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The Depressed Classes
AND
Poona Muslim Mission

BY

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IDEALS

1. Service of Islam.
2. Unity of Islam.
3. Defence and Propagation of Islam.

WORK

1. Establishing Islamic Missions.
2. Preparing Muslim Missionaries.
3. Translating Holy Quran.
4. Preparing Islamic Literature.

OUR BELIEFS

1. We believe in the finality of prophethood in Muhammad. In the words of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement "No prophet, old or new, will come after our Holy Prophet"; "The man who denies the finality of prophethood must be considered as having no faith in, and outside the pale of, Islam."

2. We believe the Holy Quran to be the final and perfect Book of God, no portion of which has ever been or shall ever be abrogated.

3. We look upon every one as a Muslim who professes faith in the *kalima*, *La ilah ill-Allah Muhammad ur Rasul ullah*, to whatever sect or school of thought in Islam he may belong.

4. We accept Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, as the Mujaddid of the 14th century, and we affirm that he never claimed to be a prophet, as he himself writes: "I lay no claim to prophethood, but claim only to be a *Muhaddath*" (a non-prophet to whom God speaks); "I am not a claimant to prophethood; on the other hand, I regard such a claimant as outside the pale of Islam;" "They have devised a lie against me who say that I claim to be a prophet."

Note :—The doctrines held by the Qadian section that the founder of the Movement is a prophet and that all non-Ahmadis are *kafirs* have been repeatedly refuted by us.

The Voice of "Untouchable India"

Three months have passed since Dr. Ambedkar's historic announcement that the "untouchables" must leave the fold of Hinduism. A cursory glance at what has passed during these three months is enough to show that the revolt of untouchability against Hinduism is widening and growing stronger day by day. Dr. Ambedkar is slowly but determinedly following his programme to make the whole of "untouchable" India realize that there is no salvation for it so long as it remains in the fold of Hinduism, and the voice of the dumb millions is becoming clearer day by day. The following few extracts selected from a very large number would show that the day is approaching when the "untouchables" would *en masse* bid a formal farewell to the Hindu religion :

" Dr. Ambedkar presiding over the meeting of the depressed classes, at Yeola, Nasik district, said

that so far they had been unsuccessful in their efforts to bring about a change of heart and it was futile to waste their energies and money in further trying to get redress and to work in harmonious co-operation. The best way was complete severance from the Hindu fold. 'We shall cease our fight for equality where we are denied it. Because we have the misfortune to call ourselves Hindus we are treated thus. If we were members of another faith, none dare treat us so.' 'Choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment.' 'We shall repair our mistake now. I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of the untouchable, but it is not my fault. But I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power.' "

—*C. and M. Gazette.*—15th October 1935.

Dr. Ambedkar's reply to M. Gandhi :

"What religion we shall belong to, we have not decided; what ways and means we shall adopt, we have not thought out; but we have decided one thing and that after due deliberation and with deep conviction, namely, the Hindu religion is not good for us. Inequality is the very basis of it and its ethics are such that the depressed classes can never acquire their full manhood in it. Let none think that I have done this in a hurry or as a matter of wrath against the

treatment meted out to the depressed classes at Kanitha village or at any other place. It is a deeply deliberated decision. I agree with Mr. Gandhi that religion is necessary, but I do not agree that a man must have his ancestral religion if he finds that religion repugnant to his notions of the sort of religion he needs as a standard for the regulation of his own conduct and as a source of inspiration for his advancement and well-being. I have made up my mind to change my religion. I do not care if the masses do not come. It is for them to decide. If they feel it is good, they will follow me, but on the contrary, if they feel that it is not, they will not follow my example. My own advice is that Mr. Gandhi should allow the depressed classes to chalk out their own line of action. Kanitha does not represent an isolated incident, but it is the very basis of a system founded on the ancestral religion of the Hindus."

—*C. and M. Gazette.*—16th October 1935.

"Mr. Jaisuklal Mehta appreciated Dr. Ambedkar's viewpoint, and said if he were an untouchable he would have left the Hindu fold long ago."

—*C. and M. Gazette.*—18th October 1935.

P. R. Venkataswami (Secunderabad):

"If Hindu reformers and Mr. Gandhi are sincere in their efforts to make us enjoy our birth-

rights of equality of treatment and status in Hinduism, the adoption of my suggestion (to make a model village completely free from the scruples of untouchability) would be the best way to solve the problem successfully. Any other method means delay, in which case change of religion is the only panacea for us."

—*Times of India*.—2nd November 1935.

P. J. Editor writes :

"I am in complete agreement with the views expressed by Mr. C. Krishnan, M. L. C., Calicut, that Mr. Gandhi and his followers desire to keep the Harijans in the Hindu fold for exploiting them for political purposes and for keeping their numbers swelled. Dr. Ambedkar deserves to be congratulated for his bold decision which was long overdue. It is being hailed with delight by all sensible and right-thinking persons who know for a fact that the Mahars and untouchables are treated worse than pariah dogs by the caste Hindus."

—*Times of India*.—2nd November 1935.

"In a public meeting of the depressed classes of Poona and allied areas Mr. Shiv Ram Jamba Kamble, the president, said that the depressed classes remained degraded in all respects for centuries and that they could not ameliorate their sad plight until the advent of the British rule

in India. From then they were able to educate themselves and now they were trying to emancipate themselves from the rigid customs of Hinduism that had been imposed on them. He supported Dr. Ambedkar's move."

—*C. and M. Gazette*, 3rd December 1935.

Resolution passed by four thousand Mahars of Karachi.

"They declare that no hope remains for improvement of the lot of Harijans in the Hindu fold. The lip sympathy of the Hindu Mahasabha of Nasik can bring no salvation to the untouchables who support Dr. Ambedkar's move."

"**Dr. Ambedkar**, after the Yeola Conference, issued a leaflet in which, after tracing the history of the sacrifices made by the Harijans, and the atrocious attitude of the Hindus, wrote that hardened, therefore, by relentless oppression and hopeless of future betterment of their condition, the sect had decided, after mature deliberation and in a calm atmosphere, to abjure Hindu religion for some other religion which gave them equal treatment, status and clean living inside that faith. Hereafter the depressed classes would have nothing to do with Hinduism, would abandon agitation for temple entry and Rath participation, and boycott all Hindu religious

places, yatras and festivities.

“The message concludes with an exhortation to the depressed classes to act upon the Yeola decision and demonstrate once again to the world their solidarity and determination to rise to the occasion and fight squarely for the achievement of self-respect and the right to live as human beings, which had been denied them from times immemorial by ‘caste’ Hindus.”

—*Times of India*, 22nd November 1935.

“In the course of a letter to Sant Ram of the Jat Pat Torak Mandal, Dr. Ambedkar writes :

“I am ever at the service of the Hindu community and that will be my attitude even when I go out of it. I admire your efforts for breaking up the caste system. But, allow me to say that I do not agree with the way you are attacking the problem. I do not see how you can break up caste without annihilating the religious notions on which the caste system is founded. I cannot develop the argument now. But I will, when I get a chance, at some other time. In the meantime I must leave it to you to deal with the question in the way you like.”

—*The Tribune*, 11th December 1935.

‘Dr. Ambedkar in the message to the All-

Kerala Thiya Youth League, regarding their resolve to give up Hinduism, observes that the time for discussing the question of a change of religion is past, and the time for decisive action has come. He says there are two things he wishes to impress upon the Thiyas. The first is that Hinduism is not a religion. It is, he says, only a contagious disease The severance of the connection with caste Hindus by the depressed classes is therefore a necessary act for their safety, and their salvation. The second thing they should do is to realise that the depressed classes, in changing their faith, must act together. The conversion should be a mass conversion. To whatever religion they go they must go in a body."

—*C. and M. Gazette*, 8th January 1936.

"Messrs. B. S. Venkatrao, leader of the depressed classes and Ariga Ramaswamy, a Harijan member of the Hyderabad (Dn.) Corporation, and other Harijans of Hyderabad and Secunderabad returned to-day after attending the Maharashtra Harijan Youth Conference.

"Interviewed Mr. Venkatrao said that the present attitude of the Harijans in India would give an honourable social status to the community.

He further stated that he was arranging in Hyderabad State for a Harijan Conference and would be inviting Dr. Ambedkar to preside. The Conference was intended to educate the Harijans in the state to sever their connection from the Hindu fold. When the programme of the Nawab of Dacca for the conversion of Harijans to Islam was mentioned, Mr. Venkatrao said that he was against individual conversion, but he believed in mass conversion, or better still in creating a new religion suitable to the community. His message to the Harijans in the State was that they should seriously consider the question of severing their connection from the Hindu fold."

—*Times of India*, 23rd January 1936.

" ' Dr. Ambedkar has every right to grumble against the Hindu community, which does not accord him equal rights,' said Mr. A.V. Thakkar, General Secretary of the All-India Harijan Sewak Sangh, addressing a public meeting held this evening at Lajpat Rai Hall under the presidency of Mr. Hansraj.

" Mr. Thakkar revealed that Nasik Municipality refused to present an address of welcome to Dr. Ambedkar because he was a Harijan. Dr. Ambedkar, when engaged in professional work at

Baroda, was not given any house, because he belonged to the depressed class. In view of this state of affairs, was not Dr. Ambedkar justified in his complaint against caste Hindus? The argument advanced by some caste Hindus that by encouraging education to Harijans they would only create 'rebels like Dr. Ambedkar' was absurd."

—*Times of India*, 23rd January 1936.

Idols broken and Hindu sacred books burnt.

It is not only through resolutions that the "untouchables" are making their voice heard. They have even broken the idols which they used to worship, and consigned to flames the Hindu scriptures which they hitherto regarded as their sacred books. Below are given a few extracts from the newspapers :

"To symbolise their decision to leave the Hindu fold, some 800 Harijan youths from the villages of Nasik District met at a Conference last night in Nasik and performed the obsequies of Hinduism by burning the Manusmriti and other Hindu sacred books, upholding untouchability. The Conference was organized by the Nasik

District Depressed Classes Youth League. Several speakers addressed the gathering at which a number of Muslims were also present to watch the proceedings.

“Feelings ran high when speaker after speaker enumerated ‘the atrocities perpetrated by the caste Hindus’ on the depressed classes and condemned the Hindu Shastras for sanctioning untouchability.

“Angry shouts greeted the suggestion of a solitary youth who pleaded that, as they had not yet settled which religion they should embrace, it was not necessary for them to perform the last rites of Hinduism.

“He was told that Harijans had decided to leave the Hindu fold, which was enough, and ‘youths should bravely implement that decision.’

“A funeral pyre was prepared, into which sacred books of the Hindus were ceremoniously thrown, to the accompaniment of funeral orations detailing the offending passages in the books.

“A resolution was also passed asking Harijans not to participate in Hindu ‘Jatras,’ not to visit Hindu holy places, not to give money to Hindu priests and not to observe Hindu festivities. It was also announced that temple entry satyagraha and agitation committee would be dissolved

forthwith.”— *C. & M. Gazette*, 10th November 1935.

“ To signalise the decision to desert Hindu religion, 3,000 Harijans destroyed several idols of Hindu gods including Khanderao, Mhasoba and Pandhariai and burnt sacred scriptures, while Harijan *gpsavis* rent strings of sacred beads at a meeting of Harijans held yesterday at Sukhene Village of the Niphad Taluka.”

—*Times of India*, 20th November 1935.

“ Ahmadnagar Harijans demonstrated in unmistakable terms their decision to leave the Hindu fold and embrace any faith that Dr. Ambedkar might choose, at a mass meeting of all the subjects of Harijans, at which a bonfire of Hindu religious books was made and an idol of a Hindu deity smashed.”

—*Times of India*, 15th December 1935.

“ Satara Harijans residing in Poona burnt Hindu religious books at yesterday's meeting held to back Dr. Ambedkar and the Yeola decisions.

“The meeting also recommended Government to proscribe Hindu religious books which encouraged caste hatred. About 1,200 untouchables were present and Mr. L. B. Powar presided.”

—*Times of India*, 18th December 1935.

Atrocities of Hindus.

The orthodox Hindus are not taking the situation calmly; on the other hand, exasperated by the untouchables' resolve to take the extreme step of renouncing the Hindu religion, they are growing more inimical to them, and many acts of atrocity have come to light, while in numerous cases the voice of the oppressed people cannot reach the public. The following two examples are sufficient :—

“Caste Hindus, at Chinchori, a village 16 miles from Poona, are stated to have boycotted members of the depressed classes from December 10. Shopkeepers in the village have also stopped dealings with them. It is alleged that the Harijans are not allowed to pass through the main thoroughfares of the village.”—*Times of India* 17th Dec. 1935.

“Suspecting the Mahar women of the village to be systematically stealing grass from the fields of the caste Hindus, the Hindu Panch or elders summoned some of the Mahar women returning with loads of grass....They collected all the caste Hindu cattle and drove the whole herd into the Inam lands of the Mahars and saw that

the crops were destroyed. Afraid of further caste tyranny, the Mahars kept quiet, but one of them subsequently told a Christian missionary at Sangamnar, who, it is reported, informed the Nasik authorities."

—*Times of India*, 8th December 35.

Dr. Ambedkar's Original Plan not Given up

His Holiness Shri Shankaracharya (Dr. Kurtukoti) stated to a representative of the *Times of India* that "Dr. Ambedkar has been dissuaded, just at present, from giving up Hinduism," to which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar made the following reply :

"I have not met Dr. Kurtukoti at any time since the Yeola Conference, and I have never had any discussion with him, although some correspondence has passed between us in regard to this question of the conversion of the depressed classes. I am surprised to read how Dr. Kurtukoti comes to the conclusion that I 'have been dissuaded, just at present, from giving up Hinduism.' I wish to contradict flatly what he says. Nobody has come to dissuade me, and I have certainly not changed my view, and I say I will not, and I have not, given up my plans.

"I am certainly very anxious to destroy all

barriers of caste from among the depressed classes, but I am not waiting for such a consummation, which I devoutly wish. Indeed, I think that the only way to break up the caste system among the depressed classes is to convert them to a religion which does not recognise caste."

—*Times of India*, 26th January 1936.

Will the "Untouchables" embrace Islam?

It is yet too early to expect that Dr. Ambedkar or his followers should declare what religion they are going to adopt after renouncing Hinduism. Dr. Ambedkar's first objective is to make the whole of "untouchable" India realize that their wrongs cannot be remedied unless they leave the fold of Hinduism. This, of course, cannot be accomplished within a few months; it might take four or five years. It is a huge task in itself, as eight crores of people spread over this vast continent will have to be approached and convinced that the religion which has hitherto been supposed to be the means of their deliverance is actually responsible for their miserable lot and the bondage in

which they have been kept. In fact, Dr. Ambedkar is quite right in not allowing a discussion of the future religion, as at this stage such a discussion would only create disunity in the ranks of the depressed classes; the first thing which they have to do is to agree that they will not remain Hindus. There are, however, indications which show that they are more inclined to Islam than to any other religion. In fact, there are only two religions on one of which they must fix their choice, *viz.*, Islam and Christianity. The latter may be useful in the amelioration of their worldly condition, but as the experience of those who have adopted Christianity shows, it cannot give them equality and brotherhood which they can only find in Islam. In some cases, the leaders of the depressed classes have even expressed the view that Islam is the only religion suited for them. On this point I have already quoted the views of a Southern India leader. Here are two more examples:

“Vehement speeches denouncing Hinduism and caste Hindus, and their treatment of Harijans were made at a largely attended public meeting of Harijans last night. Baba Patit Pavandas, of Nasik, presided.

“The speakers reiterated complete confidence in Dr. Ambedkar’s leadership and supported his decision to abandon Hinduism which, they said, was ‘a religion for a weak and effeminate people,’ and exhorted Harijans to embrace Islam, so that they might live in this world as self-respecting men.

“Instances of caste Hindu tyranny were quoted and placards denouncing the Hindu scriptures were featured.

“At the closing stages of the meeting the cries of Allah o-Akbar were raised by the audience, when the president in his speech favoured the conversion to Islam.”

—*Times of India*, 10th December 1935.

“Mr. Rajbhoj, Secretary of the All India Depressed Classes League, in an interview said that he was not surprised at Dr. Ambedkar’s views, as he had expressed those views on former occasions. What was surprising, he said, was Dr. Ambedkar’s omission to indicate what

religion he proposed to embrace. However, he added, Dr. Ambedkar had, on previous occasions, spoken a great deal in favour of Islam from a number of platforms."

— *C. and M. Gazette*, 18th October 1935.

Madras and U. P. Leaders anxious for Islamic Literature

I may also here refer to the letters of two leaders, one from Southern India and the other from United Provinces. The former writes:—

"I am one belonging to the Thiyya community. All our organizations in Malabar have already passed resolutions to the effect that the Thiyyas should leave immediately the fold of Hinduism. Now, the only question that faces the community as a whole is to which religion they should go. Our accredited leaders' views on this most important point seem strangely divided. Many of them have urged that Islam is the sole remedy for all the age-long disabilities and inequalities under which the Thiyyas are labouring. But, with regret I should add that the fact is that we know nothing of the cardinal principles of Islam."

The latter, a famous depressed class leader, writes in a similar strain and suggests that tracts in Hindi should be made accessible to the depressed classes, showing how Islam brings all its adherents to a level of equality.

Islamic Mission at Poona

Even if no demand for Islamic literature had come from the depressed classes leaders, it was the Muslims' duty—a duty which they owe to Islam as well as to their down-trodden countrymen—to carry the teachings of Islam to their doors, to make them *know* and *feel* that Islam could give them a real equality and a true brotherhood. It is to fulfil this duty that the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, Lahore, has already opened an Islamic mission at Poona. Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, the famous Sanskrit scholar and Mian Bashir Ahmad, M.A., have been placed in charge of this mission, and they left for Poona on the 26th January 1936. The

object with which the mission has been established is twofold, *viz.*, (1) to bring the knowledge of the broad principles of Islam and its social and moral aspects to the doors of the Marhatti speaking depressed classes by issuing Islamic literature in Marhatti, and (2) to establish personal contact with the depressed class leaders so that they may realize how Islam translates its teachings into practice. The latter is as important as the former, rather more; because it is the treatment in practice which would make the greater appeal to the untouchables. In fact, on this point the Muslims in certain parts of the country, particularly in Bombay Presidency, are more under the influence of Hinduism than Islam, as they not only look upon the depressed classes as impure, but even when the latter are converted to Islam they are not treated as equal members of the Islamic brotherhood. Thus the establishment of a mission was necessary not only to make the Harijans *feel* that Islam

offered them an equality which they could not even dream of in Hinduism, but also to bring about a change in the present Muslim mentality.

Besides establishing the Poona Mission, the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam has started work among certain depressed classes in the Punjab, which though begun on a small scale gives hopes of expanding very soon. The requirements of the U. P. and Madras depressed classes are also under consideration, and if the necessary funds are available, missions will have to be established in both these provinces. The Poona Mission and the Punjab work is likely to cost the Anjuman about a thousand Rupees monthly on a moderate scale, but it cannot be said when circumstances may arise which may necessitate expenditure on a vaster scale, and it is necessary to prepare ourselves for such an emergency.

The Anjuman has started this work on the strength of an appeal to its own members.

and trusting that God will open out a way and enable it to carry on this good cause. We are fully conscious that the work is too stupendous for such a small community, but seeing that the Muslims are more occupied with destructive work which is shattering their own strength, we have started the work of presenting Islam to the depressed classes, thus adding to the already heavy responsibilities of our Anjuman. For the Muslims to sit silent while Dr. Ambedkar is preparing the eight crores of his followers to leave the fold of Hinduism is not only a sin; it is a traitory to Islam. Eight crores of people are knocking at the door of Islam while the Muslims inside are fighting among themselves. They have before them an opportunity which very rarely comes to a nation, and if they waste it they shall lose a chance which is never likely to come again.

In the last tract I appealed for five thousand subscribers to the fund for the

propagation of Islam among the untouchables, each subscriber to contribute Rs. 25 annually. One should have expected that among the eight crores of Indian Muslims, even fifty thousand was not too high an estimate of the people who should come forward to respond to this appeal. But beyond the small Ahmadiyya community not more than fifty people have responded to this call. This apathy towards the work of the propagation of Islam on the part of the general Muslim public is due to the fact that their learned men are wholly occupied with another kind of work. As the late Maulana Shibli said :

کرتے ہیں تکفیر مسلمانوں کی دن رات
 بیٹھے ہوئے ہم بھی تو بیگار نہیں

“ Day and night we are engaged in the *takfir* of the Muslims ; we are not sitting idle ”.

Takfir (declaring Muslims to be *kafirs*) and *tabligh* (carrying the message of Islam to non-Muslims) are works opposed to each other, and so long as the Muslims do not give up *takfir*, they cannot turn their atten-

tion to *tabligh*.

I again appeal to every well-wisher of Islam to do his best to help the cause of the propagation of Islam among the Depressed classes, so that while Dr. Ambedkar is preparing them to renounce Hinduism *en masse*, we may prepare them to accept Islam with one voice as soon as they leave Hinduism. Adoption of any one or more of the following suggestions would help the cause :

1. Donate Rs. 25 a year or more if you can, towards the Depressed Classes Fund.
2. Within your sphere of influence try to eradicate the evil of *takfir*, looking upon all those who recite the Kalima as Muslims.
3. Do what you can to carry the message of Islam to the Depressed classes in particular.
4. Communicate to the Anjuman the address of any Depressed class leader whom you know.
5. Treat any members of the Depressed classes with whom you come in contact

as your brethren, and show them by your example that if they come over to Islam, they will have the same rights and the same social status as all other Muslims.

6. Try to impress upon those Muslims with whom you are in touch that looking down upon the Depressed classes, or upon the converts to Islam from among them, is against the teachings of Islam.

7. It is the duty of every true Muslim to bring about co-operation between the different organizations working in this country for the spread of Islam.

8. To whatever sect or denomination the workers in a certain society may belong, the question is simply to bring the Depressed classes within the brotherhood of Islam by making them recite the Kalima.

How to Help

Should our aims and objects appeal to you as worthy of your moral and material support, I would suggest some ways to help to forward this cause of Islam which is common to us all and, I am sure, dear to us all:—

1. Earmark a percentage of your income as monthly subscription.
 2. Specify a fixed portion of your Zakat for this cause.
 3. Transfer the amount of interest on your bank deposits, not permissible for personal use, to the propagation of Islam.
 4. Send a donation for any of the objects which you approve.
 5. Send an order for our literature for your own use or for presentation to non-Muslims.
 6. Help us in the free distribution of Translation of Holy Quran and other Islamic literature—cheap edition costs only Rs. 2 8a.
 7. Subscribe to our periodicals. The *Light* is particularly recommended.
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