

Shri Jains important letter of 21.12.58 to Congress President regarding problems of Harijans & Backward Classes.

New Delhi.
Dated the 21st December, 1958.

Respected Dhebar Bhai,

When Punjab Congress M.Ps. met you on the 17th and brought to your notice the difficulties, that the HARIJANS AND OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES are facing in the Punjab, you very kindly asked them to submit a detailed Memorandum. Following is an attempt in that direction. However, only their main problems are being enumerated :-

(1) **EMPLOYMENT** : These classes are mainly unskilled workers, agriculture-labourers, tenants and artisans. They have neither money nor land nor education. Hence vast majority of them will have to continue to eke their livelihood from their traditional evocations. Much attention has been paid, and rightly too upon the implements of agriculture and all sorts of grants and loans and other help is being given to the peasants. But so far as the artisans are concerned, practically nothing is being done to improve their conditions. What the artisans require most, is financial help and marketing facilities of their produce. Loans are given only to those who have some tangible property to offer as security; but as stated earlier, **INDIAN SOCIETY HAS BEEN VERY UNJUST TO THEM IN THIS REGARD.** Even the Co-operative Credit Societies are not helpful to them. Such societies can get loan from the Co-operative Bank only to the extent of their maximum credit limit (M.C.L.). This Limit is Fixed on the Basis of the Total Share Money of the Members and the property they hold. Thus M.C.L. of a Co-operative Society of these people cannot do much. Hence under the present rules they cannot get even loans through this method. Similar rules apply to loans through Industries and other Departments. Last year when all these facts were brought to the notice of the Punjab Government, it decided to advance loans to these classes upto a maximum limit of Rs. 1,000/- without security provided the Credit Worthiness of the Individual loanee was Certified by Some Legislator. This created great hope in the minds of these poor people and thousands of applications were submitted in each district. But the amount earmarked for this purpose was about a lakh for the whole State. More than this amount must have been spent in submitting the applications and travelling expenses etc. by these people. Out of a thousand applications in each district hardly 20 got the loan !

Even the Community Development Department does not pay proper heed to the unemployment problem of these people. Formerly there was no money reserved for the improvement of their traditional evocations. Now since about a year, Rs. 60,000 out of 12 lakhs are earmarked for village Industries, Arts and Crafts. This amount is very meagre as compared to the populations of these classes in the villages (at least 30% of the whole population). The tragedy, however, is that even this is not being spent for the betterment of these classes but in the name of Arts and Crafts for such items as Training in Sewing Machine etc; whose advantage is taken only by advanced sections of the village life. The result is that disparity between these classes and others in the villages has increased rather than decreased after Independence. This has created feeling of frustration in the poorer classes. The only solution is to give them liberal grants & loans

(2) **INDEBTEDNESS** : Coupled with this is the problem of their indebtedness. Majority of them are under heavy debts. The rate of interest is also very heavy. A survey in a few villages in each district will be revealing. The result is that families have to spend their whole lives in utter slavery of the creditor, who is usually a rich land lord. This burden is also to be taken off the shoulders of these poor people.

(3) **GRAZING GROUNDS** : Before Independence they used to keep cattle, goats and sheeps as in each village there was sufficient area reserved for grazing purposes. Its ownership vested in the proprietary body but under "Sharat-Wajibull Aarj", (revenue record prepared at the time of settlement), nobody could break up this land (Gau-Charand) and every villager had a right to graze his cattle there. Now due to the Punjab Utilization of Lands Act, The Consolidation Act and The Campaign of More Food, practically all these lands have been broken in every village. The land owners graze their cattle in their respective fields but the landless are facing great difficulties. There have been a good number of cases where these Classes have been bey-cotted and their cattle refused entry in private fields. Such complaints from the Harijans must have been received by the A.I.C.C. Office as well.

(4) **SITES FOR HOUSES** : Previously these people had hardly one room tenement per family in the villages. Their population has increased perhaps much more than that of others. They want more accommodation. Yet there is no land available to them. It is true that Punjab Government made them owners of sites under their previous houses, but that is not enough. Their housing problem has assumed a very acute form. Small plots given to them per family at the time of Consolidation operations do not solve the problem at all. Firstly this is not as a matter of right, but by way of grace and these poor people have to depend upon the mercies of the Consolidation Officer and Village Consolidation Advisory Committees. There are numerous complaints that the location of these plots does not suit them. Atleast one plot per adult member of a family should be given and loans for building houses should also be advanced to them.

(5) **SOCIAL STATUS** : In the village life these classes do not have a social status as they are landless. All those amongst them who cultivated land must be made owners and Government lands or surplus Banjar lands must be given only to them. Here again a tragic situation has been created in the Punjab. Instead of giving barren lands, which were available in large quantity in Karnal and Hissar Districts, to these people, leases were given to rich and other people from Gurdaspur and Amritsar districts. This again requires a thorough probe into.

(6) **SERVICES** : The administration is pro-rich as most of the public servants belong to the sections of our population other than these classes. They do not implement the progressive legislation as they should. It is, necessary, therefore, that recruitment even more than the reserved quota should be done from these classes. This is all the more necessary, so far as the police and the Military is concerned. In these two departments, there is another difficulty. They want a certain physical standard of health. These classes cannot compare with others, hence their physical standard must be lowered to such an extent that atleast the reserved quota is available for them. So far as military is concerned, even though distinction of martial and non-martial classes has been abolished, yet the method of recruitment is so defective that recruitment goes on practically in the same old fashion. This point is important to the Punjab Harijans as Punjab is a great centre of recruitment and service in the Military gives additional status to those who are recruited there. The door is practically closed to the young men of these classes. Something must be done in this direction.

These are some of the salient points with regard to the problem of Harijans and other backward classes in our State. A small pamphlet in Urdu issued by a leading Harijan worker of Karnal is enclosed herewith for giving a first hand knowledge of the difficulties, harrassment experienced by them and also of their aspirations.

We have every hope that these points will receive the consideration they deserve and something concrete will be done to ameliorate the condition of the most down trodden section of our society.

Shri Dhebar Bhai
President Congress,
New Delhi

Your Sincerely,
Mool Chand Jain
M.P.

For Punjab Congress M.Ps.

Note submitted to Sh. Jawaher Lal Nehru P.M. on 25-12-60 by Sh. Jain and Sh. Keshva M.P.

Problems of Harijan and the weaker sections in villages

Circumstances had conspired for many years for the neglect of the villages in our country. At last the Community Development Programme came to their rescue. Even then the Harijans and other weaker sections continued to suffer as before. The Community Development programme was expected to do its bit in this direction also, yet we have serious complaints of neglect and of slow pace of their improvement. Complaints are heard all over - more so after the advent of democratic decentralisation due to the consequent enormous awakening in the people. It is perhaps this feature that induced the Central Govt. to appoint a Seven-man Committee under the distinguished leadership of Shri Jai Parkash Narayan to go into this vital problem. The most appropriate thing is promptly done at the proper time.

We found that in Andhra, as in all other States, quite a good sum is provided by the Home Ministry to be spent through the Social & Welfare Department for the amelioration of the weaker sections. But practically little is spent directly for their economic uplift from the C.D. or State Plan Funds. Even the sums granted under schematic budget for village industries remain largely unspent or are spent on persons other than traditional artisans. No doubt housing colonies have come up under the auspices of sub-committee Panchayat Samitis but the source is the finance provided by Central Govt. under special schemes. These two Samitis are the best in Andhra. But even among them, one Samiti provides a paltry sum of Rs. 2800/- out of a budget of 13½ lacs (excluding Housing) for the welfare of scheduled castes and backward classes in the year 1960-61.

Not a penny has been advanced to any of the landless and scheduled castes out of the provision of Rs. 7 lacs under Cooperatives : perhaps under the shelter of want of security, despite the significant fact that they are about 40% of the total population. Even the claim of giving credit upto Rs. 500/- without security to the landless was not real as admitted by the new rule was not found to have been implemented. The claim for providing midday meal by the one Samiti appears to have touched only the fringe of the whole problem. We are told on enquiry that only 91 children were fed so far. Even this feeding of only a section of the children, we are afraid, would automatically perpetuate the psychological distinction between the haves and have nots. If even the best Samitis could acquit themselves only to this extent in favour of the weaker section, some radical thinking and tresh and earnest heart searching is warranted to tackle this age old problem. Merely to say that time will set matters right is in our humble opinion, simply shirking the issue.

Has particular attention been paid to the weaker sections after democratic decentralisation was of the important questions our team was to study. It is no doubt too premature to pronounce any verdict so soon after its introduction. But we cannot be unaware of the unanimous resolution of the Andhra Harijan Legislators demanding non-transfer, to the Zilla Parishad and Block Samitis, of the Social Welfare funds granted by Central Govt. This move is pregnant with pernicious possibilities. Any way it makes manifest that these institutions have not inspired confidence in the weaker sections. We do not at all approve this move but the cause behind this lack of confidence ought not to be ignored.

The meagre representation, in the new institutions, of the weaker sections, appears to us to imperatively demand our immediate attention. A careful scrutiny of the figures given to us of several Panchayats and a number of Samitis significantly points out that the population of the weaker section in the villages is about 40% of the village population but the representation afforded to them is only about 16% in the village Panchayats and that too due to reservation of seats for the Harijans and in the higher tier of