in which we live. A bitter thing can be made sweet. The taste of salty and astringent things can be changed. But the poison cannot be made nectar *(Amrit.!)* To talk of annihilating castes while living in the Hinduism is like talking of changing the poison into nectar *(Amrit.)*.

In short, so long as we remain in the religion which teaches a man to treat other man as filthy, the sense of discrimination on account of caste which is deeply rooted in our minds, cannot be abolished. For annihilating the castes and the Untouchability from among the Untouchables, change of religion is the only antidote.

'Change in name' and 'Change in religion'

So far, I have placed before you the points in favour of the conversion. I hope, this analysis will be thought provoking for you. For those who consider this discussion profound, I propose to put it before you in simple thoughts and in simple language. What is there in the conversion, which can be called novel ? Really speaking, what sort of social relations have you with the Caste Hindus ? You are as separate from the Hindus as Muslims and Christians are. As Hindus do not have inter-dinings and intermarriages with Muslims and Christians, so is their relation with you. Your society and that of the Hindus are two distinct groups. By the conversion, nobody can say or feel that one society has been split up. You will remain as separate from the Hindus as you are today. Nothing new will happen on account of this conversion. If this is true, then I do not understand why some people should be afraid of the conversion. Though you have not understood the importance of change of religion, you have undoubtedly under-stood the imporatance of a change of name. If any one from amongst you, is asked about his caste, he replies as being Chokhamela, Harijan etc. But he does not say that he is a Mahar. Nobody can change his name unless certain conditions demand it. There is a very simple reason for such a change of name. An unknown person cannot distinguish between the touchable and an Untouchable and so long as a Hindu does not come to know the caste of a person, he cannot bear in him hatred towards that person for being an Untouchable. The caste Hindus and the Untouchables behave in a very friendly fashion during a journey

as long as they are unaware of their castes. They exchange betels, bidis, cigarettes, fruits etc. But as soon as the Hindu comes to know that the person with whom he is talking is an Untouchable, a sense of hatred germinates in his mind. He thinks that he has been deceived. He gets angry and ultimately this temporary friendship ends in abuses and quarrels. I am sure that you have gone through such experiences. You must be knowing why this happens. The names that depict your caste are considered so filthy that even their utterence is enough to create a vomiting sensation in the heart of Hindus. Thus, by calling yourself a Chokhamela instead of a Mahar, you try to deceive people. But, you know, people are not deceived. Whether you call yourself a Chokhamela or a Harijan, people understand what you are. By your actions, you have proved, the necessity of a change in name. Then I would like to ask you, if you feel the need of change in your name, what objection should there be for the change of religion ? Changing a religion is like changing a name. Change of a religion followed by the change of name will be more beneficial to you. To call oneself a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist or a Sikkh is not merely a change of religion but is also a change of name. That is a real change of name. This new name will have no filth attached to it. It is a drastic change. None will search the origin of it. The change of name as Chokhamela, Harijan has no meaning at all. In this case, all the hatred, contempt etc. attached to the original name passes on to the new name. So long as you remain in the Hindu religion, you will have to change your name. To call oneself a Hindu is not enough. Nobody recognises that there is anyone called a Hindu. So also, by calling oneself a Mahar, will not serve the purpose. As soon as you utter this name, nobody will come near to you. Instead of changing one name today and another tomorrow, and thus remaining in a state of pendulum, I ask you, therefore, why you should not change your name permanently by changing your religion.

The role of opponents

Since the beginning of this movement of conversion, many people have raised many objections to it. Let us now examine the truth, if any, in such objections. Some Hindus, pretending to be religious, advise you saying, “A religion is not a matter of

enjoyment. A religion cannot be changed as we change our clothes every day. You wish to leave this Hindu religion and embrace another one. Do you then think that your ancestors who clung to this religion for a long period were fools ?" Some so called wise men have raised this question. I do not find any substance in this objection. A foolish alone will say that one has to adhere to ones religion because it is that of his ancestors. No wise man will accept such a proposition. Those who argue that the ancestral religion should not be changed, seem that they have not read the history at all. The ancient Aryan religion was called *Vedic* Religion, in which three distinct characteristics—beef eating, drinking and merry-making—were the pan of the religion of the day. Thousands of people followed it in India and even now some Brahmins dream of going back to it. If the ancient religion alone is to be adhered to why did the people of India renounce the Hinduism and accept the Buddhism ? Why did they renounce the *Vedic* religion and accept the Jain religion ? It cannot be denied that our ancestors lived in the ancient religion, but I cannot say that they remained there voluntarily. The *Chaturvarna* System prevailed in this country for a fairly long time. In this System, the *Brahmins* were permitted to learn, *Kshatriyas* to fight, *Vaishyas* to earn property and the *Shudras* to serve; this way of life was the rule of the day. In this way of life, the *Shudras* had no education, no property and no arms. Those your ancestors who were thus forced to live in impoverish and defence less conditions, no man with sense will say that they accepted this religion voluntarily. Here it is also necessary to consider whether it was possible for your ancestors to revolt against this religion. Had it been possible for them to revolt and they had still not acted upon, then only we could have said that they had accepted this Religion voluntarily. But if we look into the real conditions, it will be clear to us that our ancestors were compelled to live in that religion. Thus this Hindu Religion is not the Religion of our ancestors, but it was slavery thrusted upon them. Our ancestors had no means to fight this slavery and hence they could not revolt. They were compelled to

live in this Religion. Nobody can blame them for this helplessness. Rather anyone will pity them. But now nobody can force any type of slavery upon the present generation. They have all sorts of freedom. By availing of such freedom, if they do not free themselves, one will have to call them, most regretfully, as being most mean, slavish and dependent people to have lived on earth.

Difference between man and animal

it is fitted for a fool only to say that one should cling to ones own Religion only because it is ancestral. No wise person can have such an argument. This will be a worthy advice for animals, and not for man to tell him, to live in the same circumstances in which he is living. The difference between a man and an animal is that—a man can make progress while an animal cannot. Our progress is not possible without change. The Conversion is a sort of change. And if no progress is possible without the conversion, the conversion becomes essential. The only being a matter of ancestral religion can never occur as a hindrance in the path of a progressive man.

There is still one more argument against the Conversion. It is, 'the Conversion is a sort of escapism.' Today, a number of Hindus are bent upon improving the Hindu Religion. They claim that the Untouchability and the casteism can be eradicated with the help of these people. It is, therefore, not proper to change the Religion at this juncture. Whatever opinion anybody may possess about the Hindu Social Reformers, I personally have a nausea for them. I have much experience of them and I feel disgust about these half-witted people. It is really astonishing that those people, who want to live in their own caste, die in their own caste, marry in their own caste, are able to fool people with false slogans, like saying they will break the caste and if the Untouchables do not believe them, they get annoyed with them. When I hear such slogans shouted by these Hindu Social Reformers, I recollect the efforts made by the American white people for the emancipation of the American Negroes. Years ago, the condition of the Negroes in

America was just the same as those of the Untouchables in India. The difference between the two was that the slavery of Negroes had the sanction of the Law while your slavery is a creation of the Religion. Some American reformers were trying for the abolition of slavery of the Negroes. But can the Hindu Social Reformers be compared with those White Social Reformers in America, who emancipated the Negroes ? The White American Reformers fought battles in war with kith and kin for the emancipation of the Negroes. They killed thousands of Whites who defended the slavery, and also sacrificed their own blood for this cause. When we read these incidents through the pages of history, we are compelled to say that, the social reformers in America and in India are incomparable. (कहाँ राजा कहाँ पोतराजा) These so called benefactors of the Untouchables of India called reformers need to be asked— Are you prepared to fight a Civil war with your Hindu Brethren like the Whites in America who fought with their white brothers for the cause of the Negroes ? And if not, what are these tall talks of reforms for ? The greatest of the Hindus who claims to fight for the cause of the Untouchables is Mahatma Gandhi. To what extent can he go? Mahatma Gandhi who pilots the non-violent agitation against the British Government is not prepared even to hurt the feelings of the Hindus, the oppressors of the Untouchables. He is not willing to launch a *Satyagraha* against them. He is not even prepared to take legal action against the Hindus. I do not see any good of such reformers.

The fault lies with the touchables alone

Some Hindus attend the meetings of the Untouchables and rebuke the Caste Hindus. Some will advise the Untouchables from their stage saying, "Brothers, live clean, educate yourselves, stand on your own feet, etc." Really speaking, if anybody is to be blamed, it is the Caste Hindus alone. It is the Caste Hindus who commit this wrong. Yet none will try to gather these Caste Hindus and reprimand them. To those who preach to the Untouchables to continue their agitation with the help of the Hindus and by remaining in the Hindu fold, I would like to remind

them of a couple of illustrations from history. I remember to have read about a conversation between an American and an English soldier during the last World War. I find it most appropriate at this juncture. For how long the war should be continued, was the subject of their discussion. In reply to a question of the American, the Englishman said with great pride, "We shall fight the war till the last Frenchman is killed". When the Hindu Social Reformers proclaim that they shall fight to the last for the cause of the Untcuchables, it means that they propose to fight till the last Untouchable dies. This is the meaning as I understand of their proclamation. It should not be difficult for you to decide that one who fights for the cause at the cost of the lives of others cannot be expected to win the battle. If we are to die in our struggle for freedom, what is the use of fighting at wrong place ? To reform the Hindu Society is neither our aim nor our field of action. Our aim is to gain freedom for us. We have nothing to do with anything else. If we can gain our freedom by the Conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility of reforming the Hindu Society ? And why should we sacrifice our vitality, strength and wealth for that ? None should misunderstand the main object of our movement as being Hindu Social Reform. The principal object of our movement is only to achieve the social freedom for the Untouchables; it is equally true that this freedom cannot be secured without conversion. I do accept that the Untouchables need equality as well and to secure equality is also one of the objectives of our movement. But nobody can say that this equality can be achieved only by remaining in Hindu religion otherwise equality will not be achieved. Before me, there are two ways of achieving the equality. The equality will be achieved either by remaining in the Hindu fold or by the conversion. If the equality is to be achieved by remaining in the Hindu fold, mere removal of the polluting contact will not serve the purpose. The equality can be achieved only when intercaste dinners and marriages take place. This means that the *Chaturvarna* must be abolished and the Brahminic Religion must be uprooted. Is it possible ? And if not, will it be wise to expect the treatment of equality by remaining in the Hindu religion ? And can you be successful in

your efforts ? Comparatively the path of Conversion is far easy. The Hindu Society gives equal treatment to the Muslims. The Hindu Society gives equal treatment to the Christians. Obviously, the social equality is easily achieved by the conversion. If this is true, then why should you not adopt this simple path of Conversion ? According to me, this Conversion of Religon will bring happiness to both—the Untouchables as well as Hindus. So long as you remain as Hindus, you will have to struggle for polluting contacts, for food and water, and for intercaste marriages. And so long as this quarrel continues, you and the Hindu will be the perpetual enemies to each other. By the conversion, the roots of all the quarrels will vanish. Then you will have no right to claim on their temples as well there will be no need for the same. There will be no reason for you to struggle for social rights such as intercaste dinning, intercaste marriages etc; and if these quarrels cease to exist, mutual love and affection will develop among you. Look at the present relations between the Hindus on one hand and the Christians and the Muslims on the other. The Hindus do not allow the Muslims and the Christians to enter their temples, like you. They also have no intercaste marriages or inter dining with them. Irrespective of this, the affinity and love which these people have, is not in between you and the Hindus. The main reason for this difference is that, as you live in the Hindu religion, you have to struggle with the Hindu Society for the social and the religious rights. But the Muslims and the Christians, having gone out of the Hindu religion, do not need to struggle with the Hindus for the religious and the social rights. Secondly, although they have no social rights in the Hindu Society, namely, they have no inter-dining and inter-marriage with the Hindus, the Hindus do not treat them inequals. Thus by conversion, if the equality can be achieved and the affinity between the Hindus and the Untouchables can be brought about, then why should the Untouchables not adopt this simple and happy path of securing equality ? Looking at the problem through this angle, the conversion is the only right path of freedom which ultimately leads to equality. The Conversion is not the path of escapism. It is not the path of cowardice, it is the path of wisdom.

One more argument is put forth against the conversion. Some Hindus argue that the conversion is worthless if you do it out of frustration from the caste system. The Hindus plead that wherever you go, there is a casteism. If you become Muslim; there is a casteism. If you become Christian there is also a casteism. Unfortunately, it has to be admitted that the Caste System has crept into other religions in this country also. But the burden of nurturing this great sin lies with the Hindus alone. This disease originally sprang up from the Hindus and thereafter infected others. In their view they are helpless for this. Although the castes exist in the Muslims and the Christians alike, it will be meanness to liken it to that of the Hindus. There is a great distinction between the caste system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and the Christians. Firstly, it must be noted that though there is a casteism among the Christians and the Muslims, nobody can say that it is the chief characteristic of their social system. If one asks, 'who are you ?' the reply 'I am a Muslim' or, 'I am a Christian' is enough to satisfy. Nobody feels the necessity of asking as to what his caste is. But if any Hindu is asked, 'Who are you ?' and he says, 'I am a Hindu', one is not satisfied with this reply. He is further asked. 'What is your caste ?' And unless this is replied to, none can have the idea of his social status. From this it is evident as to how the caste has prime importance in the Hindu religion and how negligible it is in the Christianity and the Islam. There is one more difference between the caste system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and the Christians. The caste system in the Hindus has the foundation of the Hindu Religion. The castes in Muslims and Christian religions have no sanction in their religion. If the Hindus proclaim to disband the caste system, their religion will come in their way. On the other hand, if the Muslims and the Christians start movements for abolishing the caste system in their society, their religion will not obstruct this. The Hindus cannot destroy their castes without destroying their religion. The Muslims and the Christians need not destroy their religions for eradication of the castes. Rather their religion will support such movements to great extent. Even for the sake of argument, it is admitted that castes exist everywhere, it cannot be concluded that one should remain in the Hindu fold. If the Caste System is useless, then the logical conclusion is that one should

accept such a society in which the Caste System has no severity or wherein the castes can be abolished early and easily in a simple manner.

Some Hindus say, 'What will happen by the conversion alone ? Try to improve your financial and educational status.' Possibly some of our people will be confused and puzzled by such question. I therefore feel it necessary to discuss it here. Firstly, the question is, who is going to improve your financial and educational conditions ? You yourself or those who argue as above ? I do not think that those who advice you like this will be able to do anything except extending their lip sympathy. Nor do I find any efforts towards this direction from their side. On the contrary, every Hindu tries to improve the economic status of his own caste. His outlook is limited to his own caste alone. Brahmins are engaged in establishing maternity homes for Brahmin women, providing scholarships to Brahmin pupils, and for securing jobs for the unemployed Brahmins. Saraswats (one of the castes amongst the Brahmins) are also doing the same. Kayasthas and Marathas are doing the same. Everybody is for himself, and those who have no benefactor are at the mercy of God. You yourself have to rise, none else is to come to your aid, this is the present day condition of a society. If this is the situation, what is the purpose in listening to the advice of these people ? There is no other motive in such advice but to misguide you and kill your time. If you have to improve yourselves, then nobody need to pay any attention to that gossips of the Hindu people and they do not have any right to advice you. Although this may seem enough, I do not propose to leave this point here. I feel necessary to refute this argument.

I am simply surprised by the senseless question which some Hindus ask as to what will happen by the conversion alone ? Most of the present day Sikhs, Muslims and Christians in India were formerly Hindus, majority of them being from the *Shudras* and the Untouchables. Do these critics mean to say that those who renounced the Hindu fold and embraced Sikhism or Christianity, have made no progress at all ? And if this is not true, and if it is admitted that the conversion has brought a distinct improvement in their condition, then to say that the Untouchables will not be

benefitted by the conversion, carries no meaning; they have to think over this. Another implied meaning of the statement that 'nothing will happen by the conversion' means that 'the religion is meaningless.' I do not understand why they advocate and insist upon the Untouchables to remain in the Hindu religion when they argue that the religion is meaningless; there is neither gain nor loss. If they do not find any meaning in the religion, why should they unnecessarily argue for which religion is left and which is accepted ? Those Hindus who ask as to what will happen by the conversion alone, can be accosted with the similar question— what can be achieved by self Government alone. If it is true that the people in India, like the Untouchables, feel the necessity of the financial and educational progress, what is the good of self Government. And if the country is to be benefitted by self Government alone, the Untouchables are also bound to be benefitted by the conversion. After giving a deep thought to this problem, everybody will have to admit that the conversion is necessary to the Untouchables as self Government is necessary to India. The conversion is as important to the Untouchables as is self Government to India. The ultimate object of both the conversion and the self Government is the same. There is not the slightest difference in their ultimate goal. This ultimate aim is to attain freedom. And if the freedom is necessary for the life of mankind, the conversion of Untouchables which brings them complete freedom cannot be called worthless by any stretch of imagination.

What first ? Progress or Conversion ?

I think it is necessary here to discuss the question as to what should be initiated first, whether econmic progress or conversion ? I do not agree with the view that economic progress should precede. This issue whether religious conversion or economic progress should precede is as dry as that which deals with political reform versus social reform. Several means are required to be applied for the development and progress of the society and each of these means has its own significance. No definite seriatim can be applied for the application of these means. If, however, anybody insists for such seriatim with regard to the conversion and economic reform, I will prefer conversion to economic reform.

I fail to understand how you can achieve economic progress so long as you have the stigma of being an Untouchable. If anyone of you open a shop and it is known that the shopkeeper is an Untouchable, nobody will purchase anything from you. If anyone of you apply for a job, and it is disclosed that the applicant is an Untouchable, you will not get the job. If anyone intends to sell his land, and one of you propose to purchase it, nobody will sell the land once it is known that the purchaser is an Untouchable. Whatever means you may use for the economic progress of your own efforts will be frustrated due to the Untouchability. The Untouchability is a permanent obstacle in your path of progress. And unless you remove it, your path cannot be smooth and without the conversion, this hurdle cannot be removed. Some of your young ones are trying to get education and they are collecting money for this purpose from whatever source they find proper. Due to this temptation of money, some are inclined to remain the Untouchables and make their progress. I wish to ask one question to these youngsters, after completion of your education, if you do not get the job suited to your qualifications, what will you do of your education ? What is the reason that most of our educated persons are unemployed today ? To me, the main cause for this unemployment is the Untouchability alone. Your virtues are not valued because of Untouchability. Your caliber has no scope due to your Untouchability. Because of the Untouchability, you have been ousted from the Military service. You are not employed in the Police Department on account of your Untouchability. Due to the Untouchability, you cannot secure even the post of a peon. You are not promoted to the higher rank only because you are an Untouchable. An Untouchability is a kind of curse. You have been completely ruined and all your virtues have turned into dust. Under these circumstances, what more qualifications can you acquire and even if you acquire, what is its use ? So if you sincerely desire that your qualifications should be valued, your education should be of some use to you, the doors of your financial progress are to be opened, you must throw away the shackles of the Untouchability.

Doubts against Conversion

The arguments put forth by the critics of conversion have been discussed so far. Now I propose to clarify the doubts expressed

by some of the sympathisers of conversion. In the first place, it has been heard that some of the Mahars are worried as to what will be the fate of their *Watan* (hereditory rights of a village servant). It has also been heard that the high caste Hindus opposing to the conversion have threatened the Mahars in the villages that they will be deprived of their services as village servants if they leave the Hindu religion. All of you are aware that I am least worried if the Mahar *Watan* is abolished. During the last ten years, I have been advocating that if there is anything that doomed the fate of Mahars is the *Mahar Watan* alone and the day on which you will be freed from these chains of *Maharki,* I will think your path of liberation is open to you. However, for those who want this *Mahar Watan,* I can assure them that their *Watan* will not be jeopardised by their conversion. In this regard, the act of 1850 can be referred. Under the provisions of this act, rights of a person as a successor and property are not affected by virtue of his conversion. Those who feel this reference of law as insufficient, they have to take into consideration the circumstances prevalent in Nagar District. A number of persons from the Mahar community in this District have become Christians and at some places, in one family, some are Christians, while others still remained as Mahars. However, the *Watan* rights of these converted Christians have not vanished. This may be confirmed from the Mahars of Nagar. So, none should fear that their *Watan* will come in peril by conversion.

A second doubt is about political rights. Some people express fear as to what will happen to our safeguards if we convert. Nobody can say that I do not realise the importance of the political safeguards that the Untouchables have achieved. Nobody else has taken so much pains and has made so much efforts for securing these political rights for the Untouchables as I have taken. But I feel, it is not proper to depend solely on political rights. These political safeguards are not granted on the condition that they shall be everlasting. They are bound to cease sometime. According to the Communal Award of the British Government, our political safeguards were limited for 20 years. Although no such limitation has been fixed by the Poona Pact, nobody can say they are

everlasting. Those who depend upon these political safeguards, must think as to what will happen after these safeguards are withdrawn. On the day on which our political rights cease to exist, we will have to depend upon our social strength. I have already told you that this social strength is wanting in us. So also I have proved in the beginning that this strength cannot be achieved without the conversion. None should think of the present only. To forget what is eternally beneficial and to be allured by the temporary gains, is bound to lead to suffering. Under these circumstances, one must think of what is permanently beneficial. In my opinion, the conversion is the only way to eternal bliss. Nobody should hesitate even if the political rights are required to be sacrificed for this purpose. The conversion brings no harm to the political safeguards. I do not understand why the political safeguards should at all be jeopardised by the conversion. Wherever you go, your political rights and safeguards will accompany you. I have no doubt about it. If you become Muslims, you will get the political rights as Muslims. If you become Christians, you will get your political rights as Christians, if you become Sikhs you will have your political safeguards as Sikkhs. Political rights are based on population. The political safeguards of any society will increase with the increase of its population. Nobody should misunderstand that if we leave the Hindu Society, all the 15 seats allotted to us will go back to the Hindus. If we become Muslims, our 15 seats will be added to the seats reserved for the Muslims. Likewise, if we become Christians, our seats will be added to the seats reserved for the Christians. In short, our political rights will accompany us. So nobody should be afraid of it. On the other hand, you must think carefully on this that if we remain Hindus and do not convert, will our rights be safe? Suppose the Hindus pass a Law whereby the Untouchability is prohibited and its practice is made punishable, then they may ask you, 'we have abolished the Untouchability by law and you are no longer Untouchables.' You are simply poor and backward, like you other castes are equally backward. We have not provided any political safeguards for these other backward communities. Then why should you be given ? You will have to think deeply over what will be your reply to these questions. It will be very easy for the Muslims and the Christians to answer

this question. They will say, "We are not granted political safeguards and rights because we are poor, illiterate or backward, but because our religion is different, our society is different and so on. And so long as our religion is different, we must get our share in the political rights." This will be their appropriate reply. So long as you are living in the Hindu religion and in the Hindu society, you cannot take this stand that you are entitled for politcal safeguards because your society is different. You will be able to take this stand on the day on which you liberate yourselves from the serfdom of the Hindu society by virtue of conversion, otherwise not. And unless you take such independent stand and claim the political safeguards, your political rights and safeguards cannot be consi-dered to be permanent and free from danger, I think it will be a matter of ignorance. Looking through this perspective, it can be said that the conversion is not a hindrance but a path for strenthening the political safeguards.

If you remain in the Hindu religion, you will lose your political safeguards. If you do not want to lose your political safeguards do conversion, they will be permanent only by the conversion.

Conclusion

For myself I have taken my decision. My conversion is sure. My conversion is not for any material gain. There is nothing which I cannot achieve by remaining as an Untouchable. Nothing but spirituality is at the base of my conversion. The Hindu religion does not appeal to my reason. The Hindu religion does not appeal to my self-respect. However, for you, for spiritual as well as for material gains the conversion is must. Some persons mock and laugh at the idea of the conversion for material gain. I do not feel hesitant in calling such persons as fool. A religion which preaches what will happen or what will not to soul after death, may be useful for the rich. They may entertain themselves by thinking over such religion at their own leisure. It is quite natural that those who have enjoyed all sort of pleasures in their lifetime, may consider such religion as a real religion, which mainly tells them the pleasures they are to get after death. But what of those who by remaining in a particular religion have been reduced

to the state of dust, who have been denied the basic necessities of life such as food and clothe, who have not been treated even as human beings, are these people instead of thinking of religion from a material point of view, expected to look at the sky by merely closing eyes ? What is the use of this rich and idle people's Vedanta to the poor ?

Religion is for man

I tell you specifically that man is not for religion, religion is for man. To become human, 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 does not allow you to educate ? Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from entering a temple ? Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from water ? Why do you remain in that religion which obstructs you from getting a job ? Why do you remain in that religion, which insults you at every step ? A religion which prohibits righteous relations between man and man, is not a religion but a display of force. A religion which does not recognise a man as a human being, is not a religion but a disease. A religion which allows the touch of animals but prohibits the touch of human beings is not a religion but a mockery. A religion which precludes one class from education, forbids to accumulate wealth, to bear arms, is not a religion but a mockery of the life of human being. A religion that compels the illiterate to be illiterate, and the poor to be poor, is not a religion but a punishment.

I have tried here to the best of my knowledge to analyse and explain all the probable problems arising out of the conversion. This discourse might have become a lengthy one, but I had decided to elaborate it thoroughly right from the beginning. It was necessary for me to reply the points raised by the opponents about the conversion. I am of the opinion that nobody should convert without knowing importance of the declaration of conversion, and

hence I discuss this problem in such detail so that nobody should have any doubt about it. I cannot say how far you will agree with my views, but I hope, you will deeply brood over them. I feel that to please the masses and gain the popularity is good for a common man but not for a leader. I consider one as a leader who without fear or favour without popular accusation tells the people what is good and what is bad for them. It is my duty to tell you, what is good for you, even if you don't like it. I must do my duty. And now I have done it. It is now up to you to decide and discharge your responsibility. I have divided this problem of the conversion into two parts. Whether to leave the Hindu religion or to remain in it is the first part of the problem. If the Hindu religion is to be abandoned, what other religion should be adopted or whether a new religion should be established, this is the second part of the problem. Today, I have to decide the first part of the problem, unless the first part is decided, it is futile to discuss or prepare for the latter. Therefore you must decide the first point. It will not be possible for me to give you another apportunity to decide this. What decision you take in this conference, accordingly I will chalk out my future programme. If you decide against the conversion, this question will be closed for ever. Then whatever is to be done for myself, I will do. If at all you decide in favour of the conversion, then you will have to promise me for an organised and enmasse conversion. If the decision is taken in favour of the conversion, and the people start embracing any religion they like individually, I will not intervene in your conversion. I wish you all to join me. Whatever religion we may accept, I am prepared to put all my sincere efforts and labour for the welfare of our people in that religion. You should not, however, be led away by emotion and follow me only because I say so. You should consent only if it appeals to your reason. I will not at all feel sorry if you decide not to join me. Rather I will feel relieved of the responsibility. You have to keep in mind that this is, therefore, a crucial occasion. Your today's decision will carve out a path for prosperity of your future generations. If you decide today to get liberated, your future generations will definately be liberated. If you decide to remain slaves, your future generations will also be slaves. Hence yours is the most difficult task.

Be thy own light

While thinking over what message should I give you on this occasion, I recollected the message given by the Lord Buddha to His *Bhikkhu Sangh* just before his *Mahaparinirvan* and which has been quoted in *Mahaparinibban Sutta.* Once the Bhagwan, after having recovered from illness was resting on a seat under a tree, His disciple venerable Ananda went to the Buddha, and having saluted sat beside Him, said, "I have seen the Lord in illness as well as in happiness. But from the present illness of the Lord, my body has become heavy like a lead, my mind is not in peace, I can't concentrate on the Dhamma, but I feel consolation and satisfaction that the Lord will not attain the *Parinibban* unless the message is given to the *Sangh."*

Then the Lord replied thus, "Ananda! What does the *Sangh* expect from me ? Ananda, I have preached the *Dhamma* with an open heart, without concealing anything. The Tathagata has not kept anything concealed as some other teachers do. So Ananda, what more can Tathagata tell the *Bhikkhu Sangh.* So Ananda, be self illuminating like the Sun. Don't be dependent for the light like the Earth. Believe in yourself, don't be dependent on others. Be truthful. Always take refuge in the truth and do not surrender to anybody."

I also take refuge in the words of the Buddha. "Be your own guide. Take refuge in your own reason. Do not listen to the advice of others. Do not succumb to others. Be truthful. Take refuge in truth. Never surrender to anything. If you keep in mind this message of Lord Buddha at this juncture, I am sure, your decision will not be wrong."[1]

●●

[1.] : Janata : dated 27th June, 1936.

Translated by : Vasant Moon and Editors.