordinary event. How did this extraordinary event become possible ? What is the explanation ?

Macaulay has given his explanation. He says :

(Quotation not given in the MS.)

Macaulay's explanation is the explanation which all Englishmen believe, like to believe. Being current for a long time it has got a hold upon the minds of the English people and all European and American people. Indeed an endeavour is made to inculcate this view upon the minds of the younger generation of English people. It is quite understandable. An important element in the make up of an imperial race is the superiority complex and Macaulay's view goes to foster it as nothing else can.

But is Macaulay's view right ? Do the facts of history support that view ? Professor Seely who has studied this subject in a more realistic way than Macaulay did say :

"In the early battles of the Company by which its power was decisively established, at the siege of Arcot, at Plassey, at Buxer, there seem almost

always to have been more sepoys than Europeans on the side of the Company. And let us observe further that we do not hear of the sepoys as fighting ill, or of the English as bearing the whole brunt of the conflict. No one who has remarked the childish eagerness with which historians indulge their national vanity, will be surprized to find that our English writers in describing these battles seem unable to discern the sepoys. Read Macaulay's Essay on Clive; everywhere it is 'the imperial people,' 'the mighty children of the sea,' 'none could resist Clive and his Englishmen.' But if once it is admitted that the sepoys always outnumbered the English, and that they kept pace with the English in efficiency as soldiers, the whole theory which attributes our successes to an immeasurable natural superiority in valour falls to the ground. In those battles in which our troops were to the enemy as one to ten, it will appear that if we may say that one Englishman showed himself equal to ten natives, we may also say that one sepoy did the same. It follows that, though no doubt there was a difference it was not so much a difference of race as a difference of discipline, of military science, and also no doubt in many cases on difference of leadership.

Observe that Mill's summary explanation of the conquest of India says nothing of any natural superiority on the part of the English. 'The two important discoveries for conquering India were; 1st the weakness of the native armies against European discipline, 2ndly the facility of imparting that discipline to natives in the European service'. He adds; 'Both discoveries were made by the French.'

And even if we should admit that the English fought better than the sepoys, and took more than their share in those achievements which both performed in common, it remains entirely incorrect to speak of the English nation as having conquered the nations of India. The nations of India have been conquered by an army of which on the average about a fifth part was English. But we do not only exaggerate our own share in the achievement; we at the same time entirely misconceive and misdescribe the achievement itself. From what race were the other four-fifths of the Army drawn? From the Natives of India themselves! India can hardly be said to have been conquered at all by foreigners; She has rather conquered herself."¹

This explanation of Prof. Seely is correct as far as it goes. But it is not going far enough. India was conquered by the British with the help of an Army composed of Indians. It is well for Indians as well as for the British not to overlook this fact. But who were these Indians who joined the army of their foreigners? That question Prof. Seely did not raise. But it is a very pertinent question. Who were these people who joined the army of the East

1. Seely, *Expansion of England*, p. 200—202.

India Company and helped the British to conquer India ? The answer that I can give—and it is based on a good deal of study—is that the people who joined the Army of the East India Company were the Untouchables of India. The men who fought with Clive in the battle of Plassey were the Dusads, and the Dusads are Untouchables. The men who fought in the battle of Koregaon were the Mahars, and the Mahars are Untouchables. Thus in the first battle and the last battle it was the Untouchables who fought on the side of the British and helped them to conquer India. The truth of this was admitted by the Marquess of Tweedledale in his note to the Peel Commission which was appointed in 1859 to report on the reorganization of the Indian Army. This is what he said—

(Quotation not given in the MS.—ed.)

There are many who look upon this conduct of the Untouchables in joining the British as an act of gross treason. Treason or no treason, this act of the Untouchables was quite natural. History abounds with illustrations showing how one section of people in a Country have shown sympathy with an invader, in the hope that the new comer will release them from the oppressions of their countrymen. Let those who blame the Untouchables read the following manifesto issued by the English Labouring Classes in 17 (Left incomplete).

* * * (Extracts not given in MS.—ed.).

Was the attitude of the Untouchables in any way singular ? After all, the tyranny under which the English Labourer lived was nothing as compared with the tyranny under which the Untouchables lived and if the English workmen had one ground to welcome a foreign invader the Untouchable had one hundred.

(Space left blank in the MS.—ed.)

Not only did the Untouchables enabled the British to conquer India, they enabled the British to retain. The Mutiny of 1857 was an attempt to destroy British Rule in India. It was an attempt to drive out the English and reconquer India. So far as the Army was concerned the Mutiny was headed by the Bengal Army.¹ The Bombay Army and the Madras Army remained loyal and it was

1. The Bengal Army was so called because it was under the control of the Bengal Government and not because it was composed of Bengalees. As a matter of fact there were no Bengalees in it. It was formed mostly from up-countrymen.

with their help that the Mutiny was suppressed. What was the composition of the Bombay Army and the Madras Army ? They were mostly drawn from the Untouchables, the Mahars in Bombay and the Pariahs in Madras. It is therefore true to say that the Untouchables not only helped the British to conquer India they helped them to retain India.

How have the British treated the Untouchables so far as service in the Army is concerned ? Strange as it may appear, the answer is that the British Government has since about 1890 placed a ban on the recruitment of the Untouchables in the Indian Army. The result was that, those who had already been recruited remained. It is a great mercy that they were not disbanded. But in course of time they died or went on pension and ultimately by about 1910 completely disappeared from the Army. Nothing can be more ungrateful than this exclusion of the Untouchables from the Army.

Why did the British commit an act which appears to be an act of treachery and bad faith ? No reason has ever been given by the British Government for this ban on the recruitment of the Untouchables into the Army. It is often heard that this exclusion is not intentional but is the consequence of a policy initiated in the interest of the efficiency of the Army in about the year 1890. But is this so ?

This policy is based on two principles, one relating to organization and the other relating to recruiting.

The principle of organization that was introduced in 1890 is known as the principle of class composition as against the old principle of a mixed regiment. Under the new principle, the Indian Army was organized on the principle of class regiment or the class squadron or company system. This means, in the first case, that the whole regiment is composed of one class (or caste) and in the second case, that every squadron or company is formed entirely of one class. The old principle of recruiting was to take the best men available, no matter what his race or religion was. Under the new principle, race of the man became a more important factor than his physique or his intellect. For the purposes of recruitment, the different castes and communities of India are divided into categories, those belonging to the martial races and those

belonging to the non-martial races. The non-martial races are excluded from military service. Only the castes and communities which are included in the category of martial races are drawn upon for feeding the Army.

It is difficult to approve of these two principles. The reasons which underlie the principle of class composition it is said, “are to a certain extent political, as tending to prevent any such formidable coalition” against the British, as occurred in the Mutiny. I should-have thought that the old system of a mixed regiment was safer.’ But assuming that the principle is sound, why should it come in the way of the recruitment of the untouchables ? If, under the system of class composition, there can be regiments of Sikhs, Dogras, Gurkhas, Rajputs etc., why can there not be regiment of Untouchables ? Again, assuming that recruitment from martial races only is in sound principle, why should it affect adversely (to) the untouchables unless they are to be treated as belonging to the non-martial races ? And what justification is there for classing the untouchables who formed the backbone of the Indian Army and who were the mainstay of the Indian fighting forces for over 150 years as non-martial ? That the British Government does not deem the Untouchables as belonging to non-martial classes is proved by the fact, that in the Great War, when more men were necessary for the Army, this ban on the recruitment of the Untouchables in the Army was lifted and one full battalion was raised and was known as the 111 Mahars. Its efficiency has been testified by no less a person than that (. . .)*. When the need was over and the Battalion was disbanded much to the chagrin and resentment of the Untouchables. Sir said:

(Quotation not given in the MS.—ed.)

With this testimony who can say that the Untouchables are a non-martial race ?

It is thus obvious that none of the two reasons supposed to be responsible for the exclusion of the Untouchables from the Army. What is then the real reason ? In my opinion, the real reason for the exclusion of Untouchables from the Army is their

1. See also the opinion of General Wilcox in his “*With Indians in France*” p. (page No. not mentioned in MS.)

* Left blank in MS.—ed.

Untouchability. Untouchables, were welcome in the Army so long as their entry did not create a problem. It was no problem in the early part of the British history, because the touchables were out of British Army. They continued to be outside the British Army so long as there were Indian Rulers. When, after the Indian Mutiny, the Race of Indian rulers shrivelled, the Hindus began to enter the British Army which was already filled with the Untouchables; then arose a problem—a problem of adjusting the relative position of the two groups—touchables and untouchables—and the British, who always, in cases of conflict between justice and convenience, prefer convenience, solved the problem by just turning out the Untouchables and without allowing any sense of gratitude to come in their way.

Whatever the reasons of this exclusion, whatever the justice of this exclusion, the fact remains that the effect of this exclusion has proved most disastrous in its social consequences to the life of the Untouchables. The Military Service was the only service in which it was possible for the Untouchables to earn a living and also to have a career. It is a part of history that many untouchables had, done meritorious service in the field and hundreds had risen to the status of Jamadar, Subhedar and Subhedar Majors. The Military occupation had given them respectability in the eyes of the Hindus and had given them a sense of importance, by opening to them places of power, prestige and authority. Having been used to service in the Army for over 150 years, the Untouchables had come to regard it as a hereditary occupation and had not cared to qualify themselves for any other. Herein 1890—they were told that they were not wanted in the Army, without giving them any time to adjust themselves to the new circumstances—as was done in the case of the Anglo-Indians in 1935. When this service was closed, the Untouchables received a stunning blow and set-back from which they have not recovered. They were thrown from a precipice and without exaggeration, fell far below the level at which they had stood under the native Governments.

So much for the entry of the Untouchables in the Military service. What is the position with regard to their entry in the civil service ?

The Civil Service requires a high degree of education from the entrant. Only those with University degrees can hope to secure admission. The Untouchables have been the most uneducated part of India's population. The Civil Service has been virtually closed to them. It is only recently, that there have been among them men, who have taken University degrees. What has been their fate? It is no exaggeration to say that they are begging from door to door. Two things have come in the way of their securing an entry in the Civil Services. Firstly, the British Government refused to give them any preference. Not that the British Government did not recognize the principle of giving preference to communities which were not sufficiently represented in the Civil Services. For instance, the British Government has definitely recognized that the Mahomedans should get preference provided he has minimum qualification. That, this principle has been acted upon in their case, is evident from the nominations, which the Government of India has made to the I. C. S. since the year when the Government took over power to fill certain places in the I. C. S. by nomination.

Not a single candidate from the untouchables has been nominated by the British Government, although there were many, who called, have satisfied the test of minimum qualification.

The second reason, why the untouchables, though qualified by education, have not been able to find a place in the Civil Service is, because of the system of recruitment for these services, Under the British Government, the authority to fill vacancies is left with the head of the department. Heads of Department have been and will long continue to be high Caste Hindus. A caste Hindu by his very make up is incapable of showing any consideration to an untouchable candidate. He is a man (with)* strong sympathies and strong antipathies. His sympathies make him look first to his family, then to his relations, then to his friends and then to members of his caste. Within this wide circle, he is sure to find a candidate for the vacancy.¹ It is very seldom that he is required to travel beyond the limits of his caste. If he has to, then the Untouchable

* Inserted—ed.

1. That this is the principle on which vacancies are filled is too well known to be disputed. In fact it is so well established that if one were to know the caste of the Head of the Department, one could tell of what caste is the personnel of the Department.

will have, only if there is no other touchable Hindu to compete with them. If there is a competitor from any of the touchable caste, the Untouchable will have no chance. Thus the Untouchable is always the last to be considered in the matter of appointments to the Civil Service. Being the last to be considered, his chances of securing a post are the least.

There are two services for which the Untouchable is particularly suited. One is the Police Service and the other is menial service in Government Offices. What is the position of the Untouchables so far as police service is concerned ?

The answer is that the Police Service is closed to them.

On the 17th December 1925, a resolution was moved in the Legislative Council of the United Provinces, asking Government to remove all restrictions on the entry of the Untouchables in Government service and especially the Police Service, the Member of Government in charge of the Department, speaking on behalf of Government said :

“No, if the Honourable members wish to leave it open to all, I have no objection. But I will certainly object to any member of a criminal tribe or a low caste man like a chamar in this force at present.”

On 22nd July 1927, Lala Mohan Lal asked the following question in the Punjab Legislative Council:

Lala Mohan Lal: Will the Hon'ble Member for Finance be pleased to state if members of the depressed classes are taken in the police ? If not, does the Government intend to direct that, in the matter of recruitment of police constables, the members of the depressed classes should also be taken?

The Hon'ble Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency : Members of the depressed classes are not enrolled in the police. When there is evidence that the depressed classes are treated on an equal footing by all sections of the community, (which may not happen till dooms day) or when Government is satisfied that enrolment of members of these classes will satisfy the requirements of efficiency and be in the best interests of the composition of the service, Government will be quite prepared to throw open recruitment to them, provided they come up to the physical and other standards required of all recruits.

The Committee appointed by the Government of Bombay in 1928 reported as follows on this questions:

(Quotation not given in the MS.)

As to menial service, that also has been closed to them. Few will believe it, nonetheless it is a fact and few will be able to guess the reason, though it is quite plain. The reason why the untouchable is excluded from menial service is the same for which he is excluded from the Police Service. It is Untouchability. As part of his duty, a constable has to arrest a person. As a part of his duty, a constable has to enter the house of a person, for instance, to execute a search warrant. What would happen if the person arrested is a Hindu and the constable is an Untouchable? Police constables have to live in lines as neighbours, use the water taps. What would be the reactions of a Hindu constable if his neighbour is an Untouchable constable? These are the considerations which have barred the entry of the Untouchable in the Police Service. Exactly the same consideration have been operative in the case of menial service. A menial in Government office is, in law, required to serve in the office. But his service brings him in contact with others who are Hindus. His contact causes pollution. How could he be welcome. Besides, according to convention, a peon in office is supposed to serve the head of the Department and also his household. He has to bring tea for the boss, he has to do shopping for the wife of the boss, and he has to look after the children. The Head of the Department has to forego these services if the menial appointments went to the Untouchables. Rather than forego these services, the Untouchable was deprived of his right to serve. So complete was this exclusion that the Bombay Committee had to make a special recommendation in this behalf.

III

What did the British Government do about the education of the Untouchables? I will take the Presidency of Bombay by way of an illustration. The period of British administration, so far as Education is concerned, can be divided into three convenient periods.

I.—From 1813 to 1854

1. Education under the British Rule in the Bombay Presidency must be said to have begun with the foundation of the Bombay Education Society in 1815. That Society did not confine its efforts to the education of European children. Native boys were encouraged to attend its schools at Surat and Thana and at the beginning of 1820, four separate schools for natives had been opened in Bombay and were attended by nearly 250 pupils. In August of the same year, further measures were taken to extend native education. A special committee was appointed by the Society to prepare school books in the Vernacular languages, and to aid or establish Vernacular schools. But the wide scope of the undertaking was soon seen to be beyond the aims of a society established mainly for the education of the poor; and in 1822, the committee became a separate corporation, thenceforth known as the Bombay Native School Book and School Society, which name was in 1827 changed into the Bombay Native Education Society. The Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone was the new Society's first President. The Vice-Presidents were the Chief Justice and the three members of the Executive Council of the Bombay Government; and the managing committee consisted of twelve European and twelve native gentlemen, with Captain George Jervis R. E., and Mr. Sadashiv Kashinath Chhatre as Secretaries. The Society started its work with a grant of Rs. 600 per mensem from the Government. As early as 1825, the Government of Bombay had along side, began to establish primary schools at its own expense in district towns and had placed them under the control of the Collectors. To co-ordinate the activities of these two independent bodies, there was established in 1840 a Board of Education composed of six members, 3 appointed by Government and 3 appointed by the Native Education Society. This Board was in charge of the Education Department till the appointment of the Director of Public Instruction in 1855.

2. On the 1st March 1855, when the Board was dissolved, there was in the Presidency of Bombay under the charge of the Board, 15 English Colleges and Schools having 2850 students on the Register

and 256 vernacular schools having 18,883 students on the Register. In the same report it is stated by the Board :

“24. In August (1855) we received a petition from certain inhabitants of Ahmednagar, praying for the establishment of a *school for the education of low castes* and engaging to defray one-half of the teacher’s salary, in accordance with the terms of the late rules. A school room had been built by the petitioner and the attendance of boys was calculated at thirty. The establishment of such a school was opposed to the prejudice of the richer and higher castes, and there was some difficulty in procuring a teacher on a moderate salary, but as the application was made in strict accordance with the conditions stated in the late notification on the subject, we readily complied with the request, and the school was opened in November. We merely mention the subject, as it is the first occasion on which we have established a school for these castes”.

3. The statement by the Board, that this was the first occasion when a school for the low castes was established in this Presidency, naturally raises the question what was the policy of the British Government in the matter of the education of the Depressed Classes before 1855? To answer this question, it is necessary to have a peep into the history of the educational policy of the British Government in this Presidency from 1813 to 1854. It must be admitted that under the Peshwa’s Government the Depressed classes were entirely out of the pale of education. They did not find a place in any idea of state education, for the simple reason that the Peshwa’s Government was a theocracy based upon the canons of Manu, according to which the Shudras and Atishudras (classes corresponding to the Backward classes of the Education department), if they had any right of life, liberty and property, had certainly no right to education. The Depressed classes who were labouring under such disabilities, naturally breathed a sigh of relief at the downfall of this hated theocracy. Great hopes were raised among the Depressed classes by the advent of the British Rule. Firstly, because, it was a democracy which, they thought, believed in the principle of one man (one)* value, be that man high or low. If it remained true to its tenets, such a democracy was a complete contrast to the theocracy of the Peshwa. Secondly, the Depressed classes had helped the British to conquer the country and naturally believed that the British would in their turn help them, if not in a special degree, at least equally with the rest.

*Inserted—ed.

4. The British were for a long time silent on the question of promoting education among the native population. Although individuals of high official rank in the administration of India were not altogether oblivious of the moral duty and administrative necessity of spreading knowledge among the people of India, no public declaration of the responsibility of the State in that behalf was made till the year 1813, when by section 43 of the Statute 53 George IV, chap. 155 Parliament laid down that "out of the surplus revenues of India, a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of sciences among the inhabitants of British territories in India etc. "This statutory provision, however, did not result in any systematic effort, to place the education of the natives upon a firm and organised footing till 1823. For, the Court of Directors in their despatch dated 3rd June 1814 to the Governor General in Council, in prescribing the mode of giving effect to section 43 of the statute of 1813, directed that the promotion of Sanskrit learning among the Hindus would fulfil the purposes which Parliament had in mind. But what a disappointment to the Depressed classes, there was, when systematic efforts to place the education of the natives upon a firm and organized footing came to be made !! For, the British Government deliberately ruled that education was to be a preserve for the higher classes. Lest this fact should be regarded as a fiction, attention is invited to the following extracts from the Report of the Board of Education of the Bombay Presidency for the year 1850-51 :—

"Paragraph 5th.— System adopted by the Board based on the views of Court of Directors.—Thus the Board of Education at this Presidency having laid down a scheme of education, in accordance with the leading injunctions of Despatches from the Honourable Court, and founded not more on the opinions of men who had been attentively considering the progress of education in India such as the Earl of Auckland, Major Candy and others, than on the openly declared wants of the most intelligent of the natives themselves, the Board, we repeat, were informed by your Lordships predecessor in Council that the process must be reversed."