

THERE SHOULD BE STATUTORY COMMISSION FOR ABORIGINAL TRIBES

“The Third Conference of All India Scheduled Castes Federation was held on 5th and 6th May 1945 in Mumbai. This conference was important to understand the problems of eight crore Untouchables when tremendous activities were taking place, nationally and internationally. About one thousand delegates from all over India attended this Conference. Of these about five hundred delegates, with more than fifty women were from Nagpur alone, while about two hundred were from Gujrat. The lodging arrangement of these delegates was done at the Municipal school at Parel.

This Conference was held at the spacious ground ‘Nare Park’ of Parel, of which nomenclature was done as ‘Sadhvi Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar’. The ground was packed to its capacity with the people. Even though a ticket of ‘one rupee’ per head was charged, there were more than fifty thousand people, of which more than five thousand were women, who attended the open session. That time, about 2 to 2.5 lakhs Untouchable families were residing in Mumbai and minimum one person from at least 50 percent of these families attended this conference, many of these were old aged and many with their infants.

Initially, this conference was planned only for ‘Mumbai Scheduled Castes Federation’ in the last week of April 1945. But when Mr. S. B. Jadhav Secretary, ‘Mumbai Scheduled Castes Federation’ went to Delhi to meet Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who advised to change the nature of this Conference, that instead of limited to Mumbai it should be on all India basis. All the twenty committee members exerted and the membership was raised from six thousand to twenty thousand within a short time.

The Conference began in the evening of Saturday 5th May 1945. A large dais was prepared at one corner of the ground. At the centre of the dais the large painting of ‘Gautam Buddha’ was erected with decorated arches, as the Untouchables were respecting ‘Buddha’ as the first attacker of social discrimination existing in this country.

The various reception songs were sung in different languages. Mr. P. N. Rajbhoj, General Secretary of the Federation, presented the working report of the previous year. Mr. S. B. Jadhav, General Secretary, Reception Committee, read out the messages sent for the Conference, which included the messages from Mr. C. D. Deshmukh ICS, Governor, Reserve Bank of India ; Dr. Alben Disoja, Mayor of Mumbai; Mr. Modak, City Engineer, Sir Rustam Masani, National Warfront; Mr. Madan, ICS ; Mr. Tauntan, ICS ; advisor Governor of Mumbai; Sir Kawsaji Jahangir, Mr. Bala Saheb Kher, Former Chief Secretary, Mumbai region ; Mr. Sekhiya, Former Minister of Assam; Mr. K. A. P. Vishwanathan of 'Madras Justice Party'; Mr. Prandatt of Kanpur ; Mr. Velankar of Mumbai Bar ; Mane and Mr. Manilal Parmar of Baroda etc.

On this occasion various conferences like 'Women Conference' under the chairpersonship of Mrs. Meenambai Shivraj, 'Mumbai Municipal Workers Federation', 'Student Federation' under the chairmanship of Mr. Pyarelal Talib, 'Samta Sainik Dal' Conference under the presidentship of Mr. J. H. Subbaya were organised. In these conferences various delegates expressed the nature of atrocities committed on them by the touchables.

The historical address by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was delivered on Sunday, 6th May 1945 for which about one and half lakh people were present.”¹

(Dr. B.R. Ambedkar prepared the speech for this Conference which was then published under the title the 'Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve it.' We are giving one para from the speech.—Editors.)

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his speech proposed the Scheme for upliftment of the Aboriginal Tribes is as follows :

“It will be obvious that my proposals do not cover the Aboriginal Tribes although they are larger in number than the Sikhs, Anglo Indians, Indian Christians and Parsees. I may

¹ : The text of the Speech is published in “Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches” Vol. 1, Pp. 355-379.

state the reasons why I have omitted them from my scheme. The Aboriginal Tribes have not as yet developed any political sense to make the best use of their political opportunities and they may easily become mere instruments in the hands either of a majority or a minority and thereby disturb the balance without doing any good to themselves. In the present stage of their development it seems to me that the proper thing to do for these backward communities is to establish a Statutory Commission to administer what are now called the 'excluded areas' on the same basis as was done in the case of the South African Constitution. Every Province in which these excluded areas are situated should be compelled to make an annual contribution of a prescribed amount for the administration of these areas." ¹

A. V. Thakkar, a prominent Congress leader from Bombay and the General Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh who was closely associated with Gandhiji, criticised the proposal for a communal settlement which was envisaged in the speech of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. His letter of criticism was published in the Times of India dated 17th may 1945.

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S REJOINDER TO

A. V. THAKKAR

To,

The Editor, "The Times of India"

Sir,

Will you kindly allow me space to reply to the letter of Mr. Thakkar which appears in today's issue of *The Times of India* in which he criticised my proposals for a communal settlement? Mr. Thakkar has taken up the cudgels on behalf of the Aboriginal Tribes and has accused me of having shown utter disregard to the claim of these tribes in putting forth my proposals. Mr. Thakkar has sought to give point to his criticism by calling me a "doughty champion of the oppressed and the depressed." Let me tell Mr. Thakkar that I have never claimed to be a universal leader of suffering humanity. The problem of the Untouchables is quite enough for my slender strength, and I should be very happy if I could successfully rescue the Untouchables from his clutches and those of Mr. Gandhi.

¹ : Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1., P. 375.

I do not say that other causes are not equally noble. But knowing that life is short, one can serve only one cause and I have never aspired to do more than serve the Untouchables, who, as Mr. Thakkar says, are despised even by the Aboriginal Tribes. What is regrettable is that Mr. Thakkar should have formulated his criticisms on the basis of such extracts from my speech as have appeared in the papers. If he had cared to read the full text of my speech, he would have realised that far from excluding the cause of the Aboriginal Tribes, I had made what, according to my belief, I thought was a far better and a far effective proposal for their protection. There is no space available for setting out in detail this part of my proposal, and Mr. Thakkar would do well to consider my proposal, for the Aboriginal Tribes before rushing into the press to accuse me of partiality and small-mindedness.

The reason why I did not include the Aboriginal Tribes in the scheme of distribution of seats in the Legislature is not the result of my antipathy to them, but is entirely due to my belief that these Aboriginal Tribes do not as yet possess the political capacity which is necessary to exercise political power for one's own good. I should like to ask Mr. Thakkar whether, during the course of his career as a professional social servant for these Aboriginal Tribes and others, he has done anything to raise their educational standard so that they may know their own conditions, have aspirations to rise to the level of the highest Hindu and be in a position to use political power as a means to that end? It is, I think, the saddest commentary on the work of Mr. Thakkar that during these 20 years he should not have been able to produce a single graduate from the Aboriginal Tribes.

Secondly, I would like Mr. Thakkar to tell me why is it that he has suddenly thought of enhancing the representation of the Aborigines in the Legislature? In the Government of India Act, 1935, the representation given to the Aboriginal Tribes is almost negligible as compared with their population. Did Mr. Thakkar ever raise his voice against this inequity perpetrated by the Government of India Act? What has Mr. Thakkar to say against the proposals of the Sapru Committee? Probably Mr. Thakkar has no such malice against them as he has against me.

And, thirdly, if Mr. Thakkar desires that the Aboriginal Tribes should get representation in proportion to their population, nay that they should even get weightage, he must know that this can happen only by scaling down the representation of the Muslims. Is Mr. Thakkar prepared to fight with the Muslims his battle for the Aborigines? Mr. Thakkar does not prove his love for the Untouchables by cutting into their representation. Mr. Thakkar is not proving a hero by raising his sword against a weak community like the Untouchables which has not received in the past even its fare share of representation. He would prove himself a lover of the Aborigines and their hero if he fought to get something out of the weightage enjoyed by the Muslims.”¹

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Bombay, 17th May 1945.

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¹: The Times of India, dated 18th May 1945.