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India and the Empire

By Dr. S. K. Datta.*

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—It is with deep appreciation, that I have received from you this mark of welcome. The other day I crossed the frontier. My friends sent an intimation to your government asking that certain facilities should be provided when I came across. I was met with courtesy and kindness and I began to realize, more than I had ever done, that it does not matter whether you are a member of this great commonwealth or not. We are associated together, and I, as a member of this commonwealth, have a right, even as you have, to expect courtesy and cordiality as we go into one another's territory. As I said, it is not only being here, but my reception upon crossing the frontier and the meeting with my Canadian friends have all impressed me and made this thing a reality.

Years ago, I think it was in the Autumn of 1917, I sat in a small tent on a ridge where was situated the headquarters of the Canadian army. The Germans were throwing in their shells—one every five minutes, and they hit these slag heaps outside the coal mines sending up great spurts, and there in quiet content, for it was comparatively calm, some of your Canadians and myself talked on different matters. We spoke of India, spoke of the new relationship that had arisen, spoke of the India that had been consecrated by way of common sacrifice. Just 11 months later I remember riding into headquarters of the New Zealand division, under the command of that great soldier, Sir Andrew Russell, and that day the assault began on the German lines. There also, in underground passages, we talked of the same things, of this new consecration that comes in common sacrifice. And when I went back to India I felt that in the utmost parts of the earth, in the utmost parts of the commonwealth, my friends who sympathised, and friends who understood, were all working for this great conception.

Gentlemen, allow me to say a few words this afternoon about India itself. I was talking to your chairman this morn-

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ing and he told me it is quite possible that you will have to address you, one of the most distinguished Indians of this generation, our representative on the Imperial War Conference. I trust he comes. He will give you as vivid a picture of India as any man can possibly do. I am handicapped in not having had his experience or his responsibility. But apart from that I would allow myself to become a person who clears the way, and places before you certain fundamental facts. Understand them and I think you will understand the problem of India. Fail to grasp them and you will fail to grasp the problem of India.

Will you allow me to speak of the structure of Indian Society for a few minutes. Remember that India is a country of villages. If we had a post office for every village we would have three quarters of a million post offices. Here are these 750,000 small village communities scattered all over the country, and that has been our outlook—the small little village. A treatise written in the first century B.C. was discovered, written in Sanskrit, and do you know what it deals with? With village government and the way a village should be planned. It tells you where the village well should be, what quarters should be assigned, how the village council should be elected—it deals with the fundamental things in the government of a community of that day. You wonder why our country has not broken up? The reason is that we are composed of all these small home communities, the village system.

Now those of you who are doctors will follow me when I say, let us put the high power on to one of these communities and examine into the detail of the Indian village system. It consists of three distinct communities. There are variations, but fundamentally there are three divisions. In the first place you have the central community which is rooted in the land—families who have rights in the land, rights according to the distance from which they come from common ancestry—four sons a quarter each. You so divide and sub-divide, and so the rights are fractional in the land of the community. These are the people who live on the land, who obtain their livelihood from it, who are bound to it. He is the little peasant farmer, a class in our village system. Apart from this there is another community attached to it, the community of artisans, blacksmiths, carpenters, tanners. They are landless. The others have rights on the land. This other community has no rights on the land, or if they have they are only recently acquired. From ancient days their position has been that of the *status quo*. In the old days a village plow was broken;

they go to the carpenter and say, "Mend it." Nothing is given in return. But at the time of harvest a certain portion of that harvest was his share. He could enforce it by customary law. It doesn't matter to whom the bullock belongs in life. In death the hide and bones belong to the community of the village tanners. That is understood and enforceable in customary law, and probably, I should imagine, enforceable in modern British courts. In this last community there are three distinct groups. Most important, from our modern standpoint, you have the village priest and his family, the village merchant, who is also the village financier. You cannot carry on agricultural operations without finance. Having no land banks this man, through centuries, has financed agricultural operations. While it is true that he has exacted his profit and the majority of our peasantry are in his debt, still, that is one side of his functions, and on the other hand he has ministered to the needs of the community. He has been the guide who has financed their transactions. He keeps absolute record of all the money transactions that go on in the village. Such items appear in his books as a request for the loan of 50 rupees for, said the seeker of the loan, "I have to bribe the police." Down it goes in the book, such and such a person, such and such a sum, to bribe so and so, sergeant of police. An absolutely accurate account! His character in recent years has been assailed, but he has filled an important place in meeting the needs of the community. There is also, as part of this third community, possibly the village record keeper, the man who keeps the register of each family in the village. This community too, was essentially landless, having no rights on the land, but because of the power that they have attained they very soon began to get rights over the peasant community. There is also one other distinction between them and the peasant community, they are the literates. Establish a village school in a community and the sons of the money lender, the sons of the priests, and the sons of the record keeper go to it, but not the sons of the peasant. They are the great conservative bulwark of Indian society, and they do not move easily. They say, "What is the use of our sons acquiring education?"

Now, gentlemen, if you will bear those distinctions in mind let us speak of modern conditions. I told you it was the priest's son, the merchant's son, and the record keeper's son, who avail themselves of modern educational opportunities in a very large measure. What has been the result of it? They have become the governing classes of India, and they have become the politically minded classes in India, those who go to

our schools and to our universities. They are the people who go to Britain, who edit great political papers, leaders of political agitation and political reform in the country. At first their interest was with the crowd, when they were small in numbers. They were absorbed into the professions into which there was room and into government administration departments. But gradually the production of scholars became greater than what could be absorbed, with the narrow kind of education which has no width or breadth to it. There were only certain things they could do. The Lord Chancellor has said that a number of years ago he went to the University of Calcutta and visited a students' quarters and said, "My boy, what are you going to do?" "I am going to be a lawyer, sir." "And you?" "A lawyer." "And you?" "A lawyer. Why, what else is there to do, sir?" They have been educated in that particular system, entirely directing their interest in the one direction. Can you wonder that the professions and the government administration offices were completely taken up by them? It is told that the census of 1901 showed that although the record keepers' sons constituted only two per cent of the general population they monopolized no less than 85 per cent. of the positions under the crown.

Well, as those positions got filled up these men said, "What are we to do?" There was nothing for them to do, and the result was unrest—unrest among these particular classes, unrest which has been growing, becoming stronger and stronger. The late head of the Foreign Department of *The London Times* wrote a book, which he called "Indian Unrest." If you carefully read that book, made up of articles which he wrote for his paper, you will realize that it was particularly to this class that his remarks were directed. But things have changed rapidly in India. I met the author of that book in India last year and he said, "Three years ago I visited India. My job was to direct the opinion in the United Kingdom with regard to India. I am supposed to be an expert with regard to India. But I had no conception regarding the situation in India until my arrival here. Three years of absence from India had made all that difference. I had absolutely no conception of the tremendous change in conditions." He acknowledged that from a distance, looking at India, it was difficult to follow what was going on there.

May I place before you the difference between the unrest ten years ago and the unrest to-day? In the first place the great movement in India to-day is the breaking up of this village system. A benevolent British government with its

new schemes of sanitation and better water supply and hospitals and disease combatting arrangements paved the way for a fairly rapid growth in Indian population. What has been the result? The result has been more pressure on the land, more people who want to make a livelihood on the land, which is limited. Something must happen to relieve the strain there. I can only give certain points to focus my argument. In the first place the great Indian army has afforded relief to the villagers in India. I have met an Indian soldier in France who said, "I am here and my brother is in Mesopotamia, and a third in Egypt. The fourth, he stands by the farm. He is on the land. It was not worth while for all these four brothers to stay on the land. And the result has been that the men began to hive off from this old village system and get into other things. It was an economic necessity. You have your own problem in that connection right here in your own country.

Some years ago there was an agitation with regard to the landing of Indians here on your western coast. There were too many people on the land in India. In the third place, remember that we are developing an industrial system. I was told by the High Commissioner in London that India ranks to-day among the first eight industrial powers of the world. There again relief has been afforded to the people on the crowded land. People are going from the land into industrial life. But India has not yet quite made up her mind. Two or three years ago it was not possible to get highly skilled workmen such as you have in Canada. Many of the industrial workers who leave the village and go into our works want to get back. They have not yet finally made up their minds to cut with the village.

The other day in Calcutta I went down town to the shopping parts and I walked into an ordinary theatre, and there I sat and looked around on a crowd of all kinds of people. It was crowded to the galleries with little shopkeepers and men from the government offices. And the play came on and the whole moral of the play was that you can only have a pure heart, that women can only be faithful to their husbands, and husbands faithful to their wives, if they have been brought up in the village system. All this great city life we have was immoral, unsound, bad. I merely want to point out that the Indian still is looking back upon the village from whence he came.

We had 1,500,000 men go overseas with the British army. These men came back from the overseas campaigns with deep discontent with regard to life. They are not willing to accept

the old teaching of destiny. These things were destined for you and therefore do not struggle, and they now say, "We want a better life, we want more opportunities, more money. We want to be able to live better." In France a soldier said to me, "In France there are good roads. Why have we not good roads? I think we must get good roads." That was a part of the discontent.

Now remember that this discontent is coming to the top, and the masses are affected. And the man who has seen the distinction between the old unrest of ten years ago and the unrest of to-day has seen it. The old Indian landlord said, "I must discipline my tenants and keep them in their place." The planter says, "I must get my dividends; cheap labor is a good thing for me." Gandhi says to the man, "Have you troubles? I am sorry for you. I sympathise with you. I am going to help you."

Now at the International Congress Gandhi saw amongst a great gathering of professional men, a small group of peasants, and went up to them and said, "Why are you here?" And they said, "It is all very well to talk about Home Rule. But we have been oppressed by the landlord. We have had to submit to illegal exactions. There is no use going to court. The judge will give a decree against the landlord, but who is going to enforce it? We are his tenants after all. We may be able to hold our own for two or three years but in the end the landlord gets it back." Gandhi said, "I am going to help you." The government appointed a commission and found that for 30 years the tenants had to pay these exactions.

What is the position to-day? Sometimes I travel first class in India and whoever I meet says, "How troublesome Gandhi is? Why don't they lock him up?" But you travel third class and meet the ordinary peasant and he says, "There is one man who stood up for us. He is not afraid of the government or the crooked police or the tax collectors, or the landlords. Long live Gandhi." That is the logic of the masses. And do you wonder at it? Here is this man willing to suffer for them. The Commissioner, that is the highest Civil Service official, said to me the other day that a landlord, asked why he did not keep his tenants in order, said, "Neither you nor I can keep our tenants in order. You have lost and so have we. Neither of us has got any power to control them." And that is the situation to-day.

Distinguish, then, between the situation ten years ago and to-day. The distinction is that the masses are moving and you see the slow breaking down, the disruption of the village

system, with all its controlling powers and holding of the people together. That is a very serious situation, one of the most serious situations we have ever faced in our country. For all these centuries it has held together and now before our eyes it is crumbling away. Three hundred and twenty millions of people are losing those things that keep them together. It is a terrific thing, a terrible thing to contemplate.

What about the other side? There must be some constructive proposals. In the first place the reform of 1919 has brought power into the hands of my community, has brought parliamentary power into our hands. It has done more than that, it has given them an experience of administration for the first time. In the local governments and provincial governments they are getting their experience as ministers, with working majorities in these houses. And that is to the good. There is no use administering with people without experience, and our people are getting experience. They are holding on to the government just now. We have been termed the "Moderates" of India. The man whom your president expects to address you is himself one of the leaders of that great party. But they have no prophet. They have a program but no prophet. They cannot go out and appeal to the ordinary man. On the other hand the great masses with Gandhi at their head, they have a prophet without a program. And that is the distinction between us. Here is this man who can go out to them and appeal to them and call them and they will obey. On this side it is so many people working the machinery of government, and the working of the machinery of government does not stimulate prophetic gifts.

You remember Nehemiah the prophet, how he stood in the court of the foreign rulers, as cup-bearer, (a good job), to the foreign King who is ruling over his people. And suddenly he gets a vision. He says, "My Jerusalem, my country. The walls thereof are broken down, and the gates thereof burned," and his countenance, we are told, was sad, and he dreams of this New Jerusalem he may build up. Our people have dreamed of the New Jerusalem we might build up in this ancient and sacred India; to us nothing is more sacred. This country of ours, our heritage, shall we allow it to break down further? It seems to me both sides have seen that vision. And it seems to me that the two sides are racing one another to see who will get to the goal first. You may call it a constitutional race on the one hand and a revolutionary race on the other, and the problem before Indian thought to-day is,

"Who is going to win?" Whether this great revolutionary—I don't mean armed revolution, but a complete change of government—whether it will get there first, or will the more cumbersome machine of government get there first?

Our first central parliament, two houses of the Legislative Assembly and Council of State, assembled last year. As a matter of fact from the constitutional point of view the Legislative assembly has no powers. It can only recommend certain executive action to the government. It has no control over the executive who are appointed by the Crown and irremovable. Gandhi says after all that does not mean anything. The executive has to listen to no resolutions. The executive are faced with one of two things, either to make that Legislative Assembly a success, to accept its resolutions as binding on itself, or, the other alternative, to go to the country. The presence of Gandhi and his propaganda have done more than anything else to speed up the pace of the reforms. It compelled the executive to consider the situation, and they said every resolution that the legislature passes let us look on it as binding on ourselves, although we need not, because if we don't it gives impetus to the other side, and as these things act and interact, the real thing, to my mind, is that Gandhi ought to have limited himself to the pulpit and not got on to the platform. He has seen the poor man's woe and he has stood up for him, willing to back him up.

What about the future? Gentlemen, in this time of difficulty in India very little has been done by Canada and the Dominions. This situation we have got to face. By the results of it we will suffer and you will suffer, possibly, undoubtedly you are bound to suffer. But the most immediate suffering will be to us. As the situation presents itself before me I do not know which side is going to win, but that is no reason for us to say that we shall allow the fates to decide. We have got to make our contribution to the situation.

In the first place it seems to me that since the crying need of India to-day is education, the way Canada can help is by training in your universities a certain proportion of Indian students. I wish that it were possible. I wish that Canada and Australia would do for Indian students what the U. S. did for China. I may tell you in an aside that it is good paying business, too. I have been a member in India of a government commission appointed by Lord Montague, Secretary of State, to inquire into facilities for Indian students in the United Kingdom, and I have been amazed at the narrow outlook of certain British manufacturers. They say, "Teach

India our trade and our trade will go. We have got processes that are secret."—I am told by the experts that there are no such processes.—"And if we teach our trade it will mean that you will become our rivals." Well, cannot it enter their minds that Indians will become big buyers? We are bound in the future to become big buyers of your commodities. Wherever we are received well and received with open hearts what will happen? There will be a bias in favor of those who receive us well. It has been demonstrated in China and we believe it will be demonstrated in the case of India. We ask, therefore, greater facilities to be provided for our students both in the Universities and by your manufacturers. The big thing before India to-day is to develop her industries and we desire our students to have opportunities, not closed doors in their faces.

I would urge one other thing and that is, gentlemen, don't allow now all the high conceptions of the commonwealth to be dimmed in your eyes. It is one of the greatest conceptions. I say it not because I belong to it, but I have seen it. I have my quarrel as many of us have with England. You have had quarrels. But the great conception beyond it all is that you will have had the Anglo-Saxon powers in association together with a great Asiatic power. That in my mind is fundamental for keeping the world together. You remember the most ancient quarrel in the history of the world has been between Asia and Europe. All other quarrels have seemed small compared to that. From the days when the Greeks met the Persians look down through history. After every few centuries you find Asia and Europe again at one another's throats for power. It seems to me, to judge from the present situation, that we may not be very far from another such antagonism which would convulse the world. Don't you see this great commonwealth of ours, of yours and of mine, together in partnership of equality. It at least takes away a substantial part of the world from these other quarrels—removes them from possibility of friction. This can only be done on a basis of equality and mutual understanding and sympathy.

You remember that great scene in the Old Testament where Ruth is told by her mother-in-law that her husband is dead, to go away to her home, and you remember her reply. "Thy people shall be my people, thy God my God." And it may be that when these relationships of political control are dissolved, as between England and ourselves, and it is bound to be dissolved in a few years—when those relationships come to an end, might we, because of our faith, and might we be-

cause of our endeavor, have so demonstrated to India the substantial goodness of this relationship that India will say, "Though I am free to go I refuse to go. I shall be in this partnership." What greater conception can there be? Sometimes in India we feel disillusioned and disappointed and depressed. The majority of my countrymen do not understand this conception of it. They say it is only a bit of idealism, and we have heard talk of this kind before. "The real fact is, England wants us in the Empire so as to exploit us. Why talk about other things? Let us be free, and free as soon as possible."

The final reply of India will depend upon you. Every courtesy given, every time sympathy is shown, every time effort is made on her behalf, every time you insist that India shall have justice, every time you tell the members of the Imperial Conference that they must concern themselves about the affairs of India, every time you open the portals of your universities to admit Indian students—remember all these things will find immense favor among the Indian people, and prove to them your good motives and your desire for this commonwealth.

There is a friend of mine, known to many of you, Mr. Lionel Curtis. A month ago I was staying with him in England and there, to an Indian student from Cambridge and myself, Mr. Curtis expounded to us, with that burning enthusiasm of which he is capable because of his understanding, the great and noble conception that he had had before of the commonwealth. And somehow we saw glimpses there of the great Kingdom of God, nothing short of that, where men were as brothers, where the principles of brotherhood rule, where the basis of a man's worth was spiritual, not material.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, for this great opportunity of speaking to you here this afternoon, because I shall carry back to my country pleasant memories of this day, as I have carried back memories of your soldiers, and the soldiers of New Zealand and Australia. I have been back to India and I have told my own countrymen about them. I hope that I have done something to open your eyes to some of the great possibilities of this Empire which we call ours.