CHAPTER IV
DEMAND FOR PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY

Dyarchy was criticised as unworkable even by those who tried to work out the scheme. The Justice party in Madras gave the verdict that Dyarchy was not practical politics. In 1924, Diwan Bahadur Krishnan Nayar presided over the Non Brahmin Conference\(^1\) held at Madras. Although Dyarchy was beneficial to Madras in some respects, it was on the whole not successful\(^2\). He held that Dyarchy was no longer possible, and that the administration should be so reformed as to grant greater power to the people and that complete autonomy should be granted to the Provinces, with an amount of responsibility in the Centre. Dr. A.Ramasamy Mudaliar supported communal Electorate. But the elections of 1920 and 1923 showed that Non-Brahmins could come out in elections by merit. Prof. M.Rathnaswamy said Provincial Autonomy should be immediately granted. But he declared that India did not require immediate Swaraj. According to the Justice Party, it was co-operation and not obstruction the way for Swaraj\(^3\).

The demand for Provincial Autonomy\(^4\) was made in the Indian Legislative Assembly as early as 1921, before the Act of 1919 was worked out and its fruits enjoyed by the people. Rai Jagannath Majumdar passed a resolution\(^5\) for the establishment of autonomy in the Provinces and responsible government in the Centre. Mr. Jannadas Dwarkadas noted an amendment asking Government

\(^2\) *Ibid.*,.
\(^3\) *Prapanchamitran*, 25 July 1925, 1924, Madras Newspaper Reports, p.1378.
of India to look into the working of the government and to devise a means to introduce autonomy in Provinces and responsibility in the centre. But Sir William Vincent’s suggestion to convey to the Secretary of State, the wishes of the assembly to examine and revise the Constitution was adopted\(^6\). The Secretary of State rightly pointed out, that the period of trial for the 1919 Act was not exhausted\(^7\).

The demand for Autonomy in the Madras Legislative Council

In August 1924, A.S. Krishna Rao in the Madras Legislative Council brought forward a motion\(^8\) for discussing the necessity for the council informing Government of India that Provincial Autonomy should be granted to the Madras Presidency. Mr. Veeraiyan opposed the motion, Sir K.V. Reddy, the Ex-Minister supporting the motion said that while public work was a transferred subject, Irrigation was a reserved subject and that the same official had to serve two masters. He wanted that Provincial Autonomy should be granted to get rid of such anomalies. The Government of Madras communicated their views to the Government of India\(^9\).

If the moderate demands of Indians were satisfied with Provincial Autonomy and a measure of responsibility in the Centre, there were extreme demands for immediate Dominion Status. A resolution\(^{10}\) was moved in 1923 by Rangachariar which proposed a Royal Commission to consider the question of


\(^7\) *Native Newspaper Report*, 1921.


\(^9\) *Ibid.*,.

giving Dominion status. Motilal, by an amendment wanted a Round Table Conference to devise a new constitution with representation to minorities and approved by a newly elected Legislature. However, Government of India appointed the Muddiman Committee\(^\text{11}\) to scrutinize the working of the act of 1919 and to suggest remedies in regard to mistake, if any. The majority view was that, it was too early to assess the success or failure of the Act. The minority held the view that Dyarchy had failed. As per the majority, the Government implemented the recommendations of the Muddiman Committee.

Whatever might be the limitations of Dyarchy and the virtues of Provincial Autonomy, the period of trial for the Reform Act of 1919 was considered too short and hence too early to have any change in the administration immediately. The chances of Dominion Status also remained in the twenties. Lord Birkenhead\(^\text{12}\) unequivocally declared in stages that no change in the Administration would be effected till 1929. But in the meantime, he wanted facilities to be afforded to Indians to prove their ability that they were fit enough to prove worthy of Swaraj\(^\text{13}\). In this context, it should be pointed out, if the Empire Labour Conference passed a resolution that Swaraj should be granted to India immediately, they did not intend such a step while they were in power. In the exigendes of the times, when moral support was gathering round Indian demands, central tension broke out in U. P. between the Hindus and Muslims in

\(^{11}\) *Dravidian*, 1 Sept. 1925, Native Newspaper Report, p. 1154.
\(^{12}\) *Swadesamitran*, 22 May 1925, Madras Newspaper Reports. p. 689.
\(^{13}\) *The Hindu*, 15 June 1925.
1926. Inferring to these disturbances, the London times\textsuperscript{14} declared that judged by the past history of India, there was no probability of friendship between the Hindus and the Muslims and even Provincial Autonomy was not possible.

**The Royal Statutory Commission**

Ever since the 1919 Act, one important demand on the Indian side was for Royal Statutory Commission, as already seen as in the resolution of Rangachariar in 1923. In June 1924, the Indian Politicians gathered in London submitted a joint Representation for a Royal Commission to consider the question of Constitutional Reforms in India\textsuperscript{15}. This was not ignored by Britain. At the time of the No Confidence Notion against the Baldwin Ministry in 1926, the “Statesmen”\textsuperscript{16} announced that a Royal Statutory Commission would come to India sooner than was generally anticipated, and that it would be advisable to have a further instalment of reforms granted to India which would continue for another ten years. In November 1927, the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known the Simon Commission with Sir John Simon as Chairman was appointed to consider further constitutional Reforms in India. It was criticised as an all white Commission and Congress boycotted it. Pandit Jawaharhal Nehru led the boycott at the had of a long procession\textsuperscript{17}.

**The Simon Commission in Madras**

When Indian political parties failed to agree on an united action, it was left with the Government to take up initiative with regard to proposals on

\textsuperscript{14} *The Times, London, 1925*

\textsuperscript{15} Section 84A, Indian Council Act, 1919.

\textsuperscript{16} *Andhra Patrika*, 2 Dec. 1926, Madras Newspaper Reports, p. 1534.

\textsuperscript{17} Verinder Grover, *India 50 Years of Independence*, New Delhi, 1997, p. 100.
Constitutional Reforms. In February 1929, the Government of Madras in their Memorandum to the Simon Commission unequivocally condemned Dyarchy as a system, in which the Legislature could not control the Ministers which was sine qua non for Responsible Government. They recommended provincial autonomy, but they were cautious, in stating, that there need not be uniformity in all the provinces.\(^{18}\)

The Congress working Committee decided that Congressmen in Legislature should resign their seats. But the Viceroy Lord Irwin announced, “I am authorised on behalf of His Majesty’s Government to state clearly that in their judgement, it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issues of India’s constitutional progress, as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status”\(^{19}\). Thus comparing the rigid stand of the Congress and the lucid exposition of the policy of Government on the other, it was self evident that the controversy centred round chiefly on the manner and timing and also the stages by which the ultimate object was to be achieved. No doubt, Congress was in a great hurry. The Viceroy also made known the proposal of His Majesty’s Government to invite representatives of different parties and interests in British India and representatives of the Indian States to meet them separately or together as circumstances might demand, for the purpose of a conference and discussion in regard both to British Indian and all Indian problems.

The announcement of the Viceroy was indeed an unequivocal assurance and hence it was welcomed by all parties and individuals. The criticisms, if any,


\(^{19}\) *The Swarajya*, 1 Nov, 1929, Madras Newspaper Reports, p. 1514.
only centred round the phase ‘fullness of time’ which was fundamental in the
interests of India. It was in the eagerness that many leaders took the
announcement as immediate Dominion Status. The Madras Legislative Council
in January 1920 passed a resolution\textsuperscript{20} welcoming the pronouncement of the
Viceroy as a timely and Statesman like offer. One speaker after another during the
debate\textsuperscript{21}, expatiated on the excellencies of Dominion Status and the Chief
Minister went round relling Congressmen that they were fighting a chimera when
they wanted independence. The amendments moved by Saldhana supporting the
Delhi leaders manifesto was summarily rejected. The Chief Minister pointed out
that the way would be found for the Congress to co-operate with the British
Government, as all points of view would be available at the conference\textsuperscript{22}.

However, Gandhiji was not satisfied with the announcement. His opinion
was that it did not go far enough. He refused to accept the offer until His
Majesty’s Government first granted an amnesty to all political prisoners,
immediate Dominion Status and majority for Congress at the Conference. He
wanted that the proceedings and decision should be binding on Parliament. But
an agreed reply to the Viceroy’s announcement was framed by a conference of
Indian leaders at Delhi. They wanted a general amnesty for political prisoners, a
general policy of conciliation throughout the country, a policy based on the
assumption that Dominion Status was to be granted immediately and the period
intervening between the announcement and the framing of the constitution to be

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] The Hindu, 20 Jan, 1930.
\end{footnotes}
treated as leading to the transfer of responsibility from Parliament to a Central Legislature, the congress wanted a predominant position in it. The All-Party convention had drawn inspiration from the Viceroy’s announcement. Dominion status in a haste was not the intension of British Government. But there was a feeling of negotiation; there was a truce; and thus the sky that was overcast became clear for the time being. No doubt Lord Irwin by his statesmanlike and intrepid act averted one of the most serious catechism recorded in history\textsuperscript{23}.

**The recommendation of the Simon Commission**

In a meantime, at the Joint Free Conference in April, 1929, Sir John Simon in his speech referred to the results of his enquiry. He suggested that future reforms should be like. He expressly stated that “India may adopt the Canadian form of Government as she progresses and that too without the necessity of enquiring again and again, she may attain complete Provincial Autonomy”\textsuperscript{24}.

One relevant criticism of the enquiry of the Simon Commission was, that the work of the Commission had been fruitless, for it did not get the evidence of the advocates of boycott. But it should be admitted that England could not hold herself responsible for the opposition offered by Indians. The commission had to work under very heavy odds and it left India with a sign of relief. Sir John Simon at his departure said that he was sorry to leave, but glad to go, bleeding heads and broken bones wherever he went\textsuperscript{25}.

\textsuperscript{23} The Hindu, 16 April 1929.
\textsuperscript{24} The Indian Patriot, 17 April 1929.
The Central Committee\textsuperscript{26} which assisted the Simon Commission wanted to abolish the distinction between Reserved and Transferred subjects. It did not favour the transfer of the department of Law and Order in Bengal. It did not favour universal franchise which according to the Commission could not be granted until 1961. It proposed Second Chambers in all the Province and did not favour representation to Indians in Parliament until India attained Dominion Status. The outstanding feature was that its recommendations coincided with the recommendations of the Simon Commission that India should automatically get Dominion Status without further statutory enquiries. The Central Committee which condemned Dyarchy was unworkable in the Provinces agreed to introduce the same in the Central Government with Defence in the Reserved subject.

The Sankaran Nair Committee\textsuperscript{27} recommended Autonomy in the provinces and the introduction of responsible Government in the Centre. In regard to representation to the Depressed classes, the committee proposed nomination but not separate electorate. Favouring adult franchise, it said that a stable Government could not be formed without adult franchise, where it differed from the Central Committee on Reforms. Mr. Nair asserted that Hindu-Muslim problem would be solved only by adult franchise. He did not favour the grant of immediate Swaraj. To the Non-Brahmins he did not favour any reservation of seats.

\textsuperscript{26} Report of the Indian Central Committee, Calcutta, 1929, p. 7

\textsuperscript{27} Andhra Patrika, Madras, 5 April 1929.
Social and Religious Movements

As President of the Congress in 1915, Lord Sinha\textsuperscript{28} said that he would not accept Self Government even if it were offered that very day, and that he would wait till India became fit. He held the same view in 1925 also. He did not believe in the fitness of India even for provincial autonomy. He referred to the resolution passed in the Legislative Assembly as useless and expressed the view that the people would well work the Reforms of 1919. Neither the Nationalists nor the Moderates accepted his advice\textsuperscript{29}.

Lord Sinha was perfectly justified\textsuperscript{30} for, the handful of people who fought for Swaraj in 1925 could never expect to maintain law and order in the country if the British Military Forces were withdrawn. The Indian community was hopelessly disintegrated. The most fitting policy for congress would have been to make the members of the Congress to form into so many groups, Social, Moral, Spiritual and Political missionaries to impress upon the people of India that, united would they rise the dis-united they would be hurled headlong into political and social slavery\textsuperscript{31}.

The Vaikam Satyagraha of 1924 was a pointer to the Social degradation of the Indian Society. In Travancore, the untouchables were sealed access to public roads. This was the cause of the Vaikam Satyagraha\textsuperscript{32}. The untouchables had no free access to public roads, much less to roads adjoining temples. The

\textsuperscript{28} The Al-Ameen, Calcutta, 16 June 1929, Native Newspaper Report, May to June 1929, p. 829.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 840.
\textsuperscript{30} Rengaswamy Parthasarathy, \textit{A Hundred Years of the Hindu}, Sept 1972, Madras, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 194.
\textsuperscript{32} The Swadesamitran, 13 April, 1924, Madras Newspaper Reports, p. 613.
question of Temple Entry to the untouchables was beyond the consideration of
the higher classes then. Despite across at Vaikam, when the Vaikam temple
authorities wanted the four roads adjoining the temple to be considered as temple
property. The harm arising from their claims would be that the untouchables
would be prohibited to use those roads because of the concept of touch pollution.
If they had been temple properties, Muslims and Christians would not have been
allowed earlier to make use of the roads. Thus it was clear that the Government
wanted to make them temple properties only to avoid the untouchables walking
along the roads. The community worst affected was the Ezhavas33.

There was a determined battle34 by the untouchables to secure the right to
have access to the Vaikam road in question which resulted in the Satyagraha.
Batches of volunteers offered their services to secure the rights of the
untouchables. Kolappan35 declared that he would fast unto death if access to these
roads were not granted to the untouchables. The Satyagraha were humiliated,
arrested and imprisoned. The Vaikam Satyagraha had revealed that the country
had begun to make it clear that either selfishness of Brahmins nor the
superstitions of any religion could obstruct the wishes of the people. There was a
mass awakening, for the Ezhavas formed one of the three major communities of
Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Congress sent volunteers even from Madras.
The Nadar community congratulated those who participated in the Satyagraha36.
Non-Brahmins rightly declared that Travancore neither belonged to the Maharaja

33 The Tamilnadu, 4 May 1924, Madras Newspaper Reports, p. 673.
34 Ibid., p. 675.
35 Saraswathy, S., Minorities in Madras State, Delhi, p. 190.
36 Fortnightly Report, Second half of December, 1925.
or to Padmanabhaswamy or to any Tamil Brahmin. The Term ‘Tamil Brahmin’ was used in reference to high officials, mostly from Madras and applied particularly to Dewan Raghavaiah. All mythological accounts were questioned. It was declared that the country belonged to the people and the subjects were not created for the Raja, on the other hand that was a creation of the Raja the subjects and for the subjects.

In 1925, when C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, member of the Executive Council of Madras, passed an order prohibiting the entry of Ezhavas into the agraharam during the Car festival at Kalpathi. According to his, the order was issued to avert a disturbances of peace. The question was asked why could not the Law Member arrest the Brahmins who obstructed the Ezhavas. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer had been vehemently criticised as obstructing social progress and instrumental in perpetuating the evils in society. Public criticism was directed against the Brahmaṇa Sabhas and Varnashrama Conferences which had been looked upon as organizations only meant for the perpetuation of the unjust domination of the Brahmins. The statement of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer asking Brahmins to join these sabhas were criticised. It was asked why could he not resign his post organize the orthodox Brahmins. The secret conference of Brahmin leaders in 1925 in Madras resolved that the Non-Brahmin movement should be crushed and no Brahmin

37 Ibid.,
38 The West Coast, Berhampur, June 1925, Native Newspaper Report, p. 838.
39 Fortnightly Report, Second half of December, 1925.
40 Ibid.,
41 Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency, 1926 p39
newspaper should criticise Ramaswamy Iyer. But Ramaswamy Iyer did not take part in the conspiracy.

Some of the criticisms against C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer or the Government were not relevant, for the Government could not force a decision on any section of the community in the name of progress. There should be a fundamental change, a change of heart, manifesting in the outlook of the people. But when sentiments were running high both among the untouchables and the orthodoxy, it became necessary for Government to maintain law and order. India was demanding full responsible Government and the social condition was that a great majority of the population were not free from bondage. The minority had not so far willingly allowed the great social disability to die out, nor would it allow a reasonable step on the part of the Government to eradicate this evil. The only solution was to move cautiously watching over the gradual evolution of social thinking which was fundamental in the construction of a democratic society. Till such time, when people would come forward and accommodate the fallen they could not be fit for independence. Government which stood for a democratic society and polity could not administer revolutionary changes by violent means in the name of democracy.

Even the Christians and the Mohammedans were considered as Mlachas by the Brahmins but they were allowed to walk along public roads\textsuperscript{42}. Those who obstructed to 1/6 of India’s population in their progress was the minority of 3% of the entire population. A small minority tyrannising over a vast majority of

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{The Al-Ameen}, Calicut, 16 June 1925, Native Newspaper Report, May to June 1925, p. 858.
people is another great paradox that presented in India. A realisation of the problem had revealed to the people that it was the Aryan invasion and their design to dominate the inhabitants of India which accounted for the creation of customs and convention which had resulted in the social and political slavery of the depressed and the political slavery of the non-Brahmins in general\textsuperscript{43}.

Speaking on a resolution in the Madras Legislative Council to give free access to roads to the untouchables introduced by Veeraian in 1925, Mr. Narasimha Acharlu said, “the Adi Dravidas would wish to walk among the roads today, demand the right to enter temples tomorrow and then demand intermarriage and that these things would result in bloodshed\textsuperscript{44}”. These ripples, set in motion in the stagnated thoughts, suggests the problem that the Hindu society confronted. But it had revealed that the higher castes were sticking to social customs at the cost of India’s freedom and it was their obstruction which marred the progress of India. It was also evident, that there could not be any democracy in the social set up, or a democratic government fitted into such a society in haste. Freedom implied the abolition of slavery. What the untouchables aimed at was not bloodshed but peaceful emancipation.

**Salvage the depressed classes**

When it was a struggle of the caste Hindus to get their share in the administration, it was a greater struggle for the Non-Caste-Hindus to obtain their rights. Their problem was to get the fundamental freedom in Society. In 1926, the

\textsuperscript{43} Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, 1926, Vol. xxi, p. 535

\textsuperscript{44} Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, 1926, Vol. xxi, p. 693.
Raja of Panagal at the All India Non-Brahmin Conference stated that the work of the depressed classes had really begun only after the advent of the Justice party. This could be proved by the statement of the General Secretary of the Depressed Classes Conference held at Mayavaram in 1926. According to him, the Depressed Classes secured representation in 75 Taluk Boards and 52 Municipalities out of 126 Taluk Boards and 85 Municipalities in the Presidency. This representation spoke creditably for the achievement of the Justice Party and this was done largely because of the enlightened principles for which the Party stood. However, the Raja could not appoint a member of the depressed class as a Sub-Assistant surgeon in Tanjore as per the wishes of Mr. B. S. Rajappa, Chairman of Tanjore Municipality. Thus in spite of what had been done, the way to remove the disabilities of the Depressed Classes was still far off45.

In 1930, the Adi Dravidas of Malabar sent a petition, addressed to the District Educational Officer, that their children were not admitted in the Andalur Higher Elementary School. They declared that there was no alternative than to get converted to Christianity or Islam to get admission. The idea to secede from Hindu religion was not confined to the Adi Dravidas, but it was in the mind of every untouchables. If some of them preferred conversion, the Thiyas of Malabar wanted to form an independent community and religion of their own without any truck with any religion. The ideas gained ground among them for a ‘Swathanthra Samudayam or independent community,’ for they realised that religion far from serving any useful purpose, it was a fruitful source of evil46. The atheist doctrine

45 The Swadesamitran, 1Jan., 1926. Madras Newspaper Reports. p. 51.
46 Public General Department, 1935. G.O. No. 1120, 6 July 1933.
of Communists in India were definitely a source of weakness than strength; but the trials of the untouchables would have only landed them in case of creation in the world of Communism, where freedom would have undergone another metamorphosis.

Congressmen wearing Khader and propagating Swadesi had not for a long time, not taken up the question of untouchability. This had produced a sharp reaction among the depressed classes who had then begun to question the Congress, caste, creed, Vedas and Sastra. Self Respect Movement made a great deal of spade work in this field. Brahmin has been looked upon as the creator of castes and who divided the people. They propagated that religious tyranny should go, orthodox should die out and caste and creed should vanish.

**Separate Electorates**

In 1930, the Bombay Government appointed a Committee to enquire into the condition of the Depressed Classes. Keeping under suppression a large percentage of the population of the land hampered the national progress in a very large measure. Government was requested to help remove untouchability. It was in Madras that untouchability existed in its most virulent form and the Madras Government ought to have been the first. However, it was welcomed that the Government as a first step had started giving Poramboke lands for house-sites and establishing schools for their education. In January 1930, when the Bill to amend the Local Boards Act was introduced in the Madras Legislative Councils,

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47 G.O.No. 916-17, Govt. of India, Public General Report.

48 *The Hindu*, 15 December, 1930.
Mr. C.N. Woods introduced an amendment for separate electorate for Minorities. Those who recommended Communal electorate to the Simon Commission rallied round the amendment. This would have given the depressed classes a fair chance to have an assured number of seats in the Local Boards and Municipalities. However, it did not find enough support, for passage.49

In March 1930, at the Madras Provincial Depressed Class Federation which met at Thirupapuliyur50, they prayed Government which was the only source of hope for them to appoint a member of the depressed class in the Executive Council, one membership falling vacant then. This was a legislate claim of the depressed classes, who constituted the manual and agricultural labour of the entire presidency. Dr. Natesa Mudaliar was responsible for this important resolution. The conference also favoured separate electorate in the Local Boards and Municipalities for the Depressed Classes. Mr. R. Srinivasan said that the votes of the Adi Dravidas were obtained by promises of a trust to a pot of liquor. No real representation in a joint electorate could be possible. In fact Joint Electorate appeared only as a cunning device.51

The Hindu orthodoxy or no-changers were indifferent to the welfare of the depressed classes, who lived in perpetual poverty, starvation, ignorance and untouchability. It was also true, wherever the untouchables turned, they met only with humiliation and contempt. To them, there was hardly any sympathy from the

51 Ibid., 695.
privileged classes. Dr. Natesa Mudaliar\textsuperscript{52}, addressing them, pointed out to these difficulties and rightly stated. “You have been sleeping for centuries, and it say not be an easy task for you to shake off the slumber, but you have go to do it. My brethren, the country wants you”\textsuperscript{53}. He awakened them and reminded them of the call for Dominion Status. They were also told, that with one mass of humanity living in the most depressed condition, it was impossible to call India self-respecting and an ideal nation deserving self-government. It was evident, that it had become the duty of the Non-Brahmins in general to come forward, to assist the government in their attempt to bring back to lice these suffering millions. The primary need of the hour was to educate the children of the untouchables, to make them work hard, and to live a cleanly life, and to dissuade them not to subject themselves to intoxicants\textsuperscript{54}.

Hindu religion had so far failed to provide a safeguard to the untouchables in religion and society. But the Indian Statutory Commission\textsuperscript{55} did not fail to provide for their proper representation in the Legislative Councils. It was found impossible to reject the report of the Simon Commission. The Muslims won a victory by getting communal representation. They formed nearly one fourth of the population. The Report was satisfactory in regard to the untouchables also. Referring to them the commission said, “we think that this recommendation will help them to attain a position, in which, they can secure representation in proportion to their population and separate electorate before the introduction of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 217.
\item \textsuperscript{54} \textit{The Hindu}, 15 Dec. 1930.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{Kudi Arasu}, 29 Jun. 1930, Madras Newspaper Reports. p. 1031.
\end{itemize}
the next instalment of reforms\textsuperscript{56}. It was noteworthy that the Simon Commission recommended that 5 to 10% of the seats in the Legislature might be reserved for women also.

If separate representation was provided, it was logical that the choice of candidate should logically be left to those communities. The Simon Commission did that. Separate electorate were provided for the Muslims in six provinces\textsuperscript{57}. To the depressed classes, separate electorate were provided for in the Communal Award. A significant feature of the Round Table Conference was the His Majesty’s Government decided to proceed by way of the Round Table Conference to the solution, once for all of the Indian problems by means of the representatives of all classes and interests in British India and Indian State\textsuperscript{58}. Since it involved the All Indian Federation, a event of far reaching importance in the Constitution history of India, representation to Princely State was inevitable.

**The fatalism of Indians and the demand to leave India to her fate**

The Rt.Hon. Srinivasa Sastri speaking to the Members of Parliament in July 1930 said that India should be left to her fate. But it was on account of this fatalism that Indian Leaders did not try to find out the actual causes of India’s serfdom and remedy it. They were the conflicts of caste and religion\textsuperscript{59}. It was foreigners were able to invade and subdue India.


\textsuperscript{57} *Justice*, 12 November 1930.

\textsuperscript{58} *The Hindu*, 16 Jul. 1930. Madras Newspaper Reports, p. 1051.

\textsuperscript{59} *The Mitavadi*, 7 Jul. 1930, Madras Newspaper Reports, p. 1093.
The Communal Award

The Communal Award is one of the greatest political decisions of the British Cabinet, and, one of the most judicious Awards in History. By a simple constitutional formula Great Britain had provided for the emancipation of the Depressed Classes of India not to speak of Muslims, Christians and other benefited by it. For the first time is the history of India, Representation had been conferred on the Depressed Classes on a statutory basis. This was the shoot anchor of the Reforms proposals which had the widest repercussion in the Political, Social, Religious, Economic and moral life of the Indian people. The Award was one of the noblest gifts of civilisation to a people who were trodden under foot for centuries.

The Communal Award was not a surprise but the logical outcome of India’s failure to solve the problem of the Depressed Classes. It was the failure of the Hindus that accounted for the Award. In 1913, at the annual meeting of the Depressed Classes Mission, Justice Miller warned “I fear that if the Hindus stand aside, it will be left to the foreigners to take up the work and there is danger in it”\textsuperscript{60}. Miller’s forecast was that if it was let to foreigners to uplift them, a time would come when the Depressed Classes would awaken as the enemies of higher castes and not as their friends. As enlightened depressed class as enemies of higher class would naturally awake society. Like the waves of the non rushing forward, the small minority which held them in check would be swallowed by the managing march of the majority. Miller’s words came true with the Award. With this gift, the lowest layer in the Hindu Social edifice had been lifted up, and

\textsuperscript{60}Fortnightly Report II Half of November and I Half of December 1930
placed on equality with all other communities in politics. This was the greatest boon that Britain conferred on the Depressed Classes. According to the Award, in Madras, the Depressed Classes were given 15 seats. The Communal Award had made the Depressed Classes one of the most powerful communities in India, armed with political power. To a community, which suffered innumerable disabilities, a declared number of seats in political institutions, was extending the greatest help that Britain could practically think of along strict constitutional and democratic lines.

The Communal Award was criticised by Gandhiji who himself had admitted the very pathetic plight of the Depressed Classes. His criticism was that Britain was introducing an artificial division between the parts of the Hindu community. But it should be admitted that the division had already existed and looked upon as a natural barrier by the higher castes, and by the Award Britain had only suggested a solution to pull down the barrier. In spite of his differences he said, that the Congress had loyally accepted it because he was a party to the request made to the late Mr. Mcdonald to arbitrate\(^1\). However, later, is explained, that it was only a decision of the British Cabinet and not an Award, and he was not a party to it\(^2\). But it should be understood that to the contending parties in the Round Table Conference, it was only an Award. But his intention of fasting unto death as a protest against it rendered yeomen service to the cause of the Award which had created widespread political awakening in India from the highest to the lowest. It compelled the high caste Hindus to run to the untouchables to

\(^{61}\) Ibid.,

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 24.
embrace the Depressed Classes and to plead to undo the separate electorate but not separate representation. With the fast of Gandhiji, it was realised, unless the high castes would come to terms with the Depressed Classes, it was not possible to save his life. Even Mr. Nehru\textsuperscript{63}, who was sceptical about the decision of Gandhiji, expressed the beneficial results of his decision.

**Consequences of the Award**

At the historic meeting at Poona, the high and low assembled for the first time, to discuss India’s National question, raised by the Communal Award. Great concessions were granted to the Depressed Classes. The Depressed Classes were granted double the number of seats than what was assured by the Award. In Madras\textsuperscript{64}, they were given 30 seats in a Legislature of 215. They were given 143 seats in all the Provincial Legislatures. In the Central Legislature, 18\% of the seats allotted to the General Electorate for British India were reserved for the Depressed Classes. Instead of separate electorate, the Depressed Classes were to have a primary election among them to a panel of candidates, from whom shall be elected by the General Electorate the number of candidates to the Central and Provincial Legislatures. This was to continue for ten years\textsuperscript{65}. The system of Representation was by mutual agreement between various communities. The still more significant terms were, that there could be no disabilities attached by anyone of the ground of his being a member of the Depressed Classes is regard to elections to local bodies or appoint to the Public Services. Every endeavour was


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 55.
to be made to secure fair representation for them in services, subject to such educational qualifications as may be laid down. In every province, out of the educational grants, an adequate run was to be earmarked for providing educational facilities to the numbers of the Depressed Classes\textsuperscript{66}.

Thus, the Communal Award made a powerful impact on society, a revolutionary changes in the outlook of the people. A chain of events had been met in motion which helped the cause of an understanding between the high castes and the Depressed Classes. Thus, one great barrier was pulled down. The Poona Pact appears to be a peace treaty between two opposing camps. It was a peace treaty, which avoided a civil war. Undoubtedly, in the social history of mankind, it was unique in its kind. The Award of the Prime Minister, even though appeared communal, had only helped the cause of understanding between the various communities, and the Depressed Classes became privileged to enjoy for what they were entitled. It had helped only the cause of freedom for the oppressed, and served the cause of unity among the people.

Dr. Ambedkar had criticised the Poona Pact threadbare\textsuperscript{67}. According to him, it had completely disfranchised the Scheduled Castes, in so far as, the candidates whom they rejected in the primary elections, which were necessarily a true index of their will, had been returned in the final elections by the votes of the Caste Hindus. No doubt, this modified the effective working of the Award, but in the light of the willingness of the high castes to come down for negotiation, and

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.,
in the light of the unity of India, this was not a great loss. He also criticised the fact of Gandhiji as coercive, but it had equally coerced the high castes. The fact, that the higher castes had to vote for the depressed class candidates, was a triumph to the latter. In one sense, it had offered a crown to them by means of the ballot box. Indeed, the repercussions of the Poona Pact were many and were far reaching.

Events in India were matching fast. Time had come when the Hindus had to implement their pledge to the Depressed Classes, which they had made, to make them agreeable to a Joint Electorate. On January 31 1933, Dr. P. Subbaroyan introduced his controversial resolution\(^68\) in the Madras Legislative Council, for the ‘Removal of certain disabilities of certain classes of Hindus for Temple entry. The bill pointed out to the Poona Pact and the consequent agitation in the country and the necessity of throwing open the temples to the so-called depressed classes.

The Resolution of Dr. Subbaryoan\(^69\) was the first organised attempt of the enlightened section of the Hindu Community ever since the Aryan invasion, to try to adjust themselves to the changing circumstances. Is seen, the Communal Award had brought a great moral pressure on the Hindu Community, and to those who talked of Dominion status and independence, a problem awaited at home, the problem of untouchability. To the Hindus, high or low, the temple, from time immemorial, had been the centre of culture and civilization, the centre of social

\(^{68}\) G.O. No. 114, 31.01.1933, Public General Department, Miscellaneous, Government of Madras.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.,
and economic life. Throwing open the temples to the Depressed Classes would naturally mean admitting those people, who had been condemned as out castes, back into the fold of Hindu religion. Ever since, the Montford Reforms, the untouchables were slowly ascending the social seals. But the Communal Award gave them the proper footing, to gain back their position. Britain did not forego the Depressed Classes, and Dominion status was not given at their expenses. Whether Hindus would forego or accommodate them was the open question in 1933.

Dr. Subbarayan’s resolution was only an attempt at Temple Entry and it was no solution in the proper sense. It asked for the sanction of the minority, which had been guided by the age long custom and practising oppression. He was seeking permission for the introduction of a Bill, which would provide machinery in every temple to decide admission. But he unfailingly criticised the higher castes for their barrowness of outlook and the went of proper nationalism. He paid a compliment to the Depressed Classes for accepting the Poona Pact and thus saving the life of Gandhiji. For them, the higher castes were in doubt and should be repaid in terms of recognising their right to the classed among the Hindus. Subbarayan specifically referred to those who spoke in platforms, who would rather, not have democracy, then the temples sacriliegied by the entry of the Depressed Classes.

Temple entry would mean the beginning of religious and social democracy. But this was the great issue in conflict. The Hindu religion which was

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70 Ibid.,
71 Ibid., pp. 2 – 3.
aristocratic in character had come into conflict with the forces of democracy. It was difficult for the orthodoxy to oppose the resurgent forces that had been brought into play as a result of political power gained by the Depressed Classes. The position was that, to call a man a Hindu and then disallowing him to worship God, the worship of which was supposed to give him his religion, was most anomalous.\(^\text{72}\)

According to the proposition in question, the Dharmakarthas of temple should allow temple entry, if the Hindu voters of the Corporation or Municipalities who constituted a machinery, and favourably decided, in case 50 voters of the high caste Hindus appeared for it. The temples would be closed to any caste if 50 voters referred a proposition to the general voters.\(^\text{73}\) An examination of the resolution of Subbarayan would show that the Bill was a half hearted, half measure based on the consent of an unwilling minority. It did not go deep into the problem of religious or social freedom. Assigning a place to the depressed classes in temples, was, in fact, more humiliating than refusing admission. No doubt the discussion on the resolution revealed the working of the mind of the privileged classes. Hindu society had not yet risen to the occasion.

The failure of Lawyers; their proposition adding insult to injury; allotting place to the depressed classes in temples

The opinion of the Council of Advocates\(^\text{74}\) on Subbarayan’s Bill she light on the little effect education had on them. They expressed sympathy for the Bill,

\(^{72}\) *Ibid.*,  
\(^{73}\) G.O. No. 205, 04.03.1933, Public General Dept. Miscellaneous, Government of Madras.  
\(^{74}\) *The Indian Express*, 6 April 1934, Madras Newspaper Reports. p. 203.
but opposed to legislation or direct action to obtain temple entry by depressed classes. But, they failed to point out other unobjectionable methods. Their opinion was that, the old Hindu Society had no rigid laws, and hence changes could be introduced by the temple authorities themselves. But they had forgotten that ‘Thserthams’ and ‘prasadams’ had been made valuable legal rights, capable of being fought out in all courts up to the Privy Council. The most humiliating part of their suggestion was to allot the farthest position to the Depressed Classes in the temple. This went against the whole campaign of Gandhi to put the ‘Harijans’ along with the unprivileged caste Hindus. It would be adding insult to injury to affecting based upon the perpetuation of their inferiority.\(^{75}\)

The Free Press of India\(^{76}\) on the resolutions on untouchability before the Madras Legislative Council, which was disallowed by the Governor General, said, that such sanction, if assorted would have the effect of altering the purpose of the ancient trust, created under specified circumstances. It might discourage benevolent people from giving away their money to endowments under apprehension that their intention might be frustrated by legislation. The Free press advocated new temples to be constructed by government for Harijans. According to them, the ‘Hindus’ if they visited the new temples, the old temples right revise their decisions.

This was a very sad community on the mentality of the higher castes. This was creating religion within religion, only to perpetuate a archaism in the already

\(^{75}\) Ibid., p.204

\(^{76}\) Public (General) Dept. 1933. Miscellaneous G.O. No. 105, dt. 4.03.33
strife-torn Hindu Society. New temple for the depressed classes would mean erecting a lasting movement of religious tyranny, exercised by the assumption of superiority by a minority of the so-called high caste Hindus, thus standing is the way of religious and social democracy.

It was no wonder, that under these circumstances the Governor General withheld previous sanction to Dr. Subbarayan’s Bill on the ground that the question of untouchability was an All India subject. But he admitted Raja Aiyer’s Bill in the Legislative Assembly. This Bill proposed to abolish legal untouchability, as it was negative in character, but leaving the social and religious aspect to its fate. This was no solution to the problem. To Gandhiji, the sanction given to this Bill was an unintentional challenge to Hinduism and the informer. Hinduism would take care of itself if the reformer was regarded as God-sent. It cleared the issue. It made it easy for India and the World to understand the tremendous importance of the moral struggle that was going on in the country. It took it at one sweep of its natural platform to which it was timidly advancing.

Answering to the discussion on the above Bill, the Law Member, Sir S. L. Mitter said, that the Hindu Law and administered in different ways in different provinces, and that a Law should not be enacted without understanding all the grievances of the Depressed Classes. It was but proper that the question of the abolition of untouchability should be left to the decision of the respective Provincial Legislative Councils. He said that government was at fault in declaring

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78 Ibid.,
untouchability as in All India issue and encouraged the introduction of the Bill in the Legislative Assembly.

When the temple entry Bill was under discussion in the legislative assembly, a depressed class deputation under M.C. Raja waited on the Viceroy on 29 March 1933. They wanted the untouchability Bill to be passed. The Viceroy replied that the Bill was widely discussed, and there could be no forced decision. But he promised all practical help\textsuperscript{79}. In a democratic set up, which Britain was endeavouring to build up, it was self realisation and agreement of the parties concerned which was better than any precipitate action by government. But the government had provided the forum for discussion and the Bills fell short of the aim. Only the Reformed Legislature under 1935 Act could face the task easily. The situation was ripe, when there were 30 members of the depressed classes in the Madras Legislative Assembly and no wonder the Madras Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act II of 1939 was passed, which removed the age long custom that prohibited certain classes from entering temples and provided punishment for those who obstructed any devotee anywhere in Madras Presidency from entering temples\textsuperscript{80}. Thus it provided freedom of worship to all classes of people. The Communal Award gave an impetus to the growth of progressive forces. Travancore was the first State to declare open the temples for the untouchables, where the Ezhavas thought of conversion to Christianity or to form ‘Swathanthra Samuthayam’. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, had earned a name in

\textsuperscript{79} The Indian Annual Register, 1933, Mitra, Vol. 1, p. 470.

\textsuperscript{80} The Civil Court Manual, Madras Acts, 1940, p. 1745.
pioneering such reforms, which Rajaji complimented in the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1937 during the Budget Session\textsuperscript{81}.

The justification of the Communal Award by events of History

It is significant that after tiresome marches in tracing the social evolution of India, it would be consoling that social changes were unshared in, when Brahmins were at the helm of affairs, and to that extent, no doubt, the social bitterness had cooled down. For the Act of the Reformed Legislature the British Government also could not be found fault with by the Orthodoxy. Social and religious changes were introduced with the help of Indians themselves. The history of the removal of untouchability proves conclusively the truth of the statement of the Joint Parliamentary Committee that the Communal Award was an essential and inevitable condition of any new constitutional scheme\textsuperscript{82}. It had removed a serious blot on the Hindu religion and Hindu society for which India could feel thankful to Great Britain.

Allied to the problem of temple entry was the problem of representation of the Depressed Classes in the Cabinet. Answering to a cut motion\textsuperscript{83}, moved by V.I. Munuswamy Pillai, and A.S. Sahajanandan in May 1935, the Government of Madras pointed out, that according to para 6 of the Instrument of Instruction, the Governor should use his best endeavour to select his Ministers in consultation with the persons who in his judgement would command a stable majority,

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\textsuperscript{81} The Indian Annual Register, Mitra, Vol. I, p. 470.
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\textsuperscript{83} Public (Reform) Dept. 1935, Ordinary, G.O. No. 734, 10.05.1935.
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keeping in mind the need for fostering joint responsibility. They also pointed out that in Madras there was a Depressed Class population of 69 lakhs and from the numerical point of view they formed an important Community. With thirty seats reserved for them in an Assembly of 215, representation to them in the Cabinet was a foregone conclusion\textsuperscript{84}. Their claim was reassured in July 1935. Answering to Pramayya\textsuperscript{85}, the Hon. Mr. Souter pointed out the need for stability and joint responsibility of the Cabinet and the possibility as far as practicable that members of important minority communities to be included in the Cabinet. He assured, that taking into consideration, the population of the Depressed Classes, at nearly seven million, that in any Cabinet which might be formed, the depressed classes would have a claim to a representative. He concluded “I have no doubt, Sir, that His Excellency the Governor will take this fact into consideration”\textsuperscript{86}.

The assurance given by government was implemented in the working of the Act of 1935 and V.I. Munuswamy Pillai, had the privilege to represent the Depressed Classes in the first Cabinet under the scheme of Provincial Autonomy inaugurated in 1937. If their political strength gained for them religious emancipation as on the question of temple entry, it also created ameliorative conditions for their welfare as on the question of prohibition. Its introduction in Salem\textsuperscript{87} in 1939, for which preliminary were made even as early as 1925 was largely due to the number of depressed class representatives, who gained positional strength both in the Congress and the Legislature. Their representation

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{85} Public (Special) Dept. 1935, Miscellaneous, G.O. No. 1101, 05.07.1935.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{87} Report on the working of prohibition in the Salem District (Annamalai University), 1939.
in the Cabinet was really a crowning glory and a prelude to their rise in all spheres of life.

**Communal Electorate**

Under the 1935 Act, Elections to the Federal House and the Provincial Assemblies were to take place on a Communal Basis\(^8\). This was inevitable as per the Communal Award. The Members elected as representatives of a particular community in a Provincial Legislative Assembly would form an electoral college by which corresponding communal representations would be elected from the province to the Federal Assembly by a single transferable vote. The Indian statutory commission favoured general plural member constitutions. Each voter exercising one vote only. The characteristics of this system was that are an assurance of representative to minorities\(^9\).

The Depressed Classes were the largest in Bengal\(^9\) and Punjab and smallest in Madras and Bombay. The general plural member constituencies were favoured where no reservation was made to the Depressed Classes and also to Muhammadan Communities. After the 1934, elections it was realised that to secure representation for Moderate opinion, it was possible only within the Provincial Legislatures it could be possible for the election to the Federal Assembly was indirect and the nature of representation in the Provincial Legislatures would reflect in the Federal Parliament\(^9\). It was thought that single

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\(^9\) Ibid.,
transferable vote was well suited to secure representation for the Moderate opinion.\(^92\)

The Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform\(^93\) put the weight of their argument in favour of an All India Federation and the introduction of responsible government in the Centre. They qualified the terms responsible Government, as the executive in some senses accountable to the Legislature. The statutory commission recommended for an unitary government in the centre, in view of the complexity of the problem that India presented. However, this had been overlooked, for, they were satisfied that the Princes had declared their willingness to enter and all India Federation. According to them, the Advent of the Princely States into the Federation would add stability in Indian Policies of the future. Also, they pointed out, that the Provincial Autonomy to the units, autocracy at the Centre, would be a paradox and hence recommended diarchy in the Centre. They conceded that every shade of political opinion in India had rightly or wrongly regarded a measure of responsible government at the Centre as the hallmark of nationhood, and vital to the Status and Self respect of India and hence accepted them.\(^94\)

**The first elections under the 1935 Act**

In regard to Provincial autonomy, Congress accepted the scheme, and in the elections\(^95\), they came out successful in 6 provinces. The condition of a successful party system of government was largely influenced by communal

\(^92\) *Ibid.*,


\(^94\) *Ibid.*,

rancour. However, the Congress as it seems in a majority party for the time being, created a stability. A distinguishing feature of the elections was the multiplicity of parties\textsuperscript{96} others than the predominant parties. Unlike the two party system in England and a mobile public opinion, there were more than half a dozen splinter groups without any clear out party principles. Of them, the Justice party which stood for the Non-Brahmin cause secured only 17 seats, for the Congress itself had come to be dominated by Non-Brahmins and the Depressed Classes, the Justice party lost its hold over the masses. There was a gradual deterioration even since its association with diarchy. The party position was, Congress 160, Independent 15, peoples party, Muslim league 11, Muslim Progressive Party 1, Europeans 3, European General 3, Madras Planters 1, Kattukottai Chetti Association 1, Anglo Indian 2 and South Indian Chamber 1. To the elections to the Madras Legislative Council\textsuperscript{97}, congress contented 33 out of a total of 46 seats and secured 26 seats.

In the scheme for Provincial Autonomy, the Cabinet even though was supposed to have joint responsibility and representing those individuals who could command a majority in the Legislature, it was to represent important minorities also\textsuperscript{98}. Thus it was representative not of a single majority party or even a coalition of parties, but composed of minorities also. These were necessary elements because of Indian social conditions and definitely it was not a political party and could not anticipate the features of British politics. Added to this, in the instrument of Instructions to the Governor, a great latitude had been given in the

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{98} The Indian Annual Register, 1937, Vol. II, p. 345.
choice of Ministers without giving room for suspicion among the minorities. It appeared that such arrangements were to be the eternal and immutable feature of Indian policies.

**Democratic Experiment under 1935 Act**

The Reform Act of 1935 envisaged one of the greatest democratic experiments in India. In spite of the criticism of the Federal Part of the Constitution, the idea of a Federation Comprising Princely States and British India was in tune with the public opinion in India. The vision of a Federal policy for All India had been strengthened and given life.

It was in the provinces that a Parliamentary system of Government had been established in the first instant. For reaching at this change, it is not a break with the past, for the Act of 1919 introduced a large measure of Responsible Government. The outstanding feature was the demarcation of the Province of Autonomy, by the list of powers granted to them. The sphere of the Centre was defined by the Central list. But the residuary power rested with the centre and it had concurrent jurisdiction over the concurrent list and the laws of the Centre prevailed eventhough the Provinces also could legislate on them.

As Lord Eredkine, the Governor of Madras said, however unsatisfactory the provisions in the new Constitution regarding the Central government, it was evident, that if the powers granted to the provinces were wisely used, it would lead to the creation of a new and free India. Subsequent events unfailingly testified to this statement. It was significant, that after the 1935 Act it was the

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100 Indian Annual Register, Jan – July, p. 216.
sincere wish of the British Statesman, that Britishers and Indians should endeavour to understand and appreciate each others point of view, to establish a psychological reproachment. To the non-official European community, he made the historic comment, “It is the duty of all Europeans in the future who came to India, I speak for the younger members of the European community, it is their duty to identify themselves in every possible way with the future government of the country. If they do not do it, they will be lost”\textsuperscript{101}. Never was a truer word spoken. His statements confessed clearly that the British Mission in India was almost over, and he was trying to build up a psychological reproachment, preliminary to British withdrawal from India. On the 1 Dec. 1935, he touched upon some of these problems\textsuperscript{102} that arouse more explicitly from the introduction of democratic government. To the Civil Service and Indian legislators, he showed himself anxious, that Madras should strive to establish within her borders conditions favourable to the creation of a high Parliamentary government such as England had evolved. He hoped, that whatever, party might come to power under the reforms, should have a stable majority in the legislature. The peculiar constitution of the Madras Assembly, he feared was only too favourable to the emergence of numerous groups, with the consequence that the Ministries might be short lived and representative institutions would become impossible.

This was a true criticism of the Provincial Legislature what was needed was well defined political parties than groups. Collective responsibility would avoid group formation. Lord Erskine put the essence of the reform in a nut shall

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Indian Review}, Feb. 1937, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 89.
when he said, that the Civil Service in future would become very such like the
Civil Service in England. To the members of the Civil Service, he said in future
their duty would be to carry out loyally the orders of the Government of the day
and not to mix itself with party politics and not to take sides. At the same time,
His Excellency said, that there was corresponding obligation on the part of the
New Government to see that the Civil Service was contented and was properly
paid and generally run well. Commenting on the cost of administration, he said,
that it was an incontrovertible fact that the State was entitled to get its business
done at the cheapest rate at which that business could be efficiently performed.
He concluded by a note that should strike a responsive chord in the heart of every
lover of that country that, “I am a believer in the unity as our Valuable
Possession”103.

The Reform Act of 1935 had not the seal on Parliamentary system of
Government104 inaugurated under 1919 Act and the road to India’s Independence
had been well laid out. The Reform Act came into operation in 1937 and after the
ten year period of trial, and as accidentally stipulated in the Poona Pact, for the
enjoyment of the privileges granted to the Depressed Classes, on the midnight of
August 15 1947, Britain transferred power of the Government of India to Indian
hands, handed over power, to the care of the socialist and democrat and more
important, the some of the soil, but a child of Western Science, Pandit Jawaharlal
Nehru to build the superstructure for which Britain has laid the solid foundations.