

The interview was protracted and Dr. Ambedkar did most of the talking, while Gandhi lay weak and still in his bed. "I want my compensation," Dr. Ambedkar urged repeatedly. "I am with you in most of the things you say," assured Gandhi, "but you say you are interested in my life."

Dr. Ambedkar :— "Yes, Mahatmaji, I am. And if you devote yourself entirely to the welfare of the Depressed Classes, you would then become our hero."

Gandhi :— "Well, if you are interested in my life, you know what you have got to do to save that life. Your position, from what you tell me, is like this. You want adequate price and compensation before you can agree to forgo what you have already secured under the Premier's decision. You say that the double system of voting proposed by you gives sufficient scope to the other party to rise, while the seats to be filled under the Panel System are designed to satisfy the aspirations of your group. What worries me, however, is this. Why do you propose the Panel System only for some seats? Why do you not propose it for all the seats? If the panel system is good for one section, it should be good even for the whole of the Depressed Classes. That is how I regard the question. You are 'Untouchable' by birth, but I am now going to make, what might appear as an astounding claim for a man in my position, I am an 'Untouchable' by adoption, and as such more of an 'Untouchable' in mind than you. Any scheme that is really good should subserve the interests not of this group or of that, but of the Depressed Class as a whole. That is the criterion by which I judge this scheme. My first suggestion to you is that, if the Panel System is good for any section of the Depressed Classes, it should be extended to all the Depressed Class seats. I cannot stand the idea that your community should either in theory or in practice be separated from me. We must be one and indivisible. As I have told the other friends, I feel no difficulty in accepting your scheme of electing a panel for a few seats. I want to make a present of it to you for all the seats. I confess I do not like the scheme as it stands. It will divide your community, and would give my life to prevent that, just as I am giving my life to prevent the disruption of the whole Hindu Community. (Epic Fast Pp. 209-210)" ¹

¹ : Reprinted, Khairmode, Vol. 5-Pp. 45-46.

“Dr. Ambedkar accepted Gandhi’s suggestion. The interview ended, and the leaders started to settle other details regarding the number of men in the panel, number of total seats in the provincial assemblies, duration of the primary system, duration of the reserved seats and distribution of posts.”¹ (The Epic Fast. Pp. 209-10).”

When Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Solanki saw Mr. Gandhi, they were accompanied by most of the leaders then present in Poona.

“Friday, the 23rd September, dawned. For hours hot discussions raged over the number of candidates required to make the panel. Then there was the question of seats. Dr. Ambedkar demanded 197 seats in the Provincial Assemblies and the leaders reduced the number to 126. Negotiations dragged on. Hours rushed by. After ten hours of discussion, some points were referred to Gandhi and he upheld Dr. Ambedkar’s points. But still the negotiations seemed to break down on the question of duration of primary election and referendum to decide the duration of reserved seats. Dr. Ambedkar said that the system of Primary Election should terminate at the end of ten years; but he insisted that the question of reserved seats should be settled by referendum of the Depressed Classes at the end of further fifteen years. The leaders’ opinion was that the evil of reserved seats and separation would be perpetuated by making its removal dependent upon the will of the Depressed Classes. Dr. Ambedkar’s insistent demand for a referendum at the end of twenty-five years created a furore among the caste Hindu circles. Dr. Ambedkar frankly told them that he refused to believe that Untouchability would be no more in the next twenty years or so, and therefore he said that faced with the sword of Damocles, the Caste Hindus would be compelled to change their inhuman attitude to the Untouchables” ²

“ ... Dr. Ambedkar desired Gandhi to agree to a referendum of ten years. Gandhi was slightly better and he spoke very slowly but deliberately. “Your logic is irrefutable,” he said. “But let the referendum be at the end of five years. Surely, five years is a sufficient period to prove the bona-fides of the Caste

¹ : Keer, P. 212.

² : Keer, Pp. 212-213.

Hindus. But if you insist on postponing the referendum further, I would begin to suspect that what you want is not to test the bona fides of the Caste Hindus but time only to organize the Depressed Classes for an adverse referendum.” He made an impassioned appeal for mutual trust, confidence, and goodwill. He described how from the age of twelve, his whole being had rebelled against the very idea of regarding any fellow human being Untouchable and how since then he had led a ceaseless crusade against the evil. “You have a perfect right to demand cent per cent security by the statutory safeguards,” he told Dr. Ambedkar, “But, from my fiery bed, I beg of you not to insist upon the right. I am here to-day to ask for a reprieve for my Caste Hindu brethren. Thank God, their conscience has been roused. If you proceed to wrest from them cent per cent security by the statutory means, then it will interrupt the process of heart-cleansing and self-purification that is fast taking place among them. The particular injustice, for a while, to the Untouchables might be checked, but the taint in Hinduism would remain. After all, Untouchability is but a symptom of that deep-seated taint. And, if Hinduism is not completely purged of it, it will assert itself again and again in various ways and continue to poison our entire social and political fabric. I entreat you, therefore, not to deprive Hinduism of a last chance to make a voluntary expiation for its sinful past. Give me the chance of working among the Caste Hindus. That is but fair. If you ask for ten or fifteen years, then it is no chance at all. Hindus must give a good account of themselves within five years or not at all. For me, therefore, the five-year limit of referendum is an absolute matter of conscience. There should be a referendum, but not at the end of any period longer than five years. Tell your friends that I am adamant on this point. I may be a despicable person, but when truth speaks through me I am invincible. “(Epic Fast, Pp. 211—212).”¹

“The interview ended, and leaders started to settle other details regarding the number of men in the panel, number of total seats in the Provincial Assemblies, duration of the primary system, duration of reserved seats and distribution of posts.” “This meeting took place at the residence of Raja Bahadur Shivrul Motilal.”

¹: Reprinted. Khairmode, Vol. 5, Pp. 47-48.

“It was now four in the evening. News came in that Gandhi’s health had taken a serious turn, and he was fast losing strength. Gandhi’s son, Devdas Gandhi, with tears in his eyes, described the condition of his father to Dr. Ambedkar and entreated him not to hold over the agreement by pressing for a referendum. At last it was decided to refer this matter to Gandhi. Ambedkar with selected leaders saw Gandhi in the jail at nine o’clock that night. Gandhi approved of the idea of referendum, but said it should take place after five years. Gandhi’s voice had now sunk to a whisper. The Jail Doctors intervened and stopped further conversation. The leaves of the mango tree above refused to move. It was a breathless silence. The visitors had to return. Dr. Ambedkar was not prepared to give up his point. His will-power was on the strain. Letters threatening his life came in showers.” ¹

Here is one such letter :

“Dr. Ambedkar,

If you do not accept to Mahatma Gandhi’s demand within four days, your life will be in danger. If you want to save your life, you should accept Gandhiji’s demand and help ending his fast immediately. This is a warning to you. If you do not give up your vehemence, you will be killed.”

Signed by Haribhai K. Bhat,
A member and worker of BPEE” ²

Murderous looks were cast at him in the street, and some of the leaders insanely reviled him behind his back.”

Further, a secret plan to kill Dr. Ambedkar by some youth from touchable classes of Poona was reported by ‘Janata’ (24-9-32, P. 8), thus:

“Dr. Ambedkar’s life in danger !

Secret Meeting of Poona students Murder threat”

Poona, Dt. 23-9-32, 8 P. M.

¹:Keer,P.213.

²: Janata, dated 1st October 1932.

(By Special Reporter of Janata)

“Two days are over. Negotiations are continuously going on. Various experiments of pressurising Dr. Ambedkar are going on. The students following the Gogate cult which had shot at the Governor, are known to be secretly planning. It is also being said that if Dr. Ambedkar is removed from the scene, things would settle and Gandhiji’s life would be saved. When Dr. Ambedkar was informed of this, he laughed at it. Probably his fearless laugh indicated that he was not afraid of such a death. However, the local Untouchable community is worried about the safety of Dr. Ambedkar and they are keeping an alert. Even if there happens a slightest injury to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, there would be a grave situation. Thousands of Untouchable youth would be ready to make any sacrifice for him. All are feeling a concern that there should not be such a violent end to Gandhiji’s oath.” ¹

“The leaders who went to see Mahatmaji at 9-30 p.m. came out after a comparatively short while looking exhausted but cheerful. Dr. Ambedkar was heard to remark “Gandhiji is on my side.”

“The leaders are meeting again in conference at 8 o’clock on Saturday morning and will see Gandhiji shortly afterwards. Prevalent opinion is that complete agreement is now within reach. And unless a miraculous piece of ill-luck intervenes, Saturday noon must enable Poona to flash out the happy news of a definite settlement.

Differences on questions of major importance have almost been surmounted and have been reduced to an almost theoretical difference on the question of a referendum of the Depressed Classes at a distant future date. It is considered likely that the leaders may agree to a referendum to be taken after 10 years.

¹: Janata, dated 24th September 1932.

Among the points agreed upon are stated to be the following :—

1. A panel of 4 for election to each seat.
2. A single vote.
3. The total number of seats in all Provincial Councils to be reserved for Depressed Classes would be between 150 to 155 as against 71 allowed by the Communal Award.

The Conference, which had met at Pandit Malaviya's place, early in the morning, after a non-stop sitting of over thirteen hours, came to an end at 9-30 p. m., after which Pandit Malaviya, Sjt. C. Rajagopalachari, Mr. Jayakar, Dr. Sapru, Dr. Ambedkar and others left hurriedly for Yeravda jail.

The Conference attracted anxious crowds at Malaviyaji's place. Even when the leaders rose at 9-30 p. m., no hope of settlement to-night was entertained.

Leaders are racing against time, and lunch after dinner today went side by side with discussions.

While they looked serious and absorbed earlier, boisterous laughter was heard emanating from behind the walls in the evening.

The Conference of caste Hindus and Depressed Class Leaders commenced at 9 o'clock this morning at Malaviya's residence behind closed doors. The Conference, it is understood, covered much ground and came to a settlement on questions of panel for election, and basis of representation except in the United Provinces, though the final word on the matter is still unsaid.

Regarding panels, it is stated that a panel of four has been fixed as against Dr. Ambedkar's understood demand for two and Gandhiji's suggestion for five.

To anxious queries by pressmen late in the evening, Dr. Sapru replied : "discussions are so far satisfactory, and we propose to sit through it even in the night."

Dr. Ambedkar after the Conference stated :—

“The situation is hopeful. Differences of crucial character are few, and there are chances of agreement. Gandhiji is feeling weak owing to the fast but carried on the conversation with us for over fifteen minutes.” ¹

“On Saturday morning discussions were resumed. The question of the total number of seats was decided by granting 148 seats to the Depressed Classes in the Provincial Assemblies, and it was also decided that 10 per cent of the seats of the Hindus from British India in the Central Assembly should be given to the Depressed Classes. And then discussion was held for hours on the question of referendum which baffled the solution as before. As nobody would agree to Dr. Ambedkar’s demand, he thought it proper to see Gandhi once again in the matter. So, accompanied by Dr. Solanki and Rajagopalachari, he went to Gandhi. Gandhi told Ambedkar that his logic was irrefutable; but he said mere statutory guarantee would not root out the disease. He, therefore, entreated Ambedkar to give a last chance to Hinduism to make a voluntary expiation for its sinful past and added that there should be a referendum but not at the end of any period longer than five years. “Five years or my life,” said Gandhi with a tone of finality.

Returning to the place of discussion, Dr. Ambedkar said that he was not prepared to yield on the point of the period of referendum which should be, he averred, not less than ten years. After an hour or so they decided to make the agreement without the condition of referendum attached to it! Rajagopalachari explained it to Gandhi in the jail at three in the afternoon. Gandhi said it was excellent and gave his consent. Rajagopalachari returned posthaste to 1, Ramkrishna Bhandarkar Road, Shivalal Motilal’s Bungalow, and amidst rejoicings announced that Gandhi had blessed the agreement. It took them no time to draft the agreement. Amidst an atmosphere of joviality, freshness and chat, the agreement was signed at five in the evening on Saturday, 24th September, and it went down to history as the Poona Pact.

¹: The Free Press Journal, dated 24th September 1932.

On behalf of the Depressed Classes, Dr. Ambedkar signed it; and on behalf of the caste Hindus, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya signed it.”¹

“Text of Poona Pact

The following is the text of the agreement:—

(1) There shall be seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of the general electorate seats in the Provincial Legislatures as follows :

Madras 30; Bombay with Sind 15; Punjab 8; Bihar and Orissa 18; Central Provinces 20; Assam 7; Bengal 30; United Provinces 20; Total 148.

These figures are based on the total strength of the Provincial Councils, announced in the Prime Minister’s decision.

(2) Election to these seats shall be by Joint Electorates subject, however, to the following procedure :

All the members of the Depressed Classes, registered in the General Electoral Roll in a constituency, will form an Electoral College, which will elect a panel of four candidates belonging to the Depressed Classes for each of such reserved seats, by the method of the single vote; the four persons getting the highest number of votes in such primary election, shall be candidates for election by the General Electorate.

(3) Representation of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislature shall likewise be on the principle of Joint Electorates and reserved seats by the method of primary election in the manner provided for in Clause 2 above, for their representation in the Provincial Legislatures.

(4) In the Central Legislature, eighteen per cent of the seats allotted to the General Electorate for British India in the said legislature shall be reserved for the Depressed Classes.

(5) The system of primary election to a panel of candidates for election to the Central and provincial legislatures, as hereinbefore mentioned, shall come to an end after the first ten years, unless terminated sooner by mutual agreement under the provision of Clause 6 below.

¹: Keer, Pp. 213—214.

(6) The system of representation of the Depressed Classes by reserved seats in the Provincial and Central legislatures as provided for in Clauses 1 and 4 shall continue until determined by mutual agreement between the communities concerned in the settlement.

(7) Franchise for the Central and Provincial Legislatures for the Depressed Classes shall be as indicated in the Lothian Committee Report.

(8) There shall be no disabilities attaching to any one on the ground of his being a member of the Depressed Classes in regard to any elections to local bodies or appointment to the Public Services. Every endeavour shall be made to secure fair representation of the Depressed Classes in these respects, subject to such educational qualifications as may be laid down for appointment to the Public Services.

(9) In every province out of the educational grant, an adequate sum shall be earmarked for providing educational facilities to the Members of the Depressed Classes.”¹

“Before signing the pact, the representatives of Untouchables from Madras insisted that they would not allow Rao Bahadur Rajah and his followers to sign the pact. And, if at all they were allowed, Dr. Ambedkar and his followers would not sign the pact. Accordingly Dr. Ambedkar and his followers signed the Pact. Thereafter Dr. Ambedkar was requested to make arrangement to obtain the signatures of Mr. Rajah and his followers. After lengthy discussions, it was decided that they would be allowed to sign the pact at the end of the document and in their individual capacities. Accordingly they signed. But it was a matter of great surprise that although Mr. Rajah had to sign at the end of the document, he interpolated his signature in between the signatures of Jaikar and Sapru.”²

¹: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 9, Pp. 88—89.

²: Janata, dated 1st October 1932.

“Signatories to Poona Pact, 24-9-1932, (Epic Fast, Pp. 153-154)

(1) Madan Mohan Malaviya	(12) B. S. Kamat
(2) Tej Bahadur Sapru	(13) G. K. Deodhar
(3) M. R. Jayakar	(14) A. V. Thakkar
(4) B.R. Ambedkar	(15) R. R. Bakhale
(5) Shrinivasan	(16) P. G. Solanki
(6) M. C. Rajah	(17) P. Baloo
(7) C. V. Mehta	(18) Govind Malaviya
(8) C. Rajagopalachari	(19) Devdas Gandhi
(9) Rajendra Prasad	(20) Biswas
(10) G. D. Birla	(21) P. N. Rajbhoj
(11) Rameshwar Das Birla	(22) Gavai G. A.
	(23) Shankarlal Bankar

While signing the pact, “Rajagopalachari was so much overjoyed that he exchanged his fountain-pen with Dr. Ambedkar.

The following signatures were added in Bombay at the final sitting of the Hindu Conference on September 25 :—

(1) Lallubhai Samaldas	(10) P. Kodand Rao
(2) Hansa Mehta	(11) N. V. Gadgil
(3) K. Natarajan	(12) Manu Subhedar
(4) Kamakoti Natarajan	(13) Avantikabai Gokhale
(5) Purushottamdas Thakurdas	(14) K. J. Chitalia
(6) Mathuradas Vassanji	(15) Radhakant Malaviya
(7) Walchand Hirachand	(16) A. R. Bhatt
(8) H.N. Kunzru	(17) Colam
(9) K. G. Limaye	(18) Pradhan” ¹

¹: Reprinted, Khairmode, Vol. 5, Pp. 56—57.

Immediately the contents of the Pact were cabled to the British Cabinet, wired to the Viceroy, and also handed over to the Secretary of the Bombay Governor by each party separately, and next morning the leaders returned to Bombay to ratify the Pact. At 2 p. m. the leaders held a meeting at the Indian Merchants' Chamber Hall.”¹

While reporting the meeting called for confirmation of Poona Pact, “The Bombay Chronicle” wrote, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was in chair. He, in his speech thanked all those who helped in materialising the Poona Pact. He specially thanked Dr. Ambedkar without whose help emergence of Poona Pact would have been difficult. Now the entire responsibility is on the shoulders of Hindus to bring the pact in practice.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sjt. Rajgopalachari spoke on this occasion. Mr. Mathuradas, Vissonji Khimji moved the resolution.

Mr. Mathuradas Vissonji Khimji moved the resolution ratifying the Poona Pact.”²

At this meeting the following resolution was passed :—

“This Conference confirms the Poona agreement arrived at between the leaders of the Caste Hindus and Depressed Classes on September 24, 1932, and trusts that the British Government will withdraw its decision creating Separate Electorates within the Hindu Community and accept the agreement in full. The Conference urges that immediate action be taken by Government so as to enable Mahatma Gandhi to break his fast within the terms of his vow and before it is too late. The Conference appeals to the leaders of the communities concerned to realize the implications of the agreement and of this resolution and to make earnest endeavour to fulfil them.

“This Conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an Untouchable by reason of his birth, and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads, and all other public

¹: Keer, P. 214.

²: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 26th September 1932.

institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest Acts of the *Swaraj* Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time.

“It is further agreed that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called Untouchable Classes, including the bar in respect of admission to temples.” ¹

Mr. Sapru said, “Dr. Ambedkar faught and fought valiantly for the cause which he represented and he promised to be a good fighter in the future life of the country.

Speaking in support of the resolution confirming the Poona Pact Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who was greeted with cheers when he rose, declared :

“I believe it is no exaggeration for me to say that no man a few days ago was placed in a greater dilemma than I was. There was placed before me a difficult situation in which I had to make a choice between two difficult alternnatives.

There was the life of the greatest man in India to be saved. There was also for me the problem to try and safeguard the interests of community which I was in my humble way trying to do at the Round Table Conference according to my light. I am happy to be able to say that it has become possible through the co-operation of all of us to find a solution so as to save the life of the Mahatma and at the same time consistent with such protection as is necessary for the interests of the “Depressed” Classes in the future. I think, in all these negotiations a large part of the credit must be attributed to Mahatma Gandhi himself. I must confess that I was immensely surprised, when I met him, that there was so much in common between him and me. (cheers)

In fact, any disputes whenever they were earned to him and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru has told you that the disputes that were carried to him were of a very crucial character. I was astounded to see that the man who held such divergent views from mine at

¹: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 9, P. 103.

the Round Table Conference came immediately to my rescue and not to the rescue of the other side. I am very grateful to Mahatma for having extricated me from what might have been a very difficult situation.

My only regret is why did not Mahatma take this attitude at the Round Table Conference? If he had shown the same consideration to my point of view, it would not have been necessary for him to go through this ordeal. However, these are things of the past. I am glad that I am here now to support this resolution.

Since the question has been raised in the newspapers as to whether this Agreement will have the support of the whole "Depressed" Classes community, I should like to make it clear that so far as I am concerned and so far as the party which stands with me is concerned and I am sure I am also speaking for the other friends who are present here that we will stand by the Agreement. Let there be no doubt about this.

Our only concern is this, whether the Hindu Community will abide by it. (voices : Oh yes, we will) We feel that the Hindu Community unfortunately is not an integral whole but, if I may say so, a federation of small communities. I hope and trust that the Hindus on their side will look upon this document as sacrosanct and work in an honourable spirit.

There is just one thing that I would like to say. I am very much obliged to all friends who took part in the negotiations, but I should like particularly to mention Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. C. Rajagopalachari. Without Sir Tej Bahadur probably it, would have been difficult to carry through many of the points. I must confess that as the result of my experience of him for the last two years at the Round Table Conference that if there is any man in India who is above all communal prejudice it is Sir Tej Bahadur. His sense of fairness and justice is always a relief to all the minorities who hanker for securing some safeguards in the new Constitution.

I must also mention my friend Rajagopalchari. He came to our rescue when we were almost at a breaking-point, and had it not been for his ingenuity probably the Agreement would not

have come into being. I must also thank Pandit Malaviya for the courtesy and forbearance that he showed in the hot exchange of words and acrimonious debates that went on during all these negotiations.

The change that has been brought about in the Communal Award has been brought about by the insistence of the view that Separate Electorates are injurious to the national interests. I must confess that I remain unconvinced of that argument. I can quite understand that for a majority representation Separate Electorates are harmful but I still remain unconvinced that for minority representation Separate Electorates are an evil.

I do not believe that Joint Electorates are going to be the final solution for the problem of absorbing the "Depressed" Classes in the Hindu Community.

Any electoral arrangement, I believe, cannot be a solution of the larger social problem. It requires more than any political arrangement and I hope that it would be possible for you to go beyond this political arrangement that we are making today and devise ways and means whereby it would be possible for Depressed Classes not only to be part and parcel of the Hindu Community but also to occupy an honourable position, a position of equality of status in the community.

So long as the "Depressed" Classes an ignorant lot, not imbued with a sense of self-respect, it was possible for them to accept the social status that was given to them by Hindu law, but as they get education they will begin to smart under these social Laws and there is a great danger of their seceding from Hindu Society. I beg of you to bear that in mind and hope that you will do the needful in the matter."

Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah further supported the resolution. He said that he clearly saw a change of heart among the caste Hindu and that was why he supported the Agreement. He had no doubt at all that the Agreement will have the uninstinct support of all the "Depressed" Class people in the country.

Mr. C. Rajgopalachari moved a vote of thanks to the chair.

Pandit Malaviya announced that he was going to communicate with Mahatmaji regarding the fast declared by Sjt. Keiappan to establish the right of the "Depressed Class" people to enter the Gurvayur temple in Malabar.

Among those present at the Hindu leaders' Conference of Sunday were: Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir Lallubhai Samaldas, Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas, Sir Chunilal Mehta, Sir Govind Madgaokar, Mr. M. R. Jayakar, Pandit Hridaynath Kunzru, Mr. G. K. Deydhar, Mr. B. N. Karanjia, Mr. K. Natarajan, Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah, Dr. Ambedkar, Mr. P. Baloo, Mrs. D. G. Dalvi, Miss Natarajan, Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Mrs. Avantikabai Gokhale, Mr. B. S. Kamat, Mr. Manu Subedar, Mr. G. D. Birla, Mr. D. P. Khaitan, Mr. B. F. Bharucha, Dr. Solanki, Dr. Choitram Gidwani, Lady Chimanlal Setalvad, Mr. Walchand Hirachand, Mr. B. J. Deorukhkar, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, Mr. Devadas Gandhi, Mr. T. Prakasam and Babu Rajendra Prasad." ¹

His Majesty's Government announced on September 26, 1932 that it would recommend to Parliament the endorsement of the Poona Pact.

On Monday the 26th September 1932, the Hon'ble Mr. H. G. Haig, Home Minister, made his statement in the Central Legislative Assembly:

"Statement Re. Communal Award. The Honourable Sir, C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar (Leader of the House): Sir, will you allow me to request you to make a departure from the usual practice at question time as a very important statement has to be made by my Honourable Colleague, the Home Member, and I am sure the House will agree with me when they hear the statement that this departure is well justified. Will you allow us to do so?"

Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola): What is the statement?

The Honourable Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar: The Honourable Home Member desires to make a statement about the Communal Award and the decision of His Majesty's Government with regard to the Communal Award in relation to the Depressed Classes.

¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 26th September 1932.

Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola): As a special case, the Chair will allow the statement to be made at this stage.

The Honourable Mr. H. G. Haig (Home Member): In accordance with your permission, Sir, I will read to the House a Statement issued by His Majesty's Government this morning in connection with the agreement reached at Poona on Saturday afternoon. His Majesty's Government have learnt with great satisfaction that an agreement has been reached between the leaders of the Depressed Classes and of the rest of the Hindu Community regarding the representation of the Depressed Classes in the new legislatures and certain other matters affecting their welfare. In place of the System of General Constituencies combined with Special Depressed Class Constituencies contained in the Government Communal Award of 4th August last, the agreement provides for General Constituencies with which seats are reserved for Depressed Classes subject to important conditions as to the manner in which the reserved seats are filled. The Government, in their Award which was given in the absence of agreement between the communities, were solely concerned in relation to the Depressed Classes to provide adequate securities that the interests of these classes should be observed by the new legislatures. As representatives of the Depressed Classes and other Hindus acting together believe that the scheme now forwarded by them to His Majesty's Government is adequate for the purpose, the Government, in accordance with the procedure which they laid down in paragraph 4 of their Award, will recommend to Parliament, in due course, the adoption of the clauses of the agreement dealing with representation in the Provincial Legislatures in place of the provision in paragraph 9 of the Award (Applause).

It will be understood that the total number of general seats including those reserved for the Depressed Classes under the agreement will, in each Province, remain the same as the number of general seats plus the number of special Depressed Classes seats provided for in His Majesty's Government's decision.

His Majesty's Government note the agreement deals also with certain questions outside the scope of their award of August 4th. Clauses 8 and 9 deal with general points, the realisation of which will be likely to depend in the main on the actual working of the constitution. But His Majesty's Government take note of these clauses as a definite pledge of the intentions of the Caste Hindus towards the Depressed Classes.

There are two other points outside the scope of their Award : (1) The agreement contemplates that the franchise for the Depressed Classes should be that recommended by the Franchise (Lord Lothian's) Committee. It is obvious that the level of the franchise for the Depressed Classes (and indeed for Hindus generally) must be determined at the same time as that for other communities is being settled, and the whole subject is under consideration by His Majesty's Government—(2) The agreement also provides for a particular method of electing Depressed Classes representatives for the Legislature at the Centres. This, again, is a subject outside the terms of this Award which is under investigation as part of the whole for election for the legislature at the Centre, and no piecemeal conclusion can be reached. What has been said on these two points should not be regarded as implying that His Majesty's Government are against what is proposed in the agreement, but that these questions are still under consideration. To prevent mis-understanding, it may be explained that the Government regard the figure 18 per cent, for the percentage of British India general seats at the Centre to be reserved for the Depressed Classes as a matter for settlement between them and other Hindus. (Applause).^{1*}

"In the evening prayers were said in the Prison yard. Kasturba then handed Gandhi orange juice, and he broke his fast about half-past five amidst a gathering of some two hundred disciples and admirers, poet Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Sardar Patel and Swarup Rani Nehru being conspicuous."²

¹: (The Legislative Assembly Debates-Official Report—Volume V. 1932, Pp. 1307-1308, Monday, 26th September, 1932)."

Reprinted, Khairmode, Vol. 5, Pp. 57-59.

²: Keer, P. 215.

* For comments on Round Table Conference and Poona Pact—See appendix-V

I Responded to the call of humanity and Saved the Life of Mr. Gandhi.

In this regard Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said,

“The story of this fact has been told by Mr. Pyarelal in a volume which bears the picturesque and flamboyant title of “The Epic Fast,” The curious may refer it. I must, however, warn him that it is written by a Boswell and has all the faults of a Boswelliana. There is another side to it, but there is neither time nor space to present it here. All I can do is to invite attention to the statement* I issued to the Press on the eve of Mr. Gandhi’s fast exposing his tactics. Suffice it to say that although Mr. Gandhi declared a fast unto death, he did not want to die. He wanted very much to live.

The fast nonetheless created a problem, and that problem was how to save Mr. Gandhi’s life. The only way to save his life was to alter the Communal Award which Mr. Gandhi said hurt his conscience so much. The Prime Minister had made it quite clear that the British Cabinet would not withdraw it or alter it of its own, but that they were ready to substitute for it a formula that may be agreed upon by the Caste Hindus and the Untouchables. As I had the privilege of representing the Untouchables at the Round Table Conference, it was assumed that the assent of the Untouchables would not be valid unless I was a party to it. The surprising fact is that my position as the leader of the Untouchables of India was not only not questioned by Congressmen but it was accepted as a fact. All eyes naturally turned to me as the man of the moment or rather as the villain of the piece.

As to myself it is no exaggeration to say that no man was placed in a greater and graver dilemma than I was then. It was a baffling situation. I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the duty, which I owed as a part of common humanity, to save Gandhi from sure death. There was before me the problem of saving for the Untouchables the political rights which the Prime Minister had given them. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Mr. Gandhi

* See Pp. 143-150 of this part-Editors.

by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Mr. Gandhi. This agreement is known as the Poona Pact.

The terms of the Pact were accepted by Mr. Gandhi and given effect to by Government by embodying them in the Government of India Act. The Poona Pact had produced different reactions. The Untouchables were sad. They had every reason to be. There are, however, people who do not accept this. They never fail to point out that the Poona Pact gave the Untouchables larger number of seats than what was given to them by the Prime Minister in his Communal Award. It is true that the Poona Pact gave the Untouchables 148 seats, while the Award had only given them 78. But to conclude from this that the Poona Pact gave them more than what was given by the Award is to ignore what the Award had in fact given to the Untouchables.

The Communal Award gave the Untouchables two benefits :—(i) a fixed quota of seats to be elected by separate electorate of Untouchables and to be filled by persons belonging to the Untouchables ; (ii) double vote, one to be used through Separate Electorates and the other to be used in the General Electorates.

Now, if the Poona Pact increased the fixed quota of seats it also took away the right to the double vote. This increase in seats can never be deemed to be a compensation for the loss of the double vote. The second vote given by the Communal Award was a priceless privilege. Its value as a political weapon was beyond reckoning. The voting strength of the Untouchables in each constituency is one to ten. With this voting strength free to be used in the election of caste Hindu candidates, the Untouchables would have been in a position to determine, if not to dictate, the issue of the General Election. No caste Hindu candidate could have dared to neglect the Untouchable in his constituency or be hostile to their interest if he was made dependent upon the votes of the Untouchables. Today the Untouchables have a few more seats than were given to them by the Communal Award. But this is all that they have. Every other member is indifferent, if not hostile. If the Communal Award with its system of double

voting had remained the Untouchables would have had a few seats less but every other member would have been a member for the Untouchables. The increase in the number of seats for the Untouchables is no increase at all and was no recompense for the loss of Separate Electorate and the double vote. The Hindus, although they did not celebrate the Poona Pact, did not like it. Throughout their commotion to save Mr. Gandhi's life there was definite current of conscious feeling that the cost of saving his life may be great. Therefore, when they saw the terms of the Pact they very definitely disliked it, although they had not the courage to reject it. Disliked by the Hindus and disfavoured by the Untouchables, the Poona Pact was given recognition by both parties and was embodied in the Government of India Act." ¹

After the Poona Pact, Third Round Table Conference was held at England. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar left India on 7th November 1932 to attend this Conference. Gandhi's fast and Poona Pact were the issues of debate everywhere. One of the comments about Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is as follows :

"On boardship many important passengers talked about the Poona Pact and about Gandhi's fast that had rocked the Indian world. The fast had impressed them tremendously. One of the European passengers pointing to Dr. Ambedkar, said to his friend : "This is the young man who is writing new pages of Indian history." ²

●●

¹: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 9, Pp. 87-90.

²: Keer, P. 220.

SECTION IV

**KALARAM TEMPLE ENTRY
SATYAGRAHA, NASIK AND TEMPLE
ENTRY MOVEMENT**
