

APPENDIX - X

REACTIONS ON THE STATEMENT DATED 19-6-1936 ISSUED BY DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR ON CONVERSION

I

Dr. Moonje's Letter to Mr. Rajah

Dr. Moonje wrote the following letter dated. New Delhi 30th June 1936 to Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah :—

“Dear Sir,

On urgent calls from Bombay friends and also from Shreeman Seth Jugal Kishore Birla with the concurrence of Dr. Ambedkar, I had occasion to go to Bombay on the 18th instant. There Dr. Ambedkar had long conversations with me for three days. Eventually a formula for amicable settlement of his revolt against Hinduism was drafted. Dr. Ambedkar entirely agrees with it.

The formula is as follows :—

“If Dr. Ambedkar were to announce his decision that he and his followers are prepared to embrace Sikhism in preference to Islam and Christianity and that he shall honestly and sincerely co-operate with the Hindus and the Sikhs in propagating their culture and in counteracting the Muslim movement for drawing the Depressed Classes into the Muslim fold, the Hindu Mahasabha will be prepared, in view of their having agreed to remain within the Hindu Culture, to make an announcement that it will not object:—

- (1) To the conversion of the Depressed Classes to Sikhism;
- (2) To the inclusion of the Neo-Sikhs in the list of the Scheduled Castes; and
- (3) To the enjoyment by the Depressed Classes of the political rights of the Poona Pact by free competition between the Non-Sikhs and the Neo-Sikh Depressed Classes as provided for under the Poona Pact.”

From Bombay I have come here just this morning for consultation on it with friends before formally putting it before the Hindu Mahasabha for its consideration. I am trying to see Pandit Malaviyaji and if possible also H. H. the Maharaja of Patiala. It is a very delicate matter. I have, therefore, to request you to kindly think over it and let me have your opinion in the matter. Until we decide one way or the other, the matter will be kept strictly private and confidential.

Awaiting your reply.

Yours Sincerely,
(Sd./—) B. S. Moonje.

P. S.—“I am enclosing also a copy of the statement of his case handed over to me by Dr. Ambedkar for your perusal. Please let me have your reply to my Nagpur address.”¹

II

“Mr, Rajah’s Reply to Dr. Moonje

I have already expressed my view about Dr. Ambedkar’s proposal that the Depressed Classes should give up Hinduism and embrace some other religion. I make a distinction between conversion—which is a spiritual change and migration from one community to another for social, economic and political reasons.

Dear Dr. Moonje, you will excuse my saying that you view the whole problem of Depressed Classes, in view of Dr. Ambedkar’s proposal, as one of the communal migration and not as a religious problem. One would expect the President of the Hindu Mahasabha to view it as a religious problem and not merely as a political problem, without even looking at it as a social and economic problem. One can understand your concern if as President of the Hindu Mahasabha you placed the spiritual welfare of the Depressed Classes first and foremost and thought of the social and economic welfare next and lastly thought of them as a political factor. Your solicitude for the place of the Depressed Classes in the political scheme not only exposes the interested

¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 8th August 1936.

nature of your concern for these classes, but is like placing the cart before the horse. One would expect you as President of the Hindu Mahasabha to ameliorate the social condition of the Depressed Classes by removing civic and social disabilities of these classes, not to speak of securing for them the right of worship in Hindu temples on an equal footing with other worshippers, and to further the Harijan movement started by Gandhiji all over the country. Instead of doing this, what is it, that you are doing? You are dissecting the Depressed Classes and affiliating them religiously to the Sikhs while retaining them politically as Hindus.

The whole thing seems to me not to be conceived in the interest of the Depressed Classes but on the other hand to be planned in the communal interests of the Hindus and the Sikhs. We are not sheep and cattle to be bartered away in this fashion, driven from one political fold to another as a result of a bargain between the leaders of different communities. We want to remain so solid community moving of our own accord in the direction of progress and this we can best do by not throwing away our birth rights as Hindus but by remaining within Hinduism and changing it so as to make it more comfortable not only to our communities which are suffering from similar liabilities, though our hardships are greater and more palpable. It is not our purpose to weaken the Hindu community but to strengthen it by reforming it from within. We do not wish to be pawns in the game of communal conflicts and competition.

Your proposal involves of electoral fortunes of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. If you want us to shift religion from the Hindu fold, we shall have to choose religion between the Sikhs and the Muslims who are the bidders for our communal migration, wrongly called conversion. Why should we antagonise and stand arrayed against Muslims? They are our brothers as much as the Sikhs and the Hindus. If the Depressed Classes all to become Sikhs and call themselves Neo-Sikhs, it will create all over the India a Sikh-Hindu-Muslim problem, as in the Punjab, made move complicated by the fact that the so-called Neo-Sikh belongs to the Depressed Class even among Sikhs.

This question of conversion or the communal migration as a move of the political chess board does not disturb us much in South India. We are content to work under the Poona Pact, partly as a separate electorate and partly with a joint electorate preserving our status with the Hindus both religiously and politically. I would therefore be no party even to the political manipulations which are proposed in your letter. I would urge the Hindu Mahasabha to address itself to the task of making easy for the Depressed Classes to stay within Hinduism and Hindu Society instead of arranging for the ticket for entering them to some far off destination. As the question you raise is likely to rouse a lot of discussion. I reserve to myself the right to publish my reply when the occasion arises.

III

Rajah Backed

Mr. C. Rajagopalchari writing to Rao Bahadur Rajah said :—

“I have your note and enclosures. I read through the Correspondence. I would not be too strong language to call the whole thing a diabolical proposal. I am glad, you have sent the correspondence to Mahatmaji. I am glad, you have replied in the terms you have done and summarily rejected the Idea.”¹

IV

RAJBHOJ REPLIES TO DR. AMBEDKAR

Poona Pact Benefits not for Runaways from Hinduism

“The Poona Pact does not make any provision for converts from Hinduism, and even if some of the Harijan community embraced Sikhism or any other religion in a body, it is not within the power of the Poona Pact signatories to retain for those converts any of the advantages secured under it,” says Mr. P. N. Rajbhoj, Harijan leader and Secretary of the All India Depressed Classes league, in a statement on Dr. Moonje’s plan. Mr. Rajbhoj adds that the Poona Pact was specially intended to give the utmost concession to

¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 8th August 1936.

the members of the Depressed Classes, so that they remained an integral part of the Hindu-fold. There was no question of applying it to those that left or were leaving the *Hindu-fold*.

Dr. Ambedkar never once raised the question of conversion at the time of the Pact. I think the cry is now raised to secure more concessions, says he.

Logical Absurdity

Proceeding, Mr. Rajbhoj asks if new converts from Hinduism are to be given the benefits derived under the Poona Pact why not the old converts who may for political, if not religious, reasons want them? He says that there are large number of Depressed Classes who have embraced other faiths, but have not been able to throw off the disabilities attached to the Harijan Community, and mentions the case of the Christians in some parts of Madras. Why should concessions and benefits obtained by those who laboured under disadvantages and difficulties be given to those who did not want those disadvantages, but only the benefits of the labours of others.

The Poona leader adds, "the formula is a vicious formula and will lead to more complications and endless trouble. It should not be accepted by the Hindus or by anybody. We are Hindus or not Hindus. If we elect to remain within the Hindu-fold, we are entitled to our right and privileges as Hindus, and once we leave the Fold, we can have no claim."

Refuting the statement that the Hindus have not made any sacrifice by accepting the Poona Pact, Mr. Rajbhoj says that instead of the 71 seats given to the Depressed Classes under the Communal Award, the Pact gave them 148 seats. Concluding Mr. Rajbhoj asserts that the conversion idea has no universal appeal among the Harjijan community. Even in Maharashtra only the Mahars favoured such a view, but the Chamars were solidly opposed to any conversion. There was no support to the idea in other provinces and he was surprised how the Hindu leaders were involved into it."¹

¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 15th August 1936.

V

Mahatma Gandhi's Views

Mahatma Gandhi's letter to Mr. Rajah dated 26th July 1936:—

'I have no difficulty about giving general endorsement to your letter to Dr. Moonje. I do not at all understand Dr. Moonje's or Dr. Ambedkar's position. For me removal of Untouchability stands on a footing all its own. It is to me a deeply religious question. The very existence of our religion depends on its voluntary removal by *Savarna* Hindu in the spirit of repentance. It can never be a question of barter to me. And I am glad you take nearly the same position that I do' (The Annual Register, Vol. II, July—December 1936, page 276-279)."¹

VI

Telegram from Pandit—M. M. Malaviya, dated 30th July 1936 to Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah:— "Thanks for the copy of your letter to Dr. Moonje. I agree with you."—A. P.²

VII

The Munje—Rajah Pact³**Splitting Depressed Classes**

Sir, though Dr. Munje⁴ and the Hindu Mahasabha have been unable to wipe out the blot of Untouchability from Hinduism and thus to make the Hindu Organisation strong and compact, they have succeeded in trapping a leader of the Depressed Classes with a view to causing a split in the ranks of those classes. The Munje-Rajah Pact is being boosted by the Congress and Mahasabha organs, and it is being represented to the gullible public that the pact is being

¹ Khairmode, Vol. 6, Pp. 191—193.

² The Bombay Chronicle—8th August 1936.

³ **The Munje-Rajah Pact**—Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah, a Depressed Classes leader from Madras and Dr. B. S. Munje, President of Hindu Mahasabha had discussions on the basis of reserved seats and Joint Electorates in Delhi. They made a pact which is known as The Moonje-Rajah Pact.

⁴ **Dr. B. S. Munje**—He was President of Hindu Mahasabha, Delegate, Indian Round Table Conference.

supported by the majority of the Depressed Class people. In fact, the Munje-Rajah Pact is being strongly denounced by all most all the accredited leaders and leading organisations of the Depressed Classes in the country. The Congress and Mahasabha organs have, however, made a conspiracy to suppress all news about the vehement opposition, the pact is evoking,

It was Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah,¹ who was strongly in favour of separate electorates when Dr. Ambedkar was advocating joint electorates and reserved seats, and it was through pressure from Mr. Rajah and the Depressed Class Organisation in the Madras Presidency, that Dr. Ambedkar had to set his personal views aside and to make a demand for separate representation at the Round Table Conference. He received support in his demand from Mr. Rajah, who in a speech only some weeks back gave his opinion that the salvation of the Depressed Classes lay only in Separate Electorates. His latest somersault was a surprise to all. He entered in to a Pact for joint electorates and reserved seats with the leader of Hindu Mahasabha without consulting the other leaders and the responsible organisations in the Depressed Classes in the different provinces. Nor, has he given any reason justifying his new policy. The fact Dr. Ambedkar was greeted with a rousing reception and was supported in his demand for separate representation by thousands of people recently at Madras itself, is sufficient to prove that Rao Bahadur Rajah lacks support even in his own Presidency. The evidence which is being given before the Franchise Committee also proves beyond dispute that an overwhelming majority of the Depressed Classes is in favour of Separate Electorates.

The Bombay Congress and Mahasabha organs have given out that Mr. B. J. Deorukhkar has sent a memorandum to the Franchise Committee signed by over five thousand people belonging to the Depressed Classes in support of the Munje-Rajah Pact. It has,

¹ **Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah**—A Depressed Classes leader from Madras. President of All India Depressed Classes Association. Member of Madras Legislative Council. Member in the Central Assembly.

however, been discovered that, this is nothing but fiction. The fact is that a few set replies to the questionnaire issued by the Franchise Committee have been forwarded in the name of certain insignificant bodies, the numerical strength of which is quite negligible. Mr. Deorukhkar represent himself and at the most some people belonging to his sub-section of the Chambhar Community *viz.* the Dabholi Chambhars, who constitute but a small fraction of the so-called Untouchable community in Maharashtra.

We challenge the Congress and Mahasabha people and their friends in the Depressed Classes to prove their majority in a public meeting especially held for the purpose. So long as they are not prepared to do this the claims of the Congress and Mahasabha organs should be treated with the contempt they deserve.

Divakar Pagare (Mahar)
K.G. Chandorkar (Chambhar)¹

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¹: Surwade, Vol. 1 Pp. 143—144.

DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR

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Dr. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES

“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. “-(P. No. 236)

-Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

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