

CONVERSION MOVEMENT SANS SELFISH MOTIVE

Dr. Ambedkar's comments on Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah's statement against conversion of the Untouchables:

At the outset I would like to say that to send this correspondence to the newspapers for publication, is in itself an indecent act on the part of Mr. Rajah. Dr. Moonje had clearly mentioned at the end of his letter that till the final decision regarding conversion, this letter might be treated as personal and confidential. It cannot be believed that this fact did not come to the notice of Mr. Rajah. Mr. Rajah should have sought the permission of Dr. Moonje before releasing the correspondence to the press. This act on the part of Mr. Rajah is ill-becoming of a decent man.

The Untouchables may choose Sikhism for conversion. This fact is known to many of my Hindu friends and such members of the Untouchable community as are seriously interested in the question of conversion of the Untouchables.

The correspondence regarding the possibility of the Untouchables embracing Sikhism, which took place between Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah and Dr. Moonje has been published in the newspapers. I have gone through it.

There is no reason for Rajah to rejoice that he had exposed some great secret of Dr. Ambedkar. I do not attach any importance to the letters of Mr. Rajah. *In* my opinion Rajah commands little respect among the Untouchable masses nor do his views regarding conversion have any worth or value. Had I felt that his views had any value at all, I would have co-operated with him to change his mind.

Ignoring Rao Bahadur Rajah, Rao Bahadur Srinivasan and I were invited to the Round Table Conference to represent the Untouchables. This led to heart-burning and animosity against me in the mind of Rajah who has since then been constantly criticising and opposing me.

I am trying to serve my people. Mr. Rajah has been opposing me and finding fault with my work. At the same time he has developed the art of self-advertisement through the medium of newspapers. I do not attach much importance to this question but I fail to understand why the movement to renounce Hinduism and the desire on the part of the Untouchable masses to embrace any other religion launched by them should hurt Mr. Rajah ? If Mr. Rajah does not want to renounce the Hindu religion, nobody will force him to do so and for this reason he has no right to comment on it. Mr. Rajah says, "I will live as a Hindu and die as a Hindu." He is quite free to do so. But I would like to tell him one thing, that in making use of his proficiency in issuing statements to press, he has been exhibiting his love for the Hindu religion but until he converts himself to some other religion he will continue to live as a 'Pariah' and die as a 'Pariah'. He must bear in mind the fact that the stigma of Untouchability attached to him due to his caste is not likely to be effaced even a bit if he continues to remain within the Hindu fold. It is nonsensical to say that conversion should be done only for spiritual reasons. I would like to ask Mr. Rajah whether it is only for the reasons 'spiritual' that he wants to remain within the fold of Hinduism. If he has no ambition other than spiritual satisfaction why should he bother about the material and political benefits accruing from the reservation of seats in the legislature ? If he is so keen on living as a Hindu and dying as a Hindu, why does he aspire for reserved seats ?

Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Malaviya, I believe, have no moral courage to say anything against the conversion of the Untouchables. They have failed to honour the promises they had made at the time of signing the Poona Pact.

Mr. Gandhi says that he has failed to understand my stand; I would also say that it is difficult for me to understand his language and action. According to him, 'upliftment of Untouchables is an independent question'. If this kind of language which is used by Gandhiji is used by one saint or another, perhaps, he can comprehend it better, but for an ordinary mortal like me, who is governed by ordinary principles of society in everyday life, this Mahatmatic language of Gandhi has no meaning. Gandhi says that religion is

not a commodity to be bartered. My reply is that it is not fair on the part of Gandhi to give expression to this kind of view at this distant date. At the time of the Poona Pact, Mr. Gandhi himself accepted the principle of give and take. Gone are the days when those who are struggling for achieving the basic human rights to satisfy their hunger and ordinary basic needs like bread and water could be hood-winked to live, merely for attaining spiritual peace.

Gandhi says that the Untouchables are bartering away their religion, but he must bear in mind that the conversion movement has not been launched with any selfish motive or for any personal benefit. According to Gandhi, 'Hindus should do (repentance) *prayschit* themselves and voluntarily endeavour to eradicate Untouchability. Untouchables themselves need not do anything for the removal of Untouchability and their own upliftment. The Untouchables should simply sit with folded hands and pray, 'O' ! Lord, grant the Hindus wisdom, and courage, and light, so that they may be forgiven for their evil deeds. Let their sins be forgiven and grant them the knowledge and strength to reform their society.' This is the pious advice of Gandhiji to the Untouchables. These pious platitudes can do no good to anybody, nor can they solve any problems. No sane person can ever agree to such a proposal. This sounds more like the advice tendered by an idiot to the people living in an area effected by a plague epidemic. "Brothers, halt and listen to me ! Do not be afraid of the disease. The Municipal Committee members will have to repent one day for the dereliction of duty on their part; some plan will surely be chalked out for the eradication of the plague. Meanwhile, you must wait and see. Do not be in a hurry to leave home and hearth." Whatever wisdom you find in this advice, the same kind of advice has been tendered by Gandhi to the Untouchables in his statements.

Shri Rajagopalachari, it seems, has another fit of anger. This aged house-holder has developed a kind of indigestion owing to excessive use of acidic expletives which he is in the habit of coining. He has labelled this conversion movement as 'satanic.'

If the Untouchables have been seriously thinking of embracing Sikhism, the followers of Hinduism should think for themselves and decide whether this step on the part of the Untouchables is

really satanic. I feel that those Hindus who feel concerned about the future of Hinduism must be wondering whether this great Hindu Brahmin Rajagopalachari, is really a man out of his senses to call conversion to Sikhism 'satanic.'

In fact, if this accusation of being 'satanic' is to be levelled against any person, it is Dr. Moonje who without any respect for propriety published the personal and confidential correspondence. But I do not wish to say any more on this subject.

Shankaracharya Dr. Kurtakoti, and other prominent Hindu leaders have favoured the idea of Untouchables embracing Sikhism. In fact, it is these leaders who have propagated the idea of Untouchables embracing Sikhism... and also prevailed on me to do so. I fell for the idea mainly because I too feel I have some responsibility towards the future of Hindu culture and civilisation. Hindus are free to decide, after reading my views about the correspondence published in the newspapers, whether the policy decided by Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Rajah and Mr. Rajagopalachari about the conversion of the Untouchables to Sikhism is of the advantage to Hindu Society or not.

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