

land, planters, and such people.

6238. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : But, as I say, in order to effect your purpose, if it were necessary, you say that distinction shall not be based upon caste, creed, race or religion ?

Sir Edward Benthall : Yes ; it is a matter of legal draftsmanship.

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Lady Layton, Mrs. O. Stracey and Sir Philip Hartog, on behalf of the British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise

*C67. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : I would like to ask one question. I do not know whether you agree with me, but I suppose when you press for votes for women, I think you also desire that the franchise should be so devised that the women who will be brought upon the register will be drawn from all strata of Indian society, and not necessarily drawn, either from the upper strata or the middle strata or the lower strata exclusively ; that there ought to be some proportion of the women on the electoral roll to the communities from which they are drawn ?

Lady Layton : As far as is practically possible, certainly.

C68. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : I mean, it is not your case that you want this mathematical ratio of 1 to 4 or 1 to 5, but apart from that ratio, you would also desire that all women from all sections should be on the register ?

Lady Layton : Certainly, as far as possible, we do want to feel that the urban and rural voters and the different sections will be adequately represented.

C69. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : You will also agree, I suppose, that if the education qualification or the property qualification were fixed higher, the result of that would be that you would be getting on to the electoral roll women drawn from one section of Indian society alone ?

Lady Layton : That is so. I would supplement that by saying that if it were administratively possible, we should welcome, and we have pressed in our Memorandum, that the wives of the lower property qualification should be enfranchised, and not only the wives of the higher property qualification.

C70. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : What I am anxious to get at is this—whether you attach importance to the point which I am putting to you, namely, a well-proportioned distribution of the women's voting strength throughout the population, or whether you merely attach importance to the proportion of the man voter as against the woman voter ?

Lady Layton : Attach importance to both those factors but we think that the women's interests for the moment are sufficiently safeguarded on this particular question. If you have a sufficient number of women enfranchised in all the districts for them to represent the other women, the women who are not enfranchised, we would like to see it as low as possible and if

*Minutes of Evidence, Vol. II-C, 26th July 1933. p. 2276.

it is put at a certain place now we would like it to be moved as soon as practically possible. We ourselves would certainly wish to see it as low as possible. We would be prepared to ask for adult franchise, if it were practically possible, but we realise it is not administratively possible.

C71. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : Might I put the same point in a somewhat different manner ? Of course, all women are interested in matters of social welfare ; that is quite true. The woman's point of view may be quite common, but you will also realise that schemes of social welfare are going to cost money, if they are to be put through and that would require taxation ?

Lady Layton : Yes, I quite appreciate it would.

C72. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : And all women may not take the same point of view with regard to that ; they are likely to divide on the basis of the class to which they belong ?

Lady Layton : Yes, I can give you two answers to that. First of all, take the education point of view. If you have a certain amount of money to divide on education, women of every class would agree that it should be spent equally on men and women, whereas, if you have not got women with sufficient pressure to bear, you will still go on spending a great deal more on the boys than on the girls. In the first place, that is one of the things that has to be seen to. Also, I would say this : The women of all classes who are taking any active interest in welfare are pressing that there should be a larger proportion of finances spent on education. I think you could safely trust to the women of most classes to take that line at the present moment, but I should be very glad to see the franchise taken as near as possible, and that is why I do lay particular importance upon the literacy qualification. Any woman who is intelligent enough to be of any value to bring any pressure to bear at all can make herself literate within a reasonable period and if you have the literacy qualification, and any section of women feel strongly that the section of women which has the vote, is not taking the vote, they have the weapon in their hands, and it is for that reason that I have always been so strongly in favour of literacy, and it is for that reason that all the organised women of India are also, in favour of literacy.

C73. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : I am satisfied, as long as you see my point of view. Sir Philip Hartog, I just want to ask you a question about literacy. We have really no information as to what the administrative difficulties are, as they are alleged to be, against! adopting literacy as a test for the franchise in the case of women, but what I understand the difficulties to be are these : First of all, it is suggested that there are no certificates available which would enable a registration officer, offhand, to satisfy himself that a woman falls within the category required under literacy, and therefore, would in the position to be put on the roll offhand. That being the case, we shaft have to adopt the procedure suggested in the proposals, that a village officer should

examine and his certificate should be countersigned by a tahsildar. I think the administrative difficulty that is suggested is this : How is a village officer to approach a woman in the village to find out whether she is literate or not ? Would you make it depend upon the woman who wants to get her vote having to approach and make an application ?

Sir Philip Hartog : I think that is the only possible way. She would have to have sufficient interest to say, either herself or through her husband : "I wish to be placed on the roll ; I am literate and am willing to be tested."

C74. *Mr. Butler* : How does that differ from application ?

Lady Layton : I do not think we have objected to application on the part of literacy in our Memorandum. We do not object. We think that the people who are already recognised as literate in any educational qualification that is admitted should be put automatically on the roll. Beyond that it must be a matter of application.

C75. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : So really this objection raised on the basis of inquiries made in households, which might be objectionable, would not arise ?

Sir Philip Hartog : May I just say, it seems to me to be an appropriate point to make reference to two answers of the Secretary of State bearing directly upon the point which has been raised by Dr. Ambedkar. In answer to question 7437 the Secretary of State said : "In future, for future generations of girls or women, it will be a comparatively simple matter to adopt your educational registers and returns for electoral purposes, but in Provinces where that has not been done hitherto, there will be very considerable difficulty in doing it for the first election." Now, I should like to point out that if you read that with another answer of the Secretary of State, he says at page 817, question 7214 : "There will be no change for X years." In answer to the Marquess of Salisbury, he suggests that in the Act of Parliament he would say for X number of years there can be no alteration of the franchise. Consequently, it would be of little use to have a register for the second, third or fourth elections, if those second, third or fourth elections came within the period of X years. Let me take the question of number. The total number of literate women is estimated in the Lothian Report to be a million and a quarter. It is on page 86 of that Report. Of those, 3,45,000 are in Madras, with regard to whom there is no difficulty. That leaves over for the rest of India the relatively small number of 8,75,000. Now, if it was possible to put 3,45,000 Madras women on the rolls for one election, and that must have been done at some time or another, why is it impossible to put 8,75,000 women on the rolls for the whole of the rest of India ?

(10)

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Mrs. Hamid Ali on behalf of All India Women's Conference and two other Women's Associations

*C334. *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* : Did you say there would be no difficulty about the Muhammadan households ?

*Minutes of Evidence, Vol. II-C, 29th July 1933, pp. 2314-21.