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PROGRESS OF THE COMMUNITY IS MEASURED BY PROGRESS OF WOMEN

The All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference

SECOND SESSION

Held at Nagpur

on July 20, 1942.

Proceedings

The Second Session of the All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference commenced at 10 a. m. on July 20, 1942 in the specially erected Pandal in the Mohan Park, Nagpur, in the presence of over 75,000 audience. Women delegates and visitors numbered about 25,000. On the dias, distinguished leaders including the Hon'ble Dr. B. R. Ambedkar were seated.

After the singing of the Welcome songs, Mrs. Kirtibai Patil, Chairperson of the Reception Committee delivered her address.

Thereafter Mrs. Indirabai Patil, General Secretary, read her report.

Mrs. Jaibai Choudhary proposed the name of Mrs. Sulochanabai Dongre as President of this Second Session of the All-India Depressed Classess Women's Conference.

Mrs. Radhabai Kamble seconded the proposal and accordingly Mrs. Sulochanabai Dongre occupied the Chair and delivered her address.

She said,

"Sister delegates, at your desire our leader Hon'ble Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has agreed to address you in this Conference today. Another Conference of the *Samata Sainik Dal* is also to be held today in this very pandal. I, therefore, propose that the resolutions as framed by the Subjects Committee be moved in this open Session of the Conference without long speeches to enable out proceedings being completed in a short space of time.

I now move from the Chair the first resolution which runs as below:—

Resolution No. 1

Support to All-India Depressed Classes Conference :

1. That this Conference heartily supports all the resolutions passed at the 3rd "All India Depressed Classes Conference" held at Nagpur on 19th July, 1942.

I now put the resolution to vote. As there is no opposition, I declare the resolution carried unanimously.

The President then called upon Miss Prabhawatibai Ramteke to move the resolutions Nos. 2 and 3.

Miss Prabhawatibai Ramteke said, "President, delegates, and friends,

I will read the resolutions which stand in my name :

Resolution No. 2

Divorce Law :

That this Conference resolves that the women's right to divorce her husband be recognised by law, and to facilitate this, this Conference requests the Government and the leaders of the Society to undertake necessary changes in law.

Resolution No. 3

Polygamy :

That this Conference abhors the idea of polygamy existing in our society as being unjust to the women and therefore requests the Government to make necessary amends or changes in law to check or modify this custom.

These resolutions represent the demands for a long time. We are repeating them from every platform. They require no speech from me. I commend them for your unanimous acceptance."

The President Mrs. Dongre called upon Miss Bhimabai Badge to second the resolutions. Accordingly she seconded the resolutions. As there was no apposition the President declared these carried unanimously.

The President called upon to move Resolution No. 4 which was

moved by Mrs. Radhabai Kamble.

Mrs. Radhabai Kamble said, "President and sister delegates, I move the following resolution for your unanimous acceptance.

Resolution No. 4

Economic condition :

That this Conference resolves that for the betterment of the economic condition, the right of the female workers in Mills Bidi factories, Municipalities and Railways be recognised as under :—

(a) That they are entitled to a casual leave of 21 days and a leave at least for a month in a year just as it is in case of other employees.

(b) That in cases of death, accident or injury to these workers while on duty or work, an adequate compensation be given to them or their children.

(c) That a pension of at least of Rs. 15 be given to them on the completion of their work for 20 years, and the Conference requests the Government and the Labour Member in the Exexutive Council of His Excellency the Viceroy, to make necessary provision, by law, to meet these grievances."

Mrs. Jaibai Choudhury seconded the resolution.

Mrs. Jaibai Choudhury said,

President and sister delegates,

I second this resolution heartily. Almost all of us are labourers and it is very necessary that the law should be amended to make the provisions as mentioned in this resolution. In the absence of these provisions many labour families are suffering hardships. I commend the resolution for your unanimous acceptance.

The President declared the resolution carried unanimously.

The President then called upon Miss Manjula Kanfade to move resolution No. 5.

Miss Manjula Kanfade moved resolution No. 5 for unanimous acceptance.

Resolution No. 5.

Education :

(a) That the Conference is of opinion that the percentage of education of females amongst the Depressed Classes is very low and that to further the cause of spreading education in them this Conference requests the Government that in each Province the Provincial Government should run at its own expense hostels of at least 50 Depressed Classes girl-students in every Province.

(b) That this Conference further requests and appeals to the Government that in view of the dire proverty of the Depressed Classes which makes it impossible for them to take secondary and higher education in schools and colleges, each Provincial Government should give freeships and scholarships to such students of the Depressed Classes as are desirous of taking secondary and college education.

(c) That taking into consideration the general illiteracy amongst the females of the Depressed Classes this Conference requests all the Provincial Government in the country to immediately take steps and enforce compulsory primary education by law amongst them.

This resolution needs no speech and I commend it to you for your unanimous acceptance.

Miss Latika Gajbhiye seconded the resolution.

The resolution was further supported by the following :

(i) Miss Sulochana Naik (Amraoti)

(ii) " Virendrabai Tirthankar (Nagpur)

(iii) " Chandrabhaga Patil (Gondia)

(iv) " Kausalya Nandeshwar (Nagpur)

The President declared the resolution earned unanimously.

Mrs. Radhabai Kamble moved resolution No. 6.

Resolution No. 6.

Law for appointing Lady Supervisors in Mills :

That in many of the Mills it is observed that male Supervisors are appointed to supervise the work of the female workers. This in a number of places gives rise to most undesirable consequences. This Conference, therefore, requests the Central Government to make necessary provision in law to appoint Lady Supervisors in their stead.

Mrs. Indirabai Patil seconded the resolution.

The resolution carried unanimously.

The President Mrs. Dongre moved resolution No. 7 and 8 from the Chair.

Resolution No. 7.

Representation of Depressed Class females in Legislatures :

That like the female representatives taken in the Central and Provincial Legislatures from female constituencies, this Conference feels that for the general progress and advancement of the women of the Depressed Classes seats be reserved for them on all legislative and other representative bodies.

I now put the resolution to vote. Those in favour will signify their assent by raising their hands. (All seem to have raised their hands). Those against will now signify their disapproval by raising their hands. I see no opposition. I declare resolution carried unanimously.

Resolution No. 8.

All-India Depressed Classes Women's Federation :

That this Conference resolves that an All-India Scheduled Castes Women's Federation be established and to carry on its work a fund be raised.

I put the resolution to vote. Those in favour will signify their assent by raising their hands. (All seem to have raised their hands). Those against will now raise their hands to signify their disapproval. I see no opposition. I declare the resolution carried unanimously.

The President Mrs. Dongre then requested the Hon'ble Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to address the Conference.

Address by Dr. Ambedkar

Addressing the Women's Conference, Dr. Ambedkar said :

I am very happy to have this occasion of addressing you. There cannot be an occasion of greater happiness to any one interested in the advancement of the Depressed Classes than to witness this gathering of women. That you would assemble in such vast number—almost 20,000 to 25,000 strong—would have been unthinkable 10 years ago. I am a great believer in Women's organization. I know what they can do to improve the condition of society if they are convinced. In the eradication of social evils they have rendered great services. I will testify to that from my own experience. Ever since I began to work among the Depressed Classes, I made it a point to carry women along with men. That is why you will see that our Conferences are always mixed Conferences. I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved, and when I see this assembly, I feel both convinced and happy that we have progressed. I shall tell you a few things which I think you should bear in mind.

Learn to be clean; keep free from all vices. Give education to your children. Instil ambition in them. Inculcate on their minds that they are destined to be great. Remove from them all inferiority complex. Don't be in a hurry to marry : marriage is a liability. You should not impose it upon your children unless financially they are able to meet the liabilities arising from

marriage. Those who will marry will bear in mind that to have too many children is a crime. That Parental duty lies in giving each child a better start than its parents had. Above all, let each girl who marries stand up to her husband, claim to be her husband's friend and equal, and refuse to be his slave. I am sure if you follow this advice you will bring honour and glory to yourselves and to Depressed Classes.

Mrs. Kirtibai Patil, Chairperson of Reception Committee, expressed the thanks. Thereafter the President declared the Session as dissolved.[1]

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[1.] : Report of Depressed Classes Conference, Nagpur Session - July 1942.