

NEWSPAPER IN A MODERN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IS FUNDAMENTAL BASIS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT

Hon. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Member, Viceroy's Executive Council, performed on Wednesday afternoon the 3rd January 1945 the inauguration ceremony of the "People's Herald", the weekly organ of the All-India Scheduled Castes' Federation at 1-2 Sitaram Ghosh Steet, Calcutta, which is the office of the Federation. Hon. Mr. J. N. Mondal and Mr. R. L. Biswas on behalf of the provincial Federation welcomed Dr. Ambedkar.

The Hon'ble Mr. J. N. Mondal, President, Bengal Provincial Scheduled Castes Federation in welcoming Dr. Ambedkar said that his entire life was dedicated not only for the Scheduled Castes but also for other downtrodden masses of India. He was sure that the emancipation of the Scheduled Castes and of the downtrodden masses would come through the activities, leadership and guidance of Dr. Ambedkar.

Earlier, Mr. Rashik Lal Biswas in course of his speech said that the reason for the appearance of this weekly "People's Herald" at this juncture was obvious. In the new India which was to emerge shortly as the result of this war, the Hindu community would form the main ingredient, and of this Hindu element, the Scheduled Castes formed no inconsiderable part. These castes he added, had some peculiarities, traditions, rights and customs which marked them out from the other sections of the Hindus. The Scheduled Castes held a right to demand that these peculiarities be respected and that they should get their due position in the matter of education, appointments and all the benefits which any State could provide to its citizens. "This paper, therefore, comes into being as the All India organ of the Scheduled Castes which will voice their sentiments and legitimate aspirations, their grievances, and their demands, and also their views on the present day problems which India is facing and the composition of the future Indian State", he added.

In course of his speech, Dr. Ambedkar referred to the future of the Indian National Congress and stated that after Mahatma Gandhi's death it would be blown to pieces. Because, they could not conceive that a couple of hundreds of landlords and capitalists and a few misguided labour leaders could make a party. So far as fighting the British was concerned they could all unite but when the British would be going, when the vacuum would be created, when they would be seated in gaddi and would re-examine their social, and economic situation, would the landlords and peasants and capitalists and workers agree to live with each other in the Congress? The Congress would be blown to pieces the moment Swaraj was attained,

But affirmed he, the Scheduled Castes party would live for ever, it was an eternal party and they lived on certain fundamental principles. It was utter nonsense to say that they were fighting for loaves and fishes, they were fighting for the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity which were to abide in this country. Their principles transcended the limited cause which they had in view, namely the cause of the Scheduled Castes. Theirs was the principle that would regenerate not only India but the world as well.

"Personally I do not think" said he," there is any work in India which can be said to be nobler than the elevation of Scheduled Castes. I have many many friends in the Congress, who although dislike my politics, like me. They tell me that if I serve the wider cause of the country from within the Congress, I might one day become President of the Congress; Those appeals never allured me. I have always felt that as I have been born among these classes, it is my duty that I should do something for them first. I have also felt and quite convincingly I think, that if I or others who have the capacity to take up the cause of the Scheduled Castes leave the cause for other service and for other cause, no others will come to take up this cause and it will remain in the same rotten condition in which it has remained for the last two thousand years. But, that is only a limited view. I have struck to this cause as I regard it as a noble cause. What is the cause of the Hindus? What is the cause of the Congress? What is the talk of national freedom? So far as

the cause of Hindus is concerned it is the cause of the parasitic class, which has been living upon the blood, money and work of the toiling millions of this country. Would anybody, asked Dr. Ambedkar, who has understood political and moral philosophy and has come to believe that the salvation of world cannot be had unless the economic and social organisation of the world in every society is based upon liberty, equality and fraternity, can ever consent to give up the cause of Scheduled Castes, but serve the cause of Hindus ?

Then, take the cause of freedom of the country, proceeded Dr. Ambedkar. There is a world of difference between freedom by the powerful to oppress the weak and freedom of the weak to have an opportunity to grow fully to manhood. I would like to ask our Hindu patriots, who talk about this nonsense of freedom, etc., what use are they going to make of this freedom ? If the social freedom remains what it is, if the mentality is going to remain what it is, if the freedom that they will get from the Britishers is going to be used for suppressing the oppressed and suppressed classes, why should any one fight for it, I do not understand. If, on the other hand, you examine our cause, the principle we fight for, you will see it far transcends the limited class we have in view."

"A newspaper in a modern democratic system is the fundamental basis of good government. It is the one means of educating people. Therefore, we in India belonging to the Scheduled Castes whose misfortunes are the worst, for which there is no comparison and for which we are also anxious to get rid of, can never succeed unless the 8 crores of Untouchables, are politically educated."—

Continuing he said : "If this paper can devote some part of its space for reporting the conduct of our M. L. A.'s in the various legislature telling the people, why they have done this and why they have not done that, I have no hesitation in my mind that there will be a great reform in the conduct of our M. L. A.'s and the present chaos, which is enough to bring disgrace to our community, will stop. I, therefore, look upon this paper as a great instrument for purifying those who have gone wrong in their political life."

Dr. Ambedkar then referred to a Marathi paper that did his electioning campaign in 1937 and he advised the newspaper not only to educate their voters but also to see that men who were elected by the voters, stood by the voters and functioned their duties properly and did not 'misbehave.'

While presiding over the ceremony amidst a large gathering of Scheduled Castes leaders and workers, he said that, the occasion provided for him an opportunity to unburden his soul fully, because it was such an occasion which he had the best desire to attend. While wishing the successful advance of 'People's Herald' to the cause of Scheduled Castes people of India and speaking of the great role this paper is destined to play in the service of their people, he said that the importance of a political organ of this nature can never be underrated. He revealed on this occasion that perhaps it was not so much known that he himself edited a weekly organ at Bombay for a continuous period of more than 16 years. The tremendous influence that paper created was seen in the next elections to the Assembly from Bombay proper wherein in a general constituency he was elected with votes from all communities and defeated the rival Congress candidate with a large majority of votes. The political influence that paper created went much towards his success. So, he wished a speedy success of 'People's Herald' and hoped that every member of the Scheduled Castes would make this paper as his own.

Congratulating the editor of the newspaper, Mr. P. C. De for his taking up this responsible task of serving the cause of the Scheduled Castes, Dr. Ambedkar said that he had noticed that many people in the country looked upon the work of the alleviation of the Scheduled Castes as nothing but 'Scavenging' and a 'dirty' piece of work.

Criticising the Hindu Mahasabha, Dr. Ambedkar said that, he had no hesitation in saying that their cause was the cause of a 'parasitic' which had been living upon the laboured money and work of the toiling millions of this country. The salvation of the world could not be had unless the economic, and the social organisation of the world and of other societies were based upon the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.¹

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¹ : People's Herald, dated 10th January 1945.