

WE ARE A WARRIOR CLAN

The second session of Ratnagiri District Bahishkrit Parishad under the auspices of Bhartiya Bahishkrit Samaj Sewak Sangh was held on Saturday the 13th April 1929 at 4.30 p.m. at Chiplun under the Presidentship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Deorao Naik, editor “Samata”, S. N. Shivatarkar, D. V. Pradhan, S. S. Gupte, B. R. Kadrekar also attended this Conference. About eight thousand men and women assembled for the Conference.¹

“The situation at the time of Conference was tense. “Great efforts had to be made for securing a site for the Conference pandal. Fear lurked in the minds of the Orthodox Hindus that there would be a repetition of the Mahad incident, and the Untouchable Hindus might pollute their wells if the Conference was held in their town. So they closed their wells with great care and caution as if there were an enemy raid. Dr. Ambedkar and his colleagues stayed for two days at the Dak Bungalow in Chiplun.

Men of progressive leanings like Vinayakrao Barve and B. G. Khatu, two local pleaders, attended the Conference. Omswami Ragji welcomed the delegates and stressed the necessity for a broader outlook on the part of the Caste Hindus.

In his Presidential address to the Conference Dr. Ambedkar said, “You must abolish your slavery yourselves. It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one’s self-respect. Self-respect is a most vital factor in life. Without it man is a mere cipher. To live worthily with self-respect one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence and recognition.” He then referred to the land system of Konkan called Khoti, which sucked their blood, and promised them to strive his utmost for the abolition of that system. Telling them that he was prepared to go through any

¹: Bahishkrit Bharat, dated 3rd May 1929.

ordeal for their good, he declared. My life was threatened if I came here to wake you up to the causes of your misery and shame. Man is mortal. Every one is to die some day or other. But one must resolve to lay down one's life in enriching the noble ideals of self-respect and in bettering human life. We are not slaves. We are a warrior clan. Nothing is more disgraceful for a brave man than to live a life devoid of self-respect and without love for the country."

"He then suggested that his people should migrate to some better and distant lands, if they wished to be relieved of the oppression at the hands of Caste Hindus and Hindu landlords. He said he would try to secure them land for cultivation in Sind and in the Indore State. He cited the examples of their Muslim neighbours, who went to Africa and returned to Konkan as rich men. The idea of migration to Sind must have occurred to Dr. Ambedkar when he visited Sind to survey, in company with other councillors, the Sukkur barrage which was expected to turn thousands of acres of the desert land into a fertile agricultural region. His new contract with the Maharaja of Indore must have made him hopeful of securing some land for the Untouchables.

At night, Dr. Ambedkar was cordially invited by Vinayakrao Barve to dinner. He attended it saying that one should participate in such an inter-caste dinner not because one attained salvation when one dined in company with the Brahmins, but because such dinners smoothened social intercourse and fostered the principle of equality. " ¹

●●

¹: Keer. Pp. 127-128.