CHAPTER I

A STRANGE EVENT

I

In the annual session of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta in the year 1917 a strange event took place. In that session the Congress passed the following resolution :—

> "This Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience."

The President of the session was Mrs. Annie Besant. The resolution was moved by Mr. G. A. Natesan of Madras and was supported by Mr. Bhulabhai Desai from Bombay, by Mr. Rama Iyer from Malabar and by Mr. Asaf Ali from Delhi. In moving the resolution, Mr. Natesan said :—

> "Ladies and Gentlemen,—This question has been receiving great attention for years in other platforms ; but in view of the unique character of this Congress, the Subjects Committee thought it necessary, after having framed a scheme of self-government for India, that we should complete that by asking us to prepare ourselves for the task of self-government. The first great duty is to see that all inequalities and injustices are removed. You will see that this resolution specially asks you to remove disabilities of a most vexatious and oppressive character. Without injuring your religious feelings, without giving up all that is best in your religious tradition, I think the Congress has a right to ask of you and of me and of others elsewhere that such absurd restrictions as the non-admission of these people to schools should be removed. The Congress has also a claim upon all human beings to see that in some portions of the country where these people are refused even the use of common well, these restrictions should disappear... In attempting to elevate ourselves and in trying to remove these galling restrictions we are but elevating Indian manhood; and when Responsible Self-Government is to be given to us we shall be in a position to say that Indians of all classes, of all creeds, have the fullest rights, the commonest social rights, have free access to all schools, to all institutions so that Indian manhood may develop in all its truest, best and noblest traditions."

Mr. Bhulabhai Desai in supporting the resolution pointed out that :—

> "The disabilities under which some of our brethren suffer are a great blow to the equality and brotherhood of man that we preach. From the great height of the resolution that you have passed this morning, with what face will we approach the British Democracy or any other power if we are unable to uplift our own brethren ? They will say 'What lies in your own power, the obliteration of the social degradation of a section of your own people, you have been unable to do !' We can do it by self-help and by self-help alone and in this matter we need not approach any other power but ourselves. That proves the necessity of the great forward step that this Congress has taken in allowing this resolution to be moved before you.... The existence of this great bane is an insult to the name of Hinduism. Therefore, both on the ground of necessity and on the ground of justice, as well as on the ground of righteousness, for the truth that you cherish, how can you deny them what this resolution demands, when the justice lies in your own hands ? And if you fail to do that, with what justice, with what face, will you demand Self-Government ?"

Mr. Rama Iyer said:—

> "This... resolution calls for social freedom by which we shall shatter the shackles that bind the lower classes. They are the foot of the nation and if you and I would climb the hill of Home Rule, we must first shatter the shackles on our feet and then and then only will Home Rule come to us...You cannot be political democrats and at the same time social autocrats. Remember that a man, a social slave, cannot be politically a free man. We all have come here to see the vision of United India, not only politically united but united all along the line... Therefore, let those of us, who are Brahmins, who belong to the higher castes, go to our villages and shatter the shackles of the low castes, people who are struggling against our own men—the social bureaucrats of our own land."

Mr. Asaf Ali observed that :—

> "The problem of the Depressed Classes was one of the most difficult of all. They had been crying shame upon the arbitrary and autocratic action of the bureaucratic bunglers, but now it was the turn of the Depressed Classes—the Untouchables—to cover them, Indians, with shame. There were many millions of these victims of misfortune who had been plying their degraded trades in utter muteness for thousands of years, never emerging

from the abyss of degradation into which the cruel and utterly unjustified customs of the country had hurled them. Whether it was the spring-time of hope, or the summer of realisation to others, to these unfortunate creatures it was always the winter of black despair. It seemed a cruel irony of fate that those who were vociferously clamouring for the attainment or preservation of human rights themselves were so little mindful of the legitimate rights of others under them. Was it just or fair that a mute section of humanity should be left to suffer the very wrongs for whose redress others were shedding their blood in the battlefield ? Why, even the 'untouchables,' in spite of all that cruel custom had subjected them to, were human beings and children of the soil, in whose veins coursed the self-same 'red-blood' as in the veins of those who arrogated superiority to themselves. The Depressed Classes were entitled to the same privileges as their betters in worldly circumstances and could not be debarred from the birthright of man. It was a standing reproach to the Indians that they had any Depressed Classes at all, and it was for the extinction of this reproach that they prayed."

Many people would wonder why I describe the passing of the Resolution by the Congress moved and supported in such eloquent terms, as a strange event. But those who know the antecedents will admit that it is not an improper description. It was strange for many reasons.

In the first place, the President of the Session was the late Mrs. Annie Besant. She was a well-known public figure and had many things for which she will be remembered by the future historian of India. She was the founder of the Theosophical Society which has its Home at Adyar. Mrs. Annie Besant was well-known for rearing up Mr. Krishnamurti, the son of a Brahmin retired Registrar for a future Massiah. Mrs. Annie Besant was known as the founder of the Home Rule League. There may be other things for which friends of Mrs. Annie Besant may claim for her a place of honour. But I don't know, that she was ever a friend of the Untouchables. So far as I know she felt great antipathy towards the Untouchables. Expressing her opinion on the question whether the children of the Untouchables should or should not be admitted to the common school, Mrs. Annie Besant in an article headed 'The Uplift of the Depressed Classes' which appeared in the *Indian Review* for February 1909 said :—

"In every nation we find, as the basis of the social, Pyramid,

a large class of people, ignorant, degraded, unclean in language and habits, people, who perform many tasks which are necessary for Society, but who are despised and neglected by the very Society to whose needs they minister. In England, this class is called the 'submerged tenth,' forming, as it does, one-tenth of the total population. It is ever on the verge of starvation, and the least extra pressure sends it over the edge. It suffers chronically from under-nutrition, and is a prey to the diseases which spring therefrom. It is prolific, like ail creatures in whom the nervous system is of a low type, but its children die off rapidly, ill-nourished, rickety, often malformed. Its better type consists of unskilled labourers, who perform the roughest work, scavengers, sweepers, navvies, casual dock-labourers, costermongers ; and into it, forming its worse type, drift all the wastrels of Society, the drunkards, the loafers, the coarsely dissolute, the tramps, the vagabonds, the clumsily criminal, the ruffians. The first type is, as a rule, honest and industrious; the second ought to be under continued control, and forced to labour sufficiently to earn its bread. In India, this class forms one-sixth of the total population, and goes by the generic name of the 'Depressed Classes.' It springs from the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, conquered and enslaved by the Aryan invaders,... It is drunken and utterly indifferent to cleanliness, whether of food, person or dwelling; but marriage is accompanied with some slight formality, children are kindly treated, and there is very little brutality, violence or criminality. Criminal communities, such as hereditary thieves, live apart, and do not mingle with the scavengers, sweepers, husbandmen and the followers of other simple crafts who make up the huge bulk of the depressed. They are gentle, docile, as a rule industrious, pathetically submissive, merry enough when not in actual want, with a bright though generally very limited intelligence ; of truth and the civic virtues they are for the most part utterly devoid—how should they be anything else ?—but they are affectionate, grateful for the slightest kindness, and with much 'natural religion.' In fact, they offer good material for simple and useful though humble civic life,...

"What can be done for them by those who feel the barbarity of the treatment meted out to them, by those who feel that the Indians who demand freedoms should show respect to others, and give to others a share of the consideration they claim for themselves ?

"Here, as everywhere, education is the lever by which we may hope to raise them, but a difficulty arises at the outset,

for one class of the community, moved by a noble feeling of compassion and benevolence, but not adding thereto a careful and detailed consideration of the conditions, demands, for the children of the pariah community admission to the schools frequented by the sons of the higher classes, and charges with lack of brotherhood those who are not in favour of this policy. It becomes, therefore, necessary to ask whether brotherhood is to mean levelling down, and whether it is usual in family to treat the elder children and the babies in exactly the same way. It is a zeal not according to knowledge —and not according to nature—which would substitute equality for brotherhood, and demand from the cultured and refined that they should forfeit the hardly won fruits of the education of generations, in order to create an artificial equality, as disastrous to the progress of the future as it would be useless for the improvement of the present. The children of the depressed classes need, first of all, to be taught cleanliness, outside decency of behaviour, and the earliest rudiments of education, religion and morality. Their bodies, at present, are ill-odorous and foul with the liquor and strong-smelling food out of which for generations they have been built up ; it will need some generations of purer food and living to make their bodies fit to sit in the close neighbourhood of a school-room with children who have received bodies from an ancestry trained in habits of exquisite personal cleanliness, and fed on pure food-stuffs. We have to raise the Depressed Classes to a similar level of physical purity, not to drag down the clean to the level of the dirty, and until this is done, close association is undesirable. We are not blaming these children, nor their parents, for being what they are ; we are stating a mere palpable fact. The first daily lesson in a school for these children should be a bath, and the putting on of a clean cloth ; and the second should be a meal of clean wholesome food ; those primary needs cannot be supplied in a school intended for children who take their daily bath in the early morning and who come to school well-fed.

"Another difficulty that faces teachers of these children are the contagious diseases that are bred from first ; to take one example, eye-disease, wholly due to neglect, is one of the most common and 'catching' complaints among them. In our Panchama schools in Madras, the teachers are ever on the alert to detect and check this, and the children's eyes are daily washed and disease is thus prevented. But is it to be expected that fathers and mothers, whose daily care protects their children from such dirty diseases should deliberately expose them at school to this infection ?

"Nor are the manner and habits of these forlorn little ones desirable things to be imitated by gently-nurtured children. Good manners, for instance, are the result of continual and rigid self-control, and of consideration for the comfort and convenience of others ; children learn manners chiefly by imitation from well-bred parents and teachers and, secondarily, by suitable precept and reproof. If, at the school, they are to be made to associate with children not thus trained, they will quickly fall into the ways which they see around them. For, until good habits are rendered fixed by long practice, it is far easier to be slipshod than accurate, to be careless than careful. Ought the children of families in which good manners and courtesy are hereditary, to be robbed of their heritage, a robbery that enriches no one, but drags the whole nation down ? Gentle speech, well-modulated voice, pleasant ways, these are the valuable results of long culture, and to let them be swamped out is no true brotherhood....

"In England, it has never been regarded as desirable to educate boys or girls of all classes side by side, and such grotesque equalising of the unequal would be scouted. Eton and Harrow are admittedly the schools for the higher classes ; Rubgy and Winchester are also schools for gentlemen's sons, though somewhat less aristocratic. Then come a number of schools, frequented chiefly by sons of the provincial middle class. Then the Board Schools, where the sons of artisans and the general manual labour classes are taught ; and below all these, for the waifs and strays, are the 'ragged schools,' the name of which indicates the type of their scholars, and the numerous charitable institutions. A man in England who proposed that ragged school-children should be admitted to Eton and Harrow would not be argued with, but laughed at. Here, when a similar proposition is made in the name of brotherhood, people seem ashamed to point out frankly its absurdity, and they do not realise that the proposal is merely a violent reaction against the cruel wrongs which have been inflicted on the Depressed Classes, the outcry of an awakened conscience, which has not yet had time to call right reason to guide its emotions. It is sometimes said that Government schools pay no attention to social differences ; therein they show that they are essentially 'foreign' in their spirit. They would not deal so with the sons of their own people, though they may be careless of the sons of Indians, and lump them all together, clean and dirty alike. It is very easy to see the differences of 'tone' in the youths when only the sons of the cultured classes are admitted to a school, and it is to the interest of the Indians

that they should send their sons where they are guarded from coarse influences as Englishmen guard their own sons in England."

* * *

The second reason why one is justified in describing the passing of this resolution as a strange event lies in the fact that it was entirely opposed to the declared policy of the Congress. In these days when the "Constructive Programme" of the Congress is hawked from every street and at all times when the Congress is resting after an active campaign of non-co-operation and civil disobedience, this statement may well cause surprise to present day Congressmen and their friends. The following extracts from the addresses of the Presidents who presided at the Annual Sessions of the Congress will suffice to bring home the fact that the Congress policy was to give no place to questions of Social Reform in the aims and objects of the Congress.

To begin with, Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji who presided at the Second Session of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in the year 1886. In this presidential address he referred to the Congress attitude towards Social Reform and said :—

"It has been asserted that this Congress ought to take up questions of social reform (Cheers and cries of 'Yes, Yes') and our failure to do this has been urged as a reproach against us. Certainly no member of this National Congress is more alive to the necessity of social reform than I am ; but, Gentlemen, for everything there are proper times, proper circumstances, proper parties and proper places (Cheers); we are met together as a political body to represent to our rulers our political aspirations, not to discuss social reforms, and if you blame us for ignoring these, you should equally blame the House of Commons for not discussing the abstruser problems of mathematics or metaphysics. But, besides this, there are here Hindus of every caste, amongst whom, even in the same province, customs and social arrangements differ widely—there are Mahomedans and Christians of various denominations, Parsis, Sikhs, Brahmos and what not—men indeed of each and of all those numerous classes which constitute in the aggregate the people of India. (Loud Cheers). How can this gathering of *all* classes discuss the social reforms needed in each individual class ?... Only the members of that class can effectively deal with the reforms therein needed. A National Congress must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation, and it

must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other class questions to Class Congresses...."

The subject was again referred to by the Hon. Mr. Budruddin Tyabji who presided over the Third Annual Session of the Congress held in 1887. Mr. Tyabji observed :—

> "...It has been urged—solemnly urged—as an objection against our proceedings—that this Congress does not discuss the question of Social Reforms... I must confess that the objection seems to me strange, seeing that this Congress is composed of the representatives, not of any one class or community, not of one part of India, but of all the different parts, and of all the different classes, and of all the different communities of India. Whereas any question of Social Reform must of necessity affect some particular part or some particular community of India only and, therefore, Gentlemen, it seems to me, that although we, Mussalmans, have our own social problems to solve, just as our Hindu and Parsi friends have theirs, yet these questions can be best dealt with by the leaders of the particular communities to which they relate (Applause). I, therefore, think, Gentlemen, that the only wise and, indeed, the only possible course we can adopt is to confine our discussions to such questions as affect the whole of India at large, and to abstain from the discussion of questions that affect a particular part or a particular community only."

The third occasion when the subject was referred to was in 1892, when Mr. W.C. Bannerjee in his Presidential address to the Eighth Session of the Congress gave expression to the following sentiments :—

> "Some of our critics have been busy in telling us, thinking they knew our affairs better than we know them ourselves, that we ought not to meddle with political matters, but leaving politics aside devote ourselves to social subjects and so improve the social system of our country ; I am one of those who have very little faith in the public discussion of social matters ; those are things which I think, ought to be left to the individuals of a community who belong to the same social organisation to do what they can for its improvement. We know how excited people become when social subjects are discussed in public. Not long ago we had an instance of this when what was called the Age of Consent Bill was introduced into the Viceregal Legislative Council. I do not propose to say one word as to the merits of the controversy that arose over that measure, but I allude to it to illustrate how apt the public mind is to get

agitated over these social matters if they are discussed in a hostile and unfriendly spirit in public... I may point out that we do not all understand in the same sense what is meant by social reform. Some of us are anxious that our daughters should have the same education as our sons, that they should go to Universities, that they should adopt learned professions ; others who are more timid would be content with seeing that their children are not given in marriage when very young, and that child widows should not remain widows all the days of their lives. Others more timid still would allow social problems to solve themselves...the Congress commenced and has since remained, and will, I sincerely trust, always remain as a purely political organization devoting its energies to political matters and political matters only. I am afraid that those whether belonging to our own country or to any other country, who find fault with us for not making social subjects a part of our work, cherish a secret wish that we might all be set by the ears, as we are all set by the ears by the Age of Consent Bill, and that thus we might come to an ignominious end. They mean us no good, and when we find critics of that description talking of the Congress as only fit to discuss social problems, I think the wider the berth we give them, the better..."

"I, for one, have no patience with those who say we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I fail to see any connection between the two. Let me take, for instance, one of the political reforms which we have been suggesting year after year viz., the separation of judicial from executive functions in the same officer. What possible connection can there be between this, which is a purely political reform and social reform ? In the same way, take the Permanent Settlement which we have been advocating, the amendment of the law relating to forests and other such measures ;—and I ask again, what have these to do with social reform ? Are we not fit for them because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries ? because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends ? because we do not send our daughters to Oxford or Cambridge ? (Cheers.)"

The last occasion when a Congress President is found to refer to this subject was in 1895 when the Congress Session was held in Poona and was presided over by Mr. Surrendranath Bannerjee. Touching upon the subject, in his presidential address, Mr. Bannerjee said :—

"We cannot afford to have a schism in our camp. Already

they tell us that it is a Hindu Congress, although the presence of our Mahomedan friends completely contradicts the statement. Let it not be said that this is the Congress of one social party rather than that of another. It is the Congress of United India, of Hindus and Mahomedans, of Christians, of Parsis and of Sikhs, of those who would reform their social customs and those who would not. Here we stand upon a common platform—here we have all agreed to bury our social and religious differences and recognise the one common fact that being subjects of the same Sovereign and living under the same Government and the same political institutions, we have common rights and common grievances. And we have called forth this Congress into existence with a view to safeguard and extend our rights and redress our grievances. What should we say of a Faculty of Doctors who fell out, because though in perfect accord as to the principles of their science, they could not agree as to the age at which they should marry their daughters, or whether they should remarry their widowed daughters or not...Ours is a political and not a social movement ; and it cannot be made a matter of complaint against us that we are not a social organization any more than it can be urged against any of my lawyer friends that they are not doctors. Even in regard to political matters, such is our respect for the opinions of minorities, that so far back as 1887, I think it was at the instance of Mr. Badruddin Tyabji, who once was our President and whose elevation to the Bench of the Bombay High Court is a matter of national congratulation, a resolution was passed to the effect that where there is practical unanimity among a class, though in a minority in the Congress, that a question should not be discussed, it should forthwith be abandoned."

"There is special danger to which an organization such as ours, is exposed and which must be guarded against,... the danger of there being developed from within the seeds of dissension and dispute."

II

There are two questions about these statements which need explanation. First is to know what the Social Reform party was to which the Presidents refer. The second is why Mr. Surrendranath Bannerjee's address to the Congress in 1895 was the last occasion when a Congress President found it necessary to refer to the relation of the Congress to the problem of Social Reform and why no president after 1895 thought it necessary to dwell on it.

To understand the first question it is necessary to note that when the Indian National Congress was founded at Bombay in 1885, it was felt by the leaders of the movement that the National movement should not be exclusively political but that side by side with the consideration of political questions, questions affecting Indian social economy should also be discussed and that the best endeavours of all should be put forth for vitalizing Hindu Society by removing all social evils and social wrongs. With this view, Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao and Mr. Justice (then Rao Bahadur) M. G. Ranade delivered addresses on Social Reform on the occasion of the meeting of the First Congress at Bombay. In 1886, at Calcutta, nothing further was done. Discussion, however, was going on among the leaders of the Congress movement and other leaders of educated Indian thought whether the Congress as such should concern itself with social questions or whether a separate body should be set up for the discussion of social questions. It was at last resolved after mature deliberation by, among others, Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao, Mr. Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Mr. Narendra Nath Sen and Mr. Janakinath Ghosal, that a separate organization called the Indian National Social Conference, should be started for the consideration of subjects relating to Indian social economy. Madras had the honour of being the birth-place of the Conference, for, the First Indian National Social Conference was held at Madras in December 1887, with no less a man than the late Rajah Sir T. Madhavrao, K.C.S.I., the premier Indian statesman of his time, as the President. The work done at this First Conference, however, was not much. Among other important resolutions members then present recognized the necessity of holding annual National Conferences in different parts of India for considering and adopting measures necessary for the improvement of the status of our society, and of our social usages ; and taking steps to organize and establish Provincial Sub-Committees of the Conferences. It was agreed that among social subjects which the Conference might take up, those relating to the disabilities attendant on distant sea-voyages, the ruinous expenses of marriage, the limitations of age below which marriages should not take place, the remarriages of youthful widows, the evils of the re-marriages of old men with young girls, the forms and evidences of marriages and inter-marriages

between sub-divisions of the same caste should form the subjects for discussion and determination.

As to sanctions it was thought there should be different Sub-Committees appointed for dealing with different social questions. The Sub-Committees were to be left to evolve certain fundamental principles and penalties for breach of these principles, to be carried out and enforced as regards the members of Social Reform Party who might agree to be bound by such penalties, (1) by the Sub-Committees themselves, or (2) through their spiritual heads, whenever it was possible to do so, or (3) through Civil Courts, or failing all (4) by application to Government for enabling the Committees to enforce the rules in respect of their own pledged members.

While the Social Reform Party had formed a separate organization of its own to discuss the many social evils which festered Hindu Society, they were not satisfied with the Congress attitude of completely dissociating itself from questions of social reform. Some of them were anxious to make it an issue whether Social Reform should not precede Political Reform and press for a decision. In this they had many friends to support them. Among them was to be found the Government of India. Sir Aukland Colvin, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, very clearly and very emphatically stated that Indians ought to turn their attention to Social Reform in preference to endeavours they were making "to teach the British what their duties were in regard to the Government of India."

The reference to Social Reform in the addresses of the Congress Presidents referred to above can now be easily understood. They are a reply to the criticism by the Social Reform Party against the Congress dissociating itself from the problem of removing social evils.

Turning to the second question as to why no Congress President has referred to the question of Social Reform in his presidential address after 1895, the answer is that before 1895 there were two schools among Congressmen on the issue of social reform *versus* political reform. The viewpoint of one school was that expressed by Mr. Dadabhoy Naoroji, Mr. Budruddin Tyabji and Mr. Surrendranath Bannerjee. The viewpoint of the other school was that expressed by Mr. W. C.

Banerjee. The former did recognize the need of social reform but thought that the Congress Session was not the proper platform for it. The latter denied that there was need for social reform and challenged the view that there cannot be political reform without social reform. Though the two schools within the Congress were fundamentally opposed to each other, they had not upto 1895 developed a spirit of antagonism and intolerance towards each other. The former school was in a dominant position and the result was that the Indian National Congress and the Social Conference functioned as two parallel organizations each devoting itself to its own particular aims and objects. So great was the spirit of co-operation and good will between the two that the annual sessions of the National Congress and Social Conference were held in immediate succession in the same pandal and a large majority of those who came to attend the Congress Session also attended the Social Conference. The Social Conference was, however, an eyesore to the Congressmen who belonged to the Anti-social Reform Section. This section was evidently getting restive at the kindly disposition and the accommodating spirit which the dominant section in the Congress was showing to the Social Conference particularly in the matter of allowing it to use the Congress pandal for holding its session. In 1895 when the Congress met in Poona, this Anti-Social Reform section rebelled and threatened to burn the Congress pandal if the Congress allowed it to be used by the Social Conference. This opposition to the Social Conference was headed by no other person than the late Mr. Tilak one of those social tories and political radicals with which India abounds and who was the father of the slogan "Swaraj is my birthright" which is now seen blazoned on Congress banners. The rebellion succeeded largely because the Pro-Social Reform Party in the Congress was not prepared to fight its opponents.[1] This rebellion had one effect. It settled that the Congress was not to entertain any question of social reform

1 That the Pro-Social Reform Party in the Congress did not like to take up the challenge is evident from the letter which Mr. Surrendranath Bannerjee wrote to Mr. Ranade over the question raised by Mr. Tilak's Party regarding the use of the Congress pandal by the Social Conference in which he said "The *raison d'etre* for excluding social questions from our deliberations is that were we to take up such questions it might lead to serious differences ultimately culminating in a schism, and it is a matter of the first importance that we should prevent a split. The request of the other side is very unreasonable; but we have sometimes to submit to unreasonable demands to avert greater evils."

no matter how urgent.[1] This is the explanation why no Congress President after 1895 has referred to the question of social reform in his presidential address. The Congress by its action in 1895 had become a purely political body with no interest and no concern in the removal or mitigation of social wrongs.

III

Against this background the resolution passed by the Congress about the Depressed Classes in 1917 is obviously a strange event. The Congress had never done such a thing before although it had functioned for thirty-two years. It was even contrary to its declared policy.

Why did the Congress think it necessary to pass such a resolution in the year 1917 ? What made it take cognizance of the Untouchables ? What did it want to gain ? Whom did it want to deceive ? Was it because of a change in its angle of vision or was it because of some ulterior motive ? For an answer to these questions one must turn to the following resolutions passed by the Depressed Classes in the year 1917 at two separate meetings held in the City of Bombay under two different Presidents. The first of these meetings was held on the 11th November 1917 under the Chairmanship of the late Sir Narayan Chandavarkar. In that meeting the following resolutions[2] were passed :—

> *"First Resolution*—Loyalty to British Government and prayer for victory to the Allies."
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> *"Second Resolution* carried at the meeting by an overwhelming majority, the dissentients being about a dozen, *expressed approval of the scheme of reform in the administration of India recommended by the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League."*
>
> *"Third Resolution* carried unanimously was : 'As the population of the Depressed Classes in India considered Untouchable and treated as such, is very large, as their condition is very

[1] Some of the leading Social Reformers welcomed this rebellion by the Anti-Social Reform Party in the Congress against the Conference. Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao wrote to Mr. Ranade that he "was glad that the panda was not allowed to be used by the Social Conference, for the deception that used to be practised by the Congress upon the English people that it worked in conjunction with the Social Conference was unveiled, and the English people would now clearly understand that the Congress really did not mean to work with the Social Conference."

[2] Addresses presented to the Viceroy in India and the Right Hon'ble the Secretary of State for India (1918). Parliamentary Paper Cd. 9178 pages 74-75.

degraded owing to that treatment and as they are behind the rest of the people in point of education, being unable to secure fair opportunities for their improvement, this public meeting of the Depressed Classes strongly feels that in the scheme of reform and reconstitution of the Legislative Councils which Government may be pleased to adopt, due regard be paid to the interests of the said classes. This meeting therefore prays the British Government to be so gracious as to protect those interests by granting to those classes the right to elect their own representatives to the said Councils in proportion to their numbers."

"*Fourth Resolution* unanimously carried at the meeting was : 'That the Government be prayed for the adoption, with all convenient speed, of a compulsory and free system of education rendered necessary by the fact that the social elevation of any community depends upon the universal spread of education among its members and that degradation of the Depressed Classes is due to their illiteracy and ignorance."

"*Fifth Resolution* carried unanimously was as follows:— 'That the Chairman of this public meeting be authorised to *request the Indian National Congress to pass at its forthcoming session a distinct and independent resolution declaring to the people of India at large the necessity, justice, and righteousness of removing all the disabilities imposed by religion and custom upon the Depressed Classes,* those disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience by prohibiting them from admission into public schools, hospitals, courts of justice and public offices, and the use of public wells, etc. These disabilities social in origin, amount in law and practice to political disabilities and as such fall legitimately within the political mission and propaganda of the Indian National Congress."

"*Sixth Resolution* prays all Hindus of the castes other than the Untouchables and Depressed, especially those of the higher castes, who claim political rights, to take steps for the purpose of removing the blot of degradation from the Depressed Classes, which has subjected those classes to the worst, of treatment in their own country."

The second meeting was also held in November 1917 a week or so after the first meeting. The Chairman was one Bapuji Namdeo Bagade a leader of the Non-Brahmin Party. At this meeting the following resolutions[1] were unanimously adopted :—

"(1) Resolution of loyalty to the British throne."

1 *Ibid* p. 75.

"(2) That this meeting cannot give its support to the Congress-League Scheme in spite of its having been declared to have been passed at the meeting of 11th November 1917 by an overwhelming majority."

"(3) That it is the sense of this meeting that the administration of India should be largely under the control of the British till all classes and specially the Depressed Classes, rise up to a condition to effectually participate in the administration of the country."

"(4) That if the British Government have decided to give political concession to the Indian Public, this meeting prays that Government should grant the Untouchables their own representatives in the various legislative bodies to ensure to them their civil and political rights."

"(5) That this meeting approves of the objects of the Bahiskrit Bharat Samaj (Depressed India Association) and supports the deputation to be sent on its behalf to Mr. Montagu."

"(6) That this meeting prays that Government looking to the special needs of the Depressed Classes, should make primary education both free and compulsory. That the meeting also requests the Government to give special facilities by way of scholarships to the students of the Depressed Classes."

"(7) That the meeting authorises the President to forward the above resolutions to the Viceroy and the Government of Bombay."

It is obvious that there is a close inter-connection between the resolution passed by the Depressed Classes at their meeting in Bombay under the chairmanship of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar and the Congress resolution of 1917 on the elevation of the Depressed Classes. This inter-connection will be easily understood by adverting to the political events of the year 1917. It will be recalled that it was in 1917 or to be precise, on the 20th August 1917 the late Mr. Montagu the then Secretary of State for India announced in the House of Commons the new policy of His Majesty's Government towards India, namely, the policy of "gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire." Leading Indian politicians were expecting some such declaration of policy on the part of His Majesty's Government and were preparing schemes for changes in the constitutional structure of India in anticipation of such a policy. Of the many schemes

that were formulated, there were two around which public attention was centred. One was called "the Scheme of the Nineteen." The second was called "the Congress-League Scheme." The first was put forth by the 19 elected additional Members of the then Imperial Legislative Council. The second was an agreed scheme of political reforms supported by the Congress and the League otherwise known as the Lucknow Pact. Both these schemes had come into existence in 1916, a year before the announcement made by Mr. Montagu.

Of the two schemes, the Congress was interested in seeing that its own scheme was accepted by His Majesty's Government. The Congress with that purpose in view was keen on giving the Congress-League scheme the status and character of a National Demand. This could happen only if the scheme had the backing of all communities in India. In as much as the Muslim League had accepted the scheme, the problem of securing the backing of the Muslim Community did not arise. Next in numbers came the Depressed Classes. Though not as well organized as the Muslims, they were politically very conscious as their Resolutions show. Not only were they politically conscious but they were all along anti-Congress. Indeed in 1895 when Mr. Tilak's followers threatened to burn the Congress pandal if its use was allowed to the Social Conference for ventilating social wrongs, the Untouchables organized a demonstration against the Congress and actually burned its effigy. This antipathy to the Congress has continued ever since. The resolutions passed by both the meetings of the Depressed Classes held in Bombay in 1917 give ample testimony to the existence of this antipathy in the minds of the Depressed Classes towards the Congress. The Congress while anxious to get the support of the Depressed Classes to the Congress-League scheme of Reforms knew very well that it had no chance of getting it. As the Congress did not then practise—it had not learned it then—the art of corrupting people as it does now, it enlisted the services of the late Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, an Ex-President of the Congress. As the President of the Depressed Classes Mission Society he exercised considerable influence over the Depressed Classes. It was as a result of his influence and out of respect for him that a section of the Depressed Classes agreed to give support to the Congress-League Scheme.

The resolution as its text shows did not give unconditional support to the Congress-League scheme. It agreed to give support on the condition that the Congress passed a resolution for the removal of the social disabilities of the Untouchables. The Congress resolution was a fulfilment of its part of the contract with the Depressed Classes which was negotiated through Sir Narayan Chandavarkar.

This explains the genesis of the Congress Resolution of 1917 on the Depressed Classes and its inter-connection with the Resolutions of the Depressed Classes passed under the Chairmanship of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar. This explanation proves that there was an ulterior motive behind the Congress Resolution. That motive was not a spiritual motive. It was a political motive.

What happened to the Congress Resolution ? The Depressed Classes in their Resolution had called upon the "higher castes, who claim political rights, to take steps for the purpose of removing the blot of degradation from the Depressed Classes, which has subjected these classes to the worst of treatment in their own country." What did the Congress do to give effect to this demand of the Depressed Classes ? In return for the support it got, the Congress was bound to organize a drive against untouchability to give effect to the sentiments expressed in its Resolution. The Congress did nothing. The passing of the Resolution was a heartless transaction. It was a formal fulfilment of a condition which the Depressed Classes had made for giving their support to the Congress-League scheme. Congressmen did not appear to be charged with any qualms of conscience or with any sense of righteous indignation against man's inhumanity to man which is what untouchability is. They forgot the Resolution the very day on which it was passed. The Resolution was a dead letter. Nothing came out of it.

Thus ended the first chapter in the history of what the Congress has done to the Untouchables.

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