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REMOVE BASIS OF 'SMRITI' RELIGION

Nasik, November 28.

"Owing to the lowering of franchise the Caste Hindu masses will secure the real power under the new constitution but they are opposed to social reform. They will be extremely unwilling to change the existing custom and usage. My grievance is especially against them and not against the social reformers. Even the Congress candidates will not be able to win the elections if they declare that, if elected, they will enact legislation for abolishing Untouchability. I challenge the Congress to seek election on this mandate."

The above is the gist of the interview between Dr. Ambedkar and the deputation, elected by the Nasik Progressive Hindus at a meeting held on October 26, 1935.

The Nasik Progressive Hindus have now issued an authoritative statement summarising the interview.

The deputation, says the statement consisting of five progressive Caste Hindus, headed by Mr. R. G. Pradhan, former M.L.C., waited upon Dr. Ambedkar at his residence on November 10 and the interview which lasted over three hours, was of a cordial, friendly and frank nature.

Progressives' Views

At the outset, the deputationists placed before Dr. Ambedkar the following resolutions adopted by the Nasik Hindu Progressive Citizens in a conference presided over by Shri Shankaracharya (Dr. Kurtakoti). The resolution runs thus : (A) "The question regarding public temples, public places of pilgrimage and *thirtas* being extremely controversial and outside the sphere of immediate practical achievement, every possible effort should be made to bring about a change of public opinion with regard to that question. (B) Barring the above question except to the extent of bringing about a change of public opinion with regard to, continuance and unflinching efforts should be made both

individually and collectively by propaganda, constructive work and in other ways for securing for the *Harijans,* freedom to reside and settle in localities inhabited by *non-Harijan* Hindus for abolishing Untouchability in public places, such as wells, schools, *dharamshalas* and hotels and in general for doing away with Untouchability in the Hindu society with regard to all other matters."

Mr. Pradhan expressed the deputationists deep respect and love for Dr. Ambedkar and declared that they were anxious to solve the problem arising out of Dr. Ambedkar's speech at Yeola with his cooperation and consultation.

Mr. Pradhan said that they all desired to dissuade Dr. Ambedkar. from changing his religion, Mr. Pradhan conveyed Shri Shankaracharya's deep affection for Dr. Ambedkar.

"Remove Basis of 'Smriti' religion"

Dr. Ambedkar's Demand

In the course of the interview, which lasted over three hours, Dr. Ambedkar said: "Whatever may be the metaphysical basis of a religion, those religious principles upon which depend the ethical system and the social practices of a people must be considered to be the principal element of that religion. Though Hinduism is based on the conception of Absolute *Brahma* the practices of the Hindu community as a whole are founded on the doctrines of inequality as pronounced in *'Manusmriti'*. Some people think that religion is not essential to society. I do not hold this view. I consider the foundation of religion to be essential to the life and practices of society. At the root of the Hindu Social System lies *Dharma* as prescribed in *'Manusmriti'*. Such being the case I do not think it possible to abolish inequality in the Hindu Society unless the existing foundation of the *'Smriti'* religion is removed and a better one laid in its place. I, however, despair of the Hindu Society being able to reconstruct on such a better foundation."

Referring to the position of *Harijans* in the coming constitution, Dr. Ambedkar said that the cause of removal of Untouchability and of social reform would not advance with the help of the legislatures under the new constitution.

About abjuring the Hindu religion, Dr. Ambedkar declared: "Personally, I have made up my mind to change my religion. I am not able to tell you today what other religion I will accept. But I do not intend to secure any personal gain by the change of religion. It is not a personal question and I desire to carry with me the whole Untouchable community at all events the majority of that community, I do not want it to be split up by some joining one religion or sect and other another. From the point of view of the interests to my community it is necessary that it should be united with and absorbed into some powerful and living community. It is my intention to make this movement for change of religion an all India one. If my community does not follow me then I will alone change my religion. This may take at least four or five years and you will have this period for doing what you can. Before the final decision is made we shall of course consider what success your efforts may have met with. I admit the work before you is tremendous. But if it cannot be accomplished except after a very long period we are not prepared to wait for such a length of time."

New Sect

Referring to the offer made by Dr. Kurtakoti, regarding his creation of a new order and throwing it open to the Untouchables in common with others on equal footing and status, Dr. Ambedkar said : "I shall not undertake the responsibility of starting a new sect nor will I advise my community to join it. Let Dr. Kurtakoti start the sect if he so desires and let it spread among the 'touchables' and then we shall think over it. I cannot say today what the *Harijans* will think of it if it is established. Their attitude towards it will depend upon its numerical strength and upon the extent to which it will promote the uplift of the *Harijan* community. We shall consider whether to join it or not just as we may consider whether or not to join any other sect, but such a sect must be of a living religion

There are some difficulties in the way of our accepting *Buddhism*. I think that the *Harijan* community should be completely absorbed into some powerful community. It has decided not to join the *Arya Samaj*. We shall consider the question of joining the *Sikh religion*.

Referring to the attitude of *Harijans* towards the *Harijan Sevak Sangh,* Dr. Ambedkar declared : *"The Harijan Sevak Sangh* is not likely to advance the cause of the abolition of Untouchability. That *Sangh* is merely a wing of the Congress."

Dr. Ambedkar, continuing, said: "Democracy is not suitable to India and popular Government will not do for her. India wants a dictator, a Kemal Pasha or a Mussolini. I had hoped that Mr. Gandhi would attain the position of dictator, but I am disappointed. My complaint is not that Mr. Gandhi is a dictator, but that he is not. I feel the greatest respect for Kemal Pasha, it is he that has made Turkey into a powerful nation. If there are any people with whose religious sentiments and practices it is extremely risky to interfere, they are the Muslims. But Kemal Pasha has done it with success. Without a leader of the stamp of Kemal Pasha, there will be no salvation for India. But in the circumstances, it is impossible to get such a dictator in social and religious matters and hence I despair of the future of India."

Younger Generation

Referring to the attitude of the younger generation and the *Harijans* Dr. Ambedkar is said to have declared: "I am not hopeful of the younger generation which seems to be more predisposed to pleasure seeking and not possessing much of idealism and is not likely to produce men of ideals, principles and actions like Ranade, Tilak or Gokhale. This also fills me with despair.

"In brief, being born in the Untouchable community, I deem it my first duty to strive for its interest and my duty to India as a whole is secondary. I have strong religious sentiment according to my own conception of religion, but I have no faith in Hinduism and I hate hypocrisy. I have therefore, decided to renounce Hinduism, but I do not intend to do so immediately as I want to carry my community with me. The *Harijan* army is not marching today and it is watching and waiting for a suitable opportunity. In the meanwhile, the 'touchables' may go on making their efforts on the lines chalked out by you."[1]

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[1]: The Times of India, dated 30th November 1935.