APPENDIX—V

COMMENTS ON ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE AND POONA-PACT

1

Joint Select Committee of Parliament:

"Communal Award And Poona Pact"

The Committee are definite in their opinion that communal representation is inevitable at the present time. They describe as well-thought out and well-balanced the arrangement for the composition of Provincial Assemblies embodied in the Communal Award.

As regards the Poona Pact, the Committee express the view that in their opinion the original proposals of His Majesty's Goverment were a more equitable settlement of the general communal question, and more advantageous to the Depressed Classes in their present stage of development. But, since the Pact has been accepted as an authoritative modification of the Award, the Committee are clear that it cannot now be rejected. They are however, disposed to think that if by agreement some reduction were made in the number of seats reserved for the Depressed Classes in Bengal, possibly with a compensatory increase in the number of their seats in other Provinces, the working of the new Constittuion in Bengal would be facilitated." (A Summary of the Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on the proposals contained in the White Paper on Indian Constitutional Reforms, page 4, dated 22nd November, 1934.)[1]

2

Joachim Alwa stated in his book "Men and Supermen of Hindustan" :

"He (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar) just became bold and literally adopted Spencer's maxim 'Be bolde ! be bolde and ever more be bolde !' He learnt that by daring and reckless courage, great fears & weaknesses are removed. He was most powerfully

[1] : Reprinted, Khairmode, Vol. 5. Pp. 65-66.

tempered and pampered with undue attentions. Mahatma Gandhi had also an unparalleled record of service on behalf of the Depressed Classes whom he chose to be respectfully addressed as 'Harijans.' But the Doctor would brook no rivals. He would not tolerate no one else occupying the pedestal. Being the product of abnormal social and economic conditions in which Indian Society had abysmally let itself down, Dr. Ambedkar deliberately cultivated an abnormal individuality. (Men & Supermen of Hindustan, page 20).

'Dr. Ambedkar's request to Ramsay MacDonald to settle the Communal ratios in the Legislature led to his discomfiture in the life of the turbulent politician, The Doctor cried at the gate of the Yeravada Jail—

I trust that I will not be driven to the necessity of making a choice between Gandhi's life and the rights of my people. I can never consent to deliver my people bound hand and foot, to the Hindus for generations. I don't care even if a hundred Mahatmas are sacrificed. Mahatmas are not immortal creatures. You are all free to hang me from the nearest lamp-post..... The Mahatma declared to the Doctor 'I am proud of you. I have always listened to your speeches breathlessly.' (Men & Supermen of Hindustan, P. 22)" [1]

3

An Author Writing Under Pen-Name

A Student of Public Affairs, in his book "Has Congress Failed ? " expressed his views as under : "Not even his most ardent supporters will claim that Mr. Gandhi's participation in that Conference was a success. Communal differences were holding up progress on all sides and the Minorities Sub-Committee finally was obliged to report failure to reach a settlement. Mr. Gandhi consistently refused to consider any proposal for separate electorates for any community except the Mohammedans, the Sikhs and the Europeans, and as regards the Depressed Classes he insisted that they were Hindus and must be kept within

[1] : Reprinted, Khairmode, Vol. 4. Pp. 168-169.

the Hindu fold. Dr. Ambedkar was led by this unyielding attitude into a definite demand for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes."—P. 55)[1]

4

Dr. M. R. Jaikar stated in his Autobiography that :

" ... his (Mahatma) attitude at the Indian Round Table Conference in England drove the minorities to adopt the notorious Minorities Pact. He denied to the Depressed Classes even a single seat by reservation except through the medium of the Congress. Later he fasted in India against Prime Minister MacDonald's award comparatively a more blanced arrangement than the later, "Poona Pact" which had to be accepted at the point of the bayonet as it were. The effect of this pact was deeply deplored in Bengal by leaders who had been Gandhiji's loyal followers before." (The Story of My Life, Vol. One, Pp. 361-62) "[2]

5

On the occasion of the Birth day of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the book entitled "A Bunch of Old Letters" was published. The book includes a letter by Mr. Edward Thompson who wrote it on 6th December 1936, wherein he stated,

"I never thought Gandhi wrong until the Round Table Conference, when he was both arrogant and irrelevent. Perhaps he should not have come at all. But having come, he was unjustified in refusing to regard the other Indians, many of the men who had paid a price for their opinions, as men entitled to be consulted by him and regarded as friends engaged in a common endeavour and hope." (P. 208)" [3]

6

Mr. Glorne Bolten stated in his book 'The Tragedy of Gandhi' :

"The truth is that Mr. Gandhi was lost in London, and the old assurance and reliance was deserting him. Day after day-in the Conference which he had come to detest-he faced the

[1] : Khairmode, Vol. 4 P. 173.

[2]: *ibid,* P. 173.

[3]: *ibid,* Pp. 173-174.

Mohammedan delegates who would yield none of their demands. Day after day Dr. Ambedkar came into greater prominence. He spoke for the 'Untouchables' and every speech on the welfare of India whether from a Conservative or a Socialist-would contain references to the tragic flight of the 'Untouchables'. It was a sentimental rather than a practical concern. Mr. Gandhi, by representing the Untouchables, would have drawn eulogies from almost every one in England-but now Dr. Ambedkar had destroyed this platform. He so opposed the Mahatma that the public began to believe that two personalities dominated the Conference, Mr. Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar. Nothing could have been further from the truth. To begin with, Mr. Gandhi was not dominating the Conference nearly enough. He spoke over after Sir Samuel Hoare, when he came to like more and more, had spoken in favour of indirect election. Mr. Gandhi agreed with him entirely and he proceeded to elaborate his Panchayat Scheme whereby villages elect their representatives, a group of village-representatives elect their district representative and a group of district-representatives elect the representative for legislature. It is a system which while weakening Conservative fear, meets the Congress demand for adult suffrage. Indian Liberal delegates were warm in their approval. "Within a week," one of them said, "Gandhi will have the Conservatives at his feet." He never spoke in this fashion again, instead there was a wrangle with Dr. Ambedkar. At first Mohammedans seemed to enjoy the Mahatma's discomfiture, but in time every delegate was wishing that Dr. Ambedkar would show Mr. Gandhi the courtesy to which his personal eminence certainly entitled him."

(The Tragedy of Gandhi, pages 266-267)

"Henceforward Bow and Knights bridge were not to be the only centres for Conference plotting. Representative Mohammedans, Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Untouchables met together. In a very short period of time they had drawn up a Minorities Pact to which representatives of the Minorities with the notable exception of the Sikh leader, Sardar Ujjwal Singh, appended his signature. Mr. Benthall sent Mr. Gandhi a copy of the pact and a courteous, if rather buoyant explanatory letter. Dr. Ambedkar met Mr. Gandhi's gaze at St. James with an almost defiant smile. There were but two obvious courses open to

Mr. Gandhi. One was to accept the division of the Minorities with whatever grace he could. The other was to rally the great Hindu majority to his side to speak not as the sole representative of Congress but as the spokesman of all the Hindus, the orthodox Hindu Mahasabha included. Mr. Gandhi's eyes trenched swiftly down the clauses of the Pact. He saw at once that the Pact indicated the truculent attitude which Dr. Ambedkar had adopted. for separate electorates were generously bestowed upon the Untouchables. Obvious courses were not for Mr. Gandhi. If hitherto he had been uncertain of his mission in London he knew now that it was his duty to do. He would save the Untouchables from their leader. He called Sir Samuel Hoare. He even called Mr. Ramsay MacDonald by whom he was impressed, with the vehemence of his views.

Mr. Gandhi would speak of nothing else. "Separate Electorates to the Untouchables" he declared in a speech, "will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Musalmans will never cease to be Musalmans by having Separate Electorates. Do you want the 'Untouchables' to remain 'Untouchables' for ever ? And however lightly the Indian Liberal may regard Mr. Gandhi's views on Federation, he has a healthy respect for his views on minorities. A Minorities Pact falls short of a general agreement and because it provided the hostility of the orthodox Hindus and the Sikhs more particularly because it roused the anger of Mr. Gandhi. The Pact died the day it was born. Its demise was promptly acknowledged by the British and Indian delegates alike. The Communal settlement, as everyone now admitted, would have to be impressed by the British Government.

(The Tragedy of Gandhi, Pp. 277—278) " [1]

7

Dhananjay Keer, biographer said,

"The Poona Pact thus vibrated the whole country and had repercussions throughout the world. It proved once more that Dr. Ambedkar whom in pre-Poona pact days the Congress leaders and the press refused to recognise as the leader of the Depressed

[1] : Khairmode, Vol. 4, Pp. 170—172.

Classes, came out as the accredited leader of the Depressed Classes all over India. In the new arrangement both the sides had to lose something. The Caste Hindus had to grant 148 seats instead of 71. The Depressed Classes lost their chance of bending the Caste Hindu leaders to their will as the Depressed Classes were under the Award entitled to elect their own representatives to the Assemblies separately, and besides they were to vote in general constituencies with the Caste Hindus in electing the Caste Hindu representatives. Now the Caste Hindus got the power to elect the representatives of the Depressed Classes. By a resolution at its Delhi Session on September 26, the Hindu Mahasabha also ratified it.

The third thing that was proved was that whenever the Mahatma in Gandhi got the upper hand of the politician in Gandhi, he performed the marvel of making simple things complex and complicated ! At the Round Table Conference the Mahatma in Gandhi dominated the politician in him; and the Mahatma shook the world, but the politician failed. At Yeravda the politician in Gandhi became successful and the Mahatma was defeated ! So effective and crushing was the victory of Gandhi that he deprived Dr. Ambedkar of all the life-saving weapons and made him a powerless man as did Indra in the case of Karna. Dr. Ambedkar was justified in saying that had Gandhi shown enough resilience at the Round Table Conference in the matter of the problem of the Depressed Classes, the Mahatma would not have been required to go through the ordeal. The ordeal was of Gandhi's own making.

The Poona Pact closed an epoch. But did the war, which had been declared at Manibhuvan on August 14, 1931,* come to an end ? Or was it a second battle and the war was to continue even after the truce ?" [1]

●●

* See Pp. 51-56 of this part-Editors.

[1] :Keer, Pp. 215-16.