

# MAHATMA ON VYKOM STRUGGLE

## THE NEED FOR SELF-RELIANCE

### WHY OUTSIDE HELP SHOULD BE REFUSED

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT)

BOMBAY, May 18.

Saturday Illustrates what great strain Mahatma has begun to pass through even when he is convalescing. In the morning for more than a couple of hours he was engaged in discussing the Vykom movement with the members of the Satyagraha Deputation. That over, and after some time, Deshbandu Das, Mrs. Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Dr. Munje, Mr. Jayakar, and Abdul Kalam Azad arrived, with whom he discussed the Council question till the evening. It was past six o'clock when Mahatma received the representative of the "Hindu" for an interview after disposing of a few more visitors.

In the course of the interview Mahatma made a statement on the Vykom movement to the "Hindu" representative in the presence of the Vykom Deputation members expressing his full faith in the movement. Mahatma concluded the statement saying: "I have no doubt whatsoever that, if the organisers continue the struggle in the same peaceful manner as they have done, accepting the restrictions which I have suggested and if they are thinking of sustaining the struggle for an indefinite period their efforts must be crowned with success. I cannot however lay too much stress upon the fact that Satyagraha is a process of conversion and therefore the organisers must ever aim at changing the heart of the opponents."

#### WHY NON-HINDU ASSISTANCE SHOULD BE REFUSED.

Our representative asked: Are you in a position to make any statement about your discussions with the deputation that has come to you from Vykom?

Mahatma replied in slow accents: I think that our discussions are now practically closed and I am satisfied that the movement has been carried on by the organisers in an orderly and non-violent manner. The steadiness with which they have conducted it has drawn the attention of the whole of the Indian public. All this is certainly to the good, but after having fully discussed with the friends from Vykom the position, I still entertain the opinion that Satyagraha should be confined to the Hindus only and that, too, as far as possible to the volunteers drawn from Kerala, and, at the most, from the Madras Presidency. Satyagraha in its intensest form goes deeper and therefore necessarily covers a very small surface. Let me make my meaning clear. The purer the organisers the stronger and more effective is their Satyagraha and therefore when the organisers of Satyagraha extend the boundary line it is really an admission of one's weakness, not of the cause, but of the persons organised. I think I have said sufficiently in the pages of "Young India" to show why non-Hindus cannot possibly offer Satyagraha in respect of a religious question which is exclusively Hindu. I believe that my friends have seen the force of my argument. If I could possibly persuade the Christian and Mahomedan sympathisers who had gone to jail as Satyagrahis I will ask them to tell the authorities that they offered Satyagraha in error and that therefore if the authorities intended to discharge them they might do so because they would not court arrest in the cause of the untouchable Hindus. I am deliberately using the term untouchable Hindus, because I understand that in the Syrian Christians of Malabar there are untouchable Christians also. But as the present Satyagraha is not being offered on behalf of the untouchable Christians, the sacrifice of Messrs. Joseph, Sebastian and Abdur Rahim carries no merit with it.

#### THE SIKH KITCHEN.

So far as the Sikh Kitchen is concerned, that it is not only of place but it is harmful to the cause and to the self-respect of the people of Kerala. Harmful to the cause because it weakens the strength of the sacrifice of the volunteers and it must unnecessarily irritate that portion of the orthodox Hindus who are hostile to the reform. It is harmful to the self-respect of the Kerala people because unthinkingly they partake of the food distributed by the Sikh friends. It can only be regarded as charity. I cannot but regard that a large number of people who are well able to feed themselves could feed themselves at the kitchen and unwillingly be partakers of charity of which they do not stand in need and this, I say, irrespective of the fact whether Sikhs be regarded as a part of the Hindu society or not. I would expect the Kerala friends to have self-respect and courage enough to easily decline such assistance even if Banajan Hindus offered to establish a kitchen. I can conceive the possibility and necessity of such a kitchen in a famine-stricken area where people are starving.

#### QUESTION OF PECUNIARY HELP.

As to the pecuniary help from outside I do retain the opinion that the Kerala friends should neither seek nor receive, even if it is offered unthought, pecuniary assistance from Hindus or others outside the Madras Presidency. They only, if they so need it, seek the pecuniary assistance from the Hindus of the Madras Presidency. Of course the Kerala people distributed all over India are bound if they approve of the struggle to send in the financial assistance that they can to the organisers of the movement.

My friends asked me whether I had expressed an opinion to the effect that

the Kerala Congress Committee should not have taken up the question. My answer to them was that, if the question should have been taken up at all, the Congress Committee should have been the first body to take it up because it is pledged to bring about the removal of untouchability by all peaceful and legitimate means. But the Congress taking it up cannot and does not mean that non-Hindus can or ought to participate in Satyagraha. They can only give their moral support.

I have no doubt whatsoever that if the organisers continue the struggle in the same peaceful manner as they have done, accept the restrictions which I have suggested and if they are thinking of sustaining the struggle for an indefinite period their efforts must be crowned with success. I cannot, however, lay too much stress upon the fact that Satyagraha is a process of conversion and therefore organisers must ever aim at changing the heart of their opponents.

Q:—Have you seen a cable sent by the "Daily Telegraph's" correspondent in India to the effect that you have decided to take the lead at the next Congress on the platform for securing a majority in the Assembly and Councils replacing futile rejection of the budget by a programme combining co-operation in carrying on essential services with persistent demands backed by consistent and substantial majorities for speedy extension and recasting of reforms and speeding up of Indianisation including the army? In view of such deliberate misrepresentation prompted by a desire to discredit the Swarajists in particular and the Indian National movement in general and in view of the thick ignorance which prevails in England regarding the real aims of the movement, don't you think that an Indian Bureau should be established in England for the dissemination of the truth regarding India? Have you revised your views since Nagpur? If the expense of maintaining such a bureau will be too heavy, should not a small subsidy be paid from Congress funds to some individual who is willing to undertake the work?

A:—I did see the cablegram, but I thought that nobody would attach the slightest importance to it or credit me with the views about co-operation such as are imputed to me in the cable. As I have said so often, I am personally eager and anxious to offer co-operation, but I am more eager and more anxious to strengthen the forces of non-co-operation till there is the slightest possible indication of a change of heart of which hitherto I have seen no sign whatsoever. I retain the same views about a publicity bureau to be maintained or subsidised in London for the purpose of contradicting misstatements that may appear in the British press. I am still of opinion that no misrepresentation or misstatement can possibly do us any harm if we are ourselves strong and sound. Conversely no patronising or favourable notice of our demands in the British or the foreign press can be of any avail to us if we are ourselves weak, disorganised and not prepared to give battle to the Government. Therefore every rupee that we can spare I would utilise for the Khaddar propaganda for National Schools and for other parts of the constructive programme.

Q:—You must have seen that resort to so-called Satyagraha is becoming frequent in the country not only in connection with political grievances but purely religious or socially. Don't you think that there is danger of the abuse of this weapon and "Dharmagrah" instead of "Satyagrah" being practised for illegitimate ends? Can you lay down any rules for Satyagrahis at least those who follow the Congress lead?

#### "A POWERFUL AND SUBTLE FORCE."

Mahatma in reply said: "Yes, I agree that there is some danger of Satyagrah degenerating into an evil force and therefore becoming harmful. Abuse of a good thing is always possible especially of a force so powerful and subtle as Satyagraha. I think in my discussion of Satyagraha at Vykom I have discussed in a cursory manner its fundamentals, but I accept your suggestions and as soon as I have a little leisure I hope to draw the rules which in my opinion are binding upon every Satyagrahi."

In the course of a conversation with Messrs. K. Madhavan Nair and Kurur Neelakantan Nambudripad, who constitute the Vykom Deputation, they gave me to understand that they had three to four long interviews with Mahatma and had discussed the question thoroughly. They represented the whole case as well as they could, which Mahatma listened to with his characteristic politeness and politeness. They said to me that they were satisfied with Mahatma's statement and were confident that it would satisfy workers and sympathisers in Kerala and the Madras Presidency. Mahatma emphasised self-reliance and self-sufficiency involved in a movement. They were afraid, they said, that Mahatma might find objection to the Congress Committee undertaking the Untouchability movement as it was represented in some quarters. They were, however, satisfied that there was nothing of the kind. Mahatma's very emphatic assertion in that direction raises no apprehensions in that direction. The Deputation is returning to Vykom in a day or two.

With regard to the Council question Mahatma gave our representative to understand that a full statement would be issued to the press in the course of this week. Our representative understands that Mahatma and Swarajist leaders had had long and repeated conferences and the decision is practically arrived at. Panditji is expected to leave for Simla for the Assembly session on Wednesday and the much awaited statement will in all probability be issued on Wednesday or Thursday.

#### THE DEPUTATION TO MAHATMA.

(ASSOCIATED PRESS OF INDIA.)

COCHIN, May 19.

News has been received from the Vaikom Deputation now at Bombay that they are continuing the interview with Mr. Gandhi and that he has expressed his opinion that the Congress must fight to a finish with help from Madras Presidency.

#### E. V. R. NAICKER TO DISOBEY ORDER.

Mr. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, who has now taken charge of leading the campaign and who has been served with an order of externment from Kottayam District by the District Magistrate of Kottayam has replied, acknowledging receipt of the order and refusing to obey the same. In the course of the reply he says:—"The primary condition for the success of Satyagraha is non-violence, peace and goodwill. It is therefore just to prevent violence, riot and affray that I came, stayed and worked in Vaikom. I am convinced that this is clear to you from my speeches and activities. I am also convinced that your order is intended to prevent me from my peaceful activities and somehow cause riot or affray and then to kill the movement in a calculated manner. So I feel bound to disobey the order."

This is the third order served on Mr. Naicker, the first two being orders prohibiting him from addressing public meetings in Trivandrum and Quilon districts. Two policemen are now accompanying the volunteers while they are on their march daily, presumably to prevent their being assaulted by the townsmen.

This help is given by the authorities unasked.

#### MR. MATHEW SENTENCED.

COCHIN, May 17.

Mr. Kuruvila Mathew, Secretary, Congress Committee who was arrested at Vykom the other day, was put up for trial before Mr. Andi Pillai, 1st Class Magistrate Kottayam, and was convicted and sentenced to 3 months' simple imprisonment. He has since been removed to Central Jail, Trivandrum.

#### MR. PANIKKER'S VIEWS.

Mr. K. M. Panikkar writes:—The course of Vykom Satyagraha is being watched with deep interest all over India. Recent controversies in the Press have done much to clarify the issue and after Mahatma's illuminating remarks in "Young India" I do not think there is room for doubt that if the movement is to succeed it must be conducted with more understanding of the orthodox position and in stricter accordance with Mahatma's teaching. I agree that failure at Vykom would be a disastrous blow to the cause of progress and hence a great responsibility lies on the Satyagraha committee in having to consider the whole situation in the light of Mahatma's opinions. I do not think even the Untouchability Committee will question his right to define the true nature of Satyagraha and to lay down conditions under which alone it should be undertaken. If they do not deny this, then the position is clear. He has declared:—(1) that as the problem of untouchability has nothing to do with non-Hindu Communities the struggle should be conducted solely by Hindus, without as much as touching even the money given by Christians, Muslims and others.

(2) That the Congress should not take the lead in Satyagraha in an Indian State.

(3) That the problem should be localised.

The Satyagraha Committee has the option of their disclaiming Mahatma Gandhi and making the struggle an independent one or of accepting his conditions. If by any chance they decide on the former course, which is most unlikely, they would, I am afraid, forfeit the sympathy of the whole country. If they decide to accept his advice then their course is easy enough. I hope no question of false pride would stand in the way of the Congress Committee immediately retiring from direct participation in the fight. The Untouchability Committee may be re-constituted as an independent body which with the advice of leading Congress Workers in Kerala will carry on the fight. The localisation of the problem should also be immediately effected and the services of those generous leaders like Sjt. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker who showed courage, enthusiasm, and sympathy by shouldering in part the responsibility of the agitation should be availed of only in an advisory capacity. Kerala owes them a deep debt of gratitude but we alone must suffer for our sins and however generously their services may be offered it would be dishonourable on our part if we accepted them.

False analogies like the attitude of the Congress towards the Khilafat question and the Akali situation and the enthusiasm generated in the public mind by early successes of the movement were responsible for these unhappy mistakes. Now since Mahatma has clearly explained his position I feel certain that the Committee will realise the mistake of having attempted to start a Satyagraha under the lead of the Congress in an Indian State and to convert a local issue into an All-India affair. I can only repeat what I said before though it was not palatable then either

to the Satyagraha Committee or to the local Congress authorities. The issue must be localised as far as possible to Travancore, non-Hindu participation should be disallowed and outside help reduced to a minimum. Only in such a case could the fight be continued to a successful issue.

I shall only add one word about the Akali kitchen. Mahatma is emphatic on this point. He wants the kitchen withdrawn. Originally when I had not realised its implications I suggested to Sardar Amar Singh of Jhabbal and Mangal Singh that a luncheon may be opened at Vykom. They agreed to it and the suggestion was formally made by me to the S.G.P.C. and it was accepted. I wired Mahatma about it and left for Bombay the next day. At Juhu Mahatma expressed his strong disapproval of the step and I wired immediately to Sardar Mangal Singh not to send the kitchen and to the Satyagraha Committee at Cochin to wire the S.G.P.C. declining in both cases with thanks, mentioning in both cases that Mahatma had expressed disapproval. Before my telegram reached Amritsar the jatha had left and when I came back from Bombay I heard that the Satyagraha Committee, instead of declining the offer with thanks had sent a long telegram expressing their profound gratitude. As Mahatma has in the current number of "Young India" expressed his hope that the Akali kitchen would be withdrawn, I thought that all the facts connected with the S.G.P.C.'s offer should be made known to the public.

May I, before closing this letter, appeal again to the leaders of the movement at Vykom to weigh well the factors that are at play and continue the struggle within the strict limits set by Mahatma.