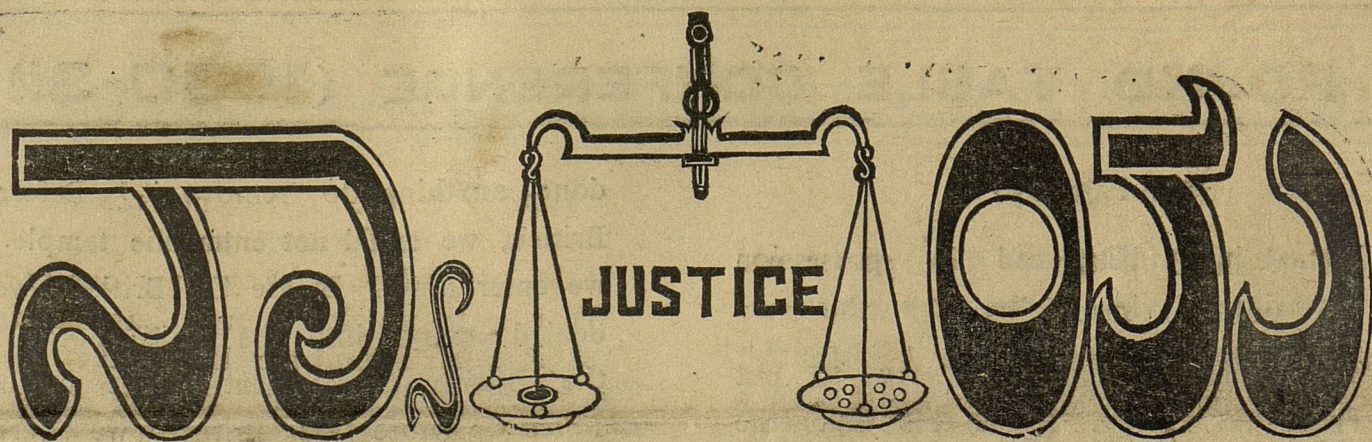


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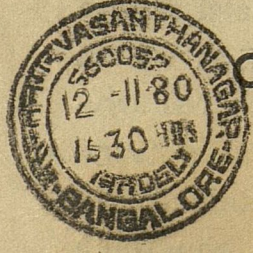
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ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE (1930-31)



On the Independence of India & the Political Rights of the Depressed Classes.



By Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR

Mr. Chairman : My purpose in rising to address this conference is principally to place before it the point of view of the depressed classes, whom I and my colleague, Rao-Bahadur Srinivasan, have the honour to represent, regarding the question of constitutional reform. It is a point of view of 43,000,000 people, or one-fifth of the total population of British India. The depressed classes form a group by themselves which is distinct and separate from the Muhammadans, and, although they are included among the Hindus, they in no sense form an integral part of that community. Not only have they a separate existence, but they have also assigned to them a status which

is invidiously distinct from the status occupied by any other community in India. There are communities in India which occupy a lower and subordinate position; but the position assigned to the depressed classes is totally different. It is one which is midway between that of the serf and the slave, and which may, for convenience, be called servile with this difference, that the serf and the slave were permitted to have physical contact, from which the depressed classes are debarred. What is worse than this enforced servility and bar to human intercourse, due to their untouchability, involves, not merely the possibility of discrimination in public life, but actually works out as a positive denial of all equality of opportunity and the denial of those most elementary of civic rights on which all human existence depends. I am sure that the point of view of such a community, as large as the population of England or of France, and so heavily handicapped in the struggle for existence, cannot but have some bearing on the right sort of solution of the political problem, and I am anxious that this

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That point of view I will try to put as briefly as I can. It is this that the bureaucratic form of government in India should be replaced by a government which will be a government of the people by the people and for the people. This statement of the view of the depressed classes I am sure will be received with some surprise in certain quarters. The tie that bound the depressed classes to the British has been of a unique character. The depressed classes welcomed the British as their deliverers from age long tyranny and oppression by the orthodox Hindus. They fought their battles against the Hindus, the Musslman and the Sikhs, and won for them this great Empire of India. The British, on their side, assumed the role of trustees for the depressed classes. In view of such an intimate relationship between the parties, this change in the attitude of the depressed classes towards British Rule in India is undoubtedly a most momentous phenomenon. But the reasons for this change of attitude are not far to seek: We, have not taken this decision simply because we wish to throw in our lot with the majority. Indeed, as you know, there is not much love lost between the majority and the particular minority I represent. Ours is an independent decision. We have judged of the existing administration solely in the light of our own circumstances and we have found it wanting in some of the most essential elements of a good Government. When we compare our present position with the one which it was our lot to bear in Indian society of the pre-British days, we find that, instead of marching on, we are only marking time. Before the British, we were in the loathsome condition due to our untouchability. Has the British Government

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We do not accuse the British of indifference or want of sympathy. What we do find is that they are quite incompetent to tackle our problem. If the case was one of indifference only it would have been a matter of small moment, and it would not have made such a profound change in our attitude. But what we have come to realise on a deeper analysis of the situation is that it is not merely a case of indifference, rather it is a case of sheer incompetence to undertake the task. The depressed classes find that the British Government in India suffers from two very serious limitations. There is first of all an internal limitation which arises from the character motives and interests of those who are in power, which prevents them from appreciating the living forces

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These are some of the questions raised by the depressed classes and the answers which in their view these questions seem to carry. This is therefore the inevitable conclusion which the depressed classes have come to: namely, that the bureaucratic Government of India, with the best of motives, will remain powerless to effect any change so far as our particular grievances concerned. We feel that nobody 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 in a Swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power into our own hands, without which we cannot bring salvation to our people.

There is one thing, Sri, to which I wish to draw your particular attention. It is this. I have not used the expression Dominion Status in placing before you the point of view of the depressed classes. I have avoided using it, not because I do not understand its implications nor does the omission mean that the depressed classes object to India's attaining Dominion Status. My chief ground for not using it is that it does not convey the full content of what the depressed classes stand for. The depressed classes, while they stand for Dominion Status with safeguards, wish to lay all the emphasis they can on one question and one question alone. And that question is, how will Dominion India function? Where will the centre of political power be? Who will have it? Will the depressed classes be heirs to it? These are the questions that form their chief concern. The depressed classes feel that they

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There is one point with which I should like to deal before I close this matter. 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 the depressed classes will never be solved unless they get political power in their own hands. If this is true, and I do not think that the contrary can be maintained, then the problem of the depressed classes is I submit eminently a political problem and must be treated as such. We know that political power is

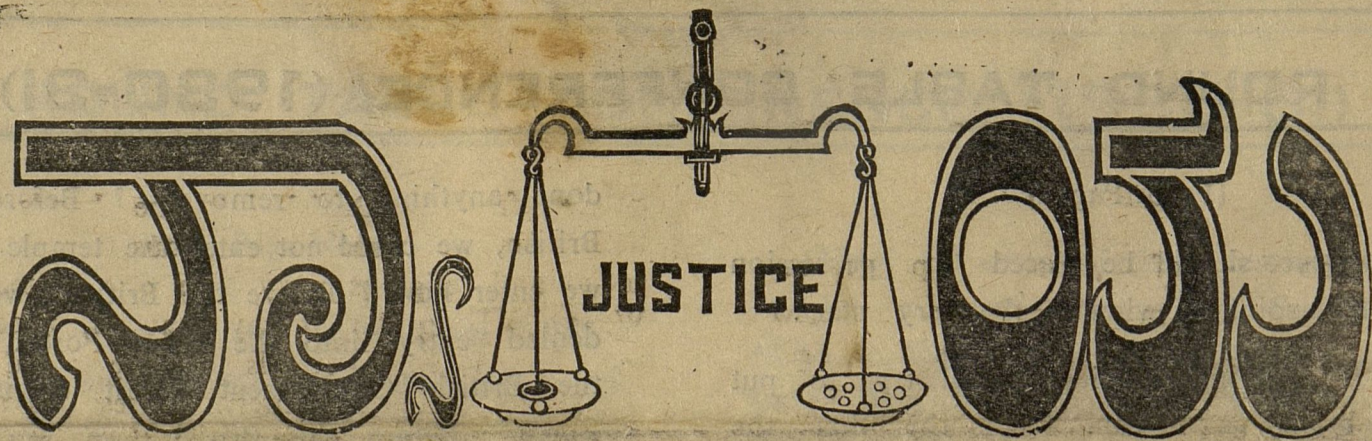
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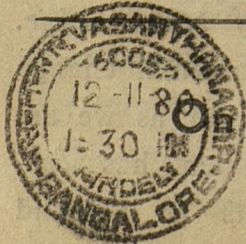
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