

## I WAS FAR AHEAD OF ... PATRIOTS OF INDIA

On Sunday the 24th September 1944 a meeting of the 'Untouchables' was held in Memorial Hall, Park Town, Madras under the Chairmanship of Rao Bahadur N. Shivraj. On arrival Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was greeted with thunderous clapping. In the meeting (1) Madras Adi Dravid Workers Association, (2) South Indian Buddhist Association, (3) Scheduled Castes Federation of the Civil and Military Station Bangalore, (4) Madras Scheduled Castes Students Association, (5) Andhra Provincial Scheduled Castes Welfare Association and other institutions presented Addresses to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. On this occasion a youth presented Dr. B.R. Ambedkar with a beautiful picture of the Lord Buddha which was drawn by himself.<sup>1</sup>

Replying to the Addresses presented to him, Dr. Ambedkar said :—

“Let me begin my saying that in this city of Madras, I have heard two comments made by a very distinguished citizen of this city which have been very uncomplementary to me—the speeches recently made by the Rt. Hon’ble U. S. Shrinivas Shastri. Mr. Shastri on one occasion, when his mind was not perturbed by this issue of Pakistan and when he still regarded Mr. Gandhi as the embodiment of India’s soul, who alone in fulness can represent India at any international gathering, said that whatever might happen, the public of India should take a great deal of precaution to see that under no circumstances I had a place in any international conference. I was somewhat surprised to hear that kind of language from that old venerable politician. I was searching my heart in order to find out whether really in the whole of my public career which I am ready to admit is not so extensive as that of the Rt. Honourable Shastri was probably as glorious as that of his. Whether during the short span of my public life, I have done something so disgraceful that India would be ashamed to see me sitting at an international gathering. I do not wish to use any abusive language, for I could have very easily said that the Rt. Hon’ble Shastri was a “lap-dog” of the British

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<sup>1</sup> : Khairmode, Vol. P. 356.

Government. He has been sitting on the lap of the British Government all this while and if he had achieved any notoriety and greatness either in India or outside, it was largely due to the fact that the British Government had been pleased to make him a "show boy." I do not wish to say that what Mr. Shastri has said, is really croakings of an old crow sitting on a diseased bowel.

What is that most of the Congressmen have been generally saying? The Scheduled Castes have been inimical to the general interests of the country, it was stated. I would like to say that I have sat side by side with the greatest men in this country *viz.* Mr. Gandhi, the Rt. Hon'ble Shastri, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, and I can enumerate a host of public men in India who undoubtedly occupy the first place and rank in India's politics. I have watched him doing what a Nationalist can be expected to do, and I am confident, not only confident but proud that whenever any public question came up at the Round Table Conference, I was far ahead of the gentlemen who are supposed to be the patriots of India (cheers).

### **Gandhi's Doings at R. T. C.**

Most people assembled here do not know the doings of Mr. Gandhi at the R.T.C. You all think that the parts we played there were glorious ones. Is that the true story? What did Mr. Gandhi do? You all know that in 1931 when Gandhi attended the R.T.C. a mandate was imposed upon him that he should ask for Independence and that India should not accept anything less than Independence, something which was undoubtedly beyond the many super politicians in India were prepared to ask. What did he do? It is regrettable to state and I think in view of the fact that I am so invariably accused of having played the part of a "black leg" at the R.T.C. I must state the story, you will be surprised to hear what I may tell you. This old amiable gentleman who went to the R.T.C. with a mandate to demand nothing short of Independence, what did he do? He said to Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State, that he was quite prepared at this stage to be content with Provincial Autonomy, a most extraordinary thing. Those of us who do not belong to the Congress, on the other side, had taken up a stand that whether in 1931. India was

ripe or prepared for Dominion Status or not, the Indian people would insist in all circumstances to have at least some share of responsibility at the centre. Indians would never agree to be content with merely Provincial Autonomy but they would insist upon some introduction of responsibility at the centre. The old gentleman was of course expected to go much beyond that, as his mandate was Independence. Curiously, unfortunately and fatally for this country, the old gentleman was so manouvered that he was made to agree that in the circumstances of 1931, he was prepared to be content with and accept the recommendations by the Simon Commission. Gentlemen, who rescued the situation? Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State, and the Conservative Party which was in office, were very anxious to close down the R.T.C. A great point was that we had appointed a Tripartite Commission, representing the three Parties in the Parliament, the Liberal, Labour and Conservative Parties. Sir Samuel Hoare looked upon it as a point of honour that Parliament should stand by the recommendations of Simon Commission and should not proceed beyond what they had recommended. Mr. Gandhi's attitude was God-sent interference. The argument presented by Sir Samuel Hoare that if Mr. Gandhi is not the greatest-man in India, who was greater than him? Who is Sapru, who is Dr. Ambedkar and who is Jinnah? If Mr. Gandhi is content with Provincial Autonomy, the whole show should be closed down and the Conference shut up and the Parliament should be proud to frame a bill in terms of the Simon Commission. I was one of those who protested against that kind of thing. We said such a thing we can never have and we can never be a party to it, we raised so much disturbance that the British Cabinet was obliged to appoint a small Cabinet Committee in order to take evidence as to what the real sense of the Representatives of the R.T.C. was. Representations were invited in order to test the case and I was one of the patient men who were called upon to give evidence before the Cabinet Committee. It was presided over by the Lord Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Secretary were the other two members. I like to say and I am proud of the fact that I was one of those who told the Committee of the Cabinet that even the Depressed Classes will not tolerate the Parliament going back. Is

that an ignorable part that one can say I have played? Can it be said that the Scheduled Castes stood against responsibility at the centre? Let me tell you another instance. We have got innumerable Native States in this country, really 1/3 of our population lives under the rule of the Indian Princes, where there is no law, where everything is done at the personal authority and at personal whims of Princes. It was one of the decisions at the R.T.C. that the Indian States should be brought in as one of the elements in the All-India Federation. The great issue was whether the representations of the Indian States should be elected by the people themselves or whether the representatives of Indian States should be nominated by the Princes. It was one of the greatest issues over which a long controversy was going on for good many days. Probably, some of you may be under the impression that on an issue like this, so important, so vital, and I may say, so dear to Mr. Gandhi in his own terms, what was the attitude of Mr. Gandhi on this point? You will be surprised to hear that Mr. Gandhi bodily went over to the Princes nominating representatives of the States to the Conference. It was I alone, a single individual member of the R.T.C. who fought from the very beginning to the end over this issue (cheers). Even Rt. Hon'ble Shastri—I may tell you very funny stories about this old gentleman—(voices : we shall be glad to hear them). We were all very much opposed to Federation. It was one of the important points which I maintained from the beginning to the end that the politics of British India should not be mixed up with the politics of Indian States. British India has been separated from Indian India, particularly for over 150 years. No doubt, we have common destiny. Nonetheless, the fact remains that we in British India have travelled a different road. The Indian States have been going along a different road. We have got different sort of political education which they have not.

### **Problem of Indian States**

We have inherited different political traditions, and therefore I was all along insisting that British India should be permitted to travel on her road for political emancipation rather than have her destiny mixed up complicated by the introduction of Indian States. Rt. Hon'ble Shastri was one of our colleagues, or

“conspirators”. We were only three, Sir Chintamani, Shrinivas Shastri and myself who hugged only hearts with the British India. We had put him—(Shastri) up our Champion, being a glorious man who can command greater respect than a youngster one like me. A day before when he was to speak at the Plenary Session, I and Chintamani took him to lunch to know whether he was still sour. We found that he was. We walked from Jenny street to King James Palace when at 3 O’ clock Rt. Hon’ble was scheduled to speak. My friends ! What did he say ? He got up and said, “My dear Prime Minister, I am a Champion”. My heart and Sir Chintamani’s were strong enough, otherwise we should have died of heart failure. Mr. Shastri said that he was in favour of Federation and he was running after me telling me that I was a strong patriot and I was up-turning our apple cans, why don’t you keep quiet ? If Mr. Gandhi was sincere and if the cause of the people of Indian States was dearer to him, it was necessary that they should be emancipated from the tyranny and oppression of personal rule of the Princes. He was the first man who ought to have said that representation should be made by elections. Mr. Gandhi instead said, he was in favour of the Princes nominating their representatives. I may tell you one thing. There is one thing, I know that Mr. Gandhi knows very little of politics, (Laughter), I am not saying this in any carping spirit. I am not passing any judgement over him nor to receive cheap applause. But I know it is fact. What happened is this, I was present at the First R.T.C. Mr. Gandhi was not obvious I knew many things and snags, I knew what strategy and tactics different parties were adopting and I was very anxious that before Mr. Gandhi opened his mouth he should be warned about the land of lies, so that he may know what he should say and what he should not. At the second R.T.C. when Mr. Gandhi came I was also a member of Federal Structure Committee. Of course being a representative of the Scheduled Castes, I could not expect to have the first place by the side of the Lord Chancellor who presided (Laughter). Giving the order of names of persons, I sat somewhere in the last. Obviously, when Mr. Gandhi came on the first day, an agenda was placed before us for discussion. I was very much worried by the fact that having regard to Mr. Gandhi’s immaturity

in political knowledge and having regard to the fact that he was not present at the first R.T.C. I was thirsting to get the first chance to speak so that I could expose the whole business and let Mr. Gandhi know what the situation was.

Dr. Ambedkar narrated here how he spoke to the Lord Chancellor of his little temperature and managed to be allowed by the Lord Chancellor to speak first. The Lord Chancellor asked Mr. Gandhi "if he has any objection", Mr. Gandhi for generosity's sake said 'no'. I spoke for about an hour and a half, and it was probably one of the largest speeches that I had made in that country. After having made the speech and having tendered false excuse, I had to keep appearances and walked out of the Conference. I was the only man sitting in the whole of London waiting for the approach of evening in order to find out what Mr. Gandhi has spoken. Precisely at midnight, a report of the proceedings of the Conference reached my door. On opening the packet delivered to me by the postman I found the very first sentence of Mr. Gandhi's speech "My heart is with Dr. Ambedkar but my head is not with him." "Everything that I had suggested in my speech he counteracted. I was very furious and I really had temperature although in the morning I had none (Cries of shame shame). The next morning I went to the Conference. Mr. Gandhi and others were there. As the proceedings were open, I intervened and told the Lord Chancellor that before the proceedings commenced, I might be permitted to ask Mr. Gandhi certain questions. That is the cause of quarrel between myself and Mr. Gandhi. I asked Mr. Gandhi three questions. One of them was whether he had received any mandate from the Congress in support of this statements that he would welcome the representation of the Indian Princes by nomination and whether the matter was ever discussed by the Congress, whether the Congress had passed any resolutions and whether he was authorised to do anything. The other question asked him was related to the indirect elections : The Conservative Party was keen on having indirect elections to which we were all opposed. Mr. Gandhi had agreed in his speech that he saw no objection to indirect election. I asked Mr. Gandhi whether it was not a fact that this principle of indirect election was brought out in the Home Rule Bill prepared by Mrs. Annie Besant

and which was for that very reason-rejected by the Congress. The other question I forget at this distance of time. The Lord Chancellor turning to Mr. Gandhi asked him what answer he had to give. Mr. Gandhi refused to give any answer.

If the past has been sold, if India has been let down, it is not by me, it is not by Scheduled Castes, it is let down by Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Shastri and others.

### **Parallel from Ireland**

Proceeding of the situation in Ireland and how a last effort was made in 1916 towards uniting of the country, referring to the conversation between Mr. Redmond representing the Southern Irish Catholics and Sir Edward Carson, the Irish Leader, and the reply that Carson gave to Redmond when the latter asked the former to ask for any safeguards he liked : "Damn your safeguards. I do not want to be ruled by you. "I would like to tell the Hindu brethren that we in India have a thousand excuses to adopt the attitude of Mr. Carson. We were in justice bound to tell the Hindus, "Damn your safeguards, we do not want your rule" Did we say so ? Have we said it either ? No, we have not said it, although we have every right and every justification to say so. We have played our part in much more humbler manner. We have said, "if you want Home Rule which as the President of Hindu Maha-Sabha said would be nothing more than Home Rule." Still we are large hearted enough because, we realise the interest of the country as a whole. We have said if you want Home Rule, you have it; we will support you. There is only one small condition that we maintain and that conditions is : give us reasonable safeguards. That is an attitude which is much more nobler than the one adopted by Carson.

I would like to ask Mr. Shastri, Mr. Gandhi or any Congress politician whether this attitude is not patriotic, whether it is not noble-minded, or whether it is not generous. How much we are forgetting the Brahmanical rule under which we have been suffering for the last 2,000 years in the hope that if we are given safeguards, we may with the help of the other generous elements in the country be able to build up a system in which not only this

country will grow to its fullest manhood and nationhood. Can you expect greater generosity, greater and nobler spirit than the one we exhibited in all this political controversy. I therefore would like to tell our Hindu brethren that they should better revise their mentality and take into account the sacrifices we are prepared to make, the risks we are prepared to take. Let us come to terms and settle this question. I am quite willing, and prepared to agree. But unfortunately, I have not found adequate response from the Hindu Community. They had been poohpoohing every time we raised our heads.

I recalled how in 1932 when the question of the Scheduled Castes first came under the surface and was placed on the same plane as that of the Muslims and whenever the Franchise Committee went in order to investigate and ascertain the total number of Scheduled Castes people in the different Provinces, I found that all Hindus liberal, narrow minded, broad minded Hindu, all joining together in one conspiracy to tell the Committee that there was no such a thing as Depressed or Scheduled Classes in our country, (shame, shame). It was the same story in U.P., Bihar, Punjab and other places. Why ? The answer is very simple. Our Hindu brethren had come to realise that His Majesty's Government had decided to give separate representation to the Scheduled Classes in the Legislature and that the amount of representation would depend upon the Scheduled Castes, and as they could not defeat the project of His Majesty's Government, these subterranean methods were employed to defeat this project by saying that there were no Scheduled Castes at all. That was the sort of strategy, a mean strategy that was employed by the Hindus in 1932. Today I find the Hindus are employing another sort of strategy.

### **Gandhi-Wavell Correspondence**

I drew the attention of the gathering to the Gandhi-Wavell Correspondence particularising the one letter, dated 15th July 1944, which I said was very important and critical. The Viceroy in the letter had stated that while His Majesty's Government was prepared to grant India freedom at the end of the war. His Majesty's Government insist upon one thing viz. that the constitution shall come into existence which will have the consent of what you call

the important elements in the national life of India. The Viceroy also went further and particularised what important elements were there. Fortunately for us, and unfortunately for our Hindu brethren I mentioned the Scheduled Classes as an important element in the National Life of India (cheers).

### **Separate Representation for Scheduled Castes**

I also referred to the controversy in some sections of the Press that this statement of the Viceroy was new and that it was a departure from the proposals which were put forward on behalf of His Majesty's Government by Sir Strafford Cripps. That is the thing which annoyed me and I could not understand the false and malicious propaganda. I looked to the Hindu Newspapermen and Editors at last to keep themselves thoroughly informed of what they were talking about, know the fact and then launch upon any criticism they liked to make I need not say how strongly the Simon Commission emphasised the need for giving separate representation to the Scheduled Castes. Could anybody say that the Scheduled Castes were not a separate and an important element? What made His Majesty's Government give them separate representation at the R.T.C. They had not been a sub-head, or a branch, or a sub-community of the Hindus. Why should His Majesty's Government give them separate representation? They were given separate representation because they (His Majesty's Government) recognised the fact that they were a separate element. Then there was the J.P.C. Report. It is all old history. There has been a great deal after.

I would like to tell our Hindu brethren that it is much better that they drop this idea, and reconcile themselves to the fact that for good or bad, the Scheduled Castes are a separate element in the National life of India. I like to tell them in categorical terms and in a precise manner, make no mistake about it.

### **Jinnah-Gandhi Talks**

I have nothing else to say on the main problem. People have been asking me, why don't you say something about the talks that

are going on between Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Gandhi. I really do not know that anybody can say something about these talks. The talks are so prolonged that one is in a very difficult position to speculate what is going on between these two old and amiable gentlemen, or whether there is life in the talks. But, I would like to say one thing. I do not take these conversations and I will give you some reasons. The communal problem was not mostly a problem between the Hindus and the Muslims. The communal problem was a wider problem. It was a problem where not only Muslims but also Christians, Scheduled Classes and probably other minorities were involved. Consequently in a matter of such nature, the wisest, safest and the most honest course would be for all representatives of the different minorities to sit together, place their cards on the table, let each one know what the other one is asking and let all of them get in common consultation with just regards to their rights of others and give a decision which might be upheld by all. These sectional settlement and arrangements have a bad smell and a bad odour. They appear to me as deals between the two men who have decided to rob the third man and better their position. I do not know what Mr. Jinnah is demanding from Mr. Gandhi. I do not know what Mr. Gandhi is inclined to give to Mr. Jinnah. But I am very much perturbed that if Mr. Gandhi gives Mr. Jinnah something more than Mr. Jinnah is entitled to, that something more is going to someone out of my share. You can, therefore, well understand why I am so very concerned about their talks. It is the most important policy of Mr. Gandhi somehow to acquire strength for the Congress by getting the help of the largest party in this country and to intimidate the British Government and to force it to come to terms without being obliged to grant the demand of the Scheduled Castes.

Mr. Gandhi in all his public career ever since the communal problem has loomed large has done only one thing and that is to neglect the Scheduled Castes (cries of Shame, Shame) to by-pass them and to leave them where they are. In this connection I referred to my unpleasant experience of Mr. Gandhi's tactics in this matter. At the R. T. C. Mr. Gandhi tried to isolate me. I am not going to use the language of Hitler that he was encircling me (Laughter) which was a better word. Although he did isolate me

and cut off every kind of support which I made on behalf of the Scheduled Castes. For a long time he failed and ultimately he used a weapon which I am sorry to say, no honest men would have used. He went to the Muslims and told Mr. Jinnah that he was prepared to grant his 14 demands and bargained for one concession. Mr. Jinnah was told that he should not agree to "this dirty dog of Untouchables." I have got in my possession a document which was drawn up between the Muslim League and Mr. Gandhi at the R.T.C. I am not speaking without any authority. Fortunately for us the Muslims had a certain amount of sense of shame and remorse. I hope and trust that he (Mr. Gandhi) had not tried it on this occasion whom he is meeting with Mr. Jinnah.

You should realise what our object is. Our aim and aspiration is to be a governing community. Let all of you bear that in mind and let all of you write it on the walls of your houses so that every day you should remember that the aspirations which we cherish, and the cause, which we are having is not a cause of a petty character. It is the biggest cause that we ever cherished in our hearts. That is to see that we are recognised as the Governing Community. If you realise that, you will recognise what tremendous effort we have to make in order to carry it into effect. Mere words will not count, mere resolutions will not count. It may be that Mr. Gandhi will treat this as bluff and put it aside. We shall have to prove both Mr. Gandhi and His Majesty's Government, and I repeat, even to His Majesty's Government this time we mean business (Hear, hear). Absolute business, and we shall demand business from His Majesty's Government. We shall allow nobody to shilly-shally. When His Majesty's Government has given a word we shall expect His Majesty's Government to honour that word. There is no use depending on the good will of His Majesty's Government, nor is there any use in depending on the good ourselves. We must build up our own strength. We must remove other causes.

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### **Come Under One Banner**

I had been noticing great enthusiasm among the Scheduled Castes perhaps due to my arrival in the city. You could never gather strength by carrying on your local activities in a local manner and with local spirit. You must all learn to come under one banner, under one association and under a single political body, and thereby make the world that you were united under one Organisation known as the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation. I thanked the organisers for the honour done to me.

Some among the gathering insisted that my speech be translated into Tamil. They were assured that the Tamil translation of the speech would be printed and circulated among them free of charge.

The meeting terminated with cries of “Long Live Dr. Ambedkar.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>: The Mail, dated 26th September 1944.