

IS DEMOCRACY SUITED TO THE GENIUS OF INDIA ?

PESHAWAR ISLAMIA COLLEGE DEBATE

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 gov't. 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 gov't, 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 gov't. 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 Gov't. in Hindu-majority Provinces and unchangeable Muslim Gov't. 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 gov't. 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 gov't. 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 gov't. This rigidity of gov't. 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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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 پختہ کارے شو
کہ از مغز دو صد خر فکر انسانے تم آید