

I WILL WREST AS MUCH POWER FOR THE COUNTRY AS POSSIBLE

On the eve of his departure to London, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was given an address, on April 23, 1933 by the Depressed Classes of Poona at the Damodar Hall in Bombay. About 8-10 thousand people were assembled for this meeting. Raibahadur S. K. Bole presided over the meeting. Mr. P. L. Lokhande read the address and Presented to Dr. Ambedkar on behalf of Nasik District while Mr. Haribhau Hanumant Rokde presented the address on behalf of Pune District. On this Occasion various district Committees donated the different amount collected by them to Dr. Ambedkars.¹

“Addressing the meeting, he said that during the second session of the Round Table Conference he was helpless. He could not estrange the British Government by siding with Gandhi who was not prepared to concede anything to the Depressed Classes. He declared that since his struggle for the rights of the Depressed Classes was nearing success, he would devote his energies to wresting as much power for the country as was possible for him. At the conclusion of the meeting, he appealed to his people not to come to the Ballard Pier to give him a send-off as was their practice. He said they should not do it at the cost of one day’s wages.”²

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¹ : Janata, dated 29th April 1933.

² : Keer, P. 238.

FIND MEN WHO WILL PROMOTE YOUR INTERESTS

“The third session of the Kolaba Distinct Peasants’ Conference was held on Sunday the 16th December 1934 at Chari in Alibag Taluka under the presidentship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The preliminary arrangements of the Conference were made by the peasants themselves. A spacious *pandal* was erected with a dais in the centre for the president and distinguished guests. The meeting place was nicely decorated with flags and buntings. Cloth boards bearing slogans such as “Victory to the peasants”, “Peasants, Unite” etc., were seen hanging in the *pandal*. Dr. Ambedkar was garlanded by the peasants at Saral, Rewas, Hashiwre, Naringi etc. The Conference commenced its sitting at 2 p.m. About 6,000 peasants from all over the district had collected for the Conference. Among those present at the Conference were Messrs. G. N. Sahastrabuddhe (Bombay S. S. League), M. V. Donde (Principal, Parel High School), S. V. Parulekar (Servants of India Society), D. V. Pradhan, K. V. Chitre, T. V. Parvate (Editor, Maratha), S. G. Tipnis, C. G. Deshpande, N. M. Deshpande, Subhedar Savadkar, Damuanna Potnis (Bhor Praja Parishad), and others Mr. Ardeshir Baria, landlord of Pezari also attended. The Mamlatdar of Alibag, Police Sub-Inspector and other Government officers were present.

Mr. N. N. Patil, Chairman of the Reception Committee, welcomed the delegates.

Dr. Ambedkar’s Speech

Dr. Ambedkar received great ovation as he rose to speak.

He said ;—

“You have today, to concentrate your attention to find out ways to remove your grievances. The term *Shetkari*. I must tell you, as commonly used today is a misnomer, people who

possess extensive lands and who have no manual labour to perform are classified with those who have to toil for their bread on a farm with no piece of land of their own. The interests of these two classes are widely apart and conflicting with each other. It would be wrong to allow the one to be interwoven with the other, and I would suggest that a clear definition ought to be made of the term "*Shetkari*".

Now let me refer to that question which today, believe the audience especially the people of "*Chari*" have uppermost in their minds. I mean the strike that the tenants of *Chari* have declared against the *Savakars* and land-lords for the last two years. Without going into the merits of the strike, I for once think that such disputes that may be existing between the land-lords and their tenants must as a matter of fact be decided by Arbitration Boards composed of representatives of both the parties with a Government nominee and empowered with some legal status. The decision of such an Arbitration Board ought to be binding on both the parties, I see no reason why in an instance like this, the Government should not intervene and appoint such a Board.

There are, I know, a great many grievances in this part of the Presidency which arise out of a system-popularly called the "*Khoti System*". I am aware of the pitiable condition into which the tenants-at-will are thrown at the hands of *Khots*. The tenant is evicted from his land by the land-lord at his sweet will which renders the income of the tenant most unsteady and makes his life miserable. This is a glaring injustice under which the tenants are labouring. Such freedom to the *Khot* to evict the tenant summarily deprives him of the fruit of labour that he has put in the soil for a number of years. Such grievances of the tenants-at-will must be immediately removed by legislation which will compel the *Khot* to pay adequate compensation to the tenant who has suffered from the eviction. These injustices have in my opinion reached their climax in the actions of the land-lord in threatening the tenant to demolish his house situated on the *Khoti* land whenever a dispute arises between a tenant and

a *Khot* in order to compel the tenant to meet the wishes of the land-lord. I do not understand why such a glaring injustice should be allowed to continue. I must say that the Government too are guilty of a charge of a grave nature in that they have countenanced such an inhuman injustice. Take the instance of the housing accommodation afforded by some mill-owners in Bombay. At the time of the strike the mill-workers stand in the fear of losing their jobs and also their quarters which makes them lose half the sting of their fight. Such a state of affairs must not be allowed to continue and today's Conference must find out an occasion to ventilate their feelings in this respect.

You must never forget that the remedy for the grievances that I have just mentioned lies in bringing about properly effective legislation. A measure such as that of a strike is not the sure means of removing your grievance. I do not grudge the right of the aggrieved to resort to strike. But that is not a weapon which they can everynow and then use. How to get such legislation on the statute book is again a question which you have to solve. Unless you have your own representatives in the Legislative Councils, you will not be able to do it. You must find men who will always promote your interests. While choosing your representative you must not allow yourself to be misled into believing that such leaders as the Congress are the only bodies who are fighting for your cause. If the Congress represents anything to-day, it represents nothing except an element against the British.

After the resolutions for the betterment of peasants were passed the President made a few concluding remarks thanking the Conference.”¹

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¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 22nd December 1934.

UNFORTUNATELY I WAS BORN A HINDU UNTOUCHABLE BUT I WILL NOT DIE A HINDU

With a view to reviewing the political and social situation in the light of ten-year old relentless social struggle, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar decided to hold a Conference of the Depressed Classes at Yeola (District Nasik) on Sunday, the 13th October 1935.

On Saturday, the 12th October 1935 when Dr. Ambedkar arrived at Nasik at 11 a.m. he was welcomed with great enthusiasm and brought him in the city in a big procession. He inaugurated library at Nasik City.

On this occasion he said,

“You believe in selfhelp. You must stand on your own feet and fight for your improvement. If any grave disaster occurs in my case, you should be able to continue the struggle after me.”

In Hiralal Lane of Ravivarpeth at 9 p.m. an intercaste dinner was arranged in which Shri Deshpande, the only Congressman participated.

On Sunday the 13th October 1935, Dr. Ambedkar went to Vinchur where he was welcomed. Similarly while going to Yeola, he was welcomed by the villagers on the way.

Yeola Municipality presented an Address in the morning to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. While replying to the Address Dr. Ambedkar said,

“Now we come to the conclusion that there is no change in attitude of the touchables and they are not ready to behave with us, with affection despite of our continuous struggle. As such we have decided to remain separate from Hindus, to live with self-help and struggle to attain self-elevation.” ¹

“The Conference met at Yeola on October 13, 1935 at 10.00 p.m. and was attended by about 10,000 Untouchables of all shades of opinion including representatives from the Hyderabad State

¹ : Khairmode, Vol. 6, Pp 84-85.

and the Central Provinces. Expressing his pleasure at the great response and interest evinced by the Depressed Classes in planning their future, Amritrao Rankhambe, Chairman of the Reception Committee, in his welcome speech said, "Degenerated Hinduism was rightly called Brahminism because it benefited only the Brahmin hierarchy as a class".

In a tremendously feeling speech lasting over an hour and a half, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar recounted the plight of the Depressed Classes in all spheres, economic, social, educational and political and pointed out the immense sacrifices made by them to secure the barest human rights as members of the same community under the aegis of Hinduism. He especially referred to the Kalaram Temple Entry Movement wherein inhuman treatment was meted out to them during the past five years, and told them how their struggle to secure elementary rights and equal status in the Hindu Society had come to naught. He said that it gave him a very painful realisation that the time and money spent on and efforts made to achieve those objectives had proved utterly fruitless.

He, therefore, expressed his opinion that the time for making a final decision to settle the matter had arrived. The disabilities they were labouring under and the indignities they had to put up with, he added, were the result of their being members of the Hindu community. He inquired if it were not better for them to abjure that fold and embrace some other faith that would give them an equal status, a secure position and rightful treatment.

He, then, with a rise in his voice, exhorted them to sever their connections with Hinduism and seek solace and self-respect in another religion, but warned them to be very careful in choosing the new faith and to see that equality of treatment, status and opportunities was guaranteed to them unreservedly.

Referring to his own personal decision in the matter, Dr. Ambedkar said that unfortunately for him he was born a Hindu Untouchable. It was beyond his power to prevent that, but he declared that it was within his power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating conditions. "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu," he thundered. In the end he asked

his people to stop the Kalaram Temple *Satyagraha* as the past five years had demonstrated the futility of such agitation against the tyrannical caste Hindus, who had thwarted their attempts and showed impenitent hearts. He exhorted them to conduct themselves in such a way in future as would leave no doubt to the outside world of their decision to be and to remain a separate community outside the Hindu fold, carving out for themselves a future worthy of free citizens.

Accordingly, after a full discussion, the conference passed, in view of the callous and criminal indifference shown by the caste Hindus to their demand for social equality, a resolution instructing the Depressed Classes to stop the struggle which they had carried on for the past ten years for raising the Untouchables to a status equal with that of the caste Hindus and in the hope of consolidating and strengthening both sections into a great and powerful society. It further exhorted the Untouchables to stop frittering away their energies over fruitless attempts and to devote themselves to securing an honourable status, and an independent position on the basis of equality with the other societies in Hindustan.”¹

“Dr. Ambedkar alongwith his lieutenants returned from Yeola and stayed at Nasik. During his stay, the Sweeper (Meghawal) community offered them tea and dinner party on 15th and 16th October 1935.”²

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's announcement to renounce Hindu religion and to embrace some other religion got wide publicity on a global scale. It was like tornado hurled at the impenient Hindu Society. It was a thunderbolt and gave a bolt inblue to the Hindus. This created an atmosphere of furore amongst various groups of Hindu fold. There were tremendous mixed reactions expressed by these groups which were as follow :—
Editors.

“The ruthless and misanthropic Orthodox Hindus were unmoved by the decision of the Depressed Classes. Decrepit and decayed as they had grown, they had lost their thinking power and vision. The illiterate Non-Brahmins thought that the

¹: Keer, Pp. 252-53.

²: Khairmode, Vol. 6. P. 86.

decision on religious matters was the concern of the Brahmins. Rejoiced at the Yeola decision, the Orthodox Hindus heaved a sigh of relief; and the Nasik Orthodox Hindus, who were harassed for the past five years by the Temple Entry *Satyagraha*, were exceedingly jubilant over the decision of the Depressed Classes to go out of Hindu fold. They applied now to the Collector for the removal of the ban on the Nasik chariot procession in the light of the fresh declaration of the Untouchables. Enlightened and political-minded opinion in the country deplored the Untouchables' decision.

A Sindhi Hindu wrote a letter in blood and threatened Dr. Ambedkar with death, if he renounced Hinduism.”^{*1}

Gandhiji's reaction on Dr. Ambedkar's Yeola Speech :

“Wardha, October 15.

Interviewed by the Associated Press representative regarding Dr. Ambedkar's Speech, Gandhiji said, “The speech attributed to Dr. Ambedkar seems unbelievable. If, however, he has made such a speech and the conference had adopted the resolution of complete severance from Hinduism and acceptance of any faith that would guarantee equality, I regard both as unfortunate events, especially when one notices, despite isolated events to the contrary, Untouchability on its last legs.

I can understand the anger of a high-souled and highly educated person like Dr. Ambedkar over atrocities such as were committed in Kawitha and other villages.

But religion is not like house or cloak which can be changed at will. It is more an integral part of One's self than of One's body. Religion is the tie that binds one to one's creator and whilst the body perishes as it has to religion persists even after death.

If Dr. Ambedkar has any faith in God, I would urge him to assuage his wrath and reconsider his position and examine his ancestral religion on its own merits and not through the weaknesses of its unfaithful followers.

* The Vividha Vritta, 3rd November 1935.

¹: Keer, Pp. 256-258.

“Lastly, I am convinced, change of faith by him and those who passed the resolution would not serve the cause which they have at heart for millions of unsophisticated illiterate Harijans would not listen to him and them when they have disowned their ancestral faith, especially when it is remembered that their lives for good or evil are intertwined with those of caste Hindus.” — A.P.”^{1*}

Dr. Ambedkar’s views on Gandhiji’s reaction :

“Bombay, October 15,

“What religion we shall belong to have is not decided; what ways and means we shall adopt, we have not thought out; but we have decided one thing, and that after due deliberations and with deep conviction, that Hindu religion is not good for us,” declared Dr. Ambedkar when shown by the Associated Press representative Gandhiji’s comment on his Nasik speech.

“Inequality” he said, “is the very basis of it, and its ethics is such that the Depressed Classes can never acquire their full manhood. Let none think I have done this in a huff or as a matter of wrath against the treatment meted out to the Depressed Classes at Kavitha village or any other place. It is a deeply deliberated decision. I agree with Gandhiji that religion is necessary, but I do not agree that man should have his ancestral religion if he finds that, that religion is repugnant to his notions of the sort of religion he needs as a standard for the regulation of his own conduct and as a source of inspiration for his advancement and well-being.”

Asked when he proposed to get himself converted and whether it would be an individual action or mass action Dr. Ambedkar said, “I have made up my mind to change my religion. I do

¹ : The Bombay Chronicle, dated 16th October 1935.

* Gandhiji published his articles in connection with the conversion issue. See Appendix 1.

not care if the masses do not come. It is for them to decide. If they feel it is good they will follow me; but on the contrary, if they feel it is not they will not follow my example. My own advice is that Gandhiji should allow the Depressed Classes to chalk out their own line of action. Kavitha does not represent an isolated incident but it is the very basis of the system found in the ancestral religion of the Hindus.”¹

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¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 16th October 1935.

MY ABILITY AND EMINENCE WERE THE FRUIT OF MY PATIENT LABOUR AND INTELLECT

The public meeting was held on Sunday, 8th December 1935 at Foras Road, Bombay. This was the first meeting being held at Bombay after the declaration of intention of conversion by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar at Yeola. About 10,000 Untouchables alongwith 50-75 Muslims and few Christians were present at this meeting. Dr. Solanki presided over the meeting. Mr. Devrao Naik made an introductory remarks followed by a speech of Mr. Surba Tipnis. Mr. Donde and Bapusaheb Sahastrabuddhe were also present.¹

“Dr. B. R. Ambedkar declared that the issue of conversion would be first decided at a Mahar Conference which he was contemplating. Letters were now pouring in the Press, the majority of them condemning severely Dr. Ambedkar, and a minority upholding his stand. Among such letters and articles was a letter written by a semi-social reformer blustering that Dr. Ambedkar would be a nonentity, if he went out of the pale of Hinduism ; for, according to him, Dr. Ambedkar owed his eminence to his Untouchability. Dr. Ambedkar, in his characteristic thrust, replied that his ability and eminence were the fruit of his patient labour and intellect, and so he would be able to preserve his individuality in any fold or in the company of any literary or political worthies, whether Brahmin or Non-Brahmin. He, however, added that he would prefer a life without distinction in any other fold if his down-trodden people prospered in it.”²

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¹: Janata, dated 15th December 1935.

²: Keer, P. 260.