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## \*ON THE HEREDITARY OFFICES ACT AMENDMENT BILL: 1

*Dr. B. R. Ambedkar:* Sir, I rise to move that Bill No. XII of 1928 (A Bill further to amend the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act, 1874) be read for the first time. This bill is not concerned with the Patel or the Kulkarni. The hereditary officers referred to in this bill are known under the Hereditary Offices Act as the inferior officers. At the present moment, such inferior hereditary officers cover the Mahars in the Deccan, the Vethias or the Varthanias in Gujarat, the Ramoshis or the Juglias and the Holiyas in Karnatak. A large part of these inferior holders are Mahars, and in the course of the remarks that I propose to offer this House, I shall largely speak of the Mahars as representative of the inferior officers.

Sir, in order to understand the provisions of this bill, I think it is very necessary that the House should know the wrongs and the grievances which have led me to bring forth this Bill. Now, the wrongs are very many, but I do not wish to spend the time of this House in giving a lucid description of what actually takes place. I will speak in general of the system and the nature of that oppressive system. First, Sir, it will be remembered that these inferior holders of watan are Government servants according to the Watan Act. But, Sir, the duties of these Government servants are not defined anywhere. It is not known, in fact nobody as a matter of fact can say, to what particular department these watandar Mahars belong. As a matter of fact, every department claims their services. They can be called upon to render service to the Irrigation Department; they can be called upon to render service to the Revenue Department; they can be called upon to render service to the Vaccination Department; they can be called upon to render service to the Education Department; they can be called upon to render service to the Local Self-government Department, and I think they can also be called upon to render service to the Police Department. They can also be called upon to render service even to the Excise Department. That I submit is an extraordinary system. Every Government servant knows and knows definitely to which department he belongs and the services that are expected of him. No department I understand employs

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\*B.L.C. Debates, Vol. XXIII, pp. 708-21, dated 3rd August 1928.

any individual as servant who can be called upon as the maid of all work but Mahars for all practical purposes are and are treated as maid of all work of all the Government departments. Further he may be called upon to render service at any hour of day or night. Every other Government servant, however humble his position between particular hours ; every peon in the Collector's office or any other office knows that he has to go to his duties at definite hours and return at definite hours. But that is never the case with these Mahars. They can be called upon to render service not only during the day not even between sunset and sunrise but they can be called upon to render service at night. If an officer calls upon the Mahar to render service during night, whether it is raining or there is lightning or any other difficulty, he dare not refuse to do so.

The third grievance is this. In the case of Mahars the officiator is the person whose name is entered in what is called the service register and he is not the only one person who is liable to render service to Government, but his whole family is liable to render service to Government. In case the officiator whose name is entered and who is liable to render service has gone out on service, if the officiator is absent on any Government duty and if there is no one to answer the call, his father may be called upon to render service. If his father is absent his grandfather may be called upon to render service but the names of the father and grandfather may not appear in the register. Not only the male member but, I submit that in their absence the female members also are impressed into Government service. If the officiator is absent his wife may be called upon ; if the wife is absent his mother may be called upon and if the mother is absent the young female members of the family are required to render service in the absence of the officiator. Imagine for one moment a situation like this; a young female Mahar of 18 years called upon by a police officer of 18 years to carry his bigar with him for a distance of five or six miles ! ! Imagine the dangers to which she is exposed under a situation like this ! ! Sir, there is no escape out of the system as it exists today. Under the system as it operates not only the officiator is obliged to render service but the whole family is obliged to render the service. I submit that this is a most oppressive system not obtainable in any other department of Government service.

Coming to the question of remuneration, what is the remuneration that these poor people get for their hard and arduous labour that they do for all the 24 hours ? This House will be surprised if I tell them that the Government practically pays nothing from their treasury directly for the services it exacts from these people. I have before me the figures given by the Government themselves. In Thana district the amount paid by Government directly to the Mahar officiator comes to Rs. 1-8-0 per month; the amount paid in the Ahmednagar district comes to Rs. 1-8-0 per month ; the amount paid in East Khandesh comes to Rs. 1-12-0 per month ; the amount paid in West Khandesh comes to 9 as. 4 pies per month ; in the Nasik district the amount comes to Re. 0-13-4 per month ; the amount paid in the Poona

district is Rs. 1-1-4 per month ; the amount paid in the Satara district comes to Re. 0-2-1 ; the amount paid in a Sholapur district comes to Re. 0-3-3 per month; and in the Bombay surburban district the amount varies between Rs. 9-8-0 and 5 as. per month. There is no salary paid by Government from their treasury in Belgaum. The figures for Ratnagiri and Kolaba are not given by Government in answer to the question put in March session of 1925. This House can see what a paltry pittance the Government pays for the services they exact from them. There is practically no remuneration whatsoever which Government gives to these poor Mahars for the services it exacts from them. The sources of income for these people, the watandar Mahars, are two. The first source is the inam land and the second source is what is called the baluta or the collection of grain made by the watandar Mahars from the villagers. These inam lands were not given by British Government but they were given to these Mahars by the ancient Emperors of this country. The Mahar watan is the most ancient watan that we have in this country and all the lands have been given to them in ancient times. I do not know, at least I am not aware, that the British Government has ever increased the extent of land that has been once given to these people in ancient times. Prices have increased, the standard of living has gone up and every Government servant has been given an increase—I do not know how many times—since the establishment of British Government. But the British Government has never paid a moment's attention to the remuneration of these people. They have left these poor people with such land as the ancient Rajas were pleased to give them. The Mahar population has increased enormously and the land assigned to the Mahars is divided and sub-divided to such an extent that the income these people get from the inam lands is absolutely not worthy of being taken into consideration. The main part of the remuneration which these people get comes largely from the second source, namely, the baluta. Now, Sir, the peculiarity of this mode of payment is really worthy of notice by this honourable House. Again I will repeat that the Mahars are Government servants ; but the Government does not take upon itself the responsibility of paying the remuneration to the person whom the Government employs. In every other case Government takes upon itself the responsibility of paying the peon, the clerk, the officer and employers but in the case of Mahars, so far as baluta is concerned, there is no way by which Government takes upon itself the responsibility that the remuneration shall be paid to them. The reason is that under the Watan Act with regard to the payment of the baluta. the Mahar is left entirely to the sweet will of the ryots. If the ryots are pleased to pay a Mahar he can get it. If the ryots are not pleased to pay the Mahars at the end of 12 months after exacting service from him, the Mahar will find that he has rendered service for nothing.

That, I submit, Sir, is an atrocious system, a system which has no justice in it whatsoever. If the Government desires that these people should work

for them, it is absolutely necessary that the Government should take upon its shoulders the responsibility of paying these Mahars; they ought not vicariously to throw off this burden in a most careless way upon a third party, namely the ryot, but that is exactly what is happening under the present system.

Then, Sir, is there any security that the watan will be continued? Is there any security that the Mahar watan will not be suspended or resumed? Sir, there is no guarantee whatsoever. The reason is obvious and very simple. In every case of course, the tenure of service of a subordinate depends entirely upon the goodwill of the immediate officers under whom he works. Here, Sir, the patil, the kulkarni and the mamlatdar are the immediate officers under whom the Mahar has to work. The Mahar, cannot expect that his watan will be safe unless, besides rendering services to the Government—I mean the legitimate services which are expected of him as a Government servant—he also renders willingly, and without remuneration, private services to his immediate superiors, namely the patil, the kulkarni and the mamlatdar. Unless he ingratiates himself into their favours—and those favours are not easily given; they are earned at the cost of services rendered without remuneration—there is no security that the patil or the kulkarni will not make a report that the Mahar is not discharging his duty—an absolutely false and concocted report. There have been innumerable cases where such reports have been made by patils and kulkarnis and acted upon by the mamlatdar and the Mahars have had their watans suspended or resumed. In my own experience, which I admit does not extend over a very large number of years, I have come across innumerable cases where Mahar watans have been suspended or resumed. I have myself tried my level best to get the superior officers, the District Deputy Collectors, the Assistant Collectors, the Collectors and even the Commissioners to reverse the orders passed by the mamlatdars, but, Sir, I have never succeeded in any single case. The result is that the subordinate officers are always certain that their decision, whether it is right or wrong, whether it is founded on legitimate grounds or not, whether, it is based on concocted evidence or not, will be upheld by their superiors. Grounded in that feeling of security there is no limit to the oppression or tyranny these people exercise over these unfortunate class of people. That, I submit, is another evil which is inherent in this system.

Now, Sir, if the evils of the system affected only the officiating Mahars and did not affect the rest of the depressed class community, probably I would not have made so much of the matter. The trouble is that the evils of this system are so wide in their scope and extent, so all-pervading, that they affect not merely the officiating class of Mahar but they affect the whole population of the depressed classes. Sir, the House will not probably believe it when I say that as a result of the watan system it is not open to the Mahar population in villages to claim the benefit of Dr. Paranjpye's circular that their children should be made to sit along with the children

of the other classes ; although this Council has passed a resolution that the depressed classes should be allowed the use of dharamshalas and all public places, it is not open to the depressed classes to ask for these privileges that this Council has been pleased to give them. This Council, as I say, will not believe in this, that the watan system is responsible for a situation like this ; but, Sir, that is the only explanation that I can offer why the Mahar population is not able to progress. The reason is simple. Whenever, for instance, any Mahar community in any particular village desires to make progress in any particular direction and that direction is not liked by the ryot, the one immediate step that the ryot takes is to stop the baluta and to proclaim a social boycott. I have known of a case where the villagers have stopped the baluta and declared a social boycott because the relative of a certain Mahar went into the village with socks and boots, an act which the villagers did not like. I have known of a case where the villagers have stopped the baluta and declared a social boycott against the Mahar population because one Mahar in the village had the daring to put tiles on his house. Sir, such a system which enslaves the whole population, which smothers the spirit of progress, which blocks the way for furtherance, is a system which, I think, no right-minded person, no man with any feelings, will sustain or will justify. Sir, no wonder that the whole of the Mahar population is absolutely tired of this watan system. My honourable friend the Revenue Member will take it from me that the whole of the Mahar population—I say that without fear of challenge—is absolutely tired of the system and is desirous of getting rid of it as soon as possibly can. With these few preliminary remarks I will now proceed to explain the provisions of the bill which is before this House today.

Now, Sir, for the consideration of my bill it is necessary to bear in mind that I propose to make two divisions of the watandar Mahar population. The first division is one which is absolutely tired of and would have nothing to do with the watan at all, a class which would like to be immediately relieved of the obligation to serve. Their only condition is that if they choose to give up their watan, that is to say their right to serve hereditary, they should not be deprived of the lands which they have in their possession. In order to carry out that object I have provided by clause 4 to add a proviso to section 15(1) of the existing Watan Act. By that proviso I propose that if a representative body of watandar Mahars or a majority of them represent to the Collector in writing that they do not want to serve and that they are willing to pay the full rate of assessment on their lands, the Collector should relieve them of their obligation to serve. That is the meaning of the proviso. Now, the first thing I should like to point out is that the principle of this proviso is not new. The principle enacted in this proviso is a very old principle, a principle with which the Government is familiar and a principle which Government have accepted and acted upon on various occasions. Sir, this House or at least the majority of honourable members in this House will know that before the introduction

of British Government in this country we had in the villages twelve different village servants known as Balutedars. When the British Government began the administration of this country they classified these 12 officers into three groups : Those whose services were necessary for the purpose of Government, those whose services were necessary only for the purposes of ryot and those whose services were necessary for both. In the case of those village servants whose services were only necessary for the purpose of the ryot, Government by what are known as the Gordon settlements, commuted their watans, that is to say they allowed them to retain full possession of the lands on their consenting to pay full revenue assessment. Sir, the proviso of my bill is nothing else than the principle embodied in the Gordon settlement.

The second example that I would like to give in support of my proposition that the principle of the bill is not new is that I find in 1923 Government issued a resolution with respect to the Shetsanadi watans. In that resolution No. 9319, dated the 13th October, Government have laid down that these Shetsanadi watandars who do not render services may be relieved of their obligations to serve provided they are willing to pay full revenue assessment.

Then, Sir, I should like to remind the House of the more recent example, I mean the Joshi Bill. When the Joshi Bill came up for discussion on the floor of this House it was pointed out that those Joshis who do not want to serve should be allowed to keep their land. Government, on that occasion, introduced of their own accord, I understand, a proviso in the bill allowing the village Joshis to retain the land provided they were willing to pay full revenue assessment. The proviso of my bill is not something different from the proviso introduced in the Joshi Bill.

Then, Sir, I should like to argue this point also from the legal point of view. Suppose, now, there was not this proviso and supposing a watandar Mahar wanted to be relieved of his obligation to serve and suppose, further, that Government wanted to exercise their powers of resumption of the watan, what would Government resume ? I submit, Sir, that Government would be entitled to resume only the land revenue and nothing more. The High Court of Bombay in a series of decisions which it has given has held that in the case of inam in this Presidency there is always the presumption that the grant is of land-revenue only and not of the land. That has been the view of the Bombay High Court. That being so, I submit, Sir, that ordinarily and without the enactment of this proviso the utmost that Government can do in the case of Mahars who do not wish to render services would be to ask for full revenue assessment on their lands because the inam merely consists in nothing else than freedom from land revenue. The grant does not include the land. I am aware. ....

*Sardar G. N. Mujumdar:* Even in the case of Mahars ?

*Dr. B. R. Ambedkar:* Yes, even in the case of Mahars.

I am aware, Sir, that there are two decisions of the Privy Council wherein

Their Lordships have stated that there is no justification for starting with a presumption of this sort. But then, Sir, there is also a decision of the Bombay High Court after those judgments were delivered. I refer to 22 Bombay Law Reporter, page 275 where the High Court has held, even after the decision of the Privy Council that that presumption holds good and the reason they have given is very important. That reason is this. Government in 1854 after the passing of the Act of 1852 for inquiring into the titles of revenue free estates passed a resolution defining the meaning of the word "resumption". I refer to resolution No. 2449 of the year 1854. The resolution expressly states that resumption means not taking away the land but the levying of full revenue assessment. The Bombay High Court says that having regard to that resolution its ruling that in the case of crown grant the resumption is of land revenue and not of land will not be unjustifiable. I, therefore, submit, Sir, that even on legal grounds what Government can resume in the case of Mahar watans would be land revenue only and not land.

The Government may perhaps object to this proviso on the financial grounds. Government have stated in the course of the debate which has preceded this bill that if watans were commuted, that is to say, if the Mahars were allowed to retain their watan lands on the payment of the land revenue, Government in that case would be obliged to employ a paid agency and that the cost of remunerating this paid agency would be an additional burden on their treasury. Now, Sir, my first submission is this: I do not think there would be any additional burden on the treasury, and for these reasons. Even if Mahar watans are commuted and even if Mahars are liberated from rendering services that they render and even if Government employ a paid agency the Government will have at its disposal a fund from which they would be in a position to pay the new agency employed. First of all they would have a fund derived from the assessment levied on the lands of the Mahars. In addition to that Government will also have the right to levy baluta because according to the ruling of Government the village population is liable to pay, the cost of the watch and ward. I submit, Sir, that these two things together will form a sufficient fund for the maintenance of the new paid agency. The one reason which terrified Government at the thought of commutation of the Maharki watan is that they think they shall have to employ the same number of people as they at present employ. I understand—I have not the exact figures—that Government are employing about 64,000 Mahars in the Bombay Presidency. I submit, Sir, under the new system they will not have to employ such a large number of people. They are employed by Government now because they can vicariously do so at the cost of the ryot. In some villages there are 16 Mahars employed. In other villages for instance in Nagar District there are 32 Mahars employed in one village. I submit, Sir, that the number of Mahars employed at the present moment is most extravagant which certainly can be greatly reduced and if the reduction comes about as I expect it is

bound to come, one-third of the present number will be sufficient and the land revenue and the baluta will constitute a sufficient remuneration without any additional burden on the treasury. I ask in all seriousness why should not the Government undertake to bear that burden? Why should not the Government pay the cost of the services? In the case of every other Government employee, Government has made itself bold to come before this Council to ask for additional money. Sir, in the year 1921 Government agreed to increase the salaries of village teachers. In the same year Government brought forward proposals to increase the salaries of the subordinate services. Apart from this, Government brought forward proposals to increase the salaries of the talatis. If, Sir, the Government have got the nerve, the courage and the sympathy for these classes to bring forward financial measures to remunerate other services, why should not Government have the same nerve, the same courage and the same sympathy in the case of these Mahars? I do not understand, Sir, why for instance Government should continue or be a party to a system which enthrals and enslaves a class of His Majesty's subjects. I submit, Sir, that either on the legal ground or the moral ground, and I say on financial ground, the principle I have enunciated in section 4 of my bill is just and equitable.

I now come, Sir, to the other class of watandar Mahars, those who care to carry on with the watan, those who are prepared to render services provided their grievances are remedied. These Mahars I have provided for in clause 6 of my bill. The provision in this section which is sought to be enacted in the interests of that part of the Mahar population, which cares to carry on the village duties, mainly consists in the re-organization. I use the word advisedly—mainly consist in the re-organization of the baluta system. If honourable members will go through the clauses which are enacted therein, they will find that there is, first of all, a provision made for the conversion of the baluta into a money cess. Secondly, provision is made for the recovery of the money cess along with the land revenue. Thirdly provision is made for the division of that cess into two parts, one for services rendered to the ryot and another for services rendered to the Government; so that that part of the cess which will be apportioned for services to the Government will be obligatory, while that part of the cess which will be apportioned for private services to the ryot will be optional. Those ryots who care to employ the services of the Mahar for their private service will be obliged to pay only that part of the cess which will have been assigned for private service. The Mahars, on the other hand, if, they do not want to render service to the ryot but want to render service only to the Government shall forfeit that part of the money cess which will have been assigned for private services.

Now, Sir, the House is likely to think that I am making some novel proposals; I wish however to emphasise that none of these provisions are new. They already exist in the Watan Act. There is only a change in the existing system and a re-organization. The first provision that baluta shall

be converted into a money cess will be found already existing in section 19 of the Watan Act. That is not, therefore, a new thing. Under the existing Watan Act the Collector is given the power to convert, whenever he thinks fit, the baluta into a money cess. The second provision that the collection of the money cess shall be made along with the land revenue, I submit again is not a new proposal. It already exists in the Watan Act. Reference to section 81 of the Watan Act will show that the Collector has, under the existing Act, the power to collect all haks, all remunerations, all emoluments, as if they were arrears of land revenue. Therefore, what I submit, Sir, is that there is nothing that is new in section 6 of the bill. All that is new in section 6 of my bill is that the discretion instead of being given to the Collector is given to the parties themselves. The existing law recognizes that circumstances will arise when provisions such as those contemplated by section 6 of my bill will be necessary. Otherwise those provisions would not have found any place in the existing law. What I feel is that although the Collector may have the discretion, he may not know, he may not be aware, and may not be cognisant of the fact that circumstances have arisen which require that his discretion should be exercised. All I say is that the Collector should be guided by the parties themselves in the matter of the exercise of the discretion, so that, if the parties desire that the baluta should be collected along with the land revenue, the Collector will know that the occasion has arisen for him to use his discretion. There is nothing new in this, except the transfer of the discretionary power from the Collector to the ryots and to the Mahars.

Then, Sir, the third provision as regards the partition of the baluta between two specific shares, one for private service and the other for Government service, is no doubt new. But I submit that circumstances have rendered it very necessary. According to the view of Government the baluta is a joint payment for services to the ryots and for services to Government. The Government on the 3rd of May 1899 passed a resolution No. 3074 wherein they have expressly laid down that baluta is a joint remuneration for services both to the ryots and to the Government. I need not go so far back in order to give support to this view. Even as late as 1919, the Government in the papers that they laid before this House, in reply to a question on this point relied upon the order passed by the Assistant Secretary to Government in which the proposition has been expressly emphasized, that the baluta is not paid for merely private services, but is also paid for services to Government. Now, Sir, what I submit is that the Mahars, some of them, are willing to render services to the Government, but they are not willing to render services to the ryots. There are also certain ryots, I know of, who do not want to employ an agency which is forced upon them as the Mahars are by the present law. They would like to employ on their own initiative at their own will, any one whom they would care to employ. In the same way there are some Mahars who do not want to render services to the ryot. They would like to have their freedom

to serve or not to serve. But under the existing law this freedom is denied to them. They are forced to serve whether they wish it or not. This is due to the fact that the baluta is a joint remuneration and there is no way of finding out how much of the remuneration in the form of baluta is due for Government services and how much of it is due for private services. In these days of rivalry in social advancement the tension between the ryots and the Mahar has become great and will continue to grow in intensity unless freedom to employ and freedom to serve is provided for. To achieve this purpose it is necessary to define the quota of baluta due from the ryot on account of private services to the ryots and that due for the services rendered to Government. What happens under the present circumstances is this, that if a Mahar does not render service to the ryot, all the same, there being no partition of the baluta, the ryot is obliged to pay the whole and the Mahar gets an advantage over the ryot.

On the other hand it happens that if the Mahar did not render service to the ryot but rendered services only to Government, he loses the whole of the baluta, for the reason that the ryot has no idea how much of the baluta is due from him for Government services. Not knowing this he withholds the whole and thereby causes a wrongful loss to the Mahars. It is therefore very essential, I think, in the interest of better administration and in the interests of peace in the villages that this partition of the baluta should take place. I submit it is absolutely contrary to the principle of law that the services of one class of people should be forced upon other classes of people. It would be atrocious to uphold a system under which a particular barber should alone shave us to the exclusion of any other barber. But the watan system is such an atrocious and barbarous system. I am sure the lawyer members of this House are aware that we had in the High Court a case in which one of the barbers had brought a suit that the Yajmans (the ryots) in a particular village were not entitled to employ the services of an outside barber, that whether or not that particular barber was efficient or not, whether he knew how to crop the hair or to pare the beard, he was entitled to render service to the ryots all the same. The same thing happens in the case of Mahars. What my bill aims at is freedom of contract; if the ryots do not want to employ the Mahars, they ought to have perfect liberty not to employ them, and if the Mahars do not want to serve, the Mahars should have perfect liberty not to serve. But under the present system, under the system of joint remuneration, this liberty of contract is negated and is not obtainable. My scheme provides for that freedom of contract, and I think at least in this century when every society has advanced from status to contract we ought not for instance to block the progress of Indian society by refusing the Mahars and the ryots the liberty of contract.

One thing I would like to say is that the system which I have outlined here in this bill is not altogether my own. It is a system which I have copied from the Berars. In the Central Provinces and the Berars, similar feuds and troubles were going on between ryots and the Mahars. A great agitation

was carried on, on the part of both the sides and Government there appointed a committee to investigate into the matter and to make their proposals. In 1920, the committee made its proposals and the Government introduced the system which I have essentially reproduced in the provisions of this bill. I submit that if the provisions of this bill, which are the result of the recommendations of the Berar Committee, are good for the Berars, I think they cannot be bad for the Bombay Presidency, because the Berar system was a replica of the Bombay system ; so much so that the whole of the Berar Committee's report is based upon the resolutions of the Bombay Government. These are the main provisions of the bill.

There is a provision in the bill, however, which probably requires a little explanation and that provision is the provision which introduces certain changes in section 9 of the Watan Act. I mean clauses 2 and 3 of my bill. Under the provisions of the Watan Act, it is laid down that watan lands shall not be alienated to any one outside the watan family. There is also a provision under section 9, which empowers the Collector to resume the land of a watandar which has been transferred to a non-watandar. But under section 9 whether or not to declare the alienation null and void and to resume such alienated land is left entirely to the discretion of the Collector. The Collector does not always choose to exercise the discretion vested in him under section 9 in favour of the watandar. This may cause no particular hardship when the land so alienated although it is watan land is not assigned as remuneration to an officiating watandar. But I submit, Sir, that if an officiator is required to render services to Government on the express understanding that his watan land has been assigned to him in remuneration for his work shall always remain in his possession, I think Government ought to resume those watan lands which have gone out of the hands of the officiator. The sections which I have introduced make the declaration of alienation as null and void obligatory upon the Collector in the case of such watan lands as are assigned as remuneration of an officiator. In introducing these sections I adopt as my basis the well-known division of watan lands into two classes, those assigned as remuneration and those not assigned as remuneration. In the case of lands not assigned as remuneration the Collector may well not exercise his discretion because of the fact that the land is not necessary immediately for the purpose of the remuneration of the officiator. In that case if the Collector does not exercise his discretion in favour of the watandar and declare the alienation null and void there is not much case for complaint. But when the land is expressly reserved and assigned as remuneration. I think the Collector ought to have no discretion whatever in the matter but in every such case, the declaration should be given that the alienation is null and void.

I admit, Sir, that there are two defects in the bill as I have drafted it, and I like to make this admission because I want to be very, very just. I do not want to throw any additional burden on the ryot in the interests of the Mahars. The simple reason is that I am an enemy of the watan system.

I have striven all along to destroy the Maharaki watan system, although I know that in the immediate future the Mahars will suffer a great loss. But I am convinced that these shackles of the watan system are the principal causes which are keeping them backward. I am taking a long view of the matter and it is this that leads me to be indifferent to the immediate benefits to the Mahars from their watans. I cannot therefore be particularly striving to steel an advantage over the ryots, not particularly striving for benefitting the Mahars at the cost of the ryot. Honourable members of this House will see that the baluta system is, as I have organised it in my bill, not going to impose any additional burden upon the ryot. I use expressly the word "equivalent". That means no additional burden shall be levied upon the ryots for the remuneration of the Mahars. That will show how just I mean to be,. That leads me to admit that there are two defects in the bill. One is that in altering section 9 (alongwith clauses 2 and 3 of the bill) so as to make it obligatory upon the collector to resume the land, there ought to be a provision allowing the Collector to pay compensation to the dispossessed non-watandar. I readily admit that the lands may have been transferred to any one in faith and for full consideration. It stands to reason that when such a transferee is deprived of it, he ought to be paid compensation. When I had first drafted this bill, I had provided that the Collector should have power to compensate the non-watandar, but on the advice of certain official members, I withdrew that, but I am prepared to make that amendment in the select committee. Secondly, I ought to have provided that just as the Mahars should have option not to serve the ryot, the ryot ought to have the option not to employ the Mahars. I am prepared also to make that amendment in the bill in the select committee to which it may be referred. These are all the things, I think, in the bill which call for explanation.

Before I bring my remarks to a close I think I ought to make it very clear to the Honourable the Revenue Member that this bill has the support of the entire Mahar population. There is no division of opinion on that point at all. In fact there cannot be a division of opinion on this bill and for very good reason. The bill is not an obligatory bill. It is purely a discretionary bill. Unless the watandar Mahars desire that the provisions of this bill should be brought into operation, they will not be brought into operation. Things will continue as they are now. A change will come only when the Mahars will feel the necessity for it. It will not be forced upon them against their will.

*Mr. P. R. Chikodi:* This is an unilateral arrangement. It ought to be bilateral.

*Dr. B. R. Ambedkar:* I know I ought to make that amendment which has been omitted but which will be made in the select committee.

I say there cannot be any opposition to this bill on the part of the Mahars themselves because the bill is not an obligatory one and it does not compel them to take advantage of it. It only makes certain provisions in their interest if they want to avail themselves of them. The Mahars have not

therefore objected to this bill. Indeed there cannot be any objection on their part. Not only have they not opposed the bill, but they have whole heartedly welcomed it. Since the time I have been at this bill I have never kept anything secret from the Mahar population. I have placed the principles and the provisions of this bill before the whole Mahar population at several meetings to enable them to express their opinion on this bill and I am glad to say that the whole of the bill and the principles embodied in it have been unanimously accepted by them. In order that the Government may not have any occasion to say that these meetings were engineered by me for the purpose of obtaining support for the bill. I have, for the most part abstained myself from attending these meetings, which have been held under the chairmanship of members of other communities. My honourable friend Mr. Bole, sitting just by my side, will corroborate me when I say that in the city of Bombay a meeting of over 5,000 watandar Mahars was held under his presidentship. Of course some people tried to fool the Mahars that the bill is going to do them harm, but I think that the honourable member will corroborate me whether or not the Mahars supported the bill unanimously without a single dissenting voice. In the same manner, I would refer to my honourable friend Mr. Rajma Lakhichand. A meeting was held of the watandar Mahars of Khandesh at Jalgaon under his presidentship, where I addressed them on the provisions and the principles of this bill. Conservatively estimated, that meeting again was attended by something like 3,000 Mahars; the theatre was full to its capacity, and when the resolution was moved, there was not a single Mahar who opposed it. I think my honourable friend Mr. Thorat will corroborate me that a similar meeting was held in the Ahmadnagar district, where also the bill was unanimously supported. I need not of course refer to the minor meetings held at different places. I can assure the House that the Mahar people are absolutely determined to have the bill, and I may tell my honourable friends that if the Government refuse to liberate these people on grounds of finance, on grounds of convenience, or on any other grounds, that it will be a war between the Revenue Department and the Mahars. If this bill does not pass, I for myself am not going to be in the Council; I am going to spend the rest of my time in seeing that the Mahars organise a general strike, and bring the Honourable the Revenue Member to feel that the principles of this bill are absolutely essential for the welfare of the Mahar people. I am speaking from the bottom of my heart; I do not want to keep anything behind. I want to say in all seriousness that that is our aim. Sir, I have been labouring in the cause of the depressed classes for the last three years as far as I possibly can. I have come across many difficulties in my way, and I have come definitely to know that the watan is probably the greatest difficulty that I have to face, in order to carry the Mahar population further. I am happy to find that the Mahars as well are convinced that these watans stand in the way of their advancement. I therefore hope that this Council will unanimously pass this bill. With these words, I move the first reading of the bill.

Question proposed.