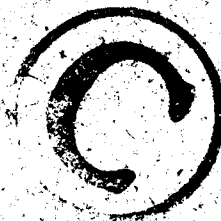


19370p

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
OF

Sgt. Vallabhbhai Patel



V2, 2145m2
N25



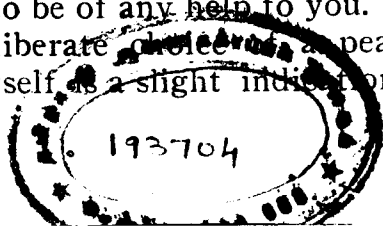
Presidential Address
of
Sjt. Vallabhbhai Patel

FRIENDS,

I must apologize to you at the very outset for reading my address in English, but I am not sure that you also do not owe a like apology to me. For one thing, I am not accustomed to speaking in English, and I have not found it difficult to make myself understood to audiences in Maharashtra in my broken Hindi. I should have expected you to have taken more advantage of the work of Hindi Prachar inaugurated by Mahatmaji and carried on with so much zeal and industry under Sjt. Harihara Sharma and his valiant band of workers, and an outsider like me should have been able to speak in Hindi and been understood by an audience, the bulk of which does not know English. But I must face the

reality and read the address in English, however much I may dislike the thing.

I shall not take up your time in recounting the circumstances which compelled me to accept the responsibility of presiding over your deliberations. My limitations are well known, and proud as I should be, under Swaraj, to spend years of apprenticeship at the feet of towering personalities of your province, learning from them the principles of citizenship and constitution, learning the history of freedom, culture and civilization, my lot is cast today among the peasants who expect me to help them somewhat out of their grinding poverty, helpless ignorance and tyrannous customs. It is amongst them that I find work cut out for me, and I feel like fish out of water in surroundings like these. Even in politics so-called, to the extent that I may be said to be interested in them, I belong to the school which is now getting out of fashion. Eight years of vicissitudes since the days of Non-co-operation find me still incorrigible; still swearing by the old constructive programme. And deeply as I appreciate the high personal regard for me that prompted your decision to have me as your president, I am frankly puzzled at your choice and can hold out no hopes to be of any help to you. I take it that the deliberate choice of a peasant worker like myself as a slight indication perhaps of



a swing of the pendulum, but I thought I should be failing in my duty, if I did not utter a *caveatemptor*.

THE SITUATION

That this is no language of convention, but springs from a genuine distrust in my capacity to guide you at the present juncture, will be apparent when we come to think of the desperate situation in which we are placed. Our bark is in the midst of stormy seas and the gravity of the situation may be gauged from the extreme reluctance of our one true leader to direct the helm. I can understand that reluctance, for it is our instincts that prompt us to turn to him, but we lack the will to do what he would have us do. Almost in spite of himself he came upon the scene at Calcutta, almost in spite of himself he moved the main resolution, but he finds today that we have not done much or enough to fulfil that resolution. Do we want him to be a passive witness to still more heroic resolutions without the least little will for corresponding action? We have the spectacle of a Viceroy going to the Assembly Chamber and setting at naught the authority of the President and his ruling. We have the spectacle of a most vindictive persecution of men whose only crime is apparently their extreme views. We see from day to day men like Dr. Satyapal and Babu Ramanand Chatterji con-

victed and sentenced for offences which any self-respecting publicist must needs commit if he is true to himself. And yet we will not bestir ourselves beyond holding a few protest meetings and similar demonstrations. The Hindu Muslim tension is as acute as ever. We cry for united action, but we will not act, and mistake brave and high-sounding resolutions for brave and heroic action. We are exasperated and impatient, we fret and fume, and the Viceroy, like a cruel Nemesis laughing at us, pleads for "the sunlight and fresh air of trust and sympathy." The sunlight that can dispel the surrounding gloom and darkness is there, if we will but see it, and you will pardon me, if in spite of you all, I say that it is there before us in the shape of the old Non-co-operation and constructive programme.

OUR UNDOING

With my faith in the old programme undimmed, I hope you will not expect me to discuss 'high politics.' Honestly, I do not understand them. For me it is enough that a resolution arrived at after mature deliberation and a clear cut programme are before the country, and the nation expects every one of its sons and daughters to fulfil the programme, and to do what the Congress has pledged itself to do if the national demand contained in the Nehru

Report is not fulfilled by the end of the year. To a peasant like me, this is quite enough, and I refuse to be moved by meaningless controversies. My conviction is getting stronger every day that the Council programme has been our undoing and so long as it is before us we will not think of anything constructive. The brilliant work of the President of the Assembly does not dazzle me. I feel that the more we have of those brilliant fireworks the more shall we be lured away from the work before us and strengthen the hands of the enemy. I think that the time is fast coming when we will realise that the whole Council programme, which since the so-called 'failure' of Non-Co-operation we have been trying to shape and re-shape, is a Frankenstein monster ready to devour us. With these highly radical, or as some of you might call reactionary views, you should not be surprised if I harp on the well-worn constructive programme.

CURSE OF UNTOUCHABILITY

For let us see if each one of us has not work enough in his province to keep him engaged all the twenty-four hours. I shall take up item by item in the order in which I should like to discuss them in your province. Take first the curse of untouchability. I have often heard Gandhiji say that so long as there is Kalighat in Calcutta where in the name of religion thousands of innocents are

slaughtered every day, it is a torture to him to go to Calcutta or to live in Calcutta, and I think he has the same feeling when he has to spend even half a day in Delhi because the Hindus and Mussalmans will keep on running at one another's throats. I wonder why he has never expressed the same feeling of disgust at having to make tours in the untouchability-ridden South. Friends, you will take it from me that the gruesome tragedy in Palghat that occurred about three months ago can only happen in this unfortunate country of ours, and if I may say so in this unfortunate province of yours, and the ugly forms of untouchability that one finds in the South, especially in some parts of Malabar, disgrace us more before the bar of public opinion than any propaganda that a "drain-inspector" may indulge in for motives that she knows best. One cannot think of a deeper disgrace than that untouchability in its most hideous aspect should be rampant in the part of India which is known as the land of temples, in the home of Shānkara and Ramanuja, in the land which is hallowed by the effulgent self-immolation of Nandanar. Friends, even if Swaraj can be had with the disgrace still clinging to us, that Swaraj will be a sham and a mockery. Little oases do exist in the vast wilderness of indifference to this curse, but they only make the wilderness more

howling. Our temples are no houses of God if access to them is denied to millions of our own kith and kin. I beseech you custodians of spirituality to take a leaf out of the book of one of the truest Vaishnavas of to-day—Sjt. Jamanlal Bajaj who has made the cause his own and is everyday busy purifying Hinduism, by getting the doors of Hindu temples opened to all who describe themselves as Hindus.

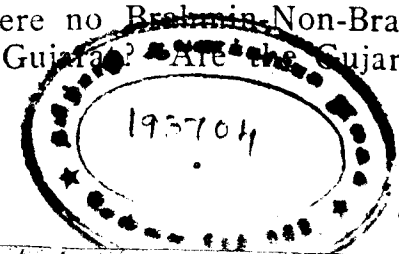
BANE OF COMMUNALISM

I shall next refer to the curse that to my mind stands next in ugliness to the one I have just adverted to—I mean the hydra-headed monster of communalism, the Brahmin-Non-Brahmin feud, that corrupts alike your politics, your religion, and even your social reform. To a South Indian who says "We have no Hindu-Moslem problem here," it has become quite usual for another South Indian to retort, "Why, there is the Brahmin-Non-Brahmin problem!" Now gentlemen, I can understand a healthy revolt against pernicious customs and traditions, that a priesthood may seek to impose upon us. I can appreciate and would even congratulate a campaign started by Non-Brahmins for the inclusion within their fold of the so-called untouchables, the Adi-Dravidas, and can imagine them proclaiming to the orthodox Brahmins, "We will claim as our own the

vast mass of humanity you have taught us to regard as untouchables and unapproachables; it is open to you to join us or to form a narrow class of untouchables of your own." If the Non-Brahmins assumed this attitude, I am sure they would earn the lasting gratitude of Hinduism. If they are dissatisfied with the prevailing tenets and traditions of Hinduism—I don't say Brahminism—they can invite the cooperation of the enlightened Brahmins and carry on a united campaign against them, for all Brahmins do not belong to the category of the 'hide-bound priesthood.' But instead of that we find a campaign organised against Brahmins as a class: a campaign of hatred carrying in its sweep not only the Brahmins, but all the best traditions of our Aryan culture. Instead of seeking to purge Hinduism of its excrescences, a section of Non-Brahmins seems to stir up the base and selfish passions of ignorant men and turn what should be a civilizing and purifying movement into a campaign for securing the largest number of loaves and fishes. Even the Khadi movement, than which I cannot think of a more healthy leveller of inequalities, is by some condemned as a Brahmin movement and one of the most spotless of Brahmins, who is free from all the traces of narrow Brahminism and whose whole life is being devoted to the service of the poor and the down-trodden Non-Brahmin, is painted

as an incarnation of the devil in some quarters. All this is nothing short of national suicide. You have your youth leagues here as we have in our part of the country. I cannot think of better work for them than to organise a crusade against the double curse of communalism and untouchability.

Having thus exercised the privilege of a Non-Brahmin to address a few words to brother Non-Brahmins, I will address a brief appeal to the Brahmins. If the Brahmin—Non-Brahmin trouble is in its ultimate analysis nothing but a quarrel of office-seekers, why will not the Brahmins exercise their proud prerogative of service and sacrifice, and wash their hands off the squabble altogether? In this connection the tradition built up by the Nambudri Brahmins of Kerala is worthy of adoption by Brahmins everywhere. I am informed that Nambudri Brahmins as a rule do not take up any paid service, Government or private. And as regards the purification of Hinduism, what worthier Brahmin reformers could one expect to have than my friends Sjt. S. Srinivasa Iyengar or the Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastry, to take only two names most familiar to me. There is not a single branch of reform of Hinduism in which they will not cooperate with the most liberal among the Non-Brahmins. Why is there no Brahmin-Non-Brahmin problem in Gujarat? Are the Gujarat



Brahmins less spiritual than their brethren in South India? May be the Brahmins in South India have to liberalise their "spiritualism",—or may I say somewhat materialise their spiritualism?—so as to enable them to include within their fold our suppressed brethren. I can hold up to all Brahmins and Non-Brahmins no worthier temple of Hinduism to build than the Satyagrahashram at Sabarmati, where a Brahmin deems it a privilege to work as a scavenger, and where Brahmins and Non-Brahmins eat in the same kitchen with their erstwhile "untouchable" brethren.

KHADI

Some one has said that rags have no sex. Neither have they any caste nor creed. What they have and know is poverty, and that to them is a more oppressive burden than any distinction of caste or creed. I challenge those who claim to be their advocates to find out better means of their uplift than Khadi and Prohibition. For me to talk of Khadi and Prohibition in this province is like carrying coals to Newcastle. Those who have heard Sjt. Rajagopalachar need not be told that after Gandhiji there is no more persuasive advocate of Khadi. His advocacy is not that of the lawyer arguing out his case in a detached way. His advocacy comes out of an afflicted heart whose haunts are the

poverty-stricken huts of the countryside, and out of the conviction that it is impossible otherwise to carry a ray of sunshine in those homes of eternal darkness. But in the main home of Khadi where it supports some thousands of poor women, we find a rather novel type of criticism levelled at Khadi. Khadi, our critics say, is a sweating system. Will they show us a purer and more humane means of giving their daily bread to the millions of our starving men and women in the country? Do they know that for the vast mass of the poverty-stricken in Tamil Nad the only alternative is death from starvation or migration to Ceylon or Penang or Malaya, where if at all the doors are open to them, a worse sweating awaits them, with certain moral ruin? An acute English observer has truly remarked: "Political power is the invariable concomitant of economic power. . . The foreigners rule; it is inevitable. But the All India Congress Committee goes on talking and acting in terms of politics. One might as well try to cure headaches by applying corn plasters to the toes."

PROHIBITION

As regards Prohibition, I congratulate your province on the earnestness with which you have taken up the campaign. I also congratulate the Madras Government on their noteworthy action in accepting the principle of the agitation for Total Prohibition of

intoxicating Drinks and Drugs and in giving concrete expression to this acceptance by making a substantial provision in this year's budget for educative propaganda for total abstinence.

The idea, however, that Propaganda against Drink should be undertaken by Government in order to obtain popular support for Prohibition measures is in my opinion, wholly a wrong idea. It might be necessary in America or England or other European countries where Drink is a respectable and ancient habit. Fortunately in our country it is still classed with crimes and sins in whatever measure it is indulged in. Our religious practices and teachings and the good example of numerous castes and groups have done the propaganda contemplated in a more effective manner than any Government or aided efforts can do. All that Government has to do is to undo the evil it has itself done during a comparatively short period in the history of our culture and morals.

The charge levelled against the Madras Government that they have done nothing by way of even partial prohibition as an earnest of their declared intention is a justifiable charge. The proposed expenditure of four lakhs of rupees on a scheme of propaganda on the eve of a general election by a Government that had hitherto shown no readiness

to adopt a Prohibition policy was naturally looked upon with suspicion by politicians, and even non-party temperance reformers did not think that it was the right step to take to preach abstinence to people and at the same time farm the liquor shops out to the highest bidders and budget for an increased Drink Revenue. However now that Government have taken the step, whatever be the motive, they cannot go back upon the policy and it is to us a fortification captured and advantage gained in the battle.

We hear of proposals for declaring some areas dry at once. The history of the Government policy is unfortunately a great impediment to the fostering of the feeling that Prohibition is to be a settled fact and that the declaration of the particular area dry is a definite step towards it. Today every official feels in his heart of hearts that Government would really be pleased whatever be their professions and declarations, if he helps in making any experiment at Prohibition a failure.

If the Government only made up its mind it could at once arm village panchayats with legal power of enforcement of Prohibition instead of harrassing as they do now village and caste organisations and their leaders with prosecutions upon the instigation of persons interested in the sale of liquor. Even slight legal powers given to village organisations will

bring about enforcement in a most effective manner, for they are really interested in a successful working of Prohibition unlike the Excise Department and other Government officials who have been brought up in an anti-prohibition tradition. Such powers and local enforcement would spread propaganda against Drink at no cost to the public purse and without the slightest suspicion of insincerity.

GOVERNMENT AND LAND REVENUE

The impotence of the present legislature in the matter of Prohibition brings me to a consideration of their similar impotence in the matter of land revenue. Your province presents the solitary spectacle of a province which bestirred itself earliest in India to bring into effect the recommendation of the Joint-Parliamentary Committee and which is still without reformed land revenue legislation.

As early as 1921 the Land Revenue Settlement Committee appointed by Government and composed of 11 officials and only 4 non-officials, with Sir Mahommed Habibullah as Chairman and with several settlement officers and the Advocate General on its personnel submitted a report containing important recommendations, and almost every year since 1924 you have been having popular victories in the Local Council on the

issue of having those recommendations embodied in legislation. But those victories have been of no avail and your province has been without legislation, like Bombay, whilst resettlements have been made and are even now in full swing. If any of your districts or even taluks were prepared for Satyagraha, I could think of no stronger justification than is afforded by the circumstances in your province. The present land revenue policy in all ryotwari provinces is no better than a policy of grab. In one province the basis of assessment is said to be the net profits, in another the rentals, whilst in a province like yours the basis of the first settlement proposals is said to be the net profits and of resettlements the rise in the prices of produce. But the only basis that is actually adopted in practice is the basis of "more revenue." In one taluka the reason for enhancement is increased prosperity as evidenced in the reduction of the consumption of liquor, while in another it is increase of prosperity as evidenced in the capacity of the people to consume more liquor; everywhere the reason for enhancement is a phenomenal rise in prices and a responsible revenue member, now the head of your province, glibly said "we are entitled to double the present rates, but we shall be satisfied with only 18¾ per cent. enhancement." Now nothing more mischievous than

this basis of a rise in prices can be conceived. There is the solitary instance of the Collector of a district—I refer to the Tanjore report—seeing the absurdity of this basis and remarking that “the increase in the assessment proposed in the scheme report are justified in view of the great increase in prices since the last settlement *if it is proved that the cost of cultivation has not increased in a much higher proportion.*” The Board of Revenue ignores the remark and the Government Resolution reminds the poor Collector that “at resettlement there is no need to calculate the cultivation expenses afresh, so long as the resettlement takes the form of a percentage enhancement of the existing rates of assessment based on a rise in prices.” The collector remarks that “increase of assessment of the holdings of small ryots, who have no crop to sell is not justified”, to which the Board of Revenue says, “It is well known that small pattadars have other means of livelihood and do not depend entirely on their patta land for their living!” They are apparently not concerned to see whether the land gives the pattadar enough to keep body and soul together! Friends, it is a most scandalous state of things and it was in order to remedy it somewhat that the Joint Parliamentary Committee made that historic recommendation, in view of the fact that “the people who are most affected have

no voice in the shaping of the system and the rules are often obscure and imperfectly understood by those who pay the revenue.” We in Bardoli had to undertake Satyagraha entailing fierce suffering of man and beast, not to secure the carrying out of the recommendation, mind you, but simply to convince Government that their “experienced” settlement officer had made no inquiries, had submitted false reports and their settlement Commissioner had based his recommendations on wrong and unreliable data. And even after the ryots’ complaints have been proved to the hilt as a result of the inquiries of an official Committee, the Government have no word of regret for the terrible hardship undergone by the people, and the Revenue Member says that different conclusions could be arrived at on the same corrected data! That I think is the limit and I pine for the day when it may be possible to organise the whole of the peasantry of Bombay and Madras to rise up, in a peaceful but effective revolt to mend or end this system. Council members in your province have fought many a battle on this issue and it is up to them to warn Government that they would leave the Councils, and advise the peasantry to withhold payment of the whole revenue, unless they were prepared to accept the old assessment pending either “a sound and progressive” legislation, or the transfer of the subject

of land revenue to the control of the Ministers.

NON-VIOLENT NON-CO-OPERATION :
THE ONLY WAY

Friends, I have nothing more to say. I would like to conclude with a clear and unequivocal confession of faith, as it is I think the duty of every public man to do, when we seem to be at the parting of the ways. I see no reason to change by a single iota the present Congress Creed, either as regards the means or the goal—a creed that was formulated for us by the noblest and the most far-seeing of our leaders, a creed that was adopted when the nation was at the zenith of its strength and power and solidarity, a creed which if sustained by adequate action will enable our nation to win its freedom and to retain it. I understand and appreciate the impatience of a section of our countrymen with the existing state of things, but I want them to understand that of the other section too. As regards the means there is not a single instance in history of an unarmed nation having wrought its freedom through an armed revolt, for the simple reason that the thing is a physical impossibility. And spasmodic acts of violence, or of heroic crime, if you please are the very opposite of an armed revolt and purely self-destructive. A second's thought

is enough to convince one that there is no other alternative for us but non-violence, and a non-violence that proceeds from an accepted creed, *i.e.*, from the heart, is ever so much more potent than the non-violence from policy. And no better formula of potent non-violence was ever devised than that of non-violent non-co-operation. Are the youths who swear by Independence ready to leave their colleges today? If they are, it would not be difficult to organise out of them a non-violent army which can paralyse the Government in little time. An organised army of youths would be quite enough to fight the two battles of Land Revenue and Prohibition to a successful issue and to bring the Government to its knees. But our youth seem to mistake brave resolutions for brave action. 'Declare Independence and action will take care of itself,' they seem to think. That attitude never helped a nation, and will not help us, to win freedom. Only on the foundation of willing sacrifice and suffering, shall we be able to raise an enduring edifice of freedom.

वंदे मातरम्

