

*ON THE BOMBAY UNIVERSITY ACT AMENDMENT BILL: 1

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Mr. President, I have listened with great interest to the speech which was delivered by my honourable friend the member for the University of Bombay. He has so exhaustively covered the subject in his speech which it took him an hour and twenty minutes to deliver that I fear very little is left for me to say. However, I think it fortunate that there is a point of view which has not been so far presented before this House either by my honourable friend the representative of the University or by my honourable friend Prof. Hamill who was specially called in to advise us on this important bill which we are discussing to-day. Sir, my honourable friend Mr. Munshi devoted a considerable part of his speech to the organization of the University of Bombay. He talked with a great deal of intimacy as regards the relations of the syndicate, the senate and the academic council as laid down in the Bill. I have not the good fortune to be a member of the University. I cannot therefore say with the same authority as to whether the provisions that have been incorporated in this particular bill will produce the results which we all desire that it should produce. But, Sir, I must say with due respect to my honourable friend the member for the University that even if we succeed in establishing the relations between the three bodies in the way in which my honourable friend wants that they should be, I am afraid that in the end we will be getting only the shadow but not the substance. Sir, the bill is primarily intended, if I understand the Honourable Minister for Education correctly, to organize the University of Bombay into a better teaching university. That I consider to be one of the principal objects of this Bill. Now, Sir, when I come to analyse the provisions that are incorporated in this bill must say that I felt that in this particular matter we are sure to be disappointed. One of the greatest defects from which this University has suffered ever since it was established was that it was primarily constituted as an examining body.

Sir, it must be realised that the University cannot succeed in promoting research or in promoting higher education, if it makes the examination

*B.L.C. Debates, Vol. XX, pp. 825-33, dated 27th July 1927.

system the be-all and end all of its existence. This fact was recognised by the University Commission of 1902 and the bill which followed the report of that Commission recognised that the statute which brought the University into being must be altered so as to enable the University directly to undertake teaching besides its usual task of examining the scholars appearing at its examinations. Now, Sir, when that particular Act of 1904 came into operation, the University, of course, was blocked in its path of undertaking higher education by the existence of a certain number of colleges which were already existing at that time. Obviously, therefore, Sir the only thing that the University could do was to appropriate to itself the field of what is called post-graduate work, and since 1912 the University of Bombay has been following along that line and has established what is called a School of Sociology and Economics to deal particularly with those students who care to take up post-graduate work in that department. I understand, Sir, that the University is also desirous of establishing certain other post-graduate faculties in order to carry out the mission which has been entrusted to it by the Act of 1904. With due respect to those who have framed this bill. I must say, Sir, that they have not paid any attention to the results of this policy of bifurcation that has been adopted by the University in carrying on its function as a teaching university. Sir, I think my honourable friend Prof. Hamill and my honourable friend Mr. Munshi will bear me out when I say that this bifurcation was brought into being by the Act of 1904, by which the University has appropriated to itself the post-graduate work and has relegated to the colleges the under-graduate work has brought about a certain amount of rivalry—I may almost say a certain degree of enmity—between the two institutions. Although my experience of this is limited, yet I was a Professor for sometime in one of the colleges, and even though I am no longer a Professor, I still have the chance of meeting my old colleagues and they tell me that the relations between the University Professors and the Professors of the colleges are not as cordial as they ought to be. Surely, Sir, that must be so. When, for instance, a University sets up itself as something higher, as something superior to the other colleges which are already carrying along similar education in their own way, one is apt to feel jealous of the other. Now, I submit, Sir, where a college professoriate is not on amicable terms with the professoriate established by the University, I think no research, no promotion of knowledge, can be carried on with any benefit either to the colleges or to the University, or to the public at large.

Secondly, I submit, Sir, that unless the University undertakes undergraduate teaching, any amount of super-imposition of post-graduate work will not be of any avail whatsoever. Sir, what is the position of the different colleges that we have to take ? Apart from the Government colleges, I beg to submit, Sir, that most of the colleges are established as a result of private effort, and I do not mean any disrespect to those who are serving upon these colleges, when I take the liberty of stating that I do not think

that the colleges are able to cope satisfactorily with the training of the under-graduates. First of all they are inadequately staffed. Take, for instance the two subjects which were my special subjects, namely, history and political economy. I find that a college has generally two professors on its staff to deal with these subjects. Now, I think it would be absurd to believe that two professors in a college can adequately teach such a vast subjects as political economy or history. The result is and I think my honourable friend Prof. Hamill will bear me out when I say that every professor is obliged to lecture for something like thirteen hours in a week. I say that a professor who is made to work in that galley slave fashion can never be a teacher in the real sense of the word. He can only be a hack doing a task with the help of ready-made notes. We can expect no originality from him and he can give no inspiration to those who may have the misfortune to listen to him. The whole study is bound to be a merely mechanical process. Not only are the colleges under-staffed but they are generally staffed by men not because they have more to give to the colleges but because they are willing to accept less. With the help of the army of under-graduates, any adventurer can form a college and get the control of under-graduate to teaching. I say, Sir, if your under-graduate work is as bad as I have described it to be, a university which merely super-imposes postgraduate to work upon it cannot succeed in promoting real knowledge or real research. Thirdly, the present system involves absolute waste, and I think that by a better organization of the University and the colleges this waste could be easily avoided. Take, for instance, the question of teaching of political economy in the city of Bombay itself. There are, Sir, to my knowledge somewhere about six professors at the Sydenham College of Commerce who deal particularly with the subjects of history and political economy and commercial geography. There are two professors at the Wilson College who are also dealing with the same subjects. There are two at the Elphinstone ; there are two at the St. Xavier's. Altogether, Sir, in a city like Bombay we have, so to say, a faculty engaged in the teaching of history and political economy which is composed of twelve teachers. Surely, Sir, if these four colleges, with their twelve professors on them, could be organized in such a fashion that the lecturing system was pooled and the students in the different colleges were allowed to listen and attend to the lectures to be delivered in any one particular college, the professors who are lecturing would be easily released to do some other kind of special work. If that is done, I am absolutely certain that these twelve gentlemen, who are now lecturing on the same subjects in the different colleges, not only will be able to manage the under-graduate teaching, but also can manage the post-graduate teaching as well. So that the expenses which we now have to incur on the extension of the School of Sociology and Economics will certainly be saved for better utilisation on other subjects. Now, Sir, not only does this waste take place with regard to the post-graduate teaching of history and political economy; but I submit,

Sir, that this waste will take place with regard to any other subject that the University might appropriate to itself as a subject for post-graduate research, for the simple reason that our colleges are, so to say, pocket universities in themselves. Each college is teaching almost every conceivable subject, and it has upon its collegiate staff, professors who teach all subjects which are laid down for the University examinations. That being so if the University establishes separate professors for post-graduate work there is bound to be duplication and waste in addition to the several disadvantages which I have mentioned in the earlier part of my speech. I therefore submit, Sir, that if the object of the bill is to promote higher education and research, the best method would be not to separate the colleges from the University as has been done now but to make a synthesis in which the University and the colleges would be partners on terms of equality and would be participating in promoting together, both the undergraduate and the post-graduate studies. Sir, what I have stated I must say is really not mine. It is what was recommended by the Sadler Commission which analysed a similar problem which faced the University of Calcutta. There is no doubt about it that the Sadler Commission was one of the most expert Commissions that could possibly be had in this country. I do not personally understand how, for instance, this Government can strut about with a report brought about by men who were absolutely inexperienced in their job and pit it against the elaborate and considered judgment of experts who sat upon the Sadler Commission.

I have read with great care the report prepared by the University Committee for the reorganisation of the University of Bombay. But I have found nothing in it which can lead me to alter my opinion* that the recommendations of the Sadler Commission will be far more effective and beneficial than the recommendations of the Bombay University Committee. I, therefore, think that it would be far better if my honourable friend the Minister for Education could still in some way, either by introducing provisions in this bill itself or by giving powers to the Senate in the matter of making regulations, allow the University to localise teaching by giving greater control over colleges which may be called "constituent colleges" situated in geographically compact centres. The committee has, I think, admitted that Poona is a place which is ripe for establishing a separate university. There is no doubt that Bombay itself is ripe to have a separate university for itself and I think that if the colleges located in these two centres were separated and grouped into a university, we would be solving the problem of the promotion of higher education and research. As regards mofussil colleges which are scattered about in the Presidency we can very easily deal with them by adopting the suggestion of the Sadler Commission which recommended the establishment of a "Mofussil Board." I say that

*Dr. Ambedkar's written evidence to the Bombay University Reforms Committee is printed as Appendix III.

the scheme suggested by the Sadler Commission is a hundred times better than the scheme recommended by this Reforms Committee, namely, the appointment of a Rector. This is all, Sir, that I have to say as regards the organisation of the University itself.

Now, I wish to turn to the question of the composition of the Senate. A great deal of heat was generated yesterday by the speech of my honourable friend Mr. Jadhav when he said that the statement of objects and reasons does, not recognise/the necessity of the representation of backward communities on the Senate of the University of Bombay. I was somewhat surprised to see that my honourable friend, the member for the Bombay University, flared up at once. But I should like to point out, Sir, that we always kick the ladder by which we rise, and that my honourable friend, the member for the University, who has violently disclaimed communalism in himself is no an exception. Sir, I should like to remind him that he himself had issued a manifesto to the graduates of the University to support him on the ground of Gujarat was for Gujaratis. I would like to ask him now if that is not communalism, what is communalism? I should like him to answer that

Mr. K. M. Munshi: I am glad to say, Sir, that that statement is absolutely incorrect.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: It is not absolutely incorrect. I myself have read your manifesto. However, politicians are men with very short memories.

What I want to state on the floor of this House is this, that I do not think that the Hindus and Mahomedans, constituted as they are, can honestly say that they are non-communal in their attitude towards each other. No member in this House can say that he is non-communal in his attitude. I challenge any honourable member to deny it

Rao Bahadur R. R. Kale: I challenge that statement.

Honourable Members: We challenge that statement too.

The Honourable the President: Order, order. No conversation across the table, please.

Rao Bahadur R. R. Kale: But the honourable member Dr. Ambedkar said that he would challenge any honourable member to deny his statement.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: There can be no gainsaying about this, that every Hindu and every Mahomedan is born in a certain caste or a community. There is no gainsaying that we are brought up and bred up in a communal environment. We share the aspirations and the ambitions of that community; we feel the disabilities of that community and consequently, there can be no doubt in my mind that every member in this House as well as outside is bound to look at every question consciously or unconsciously from a communal point of view.

Honourable Members: No, no.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: I refuse to believe in the "Noes" absolutely; I call it hypocrisy—It is absolutely hypocrisy to shout "No", Sir. I myself look at every question that comes up before this House—I honestly

admit—from a communal point of view and I ask myself whether it would be good for the depressed classes or not.

Mr. K. F. Nariman: Sorry.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Those who say “sorry” are themselves not free from communalism. It is very easy to talk about non-communalism, because it is only talk. We know, Sir, that we are so minded that we cannot, for instance, associate with other communities on terms of equality, that whenever we want to marry our daughters we begin to ask whether the bridegroom to be is a man Of our own caste or not (Laughter), when we want to invite guests for dinner we commence to enquire whether they are members of our own community.

Mr. B. G. Pahalajani: I challenge that.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: It is sheer hypocrisy to say that we do not do these things. I wish the honourable members to realise that this is a defect for which I do not accuse any one community. I say, Sir, that it is a blemish from which we all suffer. That being so, it ought to be recognised that no one community, however intellectually advanced it may be, can be the guardians of other communities. This has been recognised even by the legislators who framed the Reforms Act. If that was not so, we would not see in this Council separate representation for Mahomedans, separate representation for backward classes and separate representation for the depressed classes. It is because we are constitutionally unable to take a larger view of the situation and in order that the operative forces of communalism may be checked, that this counter-check has been provided and I think very wisely provided by these legislators. I should like to be honest, Sir, and I do hope honourable members will be honest on this point. There is no use talking one thing and doing another. That is the reason, I submit, why there is a necessity for the representation of communities, which are not intellectually advanced, on the Senate of the Bombay University. I submit Sir, that I do not wish to accuse the Senate of any conscious bias at all, yet I say that the policy of the Bombay University hitherto has not been very encouraging to the backward or the depressed classes. I will cite only one instance. Take the instance of the system of education that has been adopted by the University. There is no doubt about it in my mind and I do not think that those who represent the University will deny the fact, that our system of examination is the severest possible that exists in India to-day. This is no doubt justified by certain educationists in India who believe that the raising of the standard of examination is equivalent to the raising of the standard of education. I beg respectfully to differ from them. Examination is something quite different from education, but in the name of raising the standard of education, they are making the examinations so impossible and so severe that the backward communities which have hitherto not had the chance of entering the portals of the University are absolutely kept out. But I do not wish to speak of that; because that system applies to all communities alike.

But, Sir, just think of it. Has the University ever considered the effect of simultaneous examinations on the progress of education of the backward communities? I do not understand what virtue there is in demanding that a particular candidate who appears at an examination shall pass in all the papers at one shot. It may be a matter of indifference, for instance, for students whose parents are rich enough, who can spare time to attend the colleges during the day time and who can devote their whole time to education. But what about the poor, the poverty-stricken parent, who requires his son to earn in the day time to add to the family earnings in order to make both ends meet? What about the boy who finds very little during the 12 hours of the day to devote to university education? Surely, if the University was mindful of the economic condition of the backward communities, it certainly would not have persisted in a system of simultaneous examinations which in my opinion is absolutely unjustifiable and absurd. I will give you another instance which comes to my mind just now, because my honourable friend Mr. Munshi says that the University has been doing everything without showing any preference of any kind to anybody. One of my friends, who has been nominated to the University Senate, told me the other day he twice moved a resolution in the Senate that candidates belonging to the depressed classes who appear at University examinations should be shown some concession in the matter of fees. I understand from him that the proposition was twice turned down by the Senate.

An Honourable Member: There are poor people in all communities.

The Honourable the President: The honourable member should proceed without minding interruptions.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: It has been everywhere recognised, even by the Government, that there are communities which are economically poor and which do require certain special concessions from the Government, in order that they may come on the same level on which the other communities are. If this wise principle cannot be appreciated and understood by the Senate, then I submit such a Senate can never be the guardian of the interests of the backward classes at all.

My honourable friend Professor Hamill made certain remarks in the course of his speech, and I think it is necessary that I should deal with him, although I do not wish to take much of the time of the House. He said that the depressed classes and the backward classes could certainly get nomination on the Senate, if they can help the efficiency of the University. I think that was the line of argument that he adopted, that if the members of the depressed classes were experts in educational matters, they should certainly have a seat on the Senate of the University of Bombay. Now, I should like to say that my honourable friend Professor Hamill absolutely forgets, when he makes that statement, the true function of the Senate. The Senate is not an executive body of the University. No member from the backward classes has asked for any special representation on the

Syndicate or on the Academic Council. I recognise, and I realise fully as well as my honourable friend Professor Hamill does, that these two bodies are no doubt bodies which are to be manned by experts, who will run the show of the University. But I have to remind him that the Senate is entirely intended to be a legislative body, a body which has to put forth the needs of the backward communities and to suggest the facilities that are necessary for meeting them. The Senate in my opinion, corresponds exactly to our Legislative Council, and we have in this Legislative Council members from the depressed classes, who are appointed not because they desire to displace any honourable members who are sitting here on the Government side but their only business here is to point out to the Government what are the needs of the communities which are suffering under disabilities. That is all we are asking, and I think when my honourable friend makes the point he absolutely forgets what the Senate is intended to be.

Now, Sir, before I close, I wish to state one thing most emphatically, Sir, there is a demand from honourable members belonging to the Swaraj party that we must have provincial autonomy. Sir, it is a demand which is a welcome demand. But, Sir, I beg to submit that when three-fourths of the population is drenched in ignorance and does not know its rights and responsibilities there can be no hope of autonomy. If we do get self-government notwithstanding the fact that three-fourths of the population is drenched in ignorance, our representative system will be a sham, and there would be a rule of wealth against poverty, of power against weakness. That is really what it will be. I, therefore, say, Sir, that if we desire to have provincial autonomy, we must ensure two things. One thing is that every access must be given to every grade of modern education to the communities which are educationally backward, in order that they may realise their rights and liabilities of citizenship, and secondly, in order that every access may be given to these communities, it is absolutely necessary, under the present circumstances, that special representation should be provided for them.

Before I sit down, Sir, I do wish one matter cleared up. You, Sir, have given us a ruling yesterday about which I am not quite clear. I understand, Sir, from your ruling yesterday that the principle of communal representation has been ruled out. Now, by that I understand that the principle of communal representation in the ordinary sense of that word, namely, that the voters of a particular communities are to be grouped together to elect a member from that community is ruled out. That is my interpretation of your ruling. So that, we are debarred now from raising the question of communal representation on the various bodies of the University in that sense of the term. But I do not think that your ruling goes so far as to say that we shall have no say in the matter as to how the 40 seats which are reserved for nomination shall be distributed. I submit that that particular matter is still open for the honourable members of this House to discuss in the select committee or at the second reading. I should like to ask, therefore, my honourable friend the Minister of Education that in his concluding

remarks he should make his position clear is regards that point; because, I want to say most emphatically that unless the representation to these backward communities is provided for on the Senate, the bill would be of no value to us whatsoever, and I for one will vote against it.

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