

CHAPTER TWO

DR. AMBEDKAR IN THE MOVEMENT OF WOMEN LIBERATION

CHAPTER TWO / DR. AMBEDKAR IN THE MOVEMENT OF
WOMEN LIBERATION

Dr Ambedkar expresses the view that Manu wanted to stem the tide of women flowing in the direction of Buddhism. It is for this that Manu imposed these disabilities upon women and crippled them permanently. Those who doubt this might well consider the following injunctions laid down in the Manu Smriti:

V.88 - Funeral rites and obsequies which are performed on the death of person shall be withdrawn (i.e., shall not be performed) from those who are born out of intermixture, from those who are addicted to asceticism and from those who have ended their lives by committing suicide.

V.89 - They shall also be withdrawn from women who have joined a heretic sect, who behave too freely, who have injured a child in their womb or their husband and those who drink wine.

This injunction is among other armed at (1) those who are addicted to asceticism and (2) women who have joined a heretic sect. In this injunction asceticism refers to Parivrajakas i.e., those who have abandoned

their homes and taken to Sannyas and, in referring to a heretic sect, there is no doubt that Manu has in mind the Buddhist Religion. It is, therefore, clear that when Manu declares that no funeral rites and obsequies shall be performed for an ascetic or a woman who has joined a heretic sect, what Manu does is to to member of family - whether male or female - who has joined the Buddha's religion. This is the secret of the many inequalities which he heaped upon women. For he knew that if the home is to be protected against the invasion of Buddhism it is the woman who must be put under restraint. And he did it. All responsibility for the decline and fall of woman in India must be fastened upon Manu. I have also endeavoured to offer an explanation as to who was the author of their fall and why he brought it about. I hope that the unprejudiced and the impartial will realise that it was not the Buddha who can be held responsible for the tragedy. If anything he did, it was that the Buddha endeavoured to ennoble the woman and to raise her to the level of man.¹

Dr. Ambedkar, while comparing the Muslim society to the Hindu society, says:

The Muslim have all the social evils that affect the Hindu society. Indeed, the Muslims have all the social evils of Hindus and something more.

That something more is the compulsory system of purdah (evil) for Muslim women. Among the Muslims purdah has a religious sanctity.

Women in Islam are deprived of mental and moral nourishment owing to the purdah system. This is a religious way of implementing social segregation. Observes Dr. Ambedkar, "As a consequence of the purdah system, a segregation of the Muslim women is brought about. Being deprived of healthy social life. The process of moral degeneration must and does set in being completely secluded from the other world: They engage their minds in petty family quarrels with the result that they become narrow and restricted in their outlook. Purdah women in particular become helpless, timid and unfit for any fight in life. A social system which cuts off all contact between the two sexes produces an unhealthy tendency towards sexual excesses and unnatural and other morbid habits and ways." Such seclusion cannot but have its deteriorating effects upon the physical constitution of Muslim women. They are usually victims to anaemia, tuberculosis and dysorrhoea. Their bodies are deformed, with their backs bent, bones protruded, hands and feet crooked. Ribs, joints and nearly all their bones ache. Heart palpitation is very often present in them. The result of this pelvic deformity is untimely death at the time of delivery.²

An impassional appeal to cast off the evil practices and customs among certain sections of the depressed classes was made by Dr. Ambedkar at a meeting at Damodar Thakersey Hall, Bombay on 15.7.1927. The meeting was largely attended by men and women belonging to the Devdasi, Patraje Aradhi and Jogiti sects, and was held to accord support to the mass conversion move inaugurated at Yeola. After several speakers, both men and women, had addressed the gathering on the need for a change of faith as a step towards social freedom. Dr. Ambedkar made a fervent appeal, especially to the women, most of whom had come from Kamatipura. "Whether you change your religion alongwith us or not", said the Doctor addressing the women, "it does not matter much to me. But I insist that if you want to be with the rest of us you must give up your disgraceful life. The Mahar women of Kamathipura are a shame to the community. Unless you are prepared to change your ways we shall have nothing to do with you, and we shall have no use for you. There are only two ways open: continue to be despised and shunned, or you give up your disgusting profession and come with us". He further said: "You will ask me how you are to make your living. I am not going to tell you that. There are hundreds of ways of doing it. But I insist that you must give up this degrading life.

You must marry and settle down to normal domestic life as women of other classes do not continue to live under conditions which inevitably drive you into prostitution.³

"Most of you may be unmarried, while several might have got married. But what are you going to do after marriage? A heavy responsibility rests on your shoulders, in this respect. I would illustrate the case of my father instead of yours. He had fourteen issues in all and amongst these I was the last one. But what was my condition, while I was a student in the Elphinston College? I had to go bare footed and put on a shirt of rough cloth and a rough coat of my father. On entering this college, you will find a photograph of Muller Sahib, who provided me with shirts for the last two years. I used to ponder, how nice it would have been had my father only four children, instead of fourteen! It was he and only he, that was responsible for my misery. Once, while going to the college, I forgot the railway pass at home and on the same day, passes were to be checked. The Ticket Collector hindered me. But I had not a single pie with me and had to wait at the station of Churchgate, upto 4 p.m.. Afterwards, my class-mate, named Kaikini came there and asked me why I was sitting there. When I narrated to him what had happened, he paid four annas and relieved me from the place. He issued

a ticket for me and sent me home. Thus, I blame my father, in this regard, as he did not understand his responsibility. I don't feel it to be improper to point out this to my father, when he was wrong. Now, this responsibility rests on you, as well as on women. You should see that what I speak is meant, not only for males, but also for females. You will enter into service, but I think, most of you would become clerks and earn about 50 to 60 rupees per month. And with this pay, if you have 14 issues, what would happen to them? Will you set this responsibility on the society? Consider deeply about this, in your mind. You would not be ready to become Sanyasis and if somebody becomes one, it would be very nice! (loud cheers). Don't laugh as this is a very serious and important thing. I had five children out of which four expired. Now, I don't feel sorry for this. On the other hand, I am happy. Had these issues remained alive, it would have been greatly troublesome to carry the burden of their food and education. Now, I have got only one son and I have to shoulder his responsibility. If you show one hundredth part of this responsibility for your children, it would be well and good. This is a matter of social welfare. If you reproduce five or six issues, how will you afford to give them education and other facilities? I think, it would be

descending order, instead of ascending one. So you must consider that living like a brute is against humanity.

*(Extract from the speech delivered by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on
12 December, 1938 in Bombay)*

(Janata 17.12.1938)⁴

Scheduled Castes' Mahila Samaj:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar addressed an audience of about 3,000 persons on June 3, 1953 in a public meeting held under the auspices of the Scheduled Caste Mahila Mandal at Rawli Camp, Sion, Bombay. He said that there was much criticism on his speech made on the "Buddha Jayanti" day and advised the audience not to be misled by the criticism.⁵

Interview with Lady Layton, Mrs O. Stracey and Sir Philip Hartog, on behalf of the British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise in 1933:

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 resister 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 role to the communities from which they are drawn?

Lady Layton: As far as practically possible certainly.

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 resister?

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

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.

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 male voter as against the women voter?

Lady Layton: Attach importance to both those factors but we think that the women's interest for the movement 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 it is to be moved as soon as practically possible. We would be prepared to ask for adult franchise, if it were practically possible, but we realize it is not administratively possible.

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 women'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?

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 that: 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 movement, 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 organized women of India are also in favour of literacy.

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 registration officer, offhand, to satisfy herself 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 shall 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 that: 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?

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.

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 further generations of girls and women, it will

be a comparatively simple matter to adopt your educational registers and returns of 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 Madras women on the rolls for the 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?⁶

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

Associations:

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

Mrs. Hamid Ali: The Mussulman never has an objection to taking his wife's name. As Sir Hari puts it, there is a certain feeling of delicacy, but I have never known any feeling of difficulty among Muslims to take their wives' names. It is true the women do not take their husbands' name frequently, but they do it occasionally.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: It is in Hindu households where the husband may object to taking the wife's name.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I thought the point of the question raised by Sir Hari Sing Gaur was not whether there was some mental objection on the part of the Hindu husband or the Muhammadan husband to give utterance to the name of his wife. I thought the point of question was: which one of the two, or anyone, would object to the sort of enquiry that a registration officer will have to make?

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: I do not understand what sort of enquiry the registration officers have to make.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: It will be, "Have you a wife, if you have a wife, what is her name?"

Sir Hari Singh Gour: And "How many wives have you got?"

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Who would object to the sort of enquiry that will have to be made by the registration officer is the point of the question.

Chairman: The witness might care to interpose an answer now. Will you answer Dr. Ambedkar's suggestion, if you have any views?

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: Yes, I can only say that I do not think anybody will have any objection to a question like that. I cannot understand the mentality that even prefers a question of this nature. It seems to me wholly incomprehensible.

Chairman: Do you agree with that answer?

Mrs. Hamid Ali: Do you agree that there will be no difficulty?

Mrs. Hamid Ali: I think it will depend on the way and the tone, in which a question like this is put. Ordinarily a question like that asked in good faith and with no evil intention would not be taken amiss by anybody at all.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I want to ask (Mrs Hamid Ali) one more question. You come from Bombay. You know that there are certain district wards which are exclusively Mussalman quarters. From your experience do you really think it is possible for an election officer to enter these wards and make these enquiries?

Mrs. Hamid Ali: As far as Bombay is concerned, yes, I do not think anybody would take objection in Bombay, because in Bombay we have Municipal elections so often and people are trained to this kind of thing.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I have not exactly followed what is stated in this supplementary statement No. 56 in regard to the representation of women in the Federal Assembly. It is said, "We have repeatedly urged that we do not desire the communal virus to enter into our united ranks", you see that the proposal of the white paper so far as the representation of women in the lower House is concerned is not by communal electorates, but is by a general electorate by a single transferable vote?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: From that point of view I should have thought it could not be objected to on the ground of its being a communal electorate?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: In the first place the seats in the Lower House of the Federal Assembly for women are definitely to be on a communal basis. We have the Secretary of State's clear dictum on that point in his evidence the day before yesterday or three days ago. In the Lower House of the Federal Assembly the reserved seats to which this indirect system of election refers are definitely to be on a communal basis.

Mr. M.R. Jaykar: Your objection is to the reservation of seats on the communal basis?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes, and further the indirect system of election to those seats by legislatures which must, in the very nature of the constitution as proposed today, be on communal lines.

Miss Mary Pickford: May I just interpose here? In the Secretary State's reply when he said that the communal question was involved he was then referring to the women's seats on the Provincial Council of Bengal. It was not in reference to the seats in the Legislative Assembly.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: This is what I thought. If I may draw the attention of the witness to page 89 of the White Paper, Appendix II, I should have thought that matter had

been settled once and for all. You also refer to it. "Election to the women's seat in each of the provinces to which one is allocated will be by the Member of the Provincial Legislature Voting by means of the Single transferable vote".

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes, but my point is this. May I, then, know if the Secretary of State in answer to Miss Pickfor's question was referring to reserved seats on a communal basis for the Provincial Council of Bengal. May I understand whether the communal question does not enter into the reserved seats for women in the Lower House? Are they to be reserved on a non-communal basis? I should like to be clear on this point. I want to know on what basis these seats are to be reserved.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Let me follow this further, because to my mind, there is a certain amount of confusion, and I should like to get it cleared up. First of all, do you object to indirect election?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Yes, do.

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: That is one objection.

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: You do not want the women representatives who are to represent women in the Federal Lower House to be elected by indirect election from the Provincial Legislative Council?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Most definitely not.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: You want some sort of a direct constituency provided?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: As we are against reserved seats, if they are reserved for us on a communal basis, of course, really this question as far as we are concerned does not arise, but we would, of course, want women to enter.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Let me put a question first to clear the ground. Do you want any seats to be reserved for women at all in the Lower House?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: I have said that we would recommend for the being until such time as adult suffrage is obtained through our organizations, the acceptance of reservation, provided it were definitely laid down that the women's seats would be on a non-communal basis, and through the means of joint electorates. That is the only condition on which we would accept it.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I quite follow two things. You want for the time being a certain number of seats reserved for women?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: We have always been opposed to reservation.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The second thing I have understood from you, correct me if I am wrong, is that you do not want that provision for the representation of women in the Federal Lower House by any system of indirect election. That is the second point you have made?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: What I want to ask you is that ...?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: You say we want reservation, I have told you we have already been opposed to reservation.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: You do not want any reservation at all?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: We have already said that we do not want reservation, but as I say, if reservations are to be forced down on us as so many things have been forced down on us against our wishes, then the only conditions on which we would recommend the acceptance of reservation to our organizations would be

definitely that they would be through a system of joint electorate and direct election, and if the seats were on a purely non-communal basis, that is to say, that we have the right to put on women of our choice.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: If the matter were left to your choice, you would not want any earmarking of seats for women as such in the Federal Lower House?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Certainly not.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: If it is to be, then you would want it on a system of joint electorate and direct election?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes, direct election and a non-communal basis.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Let me take the non-communal basis. Do you want this constituency for direct election to consist only of women in that particular constituency?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: No, we want men and women.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: You want this constituency to be a sort of composite constituency, in which the voters will be both men and women?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes, that is to say, if a woman was to be elected to a reserved seat, it

would naturally follow that it must be woman.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: How would you provide these direct constituencies for the legislative Assembly?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: As I say we have not got any constructive proposal on this because we have throughout been opposed to reservation we would leave that to the discretion of the committee, but if reservations were given to us, on the term and the only terms on which we would accept it. We would leave it to the discretion of the committee to form such constituencies as would be the most representative.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I thought you said in answer to a question that you objected to this indirect system of election provided in the White Paper for the representation of women in the Lower House of the Federal Legislature because, in a certain sense, it would be, what shall I say, communal-minded?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: That the representatives in the various Provincial Councils would act in a communal manner in the exercise of their

votes, and that is the ground of your objection?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: I have already answered this question, have I not?

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Yes, I want to put one more question. Further, I see, and I want to get this matter clear, that you object to the indirect election that is proposed in the White Paper because you think that the representatives of the different communities in the Provincial Legislature will be communal-minded, and, therefore, communal considerations will be imported in that election?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: May I give you the answer again? We object to indirect election first of all, because naturally we want direct election.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Yes, I follow that.

Raj. Amrit Kaur: That is the first objection. The second objection is that this indirect election for us is proposed through the Provincial Council; these Provincial Councils, which are going to be on communal lines will naturally bring that communal question again to the women that they elect.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: That is true, but I want to put a

further question. I quite understand your objection that to have different representatives of the different communities in the Provincial Legislative Council would import to material consideration in the election of women.

Mr. M.R. Jaykar: That is only one of your objections to the indirect election, but I understand another objection is also on the ground that is indirect?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: I have said so more than once.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The question is this. Take, for instance, your direct constituency, any any constituency that you may like to take, for instance the city of Bombay. You will have in that constituency, which you would desire to be specially designed for the election of a woman representative in the Lower House, electorates of both men and women drawn from different communities?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Do you mean to suggest that those voters who would take part in the election of a woman representative would be less communal-minded than the representatives of those larger communities in the Provincial Legislative Council who would be participating in

the election of a woman candidate on the indirect basis?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Without doubt, because the communal question exists far more among the type which goes into the legislative than it does among the masses of the people.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: But I want to draw your attention to this fact, that these very electorates will be electing the men who will be the voters for the indirect election?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: It may be so, but when it is a question of joint electorates and we are going to get the votes of joint electorates, the communal question will not exist there - it cannot exist to the same extent that it does in a Provincial Council which has been elected by separate electorates and where the communal question is alive and must be very much alive.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Do you think that in the general electorate the men and women in India do not act in a communal manner?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Certainly no in the general mass.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Have you ever seen a poll going on?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes, we have had a very recent example

in the case of one of the women members of our organization who topped the poll in Bombay with the joint electorates, practically no women at all but all men the depressed classed and everyone voting and she topped the poll. That is in a municipal election. Then there was not only her but another lady, and we have had examples in elections in universities in Patna where women have been elected by men and no difficulty on the communal question has arisen.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: When the point is whether a woman will be elected, no doubt the communal feeling will be less in a direct election than it will be in an indirect election?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Certainly whether the indirect election is going to be by means of the council, it is going to be permeated by communalism.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: In those Councils where they have actually been members I understand it has been by nomination?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: Yes, there is no such thing as election.

Sir Hari Singh Gour: To the Legislative Assembly they have never been nominated so far?

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Never

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Is there a disqualification?

Raj. Amrit Kaur: I think not.

Mr. Hamid Ali: May I point out in connection with this that it is very lately that the provinces have done away with the disqualification?

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: It has been done very, very recently, in some provinces so recently that they have scarcely had time for another election since the disqualification was done away with.⁷

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: It is to be inferred that these communal differences would very likely spread to the women if the women were to enter the profession?

Mrs. L. Mukerji: I do not think so. I think that women by nature is free from such communal feelings on account of her sex.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: For instance, today the struggle or scramble for jobs and professional appointment is really confined to the men?

Mrs. L. Mukerji: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Largely, because women in India are not earning members of the family?

Mrs. L. Mukerji: I quite see your point.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Therefore, to take the case of education, if a large section of women along-with men were entering that profession, and other professions as a result of education or your own analysis, perhaps the thing would develop among women?

Mrs. L. Mukerji: It is quite possible, I cannot answer that point until we see the result.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I appreciate that but I just wanted to put the point to you.

Mrs. L. Mukerji: I feel in a future time, when our women will be in a position to go into the professions, that the communal business might die out altogether. I anticipate that.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I hope so.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: There is just one question I would like to ask you, Mrs. Sen. You have explained your views with regard to the representation of women in the Federal Lower House, and you have stated your objection to the provision made in the White Paper for indirect election?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I do not find anywhere your views as

to the provisions made for the representation of women in the Provincial Legislatures, except of course, that you have expressed generally that you would not like any provision which savours of communalism?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Have you anything to suggest on that?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: I did not quite follow the question.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: In the Provincial Legislatures several seats are provided which are to be filled by women?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: Yes.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: No detailed provisions are laid down in the White Paper as to how those seats are to be filled. It is Appendix III of the White Paper, on page 93, under "General" Madras, out of 152, 6 women, Mohammedan 29, including one woman. This is all the provision that exists in the White Paper so far.

Mrs. P.K. Sen: We would like to do away with all these communities, if you would give us six seats in each of the provinces. That would be much better, and we should be able to fill these seats with the best women available.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Have you any other method by which these six seats could be filled up?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: Yes, Capital city, for the Federal Assembly, I have already answered that question. It would be the same for the Provincial Assembly also. The capital city would be the constituent area, it would be a small electorate. It would not mean so much expense, and women from all over the Provinces would be able to stand for the seats.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: You would have one capital city to return six women in Madras?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: No. They would have their separate constituencies different principalities of the province.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The question I wanted to ask was how far you agree? Would you be prepared as a matter of concession to the communal sentiment of the various communities, that while making arrangements on the basis of a joint electorate for the return of such women in the Legislative Councils, to have a permission reserving a certain number of seats, for instance, for the Muslim women, keeping the total the same?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: We are against communal reservations.

- Mrs. P.K. Sen: That should be a joint electorate of men and women.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I do not know. At least Mr. Butler might be able to enlighten us as to how these six seats are going to be filled?
- Mrs. L. Mukerji: We do not. If it can be avoided, want any communal distinction.
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I quite follow you, I am asking you whether you would be prepared to moderate your objection, to this extent, that you would have a joint electorate with one seat reserved, so as not to disturb the communal balance.
- Mr. Butler: I think that Dr. Ambedkar will find this at "The precise electoral machinery to be employed in the constituencies for the special women's seats is still under consideration".
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Therefore, I was asking whether these seats would be filled by separate electorates of women in the general constituency, it is not made clear here. I do not know if it is done, because I find in the Table given on seats allocated under separate heads. Under "General", six women's seats, under "Muhammadan", one, that rather gives me the impression that you would have a separate electorate of Muslim women

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I can quite understand your objection to having a separate electorate of Hindu women to return five Hindu women and a separate electorate of Muslim women to return one Muslim woman. What I want to know is, whether you have also the same objection to a system in which both the Hindu women and Muslim women would vote together in a common constituency - a joint constituency, with this - reservation, that, at least one seat would be reserved for a Muslim woman?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: They would all vote for the Muhammadan lady.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I know that you would probably be so generous that you may give more. Would you be prepared to approve a reservation being made by law that just one should be reserved for a Muslim woman?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: Yes, that is already there, and we have to accept that.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: That may be on the basis of separate electorate, it is not stated how it would be. Therefore, I wanted to get your opinion on the matter. The detailed provisions as to how these six seats in Madras are to be filled are not found in the White Paper?

only, so that the result would be that 28 would be men and one a woman. I do not know, I seek for information upon the point.

Chairman: I think we had better use this afternoon in getting information out of the witness. Will you return to the point?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: It would not be at least a separate women's electorate.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: If left to you, you might give them all the six, or more than that?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: Quite.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: I mean, in view of the fear that there may be none?

Mrs. P.K. Sen: Yes.⁸

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had moved a non-official resolution regarding the measures for birth-control in the Bombay Legislative Assembly on 10th November, 1938. Dr. Ambedkar was the leader of the Independent Labour Part in the Assembly during this period. Immediately after the introduction of the 1935 Act of India, elections of the Assembly were held and Dr. Ambedkar secured 14 out of 17 seats he had contested. His success in the

1937 elections was outstanding and during the period of the Assembly he used the forum of non-official resolution to invite attention of the party in power to some of the fundamental problems in the country in general and Bombay Presidency in particular. The problem of birth-control was one such problem. Gandhism and birth-control: One of the distinguishing features of Dr. Ambedkar's leadership during this period is that he was probably the only political leader in India who had strongly advocated the cause of birth control. Gandhism was the most dominant political philosophy in these days in India and the thinking of a large number of legislators was naturally profoundly influenced by the Gandhian approach to the problem. Gandhism was opposed to any artificial measures for birth control. Mahatma Gandhi had faith only in the concept of self-control or abstinence. The legislative party in the Bombay Assembly was committed to Gandhian Philosophy and, therefore, most of the members of the congress party in the assembly were against the measures for birth-control. The champions of Gandhian philosophy advanced a number of arguments to oppose the measures for birth-control. Shri Morarji Desai, who was a Revenue Minister, for example said, "What I want to ask you, all the while, is that people should have self-control. Self-control is a very difficult



thing. In this matter we do not expect that everybody will reach that high stage of Brahmacharya which Mahatma Gandhi expects for himself and for others. But in the matter of preventing the evil to the women that stage of Brahmacharya is certainly not necessary. What self-control is necessary for man is that he should not approach his wife, that he should remain away, that he should have self-control over himself. It is just possible that he may have impulses in his own body periodically and if he loses the vital fluid at times it will not be evil as far as woman is concerned and even as far as he is concerned that will not deteriorate his health.⁹

Besides Gandhian Marxists, champions of Hindu nationalism, Muslim League and Christians the other nationalists were also opposed to the resolution. Their central theme was that British Imperialism is responsible for the poverty and other consequential evil effects in the country. If the British Imperialism is liquidated almost all the problems of our country would be automatically solved. So it is futile to discuss the measures of birth-control. There were a large number of nationalists who subscribed to this kind of thinking. As a result of this, Dr. Ambedkar was probably the only political leader in India who thought of this problem very

seriously and analysed the issue, in a very rational, scientific and pragmatic way. In the context of the all India situation in those days. Dr. Ambedkar's thinking is not only very striking but it also places him far ahead of his contemporaries. What is important? Birth rate or survival rate? Dr. Ambedkar's approach becomes more impressive in the context of the situation in 1940's. Minority communities like the Scheduled Castes were getting reservation. On the basis of their number in the services as well as in the legislatures and other elected bodies. Limiting their population was apparently going against the interest of the Scheduled Castes. But Dr. Ambedkar convinced his followers that birth-control was primarily in the interest of the poor people like untouchables and other groups. He argued brilliantly on this issue. He raised a very pertinent question in this regard, namely, what is more important? Birth rate or survival rate? Dr. Ambedkar, therefore, said that survival rate is more important than the birth rate and birth control would go a long way in improving the health and financial condition of the Scheduled Caste people. This argument is not only convincing but it is almost a profound truth that is universally applicable to all poor communities in the world. Wisdom of the poor masses: Dr. Ambedkar has expressed profound

faith in the wisdom of the poor masses. It was said that the masses in the rural areas are illiterate and ignorant and, therefore, they would not be able to follow birth control measures intelligently. Dr. Ambedkar said that the masses in our country though illiterate are intelligent enough to know wherein their interest lies and hence, there is no doubt that they will fully utilize this invention also as soon as they are made aware of its existence. Vasectomy would be found to be useful in the case of such persons and hence Government and Municipalities must provide facilities in this respect in their hospitals. Dr. Ambedkar has also said that the communities which need the measures of birth-control most are the poor communities like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.¹⁰

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Ambedkar, B.R., The Rise And Fall of Hindu Women, an article edited by L.R. Balley, Julundhar, 1988, pp. 26-29.
- 2 Dr. Surendra Ajnat, Ambedkar on Islam, Jallundar, 1986, pp. 12-13.
- 3 Source Material On Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar And The Movement of Untouchables, Vol. 1, Edited by Shri M.B. Chitnis, Bombay, 1982, p. 410.
- 4 M.P. Mangudkar, Dr. Ambedkar And Family Planning, Poona, 1990, pp. 61-64.
- 5 Source Material on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar And The Movement of Untouchables, Op.cit., p. 410.
- 6 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar- Writings And Speeches, Vol. 2, Edited by Vasant Moon, Bombay, 1982, pp. 696-98.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 698-704.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 704-707.
- 9 M.P. Mangudkar, Op.cit., pp. 1-2.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 5-7.