

constituencies in which only members of the "Depressed Classes" electorally qualified will be entitled to vote. Any person voting in such a special constituency will, as stated above, be also entitled to vote in a general constituency. It is intended that these constituencies should be formed in selected areas where the Depressed Classes are most numerous, and that, except in Madras, they should not cover the whole area of the Province.

In Bengal it seems possible that in some general constituencies a majority of the voters will belong to the Depressed Classes. Accordingly, pending further investigation, no number has been fixed for the members to be returned from the Special Depressed Class Constituencies in that Province. It is intended to secure that the Depressed Classes should obtain not less than 10 seats in the Bengal Legislature.

The precise definition in each Province of those who (if electorally qualified) will be entitled to vote in the Special Depressed Class Constituencies has not yet been finally determined. It will be based as a rule on the general principles advocated in the Franchise Committee's Report. Modification may, however, be found necessary in some Provinces in Northern India where the application of the general criteria of Untouchability might result in a definition unsuitable in some respects to the special conditions of the Province.

His Majesty's Government do not consider that these Special Depressed Classes Constituencies will be required for more than limited time. They intend that the Constitution shall provide that they shall come to an end after 20 years if they have not previously been abolished under the general powers of electoral revision referred to in paragraph 6." ¹

"According to this Award, the Depressed Classes were granted separate seats in the Provincial Assemblies and the right of double vote under which they were to elect their own representatives and to vote also in the general constituencies.

The next day, after his arrival, Dr. Ambedkar wrote a very important letter to Sir Samuel Hoare asking him to clear the meaning of the last part of the paragraph nine of the Award as there was some doubt about it among some of the members of the Depressed Classes. He further wrote that it was impossible for him to make the Depressed Classes accept the Award with the

¹: Writings and Speeches Vol. 9, Pp. 79-82.

proviso attached to it, and concluded his letter by saying that “pending the arrival of your reply I will try to hold the storm of indignation that is bursting over my head from the Depressed Classes from all parts of India from bursting in public.”¹

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has issued the following statement from Bombay, on Tuesday the 23rd August 1932, on the Communal Award :—

“No one expected the Communal Award to be everything to everybody and I myself was prepared for some variations in the proposals made by me and my Colleague Rao Bahadur Srinivasan at the Round Table Conference on behalf of the Depressed Classes. But the Communal Award has ruthlessly scaled down their representation in the Provincial Legislatures to quite insignificant proportions. The result is that the Communal Award creates positive grievances by refusing to them adequate representation.

“I see no justification for this enormity. What has, however, shocked me most is the denial of the right to representation to the Depressed Classes of the Punjab. Knowing as I do the conditions of the Depressed Classes in that Province, I have no hesitation in saying that comparatively speaking their social condition is really worse than that of their fellows in other Provinces of Northern India. Their case for Special Representation was the strongest.

“What reasons His Majesty’s Government had for depriving this most deserving class of their seat, I am unable to see unless it be to satisfy the claims of the most turbulent and vociferous sections in that Province. This injustice becomes most flagrant when it is realized that the Indian Christians and the Anglo-Indians without a tithe of the population of the Depressed Classes and without any shadow of social grievances have been provided for with special seats two for the former and one for the latter. These injustices I fear will make the All-India Depressed Classes Federation which is to consider the question averse to the acceptance of the award.”²

¹ : Keer, P.204.

² : The Free Press Journal, dated 24th August 1932.

Back to India Gandhi was arrested on January 4. Gandhi had not given up his fight for tying the Untouchable Hindus to the caste Hindus in politics. In early March, he informed the British Cabinet from Yeravda Jail that he would resist with his life the separation of the Untouchable Hindus from the Caste Hindus. And when the Communal Award was declared, granting Separate Electorates to the Untouchables, he declared his resolve to fast unto death if the separate electorates for the Depressed Classes were not abolished. Yet on principle, he had no word to say against Separate Electorates being conceded to the Christians, Muslims and Sikhs.

On one more count Gandhi's resort to a fast unto death against the grant of Separate Electorates to the Depressed Classes was not justifiable either." ¹

In this regard, Dr. Ambedkar said,

"Mr. Gandhi found that his threat had failed to have any effect. He did not care that he was a signatory to the requisition asking the Prime Minister to arbitrate. He forgot that as a signatory he was bound to accept the award. He started to undo what the Prime Minister had done. He first tried to get the terms of the Communal Award revised. Accordingly, he addressed the following letter to the Prime Minister:—

YERAVDA CENTRAL PRISON,

August 18, 1932.

DEAR FRIEND,

"There can be no doubt that Sir Samuel Hoare has showed you and the Cabinet my letter to him of 11th March on the question of the representation of the Depressed Classes. That letter should be treated as part of this letter and be read together with this.

"I have read the British Government's decision on the representation of minorities and have slept over it. In pursuance of my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare and my declaration at the meeting of the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference on

¹: Keer, Pp. 204-05

13th November, 1931, at St. James' Palace, I have to resist your decision with my life. The only way I can do so is by declaring a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind save water with or without salt and soda. This fast will cease if during its progress the British Government, of its own motion or under pressure of public opinion, revise their decision and withdraw their scheme of communal electorates for the Depressed Classes, whose representatives should be elected by the general electorate under the common franchise, no matter how wide it is.

"The proposed fast will come into operation in the ordinary course from the noon of 20th September next, unless the said decision is meanwhile revised in the manner suggested above.

"I am asking the authorities here to cable the text of this letter to you so as to give you ample notice. But in any case, I am leaving sufficient time for this letter to reach you in time by the slowest route.

"I also ask that this letter and my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare already referred to be published at the earliest possible moment. On my part, I have scrupulously observed the rule of the jail and have communicated my desire or the contents of the two letters to no one, save my two companions, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mr. Mahadev Desai. But I want, if you make it possible, public opinion to be affected by my letters. Hence my request for their early publication.

"I regret the decision I have taken. But as a man of religion that I hold myself to be, I have no other course left open to me. As I have said in my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, even if His Majesty's Government decided to release me in order to save themselves from embarrassment, my fast will have to continue. For, I cannot now hope to resist the decision by any other means ; and I have no desire whatsoever to compass my release by any means other than honourable.

"It may be that my judgment is warped and that I am wholly in error in regarding Separate Electorates for the Depressed Classes as harmful to them or to Hinduism. If so, I am not likely to be in the right with reference to other parts of my philosophy of life. In that case, my death by fasting will be at once a penance for my error and a lifting of a weight from off these numberless men and women who have childlike faith in my wisdom. Whereas if my judgment is right, as I have little doubt it is, the contemplated step is but due to the fulfilment of the scheme of life which I have tried for

more than a quarter of a century, apparently not without considerable success.

I remain,
your faithful friend,
M. K. Gandhi.”¹

This proves the contradiction of Mahatma Gandhi with regard to question of Depressed Classes.

Meanwhile Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel met Gandhiji in Yerwada Jail on September 6, 1932 and discussed the issue with him.*

“As was natural, Gandhi’s announcement threw the country into a state of consternation. Public appeals were made to Gandhi and the Government, statements were issued to the Press, and prayers were offered. Leaders like Dr. Rajendra Prasad said that Hinduism was on its trial. There was confusion and nervous strain in all Hindu circles; not because the caste Hindus and their leaders felt ashamed of their cruelty to the Depressed Classes, but because the life of their political hero, their political liberator, was at stake. The traditional tragic trend in the character of the Hindus got the upper hand and they got panicky.

Pandit Malaviya declared from Simla his intention to hold a conference of Hindu leaders in Bombay on September 19 to resolve the deadlock and save the life of the Mahatma, and informed Dr. Ambedkar about it by wire. For to save the life of the Mahatma it was necessary to alter the British Premier’s Award, and to amend it, it was necessary to get the approval of Dr. Ambedkar who had wrested these privileges for the Depressed Classes. Naturally, all eyes turned to Dr. Ambedkar as a man of the moment. It was a cruel irony of fate that the leaders and the Press that had refused to recognise Dr. Ambedkar as the leader of the Depressed Classes were now compelled to recognise his leadership of and spokesmanship for the Depressed Classes. He now became the cynosure of the whole country.

Dr. Ambedkar knew the significance and magnitude of the crisis arisen out of Gandhi’s fast unto death. Gandhi had hurled a most dangerous and fatal weapon at him. He prepared himself for repelling the weapon. He had an interview with the Governor of Bombay in Poona.”²

The hurried departure of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the champion of Separate Electorates, from Bombay to Poona on Sunday morning to interview the Governor of Bombay, on the eve of the Conference

¹ Writings and Speeches, Vol. 9, Pp. 82-83.

² Keer, Pp. 205-206.

* See appendix-IV

convened in Bombay today to persuade the representative of the "Depressed Classes" to give up the scheme of Separate Electorates and save Mahatma Gandhi's life has caused considerable speculation in the city.

The Doctor left for Poona in the morning and after a long conversation with the Governor of Bombay returned to Bombay in the evening.

"Will you attend tomorrow's Conference?" asked our representative.

To this question Dr. Ambedkar stated that beyond the telegraphic communication that he had received from Pandit Malaviya he had received no formal invitation for the Conference up to now but if he received an invitation he would by all means attend the Conference.

In a statement, issued in the evening Sunday the 11th September 1932, Dr. Ambedkar reiterates his conviction that Separate Electorates are in the interests of "Depressed Classes" and repeats that Mahatma Gandhi must first put forward his proposals to enable the Doctor then to play his own cards."¹

"I do not care these political stunts." declared Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

"This threat of Mr. Gandhi." he continued, "to starve himself to death is not a moral fight but only a political move. I can understand a person trying to negotiate with his political opponent on equal terms by giving him credit for honesty, but I will never be moved by these methods."

"My decision stands and if Mr. Gandhi wants to fight with his life for the interests of the Hindu Community the Depressed Classes also will be forced to fight with their lives to safeguard their interests.

In reference to the view expressed by Mr. M. C. Rajah, that if Dr. Ambedkar would agree to give up his demand for Separate Electorates and accepted Joint Electorates with reservation of seats the situation could be saved. Dr. Ambedkar said that he would not agree to it." ²

Mr. Gandhi wrote a letter addressed to the Government of Bombay on 15th September 1932 showing the reasons as to why he had

¹: The Bombay Chronicle dated 11th September 1932. (Issue may be of 12th September 1932.—Editors.)

²: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 14th September 1932.

taken the decision to go on a fast unto death. The said letter was sent to the press for publication on 21st March 1932. In the said letter he said;

“My fast has a narrow application. The Depressed Classes question being predominantly a religious matter, I regard it as specially my own by reason of life-long concentration on it. It is a sacred personal trust which I may not shirk.”¹

In this regard Dr. Ambedkar, clarifying his position, wrote a letter to The Times of India, the letter is as follows—

To the Editor of “The Times of India”,

Sir,

I am surprised to read in to-day’s newspaper that some eight public meetings are to be held under the auspices of the Emergency Committee in different parts of the City to pass a resolution asking the public to compel the British Government to change their policy regarding the Communal Award in so far as it affects the Depressed Classes. The obvious object of this resolution is to mobilise public opinion against the special arrangement provided in the Premier’s Award for the representation of the D. C.

Since Mahatma Gandhi declared his resolve of self-immolation over this question, negotiations have been going on between some prominent Hindu leaders and myself, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Emergency Committee yesterday evening which I did. During the time I was at the meeting no reference was made to any such programme or any such resolution having been contemplated to be placed at public meeting. Had the draft resolution been brought to my notice at yesterday’s meeting, I would have certainly objected not only to the wording of the resolution but also to the very idea of holding any public meetings pending the outcome of the negotiations that are proceeding. In fact, it was understood that no propaganda of any kind was to be carried on by either party. This consideration prevented me from holding meetings or starting propaganda in favour of the Communal Award, in spite of a lot of pressure from the members of my party.

¹: Khairmode, Vol.5, P. 26

These public meetings which the Emergency Committee proposes to hold and the resolution to be moved, but a provocative challenge to me and to my party. Those who have been carrying on negotiations with me cannot carry on their propaganda against me and at the same time hope for an amicable settlement as the result of the negotiations. It must be either negotiations or straight fight. Both cannot go together. If the other party insists on their right to carry on propaganda, they will have no right to blame me if my party also decided to carry on propaganda against them.

B.R. AMBEDKAR.

Bombay, September 18, 1932.”¹

“On the eve of the Conference of the Hindu leaders, Dr. Ambedkar issued a statement to the Press in which he said : “So far as I am concerned, I am willing to consider everything, though I am not willing to allow the rights of the Depressed Classes to be curtailed in any way. It is no use holding a conference in a vacuum or discussing things without any specific data.” He frankly related this to a deputation of the Depressed Classes from Ahmedabad, and also in his interview with the Indian multi-millionaire, Seth Walchand Hirachand. He told them that Gandhi could have discussed his proposal with the British Premier ; since he was not putting forth any proposal, he alone was to blame.

Visitors, leaders and friends began to call upon Dr. Ambedkar. One of such early visitors was Thakkar who had served with him on the State Committee. He came to talk the matter over. Dr. Ambedkar to whom time was knowledge and a precious thing said that he was very busy studying an important criminal case and therefore asked Thakkar how much time he would require. Thakkar replied that he would require an hour or so. Dr. Ambedkar said that he would give five minutes. Thakkar asked for more. The interview ended with an algebraic brevity, and Dr. Ambedkar went in. Thakkar, however, saw Dr. Ambedkar again the next day. A furious campaign was launched against Dr. Ambedkar.” ²

¹ : The Times of India of 19th September 1932.

² : Keer: Pp. 206-07.

On the eve of the Conference of the Hindu leaders i.e. on 19th September 1932, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar issued another statement to the Press. Following is the full text of the Statement.—Editors.

“I need hardly say that I was astounded to read the correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Samuel Hoare and the Prime Minister,* which was published recently in the Papers, in which he has expressed his determination to starve himself unto death” till the British Government of its own accord or under pressure of public opinion revise their opinion and withdraw their scheme of communal representation for the Depressed Classes. The unenviable position in which I have been placed by the Mahatma’s vow of self-immolation can easily be imagined.

It passes my comprehension why Mr. Gandhi should stake his life on an issue arising out of the communal question which he, at the Round Table Conference, said was one of a comparatively small importance. Indeed to adopt the language of those of Mr. Gandhi’s way of thinking the communal question was only an appendix to the book of India’s constitution and not the main chapter. It would have been justifiable if Mr. Gandhi had resorted to this extreme step for obtaining independence for the country on which he was so insistent all through the R. T. C. debates. It is also a painful surprise that Mr. Gandhi should single out Special Representation for the Depressed Classes in the Communal Award as an excuse for his self-immolation. Separate Electorates are granted not only to the Depressed Classes, but to the Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans as well as to the Mohamedans and the Sikhs. Also Separate Electorates are granted to land-lords, labourers and traders. Mr. Gandhi had declared his opposition to the Special Representation of every other class and creed except the Mohamedans and the Sikhs. All the same Mr. Gandhi now ellooses to let every body else, except the Depressed Classes retain the Special Electorates given to them.

* See, Writings and Speeches, Vol. 9, Pp. 77-87.

The fears expressed by Mr. Gandhi about the consequences of the arrangements for the representation of the Depressed Classes are in my opinion purely imaginary. If the nation is not going to be split up by Separate Electorates to the Mohamedans and the Sikhs, the Hindu Society cannot be said to be split up if the Depressed Classes are given Separate Electorates. His conscience is not aroused if the nation is split by the arrangements of Special Electorates for classes and communities other than the Depressed Classes.

I am sure many have felt that if there was any class which deserved to be given special political rights in order to protect itself against the tyranny of the majority under the *Swaraj* constitution, it was the Depressed Classes. Here is a class which is undoubtedly not in a position to sustain itself in the struggle for existence. The religion to which they are tied, instead of providing for them an honourable place brands them as lepers not fit for ordinary intercourse. Economically it is a class entirely dependent upon the High-Caste Hindus for earning its daily bread with no independent way of living open to it. Not only every path of progress is closed to them by reason of the social prejudices of the Hindus but there is a definite attempt all throughout the Hindu Society to bolt every possible door so as not to allow the Depressed Classes any opportunity to rise in the scale of life. Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to say that in every village the caste Hindus, however divided among themselves, are always in a standing conspiracy to put down in a merciless manner any attempt on the part of the Depressed Classes who form a small and scattered body of an ordinary Indian citizen.

In these circumstances it would only be fair for all right minded persons admit that for a community so handicapped, some share of statutory political power is a paramount necessity to succeed in the struggle for life and to protect itself against organized tyranny.

I should have thought that a well-wisher of the Depressed Classes would have fought tooth and nail for securing to them as much political power as might be possible in the new Constitution. But the Mahatma's ways of thinking are strange

and are certainly beyond my comprehension. He not only does not endeavour to augment the scanty political power which the Depressed Classes have got under the Communal Award, but on the contrary he has staked his very life in order to deprive them of what little they have got. This is not the first attempt on the part of the Mahatma to completely dish the Depressed Classes out of political existence. Long before there was the Minorities Pact, the Mahatma tried to enter into an agreement with the Muslims in order to defeat the claims of the Depressed Classes. He offered to the Muslims all the 14 claims which they had put forth on their behalf, and in return asked them to join with him in resisting the claims for Social Representation made by me on behalf of the Depressed Classes.

It must be said to the credit of the Muslim delegates, that they refused to be party to such a black act, and saved the Depressed Classes from what might as well have developed into a calamity for them as a result of the combined opposition of the Mohamedans and Mr. Gandhi.

I am unable to understand the ground of hostility of Mr. Gandhi to the Communal Award. He says that the Communal Award has separated the Hindu Community. On the other hand Dr. Moonje, a much stronger protagonist of the Hindu cause and a militant advocate of its interests, takes a totally different view of the matter. In the speeches which he has been delivering since his arrival from London, Dr. Moonje has been insisting that the Communal Award does not create any separation between the Depressed Classes and the Hindus. Indeed, he has been boasting that he has defeated me in my attempt to politically separate the Depressed Classes from the Hindus. I am sure that Dr. Moonje is right in his interpretation of the Communal Award although I am not sure that the credit of it can legitimately go to Dr. Moonje. It is therefore, surprising that Mahatma Gandhi, who is a Nationalist, and not known to be a communalist, should read the Communal Award in so far as it relates to the Depressed Classes in a manner quite contrary to that of a communalists like Dr. Moonje. If Dr. Moonje does not sense any separation of the Depressed Classes from the Hindus in the Communal Award the Mahatma ought to feel quite satisfied on that score.

In my opinion the Communal Award should not only satisfy the Hindus, but also satisfy those individuals among the Depressed Classes such as Rao Bahadur Rajah, Mr. Baloo or Mr. Gavai who are in favour of Joint Electorates. Mr. Rajah's fulminations in the Assembly have amused me considerably. An intense supporter of Separate Electorates and the bitterest and the most vehement critic of caste Hindu tyranny, now professes faith in the Joint Electorates and love for the Hindus. How much of that is due to his natural desire to resuscitate himself from the oblivion in which he was cast by his being kept out of the Round Table Conference and how much of it is to his honest change of faith, I do not propose to discuss.

The points on which Mr. Rajah is harping by way of criticism on the Communal Award are two; One is that the Depressed Classes have gained lesser number of seats than they are entitled to on the population basis, and the other is that the Depressed Classes have been separated from the Hindu fold.

I agree in his first grievance, but when the Rao Bahadur begins to accuse those who represented the Depressed Classes at the R. T. C. for having sold their rights, I am bound to point out what Mr. Rajah did as a member of the India Central Committee. In that Committee's report the Depressed Classes were given in Madras 10 seats out of 150; in Bombay 8 seats out of 114; in Bengal 8 seats out of 200; in U. P. 8 seats out of 182; in Punjab 6 seats out of 150; in Behar and Orissa 6 out of 150; in C. P. 8 out of 125 and in Assam 9 seats for the Depressed Classes and the indigenous and primitive races out of 75. I do not wish to overburden this statement by pointing out how this distribution compares with the population ratio. But there can be no doubt that this meant a terrible under-representation of the Depressed Classes. To this distribution of seats Mr. Rajah was a party. Surely, Mr. Rajah, before he criticises the Communal Award and accuses others, should refresh his memory of what he accepted as Member of the Indian Central Committee on behalf of the Depressed Classes without any protest. If the population ratio of representation was to him a natural right of a Depressed Classes and its full realisation was a necessity for their protection, why did not Mr. Rajah insist upon it in the Central Committee when he had an opportunity to do so?

As to his contention that in the Communal Award, the Depressed Classes have been separated from the caste Hindus, it is a view to which I cannot subscribe. If Mr. Rajah has any conscientious objection to Separate Electorates, there is no compulsion on him to stand as a candidate in the Separate Electorates. The opportunity to stand as a candidate in the General Electorate as well as the right to vote in it are there, and Mr. Rajah is free to avail himself of the same. Mr. Rajah is crying at the top of his voice to assure to the Depressed Classes that there is a complete change of heart on the part of the Caste Hindus towards the Depressed Classes. He will have the opportunity to prove that fact to the satisfaction of the Depressed Classes, who are not prepared to take his word by getting himself elected in the General Constituency. The Hindus who profess love and sympathy for the Depressed Classes, will have also an opportunity to prove their bona-fides by electing Mr. Rajah to the legislature.

The Communal Award, therefore, in my opinion satisfied both those who want Separate Electorates and those who want Joint Electorates. In this sense it is already a compromise and should be accepted as it is. As to the Mahatma, I do not know what he wants. It is assumed that although the Mahatma is opposed to the system of Separate Electorates he is not opposed to the system of Joint Electorates and Reserved Seats. That is a gross error. Whatever his views are to-day, while in London he was totally opposed to any system of Special Representation for Depressed Classes whether by Joint Electorates or by Separate Electorates. Beyond the right to vote in a General Electorate based upon Adult Suffrage, he was not prepared to concede anything to the Depressed Classes by way of securing their representation in the legislatures. This was the position he had taken at first. Towards the end of the R. T. C. he suggested to me a scheme which he said he was prepared to consider. The scheme was purely conventional without any constitutional sanction behind it and without any single seat being reserved for the Depressed Classes in the Electoral Law.

The scheme was as follows :—

Depressed Class candidates might stand in the General Electorate as against other High-Caste Hindu candidates. If any Depressed Class candidate was defeated in the election he should file an election petition and obtain the verdict that he was defeated because he was an Untouchable. If such a decision was obtained, the Mahatma said he would undertake to induce some Hindu members to resign and thus create a vacancy. There would be then another election in which the defeated Depressed Class candidate or any other Depressed Class candidate might again try his luck as against the Hindu candidates. Should he be defeated again he should get similar verdict that he was defeated because he was an Untouchable and so on "*adinfinitum*." I am disclosing these facts as some people are even now under the impression that the Joint Electorates and Reserved Seats would satisfy the conscience of the Mahatma. This will show why I insist that there is no use of discussing the question until the actual proposals of the Mahatma are put forth.

I must, however, point out that I cannot accept the assurances of the Mahatma that he and his Congress will do the needful. I cannot leave so important a question as the protection of my people to conventions and understandings. The Mahatma is not an immortal person, and the Congress, assuming it is not a malevolent force, is not to have an abiding existence. There have been many Mahatmas in India whose sole object was to remove Untouchability and to elevate and absorb the Depressed Classes; but every one of them has failed in his mission. Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone. But the Untouchables have remained as Untouchables.

I have enough experience of the pace of reform and the faith of Hindu reformers in the conflicts that have taken place at Mahad and Nasik, to say that no well-wisher of the Depressed Classes will ever consent to allow the uplift of the Depressed Classes to rest upon such treacherous shoulders. Reformers who in moments of crisis prefer to sacrifice their principles rather than hurt the feelings of their kindred, can be of no use to the Depressed Classes.

I am therefore bound to insist upon a Statutory Guarantee for the protection of my people. If Mr. Gandhi wishes to have the Communal Award altered, it is for him to put forth his proposals and to prove that they give a better guarantee than has been given to us under the Award.

I hope that the Mahatma will desist from carrying out the extreme step contemplated by him. We mean no harm to the Hindu Society when we demand Separate Electorates. If we choose Separate Electorates we do so in order to avoid the total dependence on the sweet will of the caste Hindus in matters affecting our destiny. Like the Mahatma we also claim our right to err, and we expect him not to deprive us of that right. His determination to fast himself unto death is worthy of a far better cause. I could have understood the propriety of the Mahatma contemplating such extreme step for stopping riots between Hindus and Mohamedans or between the Depressed Classes and the Hindus or for any other national cause. It certainly cannot improve the lot of the Depressed Classes. Whether he knows it or not the Mahatma's act will result in nothing but terrorism by his followers against the Depressed Classes all over the country.

Coercion of this sort will not win the Depressed Classes to the Hindu fold if they are determined to go out. And if the Mahatma chooses to ask the Depressed Classes to make a choice between Hindu faith and possession of political power I am quite sure that the Depressed Classes will choose political power and save the Mahatma from self-immolation. If Mr. Gandhi coolly reflects on the consequences of his act I very much doubt whether he will find this victory worth having. It is still more important to note that the Mahatma is releasing reactionary and uncontrollable forces, and is fostering the spirit of hatred between the Hindu Community and the Depressed Classes by resorting to this method and thereby widening the existing gulf between the two. When I opposed Mr. Gandhi at the R. T. C. there was a hue and cry against me in the country and there was conspiracy in so-called nationalist press to represent me as a traitor to the nationalist cause, to suppress correspondence coming from my side and to boost the propaganda against my party by publishing exaggerated reports of meetings and conferences, many of which

were never held. "Silver bullets" were freely used for creating divisions in the ranks of the Depressed Classes. There have been also a few clashes ending in violence.

If the Mahatma does not want all this to be repeated on a larger scale, let him for God's sake, reconsider his decision and avert the disastrous consequences. I believe the Mahatma does not want this. But if he does not desist, in spite of his wishes these consequences are sure to follow as night follows the day.

Before concluding this statement, I desire to assure the public that although I am entitled to say that I regard the matter as closed I am prepared to consider the proposals of the Mahatma. I however, trust the Mahatma will not drive me to the necessity of making a choice between his life and the rights of my people. For I can never consent to deliver my people bound hand and foot to the Caste Hindus for generations to come."¹

"The declaration of the fast unto death by Mr. Gandhi made the people learn more about the condition of the Untouchables and opened their eyes for a while to the passions that were seething in the bosom of the Untouchables. The people, the Press and patriots were roused to a realisation that there was a blot on their society. There was an endless talk about Dr. Ambedkar in every political party, in every social circle and in every religious institution. He was flooded with telegrams and letters, some threatening his life, some appealing to his conscience, and some supporting his stand.

As declared, the Conference of the Hindu leaders was held amidst this tense situation at the spacious Hall of the Indian Merchants' Chamber on September 19, 1932, under the presidentship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Solanki were seated just near the President's chair. Rajah and Dr. Moonje came to the Hall arm-in-arm."²

Among those present were : Rajendraprasad, C. Rajgopalachari, Pandit Kunzaru, T. Prakasham, Dr. Chauthiram, Swami Satyanand, Mr. Aney, G. A. Gawai, Mr. Shivraj, Mr. Jagannathan, Mr. Dharmalingam, Mr. Mandal, Sir Chunnilal,

¹ : Janata, dated 24th September 1932.

² : Keer, P. 208.

Hirachand Walchand, Sir Setalwad, Sir Madgaonkar, Sir Purushottamdas, Shri Deodhar, Mr. Natrajan, Rao Bahadur Vaidya, Dr. Deshmukh, Dalvi, Subhedar, Seth Birla, Mr. Karandikar, Dr. Savarkar, Shivatarkar, P Balu, Nikalje, Kamaia Nehru, Perani Captain, Moshon Captain, Sau. Awantikabai Gokhale, Mrs. Annapurnabai Deshmukh, Ratanben Mehta, Miss Natrajan.

In order to save the life of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, the President of the meeting suggested that a solution acceptable to both the sides should be found out.

On the request of Pandit Malviya, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar rose to speak. He stated his views in a candid manner. He said,

“Looking at the objective of this Conference, I do not feel the need of calling such a Conference. In order to oppose our demands, Mahatma Gandhi has started fast unto death. It is natural that everybody would like to save the valuable life of Mahatma Gandhi. But Gandhiji should have put some concrete alternative proposal before staking his life. Having considered the present situation, I feel that without any clear alternative proposal from Gandhiji, all efforts towards negotiations would be in vain. And to be frank, there is nothing left to be decided. Unless we know what really is in the mind of Gandhiji, all the repeatative deliberations of this Conference are not going to yield any result. To whatever length this Conference may deliberate I am not in a position to find any solution before I know what really is in the mind of Gandhiji and I tell you bluntly that I am not at all bound to proposals coming from the convenors of this conference or any of the leaders, I shall consider the opinion only of Mahatma Gandhi. Unless I know his proposal how can I give my opinion? Bring his proposal first and then I shall think over it. And I make it clear in the beginning itself that any proposal from Gandhiji should be brought by the representatives of the caste Hindus from among you and that I shall not accept any proposal brought forward by an Untouchable leader on behalf of Gandhiji. I shall not sacrifice the rightful demands of my people just in order to save the life of Mahatma Gandhi.”¹

Here, this Conference adjourned for the day.

¹: Janata, dated 24th September 1932.

“On Monday, September 20, 1932 at 12 O’clock noon Mahatma Gandhi started his fast unto death. A committee was formed to have negotiations in the matter. The committee consisted of Sir Tejbahadur Sapru, Bar. Jaikar. Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Mathuradas Wasanji as representatives of the high Caste Hindus. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was invited for the meeting. In the Conference Sir Chunnilal put forward the following views on behalf of Mahatma Gandhi before the Committee members.

They were :

1. Mahatma Gandhi opposed to the decision of awarding Separate Electorates for the Untouchables.

2. He is not fully agreeable to the Joint Electorates as well as for the reserved seats. However, he would not object if the All Hindu Conference at Mumbai would take a specific decision for the reserved seats but it would not mean that he necessarily agrees with it. If at all any fact is agreed upon he may probably give his consent.

Dr. Ambedkar rose to speak after listening the proposals of Mahatma Gandhi. His speech was really very forceful and touching to the heart. He said,

“Today in the negotiations in this difficult situation, I am in more strange position than all others. Unfortunately, in these peaceful negotiations I appear to be acting as villain for the protection of just demands of my people. I am willing to suffer to any extent in order to get fulfilled the just demands of my people.

I tell you I shall not deter from my pious duty, and betray the just and legitimate interests of my people even if you hang me on the nearest lamp-post in the street. The question faced today is not to be solved by succumbing to emotions, but by constitutional means as it involves the countless brethren who

have been suffering in the slavery for ages. Adherence only to conscience will not be of any help here. Looking at the nature of the proposal of Mahatma Gandhi, it will take some more time to think. However this Conference, through a resolution should convey to Mahatma Gandhi to postpone his fast for 10-12 days.

But the President Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya stated that it would not be possible in any circumstances. Consequent upon this Dr. Ambedkar did not agree to give up the Communal Award.”¹

“The Conference then adjourned till two in the afternoon, next day, the 21st September. But immediately the leading members of the Conference went to Birla House and there Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru evolved a scheme of Primary and Secondary elections for the reserved seats. According to it the Depressed Classes themselves were to select for every seat a panel of not less than three candidates and then out of those three chosen candidates one was to be selected by the Joint Electorate of the Caste Hindus and the Depressed Classes.” ²

“After a lengthy discussion, Dr. Ambedkar said that there could be a settlement provided the additional concessions in regard to the Award were given to make good the loss which would be caused due to giving up the Award. The representatives of the Congress assured that they would think over the proposal. Pandit Malviya suggested to form a small committee in this regard. Accordingly the Committee consisting of Tej Bahadur Sapru, Barister Jaikar, Pandit Malviya, Mathuradas Wasanji and Dr. Ambedkar was formed and these names were ‘intimated to the Conference.

Accordingly Dr. Ambedkar prepared the charter of demands and put up before the Committee at 10 p.m. on 20th September 1932 in Birla Bhavan. The text of the same is as follows.”³

¹: Janata, dated 1st October 1932.

²: Keer, P. 209.

³: Janata, dated 1st October 1932.

The Charter of demands made on the eve of Mahatma Gandhi's fast

“Part One :—Representation in the Legislature.

(A) The Depressed Classes shall have the following number of seats in the provincial Legislatures :—

		As per award
Madras	 30 out of 215	18
Bombay	 16 out of 200	10
Bengal	 50 out of 250	10
Punjab	 10 out of 175	9
U. P.	 40 out of 228	12
Behar & Orissa	 20 out of 175	7
C. P & Berar	 20 out of 112	10
Assam	 11 out of 108	4

(B) The method of election to those seats shall be by Joint Electorates and Reserved seats, provided that for the first ten years in 18 single constituencies in Madras, in 10 single Constituencies in Bombay, Central Provinces and Bengal, in 4 single Constituencies in Assam, in 7 single constituencies in Behar and Orissa, in 5 single constituencies in Punjab and in 12 single constituencies in U. P. there shall be held before the General Election a Primary Election of the voters of the Depressed Classes for electing 2 persons to constitute a panel who thereafter shall contest on behalf of the Depressed Classes in the Joint Electorate.

After Ten years

(C) After the first 10 years the system of Primary Election shall cease to be in operation and all seats without exception shall continue to be filled by direct election on the system of Joint Electorates and Reserved Seats.

(D) The right of the Depressed Classes to Special Representation through Joint Electorates and Reserved Seats shall be continued to them for a further period of 15 years. After the said period the matter shall be settled on the basis of referendum to the voters of the Depressed Classes.

(E) The right of the Depressed Classes to Special Representation in both Houses of the Central Legislature shall be recognised on a population ratio on the same terms and in the same manner as is provided for in the case of the Provincial Legislatures.

(F) There shall be Adult Suffrage at least for the Depressed Classes. The franchise of the Depressed Classes shall be the same for the Provincial and the Central Legislatures.

Part Two : Local Boards

1. The Depressed Classes shall be allowed representation in all the Provinces in all Municipalities, Local Boards, District and Taluka, Village Unions, School Boards of Panchayats and any Local Body now existing or to be constituted in the future on the population basis.

2. In all Public Services, Central and Local, the Depressed Classes shall be guaranteed appointments according to their population ratio as a minimum subject to qualifications as may be laid down for the same. Provision shall be made for reaching the quota by relaxing the statutory rules that may be in existence in matters other than educational qualifications.

3. In every province out of the Educational Grant a sum equivalent to the population ratio of the Depressed Classes in that province shall be ear-marked as a minimum for providing educational facilities to the Depressed Classes.

4. There shall be a provision in the Constitution allowing the Depressed Classes the right to Appeal to the Governor and the Viceroy for any neglect of their interest in the matter of education, sanitation, recruitment in Public Services, etc., on the same terms and in a manner provided in the Constitution of Canada, Section 93.”¹

“Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru evolved a Supreme of Primary and Secondary electors for the reserved seats. Thereupon Dr. Ambedkar said that he would consult his colleagues and come back within two hours with his proposal—Dr. Ambedkar returned at night and told them that he would accept the proposal, but demanded a much larger number of seats than the British Premier’s Award had given them.”

¹: Janata, dated 24th September 1932.

“The leaders accepted his suggestion; and Jayakar, Sapru, Birla, Rajagopalachari and Dr. Rajendra Prasad left for Poona by the midnight train on Tuesday.

On September 21 Gandhi was removed at noon to the courtyard just near the entrance of Yeravda Jail, and Sardar Patel and Gandhi’s Secretary Pyarelal were allowed to sit near his cot. At noon Sapru telephoned to Dr. Ambedkar from Poona asking him to come to Poona immediately.”¹

“Dr. Ambedkar in the interview with the *Times of India*, before leaving for Poona on Wednesday the 21st September 1932 said: “I have received a message from Poona telling me that Mr. Gandhi wishes to see me and Mr. Rajah with regard to the proposal which I submitted to the Committee appointed by the Conference last night”.

“I have accepted the invitation but I have made it clear that I will have nothing to do in the way of negotiation with Mr. Rajah and his party, and if Mr. Gandhi wishes to talk with them, he should do so separately. My reason for saying this is that the dispute is really between me and my party on the one hand and Mr. Gandhi on the other”.

“Besides I do wish to mark my emphatic disapproval of the policy of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha of creating leaders for the Depressed Class for their own purposes and by there own propaganda and then trying to foist them on the Depressed Classes. In this there is nothing personal against Mr. Rajah. I am starting to-night.”

Another Visit to Yeravda

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar who arrived in Poona by train visited Mr. Gandhi on Wednesday in the jail at 7-30 a.m. and remained in Conference with him until after 10 a.m. On leaving they said that they anticipated returning again tomorrow morning.

¹: Keer. P210.

A Statement issued after the interview says :—

The deputation consisting of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mr. Jayakar, Mr. Rajagopalachari, Babu Rajendra Prasad and Mr. G. D. Biria had a long interview with Mr. Gandhi this morning when they explained to him the scheme which had been evolved at yesterday's consultations. The interview proved to be quite hopeful, but Mr. Gandhi reserved his final opinion until he had held further consultations in the matter with friends including Dr. Ambedkar and Mr. M. C. Rajah.

The deputationists are, therefore, staying behind at Poona for another day. Sir T. B. Sapru, with whom the scheme originated, was very hopeful that it would be acceptable to Mr. Gandhi and that thus a solution of the problem would be found. The deputationists found Mr. Gandhi well and quite cheerful.”¹

“Dr. Ambedkar left by the midnight train.* On the same day Rajah and Malaviya, too, left Bombay for Poona.

On Thursday morning, i.e. on 22nd September 1932, Gandhi had a talk with Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari and said he did not like that election to some of the reserved seats should be both by primary and secondary election system and to some only by Joint Electorates. He said the primary and secondary election system should be applied to all seats alike. This was related to Dr. Ambedkar at the National Hotel. Again the atmosphere became heated. Some of the leaders suggested that in the meanwhile they should send a cable to the British Premier requesting him to cancel the Separate Electorates for the Depressed Classes.”²

On the same day “at 9 A.M. Sir Tejbahadur Sapru and Bar. Jaikar met Dr. Ambedkar at National Hotel and apprised him about the above facts.”³

“But Dr. Ambedkar stoutly and pointedly told them that he would be prepared to lose separate electorates which the British Premier had invested them with, provided he was given a concrete

¹ : The Times of India, dated 22nd September 1932.

²: Keer, P. 210.

³ : Janta, 1st October 1932.

* Dr. Ambedkar was accompanied by Dr. Sotanki—Editors.

picture of the substitutes and added that he was not a man to run after a mirage. The atmosphere of dullness gave place to grim despair. At noon Jayakar, Sapru and Malaviya saw Gandhi in the Jail. They were followed by P. Baloo and Rajah, who promised Gandhi that they would secure an agreement that would satisfy him.

Late in the evening Dr. Ambedkar, accompanied by Jayakar, Birla, Chunilal Mehta and Rajagopalachari, went to meet Gandhi in the jail. It was the gravest political crisis. When the party entered the prison court, Gandhi was lying on a white iron-cot with a jail mattress on it, under the thick shade of a low mango tree, and Sardar Patel and Sarojini Naidu sat near Gandhi. Near the cot were bottles of water, sodabicarb and salt.

When Dr. Ambedkar approached the cot, there was an echoless silence and a breathless eagerness. Would the entangling silence move Dr. Ambedkar? Jayakar had foretold that Dr. Ambedkar's intransigence would collapse when he saw Gandhi. Would the entrancing sadness in the atmosphere deepened by the twilight inveigle Dr. Ambedkar? Dr. Ambedkar was now in the presence of the enveloping personality of Gandhi who had cast his spell on powerful men and drowned them in the flood of his magnetic mysticism. Amidst the fierce whirlwind raging outside the jail and the entangling silence prevailing inside, Dr. Ambedkar was calm and collected. A lesser man would have been buried alive in such a cyclone of happenings. Dr. Ambedkar loved his people more than his life and cared more for the happiness of his people than for his own.

Gandhi was weak. He lay in his bed. The talk began. Sapru narrated to Gandhi the whole story. Malaviya put the Hindu point of view. Then in a soft, slow flow Dr. Ambedkar began. He said in a low voice:"¹

"Mahatmaji, you have been very unfair to us." "It is always my lot to appear to be unfair," replied Gandhi, "I cannot help it."

¹:Keer, Pp. 210-12.