

## **Dr. Ambedkar - The Lion at the Round Table Conferences**

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### **Introduction**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was one of the greatest sons of India. A Parliamentarian scholar and Constitutionalist of World repute, he has been universally acclaimed as a saviour of untouchables. As a great crusader of the downtrodden, he waged a relentless struggle against the old order which was based on injustice and was devoid of human dignity. He strove, throughout his life, to establish a new social order based on principles of liberty, equality and universal brotherhood. He stands as a symbol of struggle for social justice. This paper brings out the speeches of Dr. Ambedkar at the round Table Conferences. This includes his speeches in the Plenary sessions of the First Round Table Conference, his arguments in the Minorities Sub-Committee and fight for safeguarding the rights of the untouchables in the future Constitution of India and his role in the Franchise Sub-Committee as protagonist and advocate of universal adult suffrage. In second round Table Conference, he is crossing sword with Mahatma Gandhi on the question of Untouchables' Rights in Minorities Committee.

### **Round Table Conference**

On 12 November 1930, the King George V formally inaugurated the Round Table Conference. The Round Table Conference was an event of great significance to Indians as well as to the depressed classes. Its significance lay in the recognition by the British of the right of Indians to be consulted in the matters of framing a Constitution of India. As regards the Depressed Classes they were for the first time allowed to be represented separately by their delegates. These delegates were Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and R. Srinivasan.

In this very session Dr. B. R. Ambedkar put forth the cause of Depressed Classes as well as their position on Indian matters clearly and seriously. In this session Dr. Ambedkar greatly emphasised on Dalit demands which only due to the huge pressure of the awakened Dalit people of India and the demands which he raised were actually the demands of common enlightened Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar spoke on behalf of the Depressed Classes of India in the Plenary session in the 5<sup>th</sup> sitting of the Round Table Conference on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1930 to "put the point of view of Depressed Classes".

"The point of view I will try to put as briefly as I can. It is that the bureaucratic form of Government in India should be replaced by a Government which will be the Government of the people, by the people and for the people. This statement of the view of the Depressed people I am sure will be received with surprises in some quarters... We have judged the existing administration solely in the light of our own circumstances and we have found it wanting". He again surprised the Congress as well as the British by attacking the British Raj in the following words:

“The Government of India does not realise that the landlords are squeezing the masses dry and that the capitalists are not giving the labourers a living wage and decent conditions of work. Yet it is a most painful thing that it had not dared to touch any of these evils. Why? The reason why it does not intervene is because it is afraid that its intervention to amend the existing code of social and economic life will give rise to resistance of what good is such a Government to anybody? ... We feel that anybody can remove our grievances as well as we can and we cannot remove them unless, we get, political power in our own hands. No share of this political power can evidently come to us so long as the British Government remains as it is. It is only the Swaraj Constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power in our own hands without which we cannot bring salvation to our people. WE KNOW THAT POLITICAL POWER IS PASSING FROM THE British into the hands of those who wield such tremendous economic, social and religious way over our existence. We are willing that it may happen though the idea of Swaraj recalls to the mind of many the tyrannies, oppressions and injustices practised upon us in the past”.

The above remarks of Dr. Ambedkar against the British and for the Swaraj are answer to historians like Arun Shourie who uttered that he was a “pro-British and anti-nationalist” leader .

### **Emphasis on Two Major Points**

In his introductory speech, Dr. Ambedkar emphasised chiefly on two points. Firstly Depressed Classes were totally with their countrymen on the demand of independence from the British rule. Secondly, the Dalit problem was mainly a political problem which could be talked only politically. The second point was never accepted by the Congress. They only described this problem as social problem. Dr. Ambedkar stressed very forcefully on this aspect. “We are often reminded that the problem of the Depressed Classes is a social problem and that its solution lies elsewhere than in politics. We take strong exception to this view. We hold that the problem of Depressed Classes will never be solved unless they get political power in their own hands”.

“ The depressed classes form a group by themselves; the position of the depressed classes is one which is midway between that of the serf and the slave and which may, for convenience, be called service with this difference, that the serf and the slave were permitted to have physical contact, from which the depressed classes welcomed the British as their deliverers from age long tyranny and oppression by the orthodox Hindus”.

### **Minorities Subcommittee**

On 31<sup>st</sup> December,1930 in the second sitting of the sub-committee No. III (Minorities) he spoke: “The disabilities of the Depressed Classes were mentioned in almost every dispatch that was recorded by the Government of India in connection with the Political advancement of the country; but the dispatches only mentioned the difficulties and never attempted to give any solution of those difficulties.

“I voice the grievances of 43 millions of people and grievances which the committee will agree are unparallel by the case of any other community that exists in India. The depressed Classes are

a minority which comes next to the great Muslim minority in India and yet their social standard is lower than the social standard of ordinary human beings. The minorities shall have, in the future Constitution of India, representation in the public services of the country and that the Constitution shall provide that there shall be imposed on the future legislatures of India, certain limitations on their legislative powers which will prevent the majorities from abusing their legislative power in such a manner as to enact laws which would create discrimination between one citizen and another. There is difficulty the Depressed classes find in getting themselves accommodated in public inn when they are travelling, the difficulty they find in being taken in an omnibus when travelling from one place to another, the difficulty they find in securing entry to public schools to which they have themselves contributed, the difficulty they find in drawing water from a well for the building of which they have paid taxes and so on.”

### **Taking on Gandhi**

In the Ninth Sitting on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1931 of the Minorities Committee, Dr. Ambedkar took on Mahatma Gandhi and said, “What disturbs me after hearing Mr. Gandhi is that instead of confining himself to his proposition, namely that the Minorities Commission should adjourn sine die, he started casting certain reflections upon the representatives of the different communities who are sitting round this table. The Mahatma has been always claiming that the Congress stands for the Depressed Classes and that the Congress represents the Depressed Classes more than I or my Colleague Srinivasan can do. To that claim, I can only say that it is one of the many false claims which irresponsible people keep on making, although the persons concerned with regard to those claims have been invariably denying them.”

“The Depressed Classes are not anxious, they are not clamorous, they have not started any movement for claiming that there shall be an immediate transfer of power from Britain to the Indian people. They have their particular grievances against the British people and I think I have voiced them sufficiently to make it clear that we feel those grievances most genuinely”.

### **Political Safeguards**

Due to the various efforts of Ambedkar and R. Srinivasan, a scheme of political safeguards for the protection of the Depressed Classes in the future Constitution of a self-governing India was brought out as an Appendix to report of Sub- Committee No. III (Minorities). This includes Equal Citizenship, Fundamental Right, Free enjoyment of equal Rights, social Boycott, Protection against Discrimination, Adequate Representation in the Legislatures, redress against Prejudicial Action or Neglect of Interests, special Department care etc.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, Dr. Ambedkar took care of the helpless, hapless, sapless condition of the Depressed Classes and the Round Table Conferences were an event of great significance in which Dr. Ambedkar’s brainstorming, striking and though provoking speeches bear ample testimony to his depth of knowledge, thorough grasp over subject, immense power of logic, etc. He roared like a lion causing flutter in the political circles of India and England.

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