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Empowering the Untouchables on the Eve of Indian Independence

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Empowering the Untouchables on the Eve of Indian Independence

Sawyer Peck

My name is Dr. B.R Ambedkar, I was raised as a Dalit, an untouchable, conforming to the standard that I was inferior within our culture. Growing up along the underside of our society, I developed a unique perspective on how to better India as a whole, and with the opportunity we have before us, my opinion must be respected. Everything I will attempt to achieve as we move toward a new era for India will maintain Hindu foundations, while advancing the quality of life for all who live within it, including the untouchables. It has become clear to me that members of this delegation will attempt to alter the nature of untouchability, but being an untouchable is an experience that my peers fail to understand. I do not wish to abolish untouchability, I aspire to allot a certain amount of representation for Dalits within our congressional system.

The life of an untouchable is rigorous and without reward. Our cities rely on the tasks we are born into, tasks that the common individual would refuse to do if asked. We clean trash, animal carcasses, and human excrement from the streets. We handle corpses, cut umbilical cords, and slaughter livestock. I have experienced persecution first hand, along with countless atrocities. Untouchables are subject to murders, rapes, and lynching on a daily basis. Tens of thousands of these crimes are reported annually, yet estimates show that this is a mere fraction of how frequently we the untouchables face violent subjugation. Putting us below everyone in society is not just a physical and mental detriment to our health, it also affects how we as a caste develop. We are the least educated of any caste, having an average of 2.3% of untouchables under instruction in any given province. We lack the ability to fight the injustices put upon us, and without any ability to voice an educated opinion, the dehumanization of my caste will continue.

Many believe the case I have recently made is a justification for the removal of the Dalits, but I disagree. A simple solution that would abolish the untouchable class will only marginally improve the quality of life amongst that caste. A social change cannot occur based on the words of the government; we require untouchable representation to enforce laws already in place for our protection. We have laws in place to allow us in schools, yet they are not enforced. We have laws that prevent murder and rape, yet they are not enforced. The culture of India has already grown to look down upon people like us whether it is endorsed by Hinduism or not. Across the world in the United States of America, African individuals were kept as slaves for hundreds of years. When the government released them did they immediately become accepted into American society? No, in fact their representation in congress has been sparse, and their rights have been limited; laws are in place to protect them yet the society doesn't abide by them. We must move towards making a tangible difference for the quality of life in India for everyone, and my method of doing so is advantageous culturally, politically, and religiously.

My proposal aligns with ideals that your fellow English statesmen have, proportional representation for different cleavages within your country. Being that the current population of India is a bit over 300 million, 50 million being untouchables, my proposition of having 1/3 of the Indian Congress reserved for Dalits is proportionally adequate to the rest of the representatives. As I have alluded to previously, to bolster the lives within a group of people, they must be

adequately represented in the government. Being the British Governor General, I assume you understand the balance the British population has due to Parliamentary houses for both commoners and lords. Take the Parliamentary Act of 1911 for instance, which gave the representatives of the House of Commons more economic independence which proved beneficial to lower class citizens of the United Kingdom. Giving political representation to millions of overlooked individuals will benefit the country entirely, it gives them the ability to influence economic growth for their group, as well as influence lawful social change. Economic growth in all sectors reduces the need for crime as a financial necessity, and improves individual health with more citizens being able to afford healthcare. This affects social change as well, many social injustices stem from economic frustrations, which are usually taken out on lower classes of society, in this case being the untouchables.

Reserved seats for untouchables in congress will benefit India as a whole, as well as maintain traditional Hindu values. Fourteen years ago, your predecessors at the Round Table Conference in London agreed to my terms, reserved seats in the legislature for Dalits. They trusted my Ivy League education and fact-based projections. All that got in the way of my proposal was one man who had a distorted view of how the untouchables should be treated, Gandhi. I plead to you that you do not make the same mistake as previous officials. Raised a Vaisya, Gandhi did not live through the Dalit life as I did, he did not need to work for the education he received. His repeated threats of self-harm have helped him achieve his political agenda over my legitimate propositions. He preaches peace and freedom, yet does not approve of Dalits converting to Islam or at the very least Sikhism “Dr. Ambedkar wants a change of religion. If becoming a Sikh amounts to a conversion, then this kind of conversion on the part of the [Dalits] is dangerous.”(1936) He pushes to remove the untouchables, but prohibits us from pursuing a more accepting faith. Whether he understands the cultural ramifications of us staying Hindu without representation or not is immaterial, we need social change, and he does not see how it must be done. He later states “Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger.”(1936) He wants to liberate the untouchables while limiting us to Hinduism, where we will continually be persecuted, yet admits that Hinduism has no influence on caste. When saying he will not learn of the origin of the caste he is being ignorant to what we are suffering, even saying “A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced.”(1936) In this statement, Gandhi is avoiding improving the worst of Hinduism, only appreciating the benefit it has upon the fortunate. This man will not listen to the tales of the Dalits, as he believes he can speak for them “Who is the best interpreter? Not learned men surely. Learning there must be. But religion does not live by it. It lives in the experiences of the saints and seers, in their lives and sayings...”(1936) If judgement of untouchability must come from the seers of its brutality, then how might he be qualified to impart ideas upon it? I have lived the life of a Dalit, not Gandhi. When I preach to create a better life for us, whilst benefiting all of India, it is true. I am a man of education, and a man of the streets; I have acquired knowledge in the classroom, as well as through persecution. Do not let public opinion and prior notions cloud your view of what is beneficial.

Allowing for so called social changes to be the main vehicle of equality in an independent India will lead to nothing. We must spread political influences to the underrepresented, the untouchables, if we are to have a holistic view on the necessities of our newly independent state. The reservation of political power to largely looked over and mistreated groups has benefitted countries before, even yours, Governor General. Do not look back upon

our millions of persecuted individuals and feel guilty for what you did not implement. Do not allow for prior notions to influence you into following an idealistic man. What you do for millions of Indians in the coming days will define how well you understand the job you are doing, and the people you are doing it for.

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