

IF THE BOTTOM-MOST STONE IS SHIFTED THOSE ABOVE ARE TO BE SHAKEN

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in the course of his reply to the congratulatory speeches made in a meeting of the peasants and Depressed Classes members from Ratnagiri and Kolaba Districts held last night* in the Bhatt High School, Bombay, said,

“I assure you that I shall not surrender in the battle, I will have to wage for protecting and advancing the interests of the working class in India in the Executive Council. You may depend on me as regards that, I also want to make it clear that I shall not be so childish as to keep my resignation ready in my pocket and flourish it in the face of my colleagues at every point of minor differences.”

“I am anxious that the Depressed Classes movement should make a common front with the working classes of other communities,” continued Dr. Ambedkar.

“With that object in view I clung to the Non-Brahmin Party for full ten years in the hope that sooner or later it would rise to the full height of its great mission of struggling for the freedom of the toiling masses of the great non-Brahmin community.

That party had in it the germs of the great principle of democracy. Its leaders unfortunately did not realise their duties and responsibilities and allowed the party to be smashed to bits under the double influence of Government and Congress patronage.

Even now I would welcome if they did something in the matter. I do not at all insist that the Non-Brahmin labouring masses should join our party. Let them have their own party if they so desire; but we can certainly make a common front against the exploiting classes in our common struggle against the Brahmins, the capitalists, landlords and other exploiting classes. By breaking up the party the Non-Brahmins have committed a political suicide.

1 : The Bombay Sentinel, dated 14th July 1942.

* As per B. S. A., dated 16th July 1942 and the Bombay Chronicle, dated 21st July 1942 the meeting was held on 15th July 1942. The date ‘14th’ of the Bombay Sentinel in the source material might have been wrongly reprinted— Editors.

As far as I am concerned I do not desire to follow such a suicidal policy. The Depressed Classes will continue to have their own political organisation.

Some people complain that the organisation of a separate party of the Depressed Classes harms the interests of working classes in general.

It does not do anything of the kind. On the contrary our struggle composed of the lowest strata of labour is bound to help in the amelioration of all other sections of the working class.

If the bottom-most stone in a structure is shifted from its place those above it are bound to be shaken out of their position. On the other hand a labour organisation only of Caste Hindus is not bound to be helpful to the Hindus.

On the contrary, if not rightly guided, it might even be harmful to the Depressed Classes. A Caste Hindu organisation may not recognise the rights of Depressed Classes labour. It may even trample on their rights as has happened in so many cases in the past.

One illustration will suffice to prove my contention. In 1929 there was a prolonged strike in the Bombay textile mills. During the strike I approached the strike leaders to do something to remove the Caste Hindu ban on Depressed Classes men working in certain departments of mills. The labour leaders took no action on my suggestion for months together except to pass a harmless resolution and to forward it to the Fawcett Committee which again did nothing in the matter.

On the other hand, the movement for the abolition of *Khoti* was launched by us. It was a movement launched in the interests of the Depressed Classes primarily but it was automatically helpful to Caste Hindu workers on *Khoti* lands. Such instances can be multiplied "*ad infinitum*."

All that I wish to emphasise is that our sectional movement is in no way harmful to other sections. Moreover, we are ever ready to make common cause with other sections of labour.

Mr. A. V. Chitre in his presidential remarks urged upon Dr. Ambedkar necessity for expanding the field of activity of the labour movement under his control so as to include the Non-Depressed Classes. He said that he "wanted to see Dr. Ambedkar not merely as the leader of the Depressed Classes but of the entire toiling masses of India".

Among the other speakers were Messrs Surendranath Tipnis, Narayan Nagu Patil, Devrao Naik, Wadvalkar and Gaikwad.