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TAXES MUST BE UTILISED FOR FARMERS

"Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was entertained in July 1939 at a tea-party by the authorities of Hansraj P. Thackersey College at Nasik. Replying to questions that were put to him in writing at that function, Dr. Ambedkar said,

"The money the Government was raising in the form of taxes must be utilised to relieve the farmers of their debts, to fight poverty and to impart education ; but he said that it could not be done if prohibition was given a priority or a preference over these urgent problems. Asked whether he agreed to the zonal scheme sponsored by Sir Sikander Hyat Khan in respect of a division of India, he replied that he did not approve of the seven zones and suspected that it was a step in the direction of establishment of Pakistan. As regards British rule, he expressed his view that apart from all other defects or disabilities, it had conferred two benefits on Indians, namely, one common Central Government, and a feeling among the people belonging to different religions that they were part of one Government."[1]

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[1] : Keer, P. 324.

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MAHAR WATAN IS HEARTLESS EXPLOITATION

To see the prospect of a *Satyagraha* movement and general strike throughout the Province of Bombay for redressal of the numerous grievances of the *Mahar and Mang Watandars* a conference of watandars was held at Ahmednagar* during the week end under the Presidentship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Almost all the Independent Labour Party members of the Legislative Assembly were present.

Tracing the origin of the institution of village Officers Dr. Ambedkar said,

During the Maratha regime there used to be 12 different officers like Patel, Kulkarni, Desai, *Nhavi* (barbar), *Sutar* (carpenter), Musalman, etc. to whom were assigned specific duties for the performance of which they were given lands free of revenue.

With the advent of the British the system of payment through *watan* lands was abolished in all cases except that of the Mahars. People with regular salaries were appointed in their places.

"What is interesting about this process of abolition of the old system" said Dr. Ambedkar, "is that in hundreds of cases the *ex-Patels, Kulkarnis, Talatis,* etc. while relieved of their official duties were allowed to retain their lands and the increase in land revenue that was made in their *watan* lands was only nominal. Thus the Government to-day are virtually paying lakhs of rupees to the decendents of these village officers though they have no village duties to discharge."

As against this was the fate of the *Mahar Watandars,* and almost every *Mahar is a Watandar*. The British did not abolish this hereditary office. The *Mahars* continued to discharge their duties as before but the concessional land revenue of "*Judi*" as it is called was increased.

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* At Haregaon, Taluqua Kopargaon Dist. Ahmednagar on 16th December 1939 as published in Janata, dated 23rd December 1939.

Unjust Impost

The matter was investigated by Government and by an act passed in 1874 it was laid down that *watan* lands could not be alienated nor burden on them increased unless it was in the interest of the *Mahar Watandars* themselves. In spite of this the Congress Government which claimed to serve the interest of the Depressed Classes and which had scores of other sources to increase their revenues, hit upon this the most poverty-stricken classes to get additional revenues.

"This is not only unjust and inequitable," said the President, "but because it violates the exisiting law which still remains on the statute book, it is illegal and unconstitutional. And unless the Government realise their folly and cancel the order the *Mahar Watandars* will be compelled to declare a revolt against the authorities and refuse to carry out their village duties.

The President did not want any precipitate action. He wanted to give time to the authorities to rectify the matter and proposed that a six month's notice should be given before direct action was resorted to.

"Why are we so serious about it ? It is because even without the additional burden put by the Congress Government, the *Mahar Watan* system is a system of heartless exploitation."

There was another big hardship from which thousands of *Mahars* suffered. There were innumerable villages in the province where the *Mahars* had to do all the jobs assigned to them without even the *Watan* land or any other sort of payment. In fact it was nothing short of forced and free labour. That had got to be put to an end.

In connection with these and other grievances he proposed that a deputation should be sent to the Governor to present all the facts to him and to secure redressal.

Turning next to the Congress Dr. Ambedkar said,

"It is a good thing that the Congress has revealed itself so soon and that it did not wait till it had secured full *swaraj* when it would have been so terribly difficult to remedy matters."

"We are not going to forget that lesson now. We may not be as strong as the Congress. We may not be as numerical. But we believe in the principle of social life that if we get nothing more than a dry bread to eat that we should share it with our companions. The Congress is not out for a dry bread. It is out for a full feast and wants to enjoy it all for itself. It wants to keep others starving."

"Well, we may not be able to snatch the dishes out of their hands. But there is one thing we can do we can pick up a handful of dust and fling it while they are at feast."[1]

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[1] : The Bombay Chronicle, dated 19th December 1939.

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GOVERNMENT HAS DONE NOTHING FOR DEPRESSED CLASSES

"This conference was held under the Presidentship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar at Ankalkhop village, Satara district, on December 24th 1939 and was attended by 2,000 persons. Speakers praised the work of Dr. Ambedkar for the Depressed Classes and urged that he should be given support.

Dr. Ambedkar said that the Congress Government had done nothing for the Depressed Classes but on the contrary had enhanced revenue cess on *Inami* and *Maharki* lands. There should be a limit to the amount of village work expected of *Mahars* who should be suitably remunerated. Unless their grievances were redressed within 6 months, *Mahars* should be prepared to discontinue."[1]

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[1] : The Bombay Secret Abstract: 6th January 1940.

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HINDUS RESPONSIBLE FOR SIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY

"Dr. Ambedkar was presented with an address of welcome by Belgaum Municipality at Belgaum on December 26, 1939.

Replying to the address, Dr. Ambedkar said that Caste Hindus and none else were responsible for the sin of Untouchability, which he was trying to remove by working for the uplift of Harijans. The question of tackling the problem of Harijans was more urgent than even that of winning *Swaraj*."[1]

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[1] : The Times of India, dated 27th December 1939.