29

WHAT WAY EMANCIPATION ?

On the background of his declaration that, "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu." at Yeola, Distt. Nasik, Maharashtra, on 13th October, 1935, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar convened a Conference on 30th and 31st May 1936 at Dadar, Bombay. The sole aim of this Conference was to assess the support of his own people for the conversion movement. It was attended by about thirty five thousand Untouchable Mahars.

In a specially erected pandal the following slogans were displayed.

* **Man is not for religion, religion is for man.**
* **To become humane, convert yourselves.**
* **To get organised, convert yourselves.**
* **To achieve strength, convert yourselves.**
* **To secure equality, convert yourselves.**
* **To get liberty, convert yourselves.**
* **To make your domestic life happy, convert yourselves.**
* **Why do you remain in that religion which does not treat you as human beings ?**
* **Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from entering temples ?**
* **Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from drinking water ?**
* **Why do you remain in that religion which does not allow you to get education ?**
* **Why do you remain in that religion which insults you at every step ?**
* **Why do you remain in that religion which obstructs you from getting a job ?**

*** A religion which prohibits righteous relations between man and man is not a religion but a display of force.**

*** A religion which treats recognition of humanity as irreligion is not a religion but a disease.**

*** A religion which allows the touch of unholy animals but prohibits the touch of human beings is not a religion but a foolishness.**

*** A religion which precludes one class from getting education, forbids it to accumulate wealth, to bear arms, is not a religion but a mockery of human life.**

*** A religion that compels the illiterate to remain illiterate, the poor to remain poor, is not a religion but a punishment.**

*** Those who profess that the God is omnipresent but treat men worse than animals, are hypocrites. Do not keep company of such people.**

*** Those who feed ants with sugar but kill men by prohibiting them from drinking water are hypocrites. Do not keep their company.**

Mr. Stanley Jones, a European missionary and Mr. B. J. Jadhav, were the special invitees. There were a number of Sikh and Muslim leaders and priests who were eager to catch any direct or indirect hint in the matter of conversion. The object of the Conference was to devise ways and means to implement the resolution passed at Yeola on 13th Oct. 1935. Mr. D. Dolas welcomed the delegates while Mr. B. S. Venkatrao, a Depressed Classes leader from Hyderabad presided over the Conference.[1]

[1] : Janata, dated 20th June, 1936.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar spoke elaborately in Marathi on 31st May 1936. He delivered a prepared speech.—Editors

He said,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

You must have come to know by now that this conference has been purposefully called upon to ponder over the declaration of conversion which I made recently. The Subject of conversion is very dear to me. Not so only, I feel the whole of your future depends upon this subject. I have no hesitation in saying that you have clearly understood the gravity of this problem. Had it not been so, you would not have assembled here in such a large number. I am very happy to see this mammoth gathering.

Need for the Conversion

Since the time of my declaration of the conversion, our men conducted several meetings at various places and expressed their views and opinions, which I hope must have reached you. But so far we had no opportunity to gather to discuss and decide the problem of the conversion. I was very much concerned for such an opportunity. You will all agree that planning is very necessary for making the movement of conversion a success. A conversion is not a child play. It is not a subject of entertainment. It deals with, how to make man's life successful. Just as a boatman has to make all necessary preparations before he starts for voyage, so also we have to make such preparations. Without this, it will not be possible to reach the other shore. But as the boatman does not load the luggage unless he gets an idea of the number of passengers boarding the boat, so also, my position is like him and I cannot proceed without definite facts. Unless I get an idea as to how many persons are willing to leave the Hindu fold, I cannot start preparation for the conversion. When I expressed the idea before some workers in Bombay that I would not be able to judge the public opinion unless we meet in a conference, they voluntarily shouldered the responsibility of calling this conference without putting up any excuse about expenses and labour. What pains they had to take has already been described by our revered leader and the President of the Reception Committee, Shri Rewji Dagduji Dolas in his speech. I am extremely indebted to the Reception Committee of the Conference for arranging the meeting after making such strenuous efforts.

Why only Conference of Mahars ?

Some people may raise an objection as to why the Conference has been called upon only of the Mahars ? If the declaration of the conversion is meant for all the Untouchables, why has not a meeting of all the Untouchables been convened ? Before starting the discussion on the issues before the Conference, I feel it obligatory to reply to these questions. There are various reasons for convening the Conference only of the Mahars. Firstly, neither any safeguards from the government nor social rights to be demanded from the Hindus through this Conference. The only question before this Conference is, 'What should be done for the betterment of our life ?' How are we to carve the path for our future life ? The question can be solved and need to be solved by the respective castes separately. This is one of the reasons, why I have not called a Conference of all the Untouchables.

There is another reason for calling the Conference of only the Mahars. About ten months have passed since the declaration was made. During this period, sufficient efforts have been made to awaken the pubilc conscience. I feel, the proper time to judge the public opinion has come. In my opinion, to do this, meetings of each caste separately, is the simplest way to judge its opinion. In order to materialise the problem of conversion, it is very necessary to judge public opinion. And I believe, public opinion judged through meetings of each caste separately will be more representative and reliable than the opinion arrived at through a common meeting of all the Untouchables. Such a meeting, though termed as of all the Untouchables, will not necessarily be representative of all the Untouchable castes. In order to avoid this sort of situation, and to ensure the public opinion, this meeting of Mahars alone has been called. Though the other communities are not included, they are not at loss. If they do not intend to convert, they have no reason to regret for not being included in this Conference. If at all they wish to leave their religion, nothing can come in their way, only because they have not participated in this Conference. The other communities from the Untouchables are free to hold meetings like the Mahars and express their opinion. I would advice them to hold such meetings, and I will extend whatever help is needed from me, to the best of my capacity. This much is enough as an introduction. Now I turn to the main subject.

For a common man this subject of conversion is very important but also very difficult to understand. It is not an easy task to satisfy the common man on the subject of conversion. Hence, it is difficult to bring the idea of conversion into reality, unless you are all satisfied. I shall, therefore, try my level best to explain the subject as simply as possible.

Material Aspect of Conversion

The matter of conversion should be viewed through two aspects— Social as well as Religious; Material as well as Spiritual. Whatever may be the aspect, or line of thinking, it is necessary to understand in the beginning, the nature of the Untouchablity and how it is practised. Without this understanding, you will not be able to realise the real meaning underlying my declaration of the conversion. In order to have a clear understanding of the Untouchability and its practice in real life, I want you to recall the stories of the atrocities perpetrated against you. The instances of beating by caste Hindus for the simple reason that you have claimed the right to enrol your children in Government schools, or the right to draw water from a public well, or the right to take a marriage procession with the groom on a horse-back, are very common. You all know about such incidents as they happen just before your eyes. But there are several other causes for which atrocities are committed on the Untouchables by the Caste-Hindus which if revealed, will surprise the public outside Hindusthan. The Untouchables are beaten for putting on clothes of superior quality. They have been whipped because they used the utensils made of metal like copper etc. Their houses are burnt because the land has been brought for cultivation. They are beaten for putting on the sacred thread on their body. They are beaten for refusing to carry the dead animals and eat the carrion, or for walking through the village road with socks and shoes on, or for not bowing down before the caste-Hindus, for taking water in the copper pot while going out in the field to ease. Recently, an instance has been noticed, where the Untouchables were beaten for serving *Chapatis* in the dinner party. You must have heard and some of you must have also experienced such type of atrocities. Where beating is not possible, you might be aware as to how the weapon of boycott is

used against you. You all know, how the Caste-Hindus have made your daily life unbearable by prohibiting you from getting labour, by disallowing your cattle to graze in the jungles and prohibiting your men from entering the village. But very few of you might have realised as to why all this happens. What is at the root of their tyrrany ? To me, it is very necessary, that we understand it.

This is a Matter of Class Struggle

The instances cited above have nothing to do with the virtues or vices of an individual. This is not a feud between two rival men. The problem of the Untouchability is a matter of class struggle. It is a struggle between Caste-Hindus and the Untouchables. This is not a matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another. This class struggle has a relation with the social status. This struggle indicates how one class should keep its relations with another class. This struggle starts as soon as you start claiming equal treatment with others. Had it not been so, there would have been no struggle for the simple reason like serving the *chapatis,* wearing the super quality clothes, putting on the sacred thread, fetching the water in a metal pot, riding the bridegroom on the horse-back etc. In all these cases, you spend your own money. Why then the high caste Hindus get irritated ? The reason for their anger is very simple, your behaving on par with them insults them. Your status in their eyes is low, you are impure, you must remain at the lowest rung, then alone, they will allow you to live happily. The moment you cross your level, the struggle starts. The instances given above also prove one more fact that the Untouchability is not a short or temporary feature, it is a permanent one. To put it straight, it can be said that the struggle between the Caste Hindus and the Untouchables is a permanent phenomena. It is eternal, because the religion which has placed you at the lowest level of the society is itself eternal, according to the belief of the High Caste people. No change, according to times and circumstances is possible. You are at the lowest rung of the ladder today. You shall remain lowest forever. This means, the struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables shall continue forever. How will you survive through this struggle is the main question. And

unless you think over it, there is no way out. Those who desire to live in obedience to the dictates of the Hindus, those who wish to remain their slaves, they do not need to think over this problem. But those who wish to live a life of self-respect and equality, will have to think over this. How should we survive through this struggle ? For me, it is not difficult to answer this question. Those who have assembled here will have to agree that in any struggle, one who holds strength becomes the victor. One who has no strength, need not expect success. This has been proved by experience, and I do not need to cite illustration to prove it.

Achieve the power first

The question which you must now consider is, whether you have enough power to survive through this struggle ? Three types of strength are known to man. (1) Man-power, (2) Wealth, and (3) Mental strength. Which of these, you think that you possess ? So far as man-power is concerned, it is clear, that you are in a minority. In Bombay Presidency, the Untouchables are only one eighth of the total population, that too unorganised. The castes within themselves do not allow them to organise. They are not even compact but scattered through the villages. Due to these reasons, this meagre population is of no use as a fighting force for the critical dwelling place of the Untouchables. Financial strength is also just the same. It is an undisputed fact that you at least have a little bit of man-power, but finances, you have none. You have no trades, no business, no service, no land. The pieces of bread thrown out by the higher castes, are your means of livlihood. You have no food, no clothes. What financial strength can you have? You have no capacity to get redress from the law courts if injustice done to you. Thousands of the Untouchables tolerate insult, tyranny and oppression at the hands of the Hindus without a sigh of complaint, because they have no capacity to bear the expenses of the Courts. As regards mental strength, the condition is still worst. For centuries, you have not only served the higher caste but also tolerated their insults and tyranny without grudge and complaint, which has killed the sense to retort and revolt. Confidence, vigour and ambition have completely vanished from you. All of you have become helpless, unenergetic

and pale. Everywhere, there is an atmosphere of defeatism and pessimism. Even the slightest idea that you can do something, does not arise in any body's mind.

Why are you only oppressed ?

If the fact that I have described above is true, then you will have to agree with the conclusion of it. The conclusion is, if you depend only upon your own strength, you will never be able to face the oppression. I have no doubt that you are oppressed because you have no strength. It is not that you alone are in minority. The Muslims are equally small in number. Like Mahar-Mangs, they too have few houses in the village. But no one dares to trouble the Muslims while you are always a victim of tyranny. Why is this so ? Though there may be two houses of Muslims in the village, nobody dares to harm them, while the whole village practise tyranny against you though you have about ten houses ? Why does this happen ? This is a very permanent question and you will have to find out a suitable answer to this. In my opinion, there is only one answer to this question. The Hindus realize that the strength of the whole of the Muslim population in India stands behind those two houses of Muslims living in a village and therefore they do not dare to touch them. Those two houses also, enjoy free and fearless life because they are aware that if any Hindu commits aggression against them, the whole Muslim community from Punjab to Madras will rush to their protection at any cost. On the other hand, the Hindus are sure that none will come to your rescue, nobody will help you, no financial help will reach you, nor will the officers help you in any eventuality. Tahsildar and Police belong to Caste Hindus, and in cases of disputes between Hindus and the Untouchables, they are more faithful to their caste than towards their duty. The Hindus practise injustice and tyranny against you only because you are helpless. From the above discussion, two facts are established. Firstly, you cannot face tyranny without strength. And secondly, you do not posses enough strength to face the tyranny. Having these two facts proved, the third automatically follows. That is, the strength required to face this tyranny needs to be secured from outside. How are you to gain this strength is really an important question, and you will have to ponder over this with an unbiased mind.

Strength needs to be brought from outside

The casteism and religious fanaticism in this country, as I see it, had a very peculiar effect on the minds and morality of the people. In this country, nobody seems to be pained by the poverty and sufferings of the people. And if at all anybody is pained, he does not try to eradicate it. People come to the help of those in poverty, sorrow and suffering but only amongst one's own caste or religion. Though this is a perverted sense of morality, it cannot be forgotten that it is prevalent in this country. In the villages the Untouchables suffer at the hands of the Hindus, it does not mean that there are no men of other religions and that they do not realise that the maltreatment to the Untouchables is unjust, or that the oppression of the Untouchables by the Hindus is most unjustified, but they do not come to the rescue of the Untouchables. What is the reason behind it ? If you ask them, why do they not help you, they reply that it is not their business to interfere and that had you been members of their religion, they would have helped you. From this you will realise one thing that, unless you establish close relations with some other society, unless you join some other religion, you cannot get the strength from outside. It clearly means, you must leave your present religion and assimilate yourselves with some other society. Without that, you cannot gain the strength of that society. So long as you do not have strength, you and your future generations will have to lead your lives in the same pitiable condition.

Spiritual aspects of conversion

Uptilnow, we have discussed why the conversion is necessary for material gains. Now I propose to put forth my thoughts as to why the conversion is much necessary for spiritual well-being. What is Religion for ? Why is it necessary ? Let us try to understand it. You will find that several people have defined religion in a various ways. But amongst all of these definitions, only one is most meaningful and agreeable to all. 'That which governs people is Religion'. This is the true definition of Religion. This is not my definition. Mr. Tilak, the foremost leader of the *Sanatani* Hindus himself is the author of this definition. So nobody can accuse me of having interpolated the

definition of religion. Though I have not defined it, it is not that I have accepted it merely for argument's sake. I accept it. Religion means the rules imposed for the maintenance of society. I also have the same concept of religion. Although this definition realistically or logically appears to be correct, it does not disclose or clarify the nature of rules which govern a society. The question still remains as to what should be the nature of rules which govern society. This question is more important than that of definition. Because the question which is religion and which is not religion, does not depend on its definition but on the motive and nature of the rules that bind and govern a society. What should be the nature of real religion ? While deciding this question; another question naturally follows. What should be the relation between a man and society. The modem social philosophers have postulated three answers to this question. Some have said that the ultimate goal of society is to achieve happiness for the individual. Some say the society exists for development of the inherent qualities and energies of man and help him to develop his self. However some claim that the chief object of social organisation is not the development or happiness of the individual but the creation of an ideal society. The concept of Hindu religion is, however, very different from all these concepts. There is no place for an individual in Hindu religion. The Hindu religion is constituted on a class-concept. Hindu religion does not teach how an individual should behave with another individual. A religion which does not recognise the individual is not personally acceptable to me. Although society is necessary for the individual, mere social welfare cannot be the ultimate goal of religion. According to me, individual welfare and progress (individual development) should be the real aim of the religion. Although the individual is a part of the society, the relation with society is not like the body and its organs, or the cart and its wheels.

Society and the Individual

Unlike the drop of water that merges its existence with the ocean in which it drops, man does not lose his entity in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for

the service of the society but for his self development. For this reason alone, in developed countries one man cannot enslave another. A religion in which an individual has no importance is not acceptable to me. The Hinduism does not recognise the importance of an individual, and therefore it is not acceptable to me. I do not accept a religion in which one class alone has a right to gain knowledge, another has only a right to use arms, the third one to trade and the fourth, only to serve. Everyone needs knowledge. Everybody needs arms. Everyone wants money. The religion, which forgets this, and with an intention to educate a few, keeps the rest in darkness, is not a religion but a conspiracy to keep the people in mental slavery. A religion which permits one to bear the arms and prohibits the other from doing so, is not a religion but a craftiness to keep the latter in perpetual slavery. A religion which opens the path to the acquisition of property for some and compels others to depend on these few even for the daily necessities of life, is not a religion but sheer self agrandisement. This is what is called the *Chaturvarna* in Hinduism. I have clearly stated my views about it. It is for you now to think whether this Hinduism is beneficial to you. The basic idea underlying a religion is to create an atmosphere for the spiritual development of an individual. If this is agreed upon, it is clear that you cannot develop yourself at all in the Hinduism. Three factors are required for the uplift of an individual. They are : Sympathy, Equality and Liberty. Can you say by experience that any of these factors exists for you in the Hinduism ?

Is there any sympathy for you in Hinduism ?

So far as sympathy is concerned, it does not exist. Wherever you go, nobody looks at you sympathetically. You all have good experience of it. The Hindus have no sense of brotherhood towards you. You are treated worse than foreigners. If one looks at the relations of the neighbouring Hindus and the Untouchables of a village, none can say that they are brothers. They can rather be described as two opposing armies at warcamp. The Hindus do not have the slightest affinity towards you as they have towards, Muslims. They consider Muslims closer to them than you. The Hindus and the Muslims are helpful to each other in

local boards, legislative councils and in business. But is there a single instance of such sympathetic consideration being shown towards you by the Caste Hindus ? On the contrary, they always cultivate hatred against you in their minds. What dreadful effects this hatred has produced can be heard from those who have had an occasion to go to the Court for justice, or to the police for help. Does anyone of you believe that the court will give you justice or the police act rightly ? And if not, what is the reason for cultivating such sense of hatred against you ? In my opinion, there is only one reason for such disbelief. You believe that the Hindus will not use their power rightly because they lack sympathy for you. And if it is so, what is the use of living in the midst of such hatred ?

Is there equality for you in Hinduism ?

In fact, this question should not be asked. The Untouchability is nothing but concrete inequality. Such a living example of inequality is to be found nowhere. Not at any time in the History of world can we find such inequality, which is more intense than the Untouchability. On account of a superiority-inferiority complex, one cannot offer his daughter to another in marriage or one cannot dine with the other. Such examples of inequality are usual. But is there a system existing anywhere in the world except in the Hindu religion and the Hindu society where a man is treated so low as not to touch another man ? Can anybody believe that there exists an animal called man by whose touch man becomes impure, water is polluted, and God becomes unworthy for worship ? Is there any difference between the treatment meted out to an Untouchable and a leper ? Though people feel nauseated thinking of a leper, they at least have sympathy for him. But people have nausea as well as hatred against you. Your condition is worse than the leper. Even today, if anyone hears words coming from the mouth of a Mahar, at the time of breaking a fast, he will not touch his food. Such a filth is attached to your body and your words. Some people say that the Untouchability is a stigma on Hindu religion. This statement, however, does not convey any sense at all. No Hindu believes

that the Hindu religion is a stigma. The majority of Hindus, however, believe that you are a stigma, that you are impure. How have you been brought to this condition ? I think, you have been thrust into this condition because you have continued to be Hindus. Those of you who have become Muslims are treated by the Hindus neither as the Untouchables nor as the unequals. The same can be said of those of you who have become Christians are treated by the Hindus neither as the Untouchables nor as the unequals. An incident that recently occurred in Travancore is worth mentioning. The Untouchables called Thiya in that area are prohibited from walking in the streets. Few days ago, some of these Untouchables embraced the Sikkh religion. All of a sudden, the ban prohibiting them from walking in the street was withdrawn. All these things prove that if there is any reason of you being treated as the Untouchables and the unequals, is your relation with the Hindu religion.

In such a state of inequality and injustice, some Hindus try to soothe the Untouchables. They say, 'Get educated yourselves, be clean, and then we will touch you, we will treat you as equals.' In fact, we all know by experience, that the condition of educated, moneyed and clean Mahar is as bad as that of an uneducated, poor and dirty one. Let us ponder for the time being and consider, that if one is not respected because he is uneducated, poor, and not well-dressed, what should a common Mahar do ? How can one secure equality when one cannot gain education, have property or be highly dressed ? The Principle of equality as taught in Christianity and Islam has no concern whatsoever with knowledge, wealth, or dress which are outward aspects of oneself. Both these religions consider a sense of humanity as the main feature of their religion. They preach that humanity should be respected by all and none should disrespect others, none should treat others as unequals. These teachings are completely wanting in the Hindu religion. What is the use of such a religion in which the man's sense of humanity is not respected ? And what is the good of clinging to it ? In reply to this, some Hindus cite the *Upanishadas* and proudly say that God is all-pervading according to the principle enunciated in the *Upanishdas*. It may be pointed

out here that Religion and Science are two different things. It is necessary to consider whether a particular theory is a principle of science or the teaching of religion. That God is all-prevading is a principle of science and not of religion, because religion has a direct relation with the behaviour of man. The principle of God being omnipresent is not teaching of religion, but a principle of science. This statement is supported by the fact that the Hindus do not act according to the above principle. On the contrary, if the Hindus insist on saying that the omnipresence of God is not the principle of Philosophy but the basic Principle of their religion, I would simply say that nowhere in the world is such a meanness found as it exists among the Hindus. The Hindus can be ranked among those cruel people whose utterances and acts are two poles apart. They have this Ram on their tongue and a knife under their armpits. They speak like saints and act as butchers. Do not keep company with those who believe that the God is omnipresent, but treat men worse than animals, they are hypocrites. Do not keep contact with those who feed ants with sugar but kill men by prohibiting them from drinking water, they are hypocrites. You are unable to imagine what bad effects their company has left on you. You have ceased to be respected. You have no status at all. To say that the Hindus alone do not pay you any respect is inadequate. Not only the Hindus but the Muslims and the Christians also consider you the lowest of the lowly. In fact, the teachings of Islam and Christianity do not create the sense of high and low. Then why do the followers of these two religions treat you as low ? The reason is only one that the Hindus consider you as lowest of the low, so the Muslims and the Christians also consider you likewise. They fear that if they treat you as equals, the Hindus will treat them also as low. Hence, Muslims and Christians also follow the Untouchability like Hindus. Thus, we are not low in the eyes of the Hindus alone, but we are the lowest in the whole of India, because of the treatment given to us by the Hindus. If you have to get rid of this shameful condition, if you have to cleanse this stigma and make this precious life graceful, there is only one way and that is to discard the Hindu religion and the Hindu Society.

Have you any freedom in Hindu religion ?

Some people might say that you have a freedom of trade guaranteed by law like any other citizen. You are also said to have got the personal liberty like others. You will have to think deeply over such statement to see whether they really carry any meaning. What is good in saying, you have freedom of trade to a person who is not allowed by the society to do any other business rather than an ancestral one. What is the use of telling someone such words, you are at liberty to enjoy your property, nobody else will touch your money, when all doors of acquiring property are closed to him. To tell a person, who is treated as unfit for entry into any service due to the defilement attached to him by birth, and under whom working is most contemptuous for others, that he has a right to serve, is to make mockery of him. The Law may guarantee various rights, but only those can be called real rights which you are permitted by the society to exercise. The Law guarantees to the Untouchables the right to wear decent clothes but the Hindus do not allow them to put on these clothes, what is the use of this right ? The law guarantees to the Untouchables the right to fetch water in metal pots, the right to use the metalic utensils, the right to put tiles on their houses but the Hindu Society does not allow them to exercise these rights, what is the use of such rights ? The various instances of such violations can be cited. In short, that which is permitted by the society to be exercised can alone be called a right. The right which is guaranteed by law but is opposed by the society is of no use at all. The Untouchables are in more need of social liberty than that which is guaranteed by law. So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by law to you, is of no avail. Some persons might advise you that you have physical freedom. Of course, you can go anywhere, can speak anything you wish, subject to the restrictions imposed by law. But what is the use of such freedom ? A man has a body as well as a mind. Mere physical freedom is of no use. Freedom of the mind is of prime importance. Really speaking, what is meant by the physical freedom to a man ? It means, he is free to act according to his own freewill. A prisoner is unchained and made free. What is the principle underlying this ? The principle is that he should be free to act according to his own free will and he should be able

to make the maximum use of the abilities he possesses. But what is the use of such freedom of a man whose mind is not free ? The freedom of mind is the real freedom. A person whose mind is not free, though not in chains, is a slave. One whose mind is not free, though not in prison, is a prisoner. One whose mind is not free, though alive, is dead. Freedom of mind is proof of one's existence. What is the proof, then to judge, that the flame of mental freedom is not extinguished from a person ? Of whom can we say that his mind is free ? I call him free, who with an awakened consciousness realises his rights, responsibilities and duties, he who is not a slave of circumstances, and is always bent upon changing them in his favour, I call him free. One who is not a slave of usage, customs arid traditions, or of teachings because they have come down from his ancestors, whose flame of reason is not extinguished, I call him a free man. He, who has not surrendered himself, who does not act on the teachings of others, who does not believe in anything unless it is examined critically in the light of the cause and effect theory, is a free man. Who is always prepared to protect his rights, who is not afraid of public criticism, who has enough intellect and self-respect so as not to become a tool in the hands of others, I call such a man as a free man. He, who does not lead his life under the directions of others, who carves out his own aim of life according to his own reasoning and decides for himself as to how, and in what way his life should be led, I call him a free man. In short, a man who is his own master, him alone, I consider a free man.

In the light of the above observations are you free ? Have you any freedom to carve your own aims ? In my opinion, not only you have any freedom but you are worse than slaves. Your slavery has no parallel. In the Hindu religion, none can have freedom of speech. Everyone who lives in Hindu religion must surrender his freedom of speech. He must act according to the *Vedas*. If the *Vedas* do not support the actions, instructions must be sought from the *Smritis,* and if the *Smritis* fail to provide any instructions, he must follow the footsteps of great men. In Hinduism, conscience, reason, thoughts have neither any importance nor any scope. A Hindu must necessarily be a slave of either the *Vedas* or the *Smritis* or must imitate the great men. He is not supposed to use his reasoning. Hence, so long as you are a

part of the Hindu religion, you cannot expect to have freedom of thought. Some people might argue that the Hindu religion did not force you alone into mental slavery, but has snatched away the freedom of mind of all other communities. It is quite true that all the Hindus are living under a state of mental slavery. But from this nobody should conclude that the sufferings of all are alike. Everyone in the Hindu religion is not equally affected by the adverse effects that this mental slavery has produced. This mental slavery is in no way detrimental to the material happiness of the Caste Hindus. Though the Caste-Hindus are slaves of the above-mentioned trio *viz. Vedas, Smritis* and the Great men, they arc given a high position in the Hindu Social System. They are empowered to rule over others. It is an undisputed fact that the whole of the Hindu religion is the creation of the high Caste Hindus for the welfare and prosperity of the high-castes. To which they call a religion, has assigned you a role of the slave. Every arrangement is made in the religion itself, so that you may not be able to escape from this slavery. Therefore, to you there is more need of breaking the bondage of mental slavery of the Hindu religion, so far the Hindus do not need. In view of this, the Hinduism has marred your progress from two sides. It has sacked your mental freedom and made you slaves. In the outer world also, it has doomed you to the conditions of a slave. If you want freedom, you must change your religion.

Untouchables' organisations and conversion

The present movement of eradication of the Untouchability has been criticised on the ground that the various castes in the Untouchable class practise casteism in their mutual dealings; ney they practise Untouchability. Mahars and Mangs do not dine together. Both these castes do not touch the scavengers and practice Untouchability against them. What right these people have to expect from the High Castes the non-observance of Untouchability, when they themselves practise casteism and Untouchability amongst themselves ? This question is always raised. The Untouchables are generally advised to abolish castes and Untouchability from amongst them and then come up for redress. We all have to accept that there is a truth in this argument.

But the allegation made in this is false. It cannot be denied that the castes included in the Untouchables practise casteism and some the Untouchability. But it is equally false to say that they are any way responsible for this crime. The Casteism and the Untouchability have originated not from the Untouchables but from the high-Caste Hindus. They have laid down the practice of the casteism and the Untouchability. The lesson of observing the casteism and the Untouchability has been put in the practice by the high Caste Hindus. And if this is true, the responsibility of this tradition of the casteism and the Untouchability falls on the Caste Hindus and not on the Untouchables. If this lesson is false, the burden of its being untruthful falls on those who taught it, and not on those who learnt it. Though this reply appears to be correct, it does not satisfy me. Though we are not responsible for the cause due to which castes and Untouchability has taken root among us, it will be good not to condemn it and allow it to continue as it is. Although we are not responsible for the introduction of the Untouchability and the castes among us, it is our responsibility to annihilate it. And I am glad that all of us have realised this responsibility. I am sure there is no leader among the Mahars who advocate the practice of the casteism. If comparison is to be made, it will have to be made among the leaders. If we compare the educated class of the Mahar community with that of the Brahmins and one will have to admit that the educated class from the Untouchables is more eager to abolish castes. This can well be proved by deeds also. Not only the educated class of Mahars but even the uneducated and illiterate Mahars are the protogonists of abolition of castes. This also can be proved. Today, there is not a single person in the Mahar community who is opposed to the inter-caste dinning among the Mahars and the Mangs. I feel greatly satisfied that you have realised the necessity of abolition of castes, for which I extend my the heartiest congratulations. But have you ever thought as to how the efforts towards abolition of castes in the Untouchables can be made successful ? Castes cannot be abolished by inter-caste dinners or stray instances of inter-caste marriages. The Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of the mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. We practise the casteism, we observe the Untouchability, because we are asked to do so by the Hindu religion