

IS DEMOCRACY SUITED TO THE GENIUS OF INDIA?

PESHAWAR ISLAMIA COLLEGE DEBATE

a dry person, devoid of everything. He did not know whether salvation could come in the other world. He wanted salvation in this world and did not bother about the other world. As he was a social being he could not have salvation for himself alone. That was why he wanted to share prayer with all of them."

We wonder whether it has ever struck Mahatmaji that for the idea of mass prayer he ought to feel indebted to Islam. Hinduism has no such thing. Christianity too restricts mass prayer to one day in a week and exclusively within the four-walls of the Church. As practised by Mahatma Gandhi, in any place, and every day, morning and evening, mass prayer has a distinct Islamic touch about it. We have not had the privilege of observing how actually his congregation meets, whether it is the usual form of secular meetings with the addition of certain hymns and music. But we can say that Mahatmaji's endeavour in the direction of mass prayer will be productive of the greatest benefit only if the Islamic postures and other general arrangement of the congregation as practised in a mosque are also adopted. That will lend a genuine touch or reverence to the performance.

In addition to this, much depends on the content of prayer. In the first place, the conception of God to whom the votary seeks some sort of approach or contact must also be a correct conception. But for this it will be a random shot, some thing like the Bushman of Africa adoring his Mumbo Jumbo. A perfect flawless conception of the Deity is the first prerequisite of all mass prayer. If prayer is to be the projection of the human soul towards the universal soul pervading all existence with a view to elevating and expanding itself, the projection must be in the right direction. Here again Mahatmaji will with advantage drink at the fount of the Quran which opens with that masterpiece of prayer, the *Fatima* upon which no improvement is imaginable.

This is no place to go into a discussion of this Islamic prayer. It is a profound philosophy of life and of the inter-relation of God and man summed up into a nutshell. The concepts embodied in this prayer alone can supply the food rich enough in spiritual vitamins to do any real good to the individual ego by elevating and uplifting it.

Mahatmaji pleads ignorance of any such thing as salvation in the other world. This we are afraid, is a very amateurish approach to the question of religion. A religion that takes no account of this is a misnomer. It may be morality, spirituality, *Ahimsa* or any other blessed thing, but it is not religion. Religion is grounded in the idea of continuity of this earthly existence in some form or other and where this idea is lacking, the very bottom is knocked out of religion.

Mahatmaji on Transmigration.

The assertion that he does not know about or bother about salvation in the other world is not only a very perfunctory approach to religion, a tinkering with a big problem which has formed the life-quest of the leading lights of humanity. It is inconsistent with his own accepted views on the theory of transmigration of soul. On another occasion his answer to a question thus reveals his mind on this point:

Q. Is it necessary for the mind to go through different stages of progress (in-
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An inter-collegiate debate on the above topic was recently held at Islamia College Peshawar in which a large number of speakers from many colleges took part. The trophy was won by the speakers from the Muslim University Aligarh. The following is the text of an undelivered speech by Mr. A. H. Saeed of the Medical College Lahore who, for unavoidable reasons, could not participate in the contest.

We are here to discuss whether democracy is suited to the genius of India. I would first of all ask the question: What is democracy? To borrow the historic words of that great American, Abraham Lincoln, democracy is the Govt. of the people, by the people, for the people. I would ask this house to please make a careful note of this word *people*. The conception of people-hood is the cornerstone of democracy. Where this very basic conception is missing, there can be no democracy.

India, sir, is a country where this very basic conception of a common people-hood does not exist. Here we have Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, Brahmins and non-Brahmins, Pathans and Sheikhs—but, alas, no such thing as people. In America, everyone is an American and nothing but an American; in England everyone is an Englishman and nothing but an Englishman. This stamps the whole population with a common stamp—the stamp of a common people-hood. This is not the case in India. If you ask a man in the street, "who are you?" he will tell you "I am a Hindu, I am a Muslim." We think in terms of our castes and creeds. The very idea of a common people-hood is foreign to this land of castes and sub-castes and still more sub-castes. I put it to my friends of the opposition: Dare you deny this? Is this not the most patent feature of Indian life? If you cannot shut eyes against this glaring fact of the Indian genius, with what face do you come up to this stage and tell the world that democracy is suited to Indian genius?

Pray, don't throw dust into the eyes of the world. Indian social structure is the very negation of democracy. Nowhere in this wide world do you have the spectacle that is a common sight at every Railway Station from Peshawar to Calcutta and from Bombay to Madras—viz. Hindu Pani and Muslim Pani. Is that, sir, the way to democracy, I ask? Is that the genius congenial to the growth of democratic institutions? A people who cannot share in common a most universal gift of God-like water cannot possibly be expected to share a common government. A people who cannot drink from the same cup without incurring the risk of eternal damnation are certainly not the people to talk of democracy.

Now, let us come to the second point, which is also fundamental to the conception of democracy—viz, the idea of human equality. Equality of citizens is the very life-breath of democracy. Here again we find ourselves up against the dead wall of caste when we come to apply this standard to the Indian conception of society. We find Indian humanity graded and sub-graded into a hundred and one strata, as high and low and lower and still lower and lowest. In this year of grace 1946, there are crores and crores of the sons of the soil, condemned to a lot worse than that

of the lower animals. You may pat and caress your cat or dog but there are millions of our fellow-men whose very touch is a pollution. Nay, there are also those known as the unseeable—that is to say, those who must not be seen, whose very sight brings pollution. For Heaven's sake, let us not talk of democracy in the face of this most inhuman social tyranny known to history. It simply does not lie in our mouth to indulge in such tall talk which has no foundation in fact.

Now let us come to the political aspect of the proposition. In political sphere, democracy means that the govt. of the country may be susceptible to change from one set of hands to another. In Britain we have just seen this marvellous feature of democracy assert itself. The Conservatives who have so long been in the saddle of the govt, who, in fact, were responsible for winning the war and saving the British people from a terrible doom, have been thrown out of office by the popular vote. I would ask this house to mark this incident. It constitutes one of the essentials of a democratic form of govt. that it should not be rigid, inflexible, incapable of changing hands. It must be amenable to change of hands. Let us apply this test to India. What do you find? A Hindu always voting for a Hindu, a Muslim always voting for a Muslim. What is the result? An unchangeable Hindu Govt. in Hindu-majority Provinces and unchangeable Muslim Govt. in Muslim majority Provinces, whereas at the Centre, an unchangeable Hindu majority rule. I ask this house: Am I exaggerating? Am I bungling with facts? Is not this exactly and actually the state of things in this country—a Hindu electorate always returning a Hindu and a Muslim electorate always returning a Muslim candidate? If this is really the state of things, I put it to you to say: Can a democratic form of govt. work in this country? In Britain, a Conservative may change into a Labourite and vote for a Labour candidate but a Hindu will never vote for a Muslim if he can help it, nor a Muslim for a Hindu. The voting here is not fluid as in other democratic countries. It is rigid, inflexible, unchangeable and consequently so shall be the kind of govt. based on such voting. The majority party will always be the majority, the ruling party, the minority will always be the minority, content with forming the opposition, never aspiring to capture the reins of govt. This rigidity of govt. is again the direct negation of democracy. To say therefore that democracy is suited to Indian genius is to betray ignorance of this fundamental feature of a true democracy. So long as we think and feel and vote in terms of Hindus and Muslims, and Sikhs and Christians, we are poles away from the true spirit of democracy.

Sir, I believe I have said enough to establish that democracy is suited neither to the social structure nor the political conditions of this country. And if I am not transgressing the bounds of my topic, may I also add a word as to the worth of the democratic form of government as understood in the West. You will excuse me to say democracy as we find it working in the Western lands is all farce and cant. America, known as the citadel of democracy, has its own untouchable population, the Negroes. American democracy
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FAILURE OF WHITE MAN'S LEADERSHIP

Colonization Worse than the Adventures of Changiz or Atilla

The following is an extract from the Presidential Address of Mr. Abdur Rahim Siddiqi M. L. A. (Central) as President of the All-India Indonesia Conference held some time back in Lahore.

We in Asia have come to the conclusion that Colonial Powers have lost their right, morally and legally, to rule over their possessions, for they failed in their duty to protect them when the enemy came. They ran away and left their subjects to the tender mercies of the invader whose cruelties and atrocities they are never tired of recounting by word of mouth, in print and through pictures. If that hoax, the Atlantic Charter, had any sincerity or reality behind it, even in the brains of those who perpetrated it on the so-called United Nations, one wonders how, without any sense of shame or qualm of conscience, they could go to Dombarton Oaks and from there to San Francisco and produce Security Councils, Trusteeships and Mandates for a world that was to be converted into an Abode of Peace, in which white and non-white humanity was expected to live in amity and concord.

The leadership of the world has, in the past, changed from nation to nation and continent to continent. Chinese, Indian and Islamic civilizations, of the many ancient ones, are still extant and capable, of extricating mankind out of the *inferno* into which Western European civilization and its offshoots across the oceans have thrown it. It has made a fetish of colour and race and in the name of Christian civilization, otherwise known as the White Man's Burden, it has destroyed men in numbers larger than all the wars put together since the days of Adam. Its political thinkers have declared that man can exist only in a state of war. The peoples of the West have taken that lesson to heart in preference to the teachings of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, whose name they invoke daily. I do say that there have not been other wars and war-leaders in history but do we not decry them as scourges of God and enemies of mankind? A distinction must, however, be made between them and their successors. A Changiz or an Atilla was fired by ambition and a spirit of bravado. He came, destroyed and disappeared. Colonialism, on the other hand, has kept two-thirds of humanity in bondage and fattened on its misery unabated for centuries. The question poses itself before us, in all its grim and terrible reality, whether the time has come for the two-thirds to cry halt and put a stop to their exploitation, persecution and destruction. I am satisfied that so long as the leadership of the world remains with its present dictators so long will its agony continue. The change may take time but it must come.

A beginning has to be made without delay. Not that I do not realize the importance of China in the work of emancipation. I am, however, inclined to the view that we in India, despite our own state of subjection, are better placed, geographically, economically, and culturally, for the task. Our Hindu fellow-countrymen are gradually developing a wider vision and broader affinities. Composed as it is of a

hundred million souls India possesses the largest block of Muslims in the world, I see no reason why the Hindu and Muslim peoples of India should not give the lead to Asia, it has been waiting for all these years. With almost 150 million Muslims in China, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines to our east and a much larger number to our north and west in Asiatic Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, the Arab countries and Turkey—all possessing an international outlook and working in alliance—the moral leadership of the world should not be long in coming to us.

We should take it for granted that the World Organization, located in America or housed once more in the Palace of Peace, in Geneva, will be yet another humbug like the old League of Nations. To build our future on it will be to build on sand, as shifty and undependable as the policies and camouflages of its progenitors. Suggestions have been made that there should be an Eastern and a Western Council under it. World security is also to be divided up into Religious Securities. We should not, however, forget that its sponsors will have a few show boys from the Orient to give colour and grace to the solemn assemblages in the West and Western Powers will gather together in those of the East, in the name of the millions they rule, so that they may retain control over both. The theory of an Indian Ocean Region also has been adumbrated to rope in India and Future India with Australia and New Zealand on one side and East and South Africa on the other to maintain British hegemony over it and to make it the playground of the British Navy. We need neither hegemonies nor supremacies. We want to be left alone to contribute our share to make the world a better place to live in. We do not wish to interfere with the affairs of other people but, at the same time, we do not wish others to interfere with ours.

The case of Indonesia is a test case. Our sympathies go out to its people as Asiatics and Muslims. After India, Indonesia is the second largest block of Muslim population, numbering over 70 million. Islam entered its Islands from Malacca, in the early decades of the 15 century. The oldest and the most venerated leader of the faith in Java, Malik Ibrahim, who died in 1419, was an Indian from Malabar. Indonesia remained the property of the Dutch king till 1848 when the Estates-General assumed the power to control the colonies. The so-called reforms then introduced were the basis of Dutch rule, never popular with the people, until it ended with the Japanese occupation, in 1942. The great rebellion of Aceh, in north Sumatra, against Dutch oppression and cruelties which began in 1873 and ended in 1905, when the Sultan surrendered, was the beginning of the Freedom Movement which has culminated in the establishment of the Indonesia Republic to-day. Had Great Britain not stepped in, Abdur Raheem Soekarno and his glorious band of patriots would have achieved success. It is obvious that in crushing the Muslims of Indonesia, the men at the helm of affairs in London, are hoping to keep the conflagration from spreading further afar. These men do not yet realise that this policy of theirs is resented by the hundred million Muslims in India. Whether the war has made Great Britain a second class Power or not is too early to tell but there is no doubt in my mind that if the wise-

acres of Whitehall do not wake up and adopt a friendlier attitude towards the Muslim World, that contingency may not remain an improbability. Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran stood by Great Britain in its days of danger. Is it wise, is it honourable, is it even politic to discard their friendship for petty advantages in other quarters? If Britain so desires, it can still wield its influence to better purpose and induce its neighbours and friends to put a stop to tyranny and massacre. That way lie friendship, peace and safety. It is nobler to be the Big Brother than to be the Bully. British interference in Java, accompanied as it is by blood and thunder, must cease forthwith. India demands it. The Muslim world demands it. Honour demands it and so does the blood of the heroes who laid down their lives for decent relationship among men of every colour and from every clime.

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cluding collapse) before it attains absolute calm?

A. Before attaining perfect calm it is essential for almost everyone to go through stages of progress. I use the word "almost" advisedly. It excludes those who have made consistent effort in a previous existence but without complete success who will not, therefore, have to pass through purgatory in this life.

Here Mahatmaji *does* bother about the value of one birth for one's calm and well-being in another. Here he affirms the possibility of one birth affecting the life of man, for good or for evil, in another birth.

It seems Mahatmaji's inconsistencies are not confined to the political field. They encroach upon his religious musings as well with inevitable bungling up in that sphere as well.

NOTES & COMMENTS

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may have given them votes but it has denied them a human soul. They are kept at arm's length. In social life they are as segregated as our untouchables. They have separate schools for them, separate churches, separate restaurants, separate buses and separate trains to travel by. They dare not mix up with the white population. Both sections of the population follow the same religion, Christianity but it seems there are two Fathers-in-Heaven whom they worship—one white, the other black. Democracy in the system known as the British Commonwealth of Nations has no better account to render. While on their lips there is a tall talk about human equality and freedom, 40 crores of Indians are still condemned to political bondage. We were told this war was being fought to save democracy but we see how those pious professions are being just now translated into practice in Indonesia and Indo-China. France where the cry of liberty, equality and fraternity found its birth is trampling upon the liberties of Muslim population in Syria. And the conspiracy to rob the Arabs of their homeland in Palestine and hand it over to the Jews is but another most glaring feat of this so-called Western democracy. Rightly did Iqbal exclaim at this kind of democracy when he said:

گریز از طرز جمهوری غلام پندخته کارے شو
کہ از مغز تو صد خرف فکر انسانے نئے آید