

I AM A GREATER NATIONALIST THAN ANYBODY ELSE

“Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar now gave a clarion call to his people to give battle for the cause of justice and humanity and to expose the machinations and conspiracy hatched against the rights of his people. He knew this was the last opportunity to assert the rights and will of his people; for he feared that a free India might revert to the old traditions and his people would be impoverished, neglected and ostracized from society and public services.

On June 29, 1946 a caretaker Government was announced and the British Mission left for London, leaving other details to be settled by the Viceroy.

The battle started on July 15, 1946, at Poona, synchronizing with the opening of the Poona session of the Bombay Assembly.”¹

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in an interview with the A.P. A. on 17th July 1946 said,

“We like this country to progress as much as anybody else does. We do not want to stand in the way of that. All we want is that our position is safeguarded in the future India.”

“To this end we will take part in every kind of struggle against the British proposals of May 16. If the Muslim League starts any direct struggle against the British—I fully support the stand taken by the Sikhs at present—then they will also get our support in their action.”

He also warned that the present *Satyagraha* movement by the representatives of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation in Poona would ultimately become a country wide struggle in the same “form of that launched by the Congress in August 1942.”

“This is only the beginning of our struggle,” Dr. Ambedkar said : “when the struggle is forced to take the form of the Congress movement, we will do every thing that the Congress had done in the August disturbances.”

Dr. Ambedkar described the Scheduled Castes demonstrations now going on in Poona as a “Protest against the breaking of every sort of promise given to the Scheduled Castes by the British Government during the past 28 years.”

¹: Keer, P. 381.

“Unless we secure recognition as a minority entitled to protection and safeguards in the Constitution, this struggle will continue elsewhere in a different form. Then it will be time for the Provinces to launch a countrywide struggle against the unjust proposals of the British Government.”

Asked whether he had issued any directive to the Provincial organisations on the form they should adopt in carrying out demonstrations, Dr. Ambedkar replied : “we will leave it to the Provinces to adopt their own form of struggle. All these things cannot be discussed theoretically. Every Province has its own background and what may be effective form of struggle in one Province may not be suitable to another.”

Dr. Ambedkar said it was the intention of the Federation to continue the demonstrations at Poona in the present form of sending small groups to offer *Satyagraha*. “The main difficulty against a large-scale struggle in Poona at present is rationing,” Dr. Ambedkar added, “Otherwise, we would have had a very much bigger demonstration.”

Asked whether he provisionally planned to offer *Satyagraha* in the near future, the leader of the Scheduled Castes replied, “It is not necessary for a General to be present on the battlefield. I have got trusted lieutenants who look after the struggle and certainly when the development of events necessitates my presence there and my taking part in the struggle, I will be on the scene.

“At present I get all the latest information on the struggle from a personal messenger despatched daily from Poona.”

No Invitation from Gandhi

Dr. Ambedkar said he had tentatively planned to leave for Poona on Sunday “to see things personally”. He said he had received no invitation from Mr. Gandhi or any top-rank Congressmen “to open talks for a settlement of the affair”.

He added that the Federation, however, was willing to start negotiations with the parties concerned. Dr. Ambedkar continued : “I would like to point out clearly that the Scheduled Castes in this country think that Mr. Gandhi agreed to accept the long-term

proposals of the British Cabinet mainly on the ground that the British Ministers agreed to ignore the Scheduled Castes. That is what Mr. Gandhi found to be the greatest advantage in the long-term proposals notwithstanding their vicious character, of which Congress leaders themselves have spoken so much recently. The British Government have agreed to sacrifice the Scheduled Castes in order to win over Congress, and this I charge as absolute breach of faith, he asserted.

“We like this country to progress as much as anybody else does. We do not want to stand in the way of that. All we want is that our position is safeguarded in the future India.”¹

On 21st July 1946 a meeting of Untouchables was convened at Poona in Ahilyashram. After the meeting, Dr. Ambedkar addressed a Press Conference. The report of that Press Conference is as under: Editors.

Future of Scheduled Castes Congress was asked for Blue-Print

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, addressing a Press Conference in Poona today, demanded an open declaration from the Congress how they proposed to safeguard the interests of 60,000,000 Untouchables in the future Constitution of India. He asked for a blue-print and no promises in general terms.

The *Satyagraha* launched in Poona was only the beginning of a countrywide struggle to secure for the Scheduled Castes their just political rights. He claimed that the Poona *Satyagraha* was being conducted on a high moral plane and the non-violent behaviour of the whole mass of volunteers provided a lesson even to Mr. Gandhi who regarded himself as a ‘graduate in *Satyagraha*’. He issued, however, a warning that when moral resources were exhausted they would look for ‘other means’ to register their protest.

Dr. Ambedkar was surprised that the Prime Minister, Mr. B. G Kher should have asked the question ‘What have the Harijans to get against the Bombay Government?’ The answer was simple.

¹: Reprinted—Jai Bhim : August 13, 1946, Pp-1 and 2

‘Heirs to Power’

The Cabinet Mission had decided that the heirs to British power, authority and sovereignty in this country, were two communities only - the Muslims and the Caste Hindus. In the proposed constituent assembly all questions were going to be decided by the simple majority votes of the Caste Hindus alone. The British people had decided to quit India and their powers would be inherited by the Caste Hindus and the Muslims. Were the Scheduled Castes people then not entitled to ask the Caste Hindus what they proposed doing for the safety of 60,000,000 Untouchables.

Dr. Ambedkar claimed that the Bombay Government and the Bombay Legislative Assembly were part and parcel of Congress and the *Satyagraha* was intended as a protest against the Congress policy.

Dr. Ambedkar announced that he had no desire to launch *Satyagraha* in Muslim Provinces such as the Punjab and Bengal because ‘we have no quarrel with the Muslims. They have assured us that our interest will be safeguarded’.

Indignantly repudiating that the *Satyagraha* movement was motivated by a sense of frustration, Dr. Ambedkar said that in the last election the Scheduled Castes had won cent percent. There would have been a frustration if the Scheduled Castes votes had voted for candidates put by the Congress. He was prepared to prove statistically that not even four per cent of the Scheduled Castes voted for Congress Harijans who had been returned entirely on the votes of Caste Hindus. He did not suffer from a sense of defeat. It was triumph that 90 per cent of the Scheduled Castes were behind his Federation.

Poona Pact

The Poona Pact which prevented true representatives of the Scheduled Castes from being returned to legislatures must go. It had resulted in disenfranchising 60,000,000 Untouchables. Even according to international law no treaty was final or sacrosanct as the Poona Pact had now become injurious to their cause, the Scheduled Castes were entitled to fight for its revision.

Before his return to Bombay this evening, Dr. Ambedkar addressed a very largely attended public meeting of Scheduled Castes in Poona, at which he said struggle would be continued 'to the bitter end.'

No fewer than 569 Scheduled Castes volunteers have so far been arrested and convicted in connection with the Poona *Satyagraha*. ”¹

What we ask for is justice and fair-play

Bombay, Wednesday*

The threat that he had many surprises up his sleeves and would, when the 'right' time came, unleash deadlier moral weapons to storm the citadel of the "Hindu Congress heirs to British power" was made by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, President of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation, in the course of a 60 minute chat with the "Bombay Chronicle" representative this evening.

No mock Show

Dr. Ambedkar said "I have not yet shown my full teeth. Do not imagine we are staging a mock-show at Poona. It is only the beginning of a struggle that would grow grimmer and fiercer day by day, ultimately rocking the entire country."

Giving a sample of the contents of his armoury, he observed, "For instance, I and my people might fast unto death!"

A hundred thousand ' *Satyagrahis* ' were ready to march to Poona, "If only the Premier of Bombay promised necessary rations." The struggle would take an All India shape shortly. Poona showed but a glimpse into the "tremendous potentialities" of his people.

Benefactor of Congress

Saying that he was in a way the benefactor of the Congress, Dr. Ambedkar claimed, it lay within his power to nullify the existence of that organisation totally. "Could not I and my community decide to become Muslim converts? If I adopt Mr. Jinnah's religion I will not stand to lose in any measure and, indeed, he might nominate me as a Muslim member to the

¹: The Times of India, dated 22nd July 1946 Reprinted—Khairmode, Vol .8, Pp. 96-98.

* The 26th July 1946

Executive Council. I have not taken that drastic step because I want to save the Congress from total degeneration," he averred.

"Why have I not embarked on that very drastic course?" Dr. Ambedkar continued. "It is because I desire to give the Congress one more chance. The fight which we have inaugurated shows that my party has taken the line of least resistance."

He would himself participate in the "*Satyagraha*" at the opportune moment. At the present juncture the "General Staff" of the movement consisted only of a small nucleus of 'commanders'. As the supreme commanders and the 'confidence' of thousands of followers, Dr. Ambedkar did not deem it necessary for him to court arrest. "But", he said, "I am not afraid of jail life. Only, I do not believe in spectacular and unplanned action."

Asked what sort of blue-print he expected from the Congress, the Doctor answered : "What has the Congress done to us constructively in the last twenty years. They are now the inheritors of British power and domination. We have a right to ask them what they propose to do to us under the new Constitution. We do not place any trust in vague promises and platitudes. We want concrete proof of Congress sincerity to deal with us justly and fairly. Let them descend from the dizzy heights of phrase mongering to the the brass-tacks."

Plea For "Satisfactory Blue Print"

"Should the Congress issue a thoroughly satisfactory blue-print, would you be prepared to call upon your followers to join that body?" Dr. Ambedkar was asked next.

"Certainly not", he replied. "We are more radically inclined, socially and politically, than the Congress. We represent the poorest of the poor. We are sons of the soil, the true masses. As such, we cannot contemplate joining a pseudo-socialist organization as the Congress."

However, if the Congress made a square deal to the Scheduled Classes, and was ready to launch on a "real" struggle for the resurgence of the country, he would unhesitatingly offer his co-operation.

Dr. Ambedkar denied he had said in his Poona Press Conference that his party had been given any assurances from the Muslim League in any form and on any issue. His unwillingness to start '*Satyagraha*' campaigns in the 'Muslim' Provinces proceeded from the premise that the Muslims had done no harm to the Scheduled Classes.

Votes Won But Seats Lost

In an allusion to the fate of the Scheduled Class candidates in the recent general election, he maintained that there was no real trial of strength. His men had won all the votes but lost the seats because "*Hindu*" votes helped to swamp their chances.

"We are fighting for our liberty, for our very existence," Dr. Ambedkar feelingly observed towards the end. "We, a large community, have been denied elementary justice for decades. We have been maltreated, our just demands bruised aside with contempt. No chord of sympathy has been touched from any quarter. What we ask for is justice and fair-play. Let us have it or, by God, the consequences would be terrible as none could picture."¹

Baba Saheb ready to lead

In an interview to the Associated Press of India, Bhimrao Ambedkar said today that the Scheduled Castes Federation had been compelled to limit the number of *Satyagrahis* to very small numbers owing to the difficulty of feeding them, "We have been receiving telegrams and letters from all parts of India, and even from Burma and Malaya - offering to come to Poona to join the *Satyagraha* movement. But the real difficulty is to provide them with food and accommodation. Owing to the rationing difficulties, "It is not possible". For the small batches of men who will from to-day onwards offer *Satyagraha* by defying the District Magistrate ban on assembly within the precincts of the Assembly - all at Poona the Mushti Fund will cater. Apart from this, the men themselves have been requested to bring with them four or five days rations.

Dr. Ambedkar has told the organisers of the movement that he would himself be ready to proceed to Poona whenever they required him. "²

¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 25th July 1946.

²: Jai Bheem : August 13, 1946. p.7.

Lucknow starts Satyagraha, 140 arrested

More than 140 members of the Lucknow branch of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation were arrested to-day when they resorted to mass *Satyagraha* as a protest against the Poona Pact.

Of the 140 Federation members arrested 80 were taken under custody near the Council House, and the rest from various parts of the city.

Restrictions under Section 144 Criminal Procedure Code were strictly enforced by the police.

Scheduled Castes to launch passive resistance General Secretary's Announcement

Members of the Scheduled Castes Federation and their followers will register their protest by launching a non-violent *Satyagraha* movement all over India* against what they describe as the injustice done to them in the Cabinet Mission's proposal, which ignored the existence of the Scheduled Castes as a separate political entity.

A beginning is to be made at Poona on July 15 during the session of the Bombay Legislative Assembly by violation of the order of the District Magistrate of Poona, prohibiting meetings, demonstrations and processions, along the area of half a mile from Council Hall and the Secretariat."¹

General Secretary's Explanation

Explaining this decision in the course of a statement Mr. P.N. Rajbhoj, General Secretary of the Scheduled Castes Federation says 'the time has arrived to launch a passive resistance movement according to the resolution passed by the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation on June 4, 1946 in Bombay. There is now no alternative for us but to resort to direct action. The circumstances require a struggle in order to save the scheduled castes from the impending Catastrophe.'

Mr. Rajbhoj adds that the British Government and their statement committed a breach of trust in ignoring the Scheduled Castes

* See appendix -V

¹: Jai Bheem : August 13, 1946.

as a separate political entity and rejecting the demands made by Dr. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur N. Sivaraj for political safeguards. "The Federation is, therefore, bound" he says, "to take direct action against the British Government. They cannot also forget the mischievous part which the Congress has played in this sordid affair. The Federation is convinced that the Congress has misused its position as the majority party and the eagerness of the British to placate the Congress forced them to deny the Scheduled Castes the status of a separate political entity. What has been done by the Cabinet Mission to the Scheduled Castes is the direct result of the Congress Machination and the Federation is, therefore, bound to take action against the Congress as well."

The Council of Action appointed in June to devise ways of launching a struggle will, Mr. Rajbhoj states, intimate the various Provincial components of the nature of the struggle each should embark upon. But in the meantime, the Bombay Provincial Scheduled Castes Federation has decided, he adds, to take the first step in the struggle by breaking the order of the District Magistrate Poona on July 15. Mr. Rajbhoj called upon all those who wish to participate in the movement to enrol themselves at the office of the Bombay Provincial Scheduled Castes Federation at Poona, where Mr. B. K. Gaikwad, President is in-charge. ¹

In another press interview published in 'Jai Bheem' dated 16th September 1946. Dr. Ambedkar pointed out other view of which some of the points have resemblance with the views in the preview interviews—Editors.

Babasaheb explains purpose of *Satyagraha*

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar demanded in a Press interview that the Congress should issue a blue print explaining how they were going to dispose of the destiny of the 60 million Scheduled Castes of the Country. The purpose of the *Satyagraha* launched by the Scheduled Castes Federation in Poona, he explained, was to get answer from the Congress to this question and ask the Congress to make an open declaration of their plan to protect the interests of the Scheduled Castes in the future constitution of India.

¹: Jai Bheem : August 13, 1946. Pp. 2-3.

Dr. Ambedkar said that the British Cabinet Mission had decided rightly or wrongly — the Scheduled Castes considered it wrongly and iniquitously — that the heirs to the British Power, authority and sovereignty in India were only two — the Muslims and the Caste Hindus. The Scheduled Castes had no quarrel with the Muslims, for they were prepared to make a declaration of their intentions towards the protection of the rights of the Scheduled Castes and there would be no *Satyagraha* in such Provinces where the Muslims were in power. The Congress, however, so far had been mute over this question. In the Constituent Assembly, the Congress would be in a majority of three fourths and they would decide the issues affecting the rights and interests of the Scheduled Castes by their majority vote. The Scheduled Castes were, therefore, entitled to get an answer from the Congress to their question.

Dr. Ambedkar said that if the Scheduled Castes were troubling the Bombay Government, it was because it was a part and parcel of the Congress machinery. Mr. B. G. Kher had suggested in his statement that the present *Satyagraha* was motivated by the sense of frustration on the part of the Federation because they had lost in the last elections, “Mr. Kher” Dr. Ambedkar said, “was free to attribute any motives, high or low, to the movement but he wanted to make it clear that so far as he was concerned, he would do nothing in politics or public life which he could not justify publicly.” It was wrong, however, to say that a sense of frustration had been created in the minds of the Scheduled Castes. They had scored cent per cent victories though they had lost cent per cent seats.

“There would have been frustration if the Scheduled Castes had voted against our candidates, and for the Congress nominees. That would have been our ruination. But not over four per cent voted in favour of the Congress candidates who have been returned on Caste Hindu votes. That was not our defeat but triumph. But the fact that we lost these elections does not mean that we are going to lose them every time.”

Turning to the demands of the Scheduled Castes, Dr. Ambedkar said, one of them was the abrogation of the Poona Pact. “Why should we not agitate against it?” he asked. “No treaty in the world is accepted as sacrosanct. The Poona Pact has resulted in

the political disenfranchisement of the very people in whose interests it was made. What we are asking for is that the deliberate opinion of one community should not be nullified by that of another community. In the primary elections, wherever held in the country no Congressman won against the Federation candidate. But in the general elections the candidates selected by the community were rejected and 'stooges' and 'tools' of another party came on top because of Caste "Hindu Votes." Dr. Ambedkar demanded that any arrangements made for the political protection of the community must be "full-proof and knave-proof."

Dr. Ambedkar appealed to those who had the interests of the masses in their heart to join the Scheduled Castes in their *Satyagraha* campaign. Independence might not necessarily mean freedom and liberty for all. The power might pass in the hands of a small junta who might subject the masses to a greater harassment than they had experienced before. "We are prepared" Dr. Ambedkar declared, "to carry on the struggle whether help comes or not to the bitterest end on moral plane. If moral resources are exhausted, then we shall resort to other methods. The liberty of a people is greater than the sanctity of the means employed to achieve it."¹

Dr. Ambedkar exhorted his men to carry on the struggle to the bitter end. The Congress Harijan leaders, who always reaped the fruit of Ambedkar's labour and struggle, spoke against Ambedkar's agitation and supported those who always opposed Harijans' demands. It was like barking at one's own benefactor.

Gandhi, referring to this *Satyagraha*, wrote in *Harijan* that there was a parody of *Satyagraha* in the show staged by Ambedkar; and if the means were non-violent the cause was certainly vague.

The *Satyagraha* movement went on unabated for a fortnight, and its pressure forced the Government to abrogate their Poona Assembly Session. The Congress leaders felt the need for a rapprochement with Ambedkar. So S. K. Patil, Chief of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee saw Dr. Ambedkar at the Siddharth College: and they both, accompanied by N. M. Joshi, met Sardar Patel on July 27. The talks continued for an hour or so in

¹: Jai Bheem : 16th September, 1946.

connection with the representation of the Scheduled Castes on the Constituent Assembly and the Poona *Satyagraha*. It seems they could not come to a settlement as on August 8, a Scheduled Caste procession led by prominent leaders of the Scheduled Castes such as Gaikwad and Rajbhoj marched to the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee which was holding its session at Wardha.

Sometime later, Ambedkar wrote to Sardar Patel that he considered the country greater than any individual howsoever great he might be. He also said that one could be a great nationalist without being a Congressman and added that he was a greater nationalist than any Congress leader. ”¹

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¹: Keer p. 383