



“CONTRIBUTION OF PUNE DISTRICT IN THE MOVEMENT OF INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY”

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar founded the Independent Labor Party in 1936 to get the untouchables their political rights. This research article examines how Pune district responded to the party's move, with special reference to the performance of R. R. Bhole, who was elected from Pune to the Legislature of Mumbai Province.



KEYWORDS : R. R. Bhole, Untouchables, Poona, Bombay province, Political rights.

INTRODUCTION

After realizing the fallacy of the Pune Pact, the untouchables felt the need for their own independent political party to get their political rights. From this situation, the Independent Labor Party was formed in 1936 AD. A report on the constitution, mission and program of this new party was published in the Times of India dated 15th August 1936, part of which is as follows: 'A new political party has been organised in Bombay for the purpose of contesting the elections in the Bombay Presidency under the new constitution to both Chambers of the Legislature. It is known as the 'Independent Labour Party' and has been found by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the Depressed Classes Leader. The party is open to anyone who wishes to stand for with the program formulated for the purpose.

PARTY PROGRAM

1. Addressing the Defects in the New Constitution (Act of 1935).
2. Curbing population growth.
3. Raising the issues of labour and the oppressed.
4. Reducing the burden of taxes on the poor.
5. To insist on social reforms from the point of view of untouchables.
6. To improve education from primary education to higher education.

Details of this manifesto were published in the Janata issue dated 22 August 1936 under the title Manifesto of the Independent Labor Party.¹

1937 Election – ILP's performance in Pune :

In the February 1937 elections, the party campaigned strongly in Bombay province and achieved great success. In this election, the Independent Labor Party won 13 of the total 15 seats contested by the party. Also, candidates from other two seats sponsored by independent parties were

elected. In the 1937 election to the Bombay Province Legislative Assembly 15 out of 17 candidates of Labour Independent Party who contest the election were declared successful. They were 1) Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Bombay) 2) B.K.Gaikwad (Nasik) 3) P.J.Roham (Ahmadnagar) 4) **R.R.Bhole (Poona)** 5) D.G.Jadhav (Khandesh) 6) Jivappa Aidale (Solapur) 7) K.S.Savant (Satara) 8) Bhausaheb Gadkari (East Poona) 9) Shamrao Parulekar (Thana) 10) Bapurao Bhatankar (Thana) 11) Ganghar Ghatge (Ratnagiri) 12) Bhai Chitre (kolaba) 13) B.H.Varale (Belgaum) 14) Shri.Kale (Bijapur) 15) D.W.Raut (Kolba).²

R. R. Bhole, trusted colleague of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and deputy leader of the party, was elected from Pune in this election. Also, during the elections, the Independent Labor Party supported *Lokshahi Swarajya Party* leader Bhalakar Laxman Balwant Bhopatkar, who was once the president of the Maharashtra Provincial Congress. Bhopatkar had requested Ambedkar that the untouchables of Pune should be asked to vote for him. Although Bhopatkar belonged to a party supported by orthodox and reactionary people, Bhopatkar always took up the issue of untouchables. Also, his party was determined to implement the new constitution (Act of 1935 AD). Bhopatkar's party leader N. C. Kelkar was campaigning strongly about this. That is why Kelkar and Bhopatkar were bombarded by ex-colleagues in Congress and pro-Congress newspapers. Dr. Ambedkar, who criticized the Congress leaders and their policies, also appealed to the Punekar Brahmins to support the untouchables in the elections. Even though the Congress party put all its might into the two seats of Dr. Ambedkar in Mumbai and Bhopatkar in Pune, Dr. Ambedkar won. But Bhopatkar was defeated. In this way, Independent Labor Party cooperated with like-minded parties in this election.

Contribution of Pune District to Party growth efforts :

For the growth of this newly formed party, the activists and leaders of Pune district themselves went to Pune district and surrounding areas and contributed as follows-

As announced in advance on 25th January 1937 at Ahmednagar, 'Ahmednagar Zilla Parishad of Untouchables' was held at Camp Sadar under the chairmanship of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. An average of five to six thousand people gathered at this conference. At this time Nalavde Arjunrao, Pargaonkar Bhanudas, Nevaskar Kavaram and Pandharinath Buwa, activists from Pune were entertaining the people by singing the songs of Samaj Prabodhana. On this occasion, Babasaheb gave a speech on guidance.³

The first meeting of the members of the Bombay Provincial Assembly of the Independent Labor Party was held on Tuesday 20 July 1937 at Ahilya Shram, Pune under the chairmanship of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. As the leader of the Independent Labor Party, Babasaheb made his party aware of strict discipline and organisation, after the rules regarding working in the Council were passed. On this occasion, Babasaheb said that, "Our party's program is to reconcile with Bahujan society. The first task of our party is to protect the interests of the poor, working class and peasants. There is no doubt that you will surely get success in the work done with selfless intellect."⁴

The 'Seventh Session of the Satara District Mahar Parishad' was successfully held under the chairmanship of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on 6th November 1937 at Masur, District Satara. On this occasion, a large procession of Babasaheb, one and a half to two miles in length, was taken out. Pune's R. R. Bhole, Vinayakrao Gadkari and Annasaheb Potnis were also present in this conference. Speaking in this Parishad, Dr. Babasaheb criticized the Congress and non-Brahmin party for their indifference towards the poor and Dalit masses.⁵

A meeting was held at Daund, District Pune on 7 November 1937 under the chairmanship of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. This area is particularly backward in Pune district and that is why Babasaheb went to this place and saw the overall situation there. MLA Rajaram Bhole welcomed everyone and a speech was given under the support of MLA Bhausaheb Gadkari. In his speech on the occasion, Babasaheb said, "The main purpose of today's meeting is to form a branch of the Independent Labor Party. Our party is not only for the untouchables, but mainly the people who earn their living and are farmers are included in this party..... It is necessary for our people to go more in the legislature. Only those are your representatives, who will work in your interest. From Pune Major Subedar Ghadge

Bandhu, Madhale, Anna Potnis, Dikhle Bandhu, Borale, Pansare, Gaikwad, Ghodke etc. were present in this meeting. In this meeting, resolutions were passed, 1) support for the Mahar Watan Bill, 2) construction of local board wells near untouchables settlements, 3) support for the bill to abolish Khoti practices, 4) relief from the hardships caused to the Mahars due to military firing or payment of wages against it etc.⁶

In the conference of Independent Labor Party held at Medhe in Satara district, untouchable leader from Pune P. N Rajbhoj participated. Mahar Watan issue was discussed in this conference. The report of the said conference has been mentioned by the Intelligence Police Department of the then British Government as follows. Rajbhoj said "I will be the first man to participate in the satyagraha movement if it will be launched for the Mahar-Vatan. I lastly appeal to you all to sink our caste differences and work unitedly under the leadership of Dr.Ambedkar." (Reporting from S.H.S.I. C.I.D. B.P.Poona.)⁷

A British confidential letter dated April 7, 1938 mentions that Gopinath Raoji Potnis, the representative of Bhor Sansthan participated in the meeting held at Mandangad to oppose Khoti system in Konkan and to support Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.⁸ The same file also mentions that Independent Labor Party workers established a branch of the Independent Labor Party at Jejuri in Pune district in April 1938.

Work of R. R. Bhole :

Rajaram alias R. R. Bhole, who was a very close and trusted associate of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, was a member of the Independent Labor Party. He has done a very original work for the untouchables. In the Bombay Assembly Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was the leader of the party, while Bhole was the deputy leader of the party. The bills brought by him while in the legislature and the discussions and speeches made on them show his longing for the liberation of Dalits. Khoti was the hotbed of exploitation of Dalits in Konkan. He asserted strongly in the legislature that this hoax should be destroyed. He severely criticized the budget in the assembly. His speeches in the Assembly between 1937 and 1939 on irrigation projects, primary education facilities, rural health facilities, strict enforcement of liquor ban, employment generation, abolition of untouchability etc. testify to his excellent parliamentary skills. Along with the issues of untouchables, the Independent Labor Party started a movement in the villages on the issue of farmers and labourers.

During the Second World War, the Government of India sent a delegation of four representatives to England and America. It included Bhole. The purpose of this delegation was to convey information about Indian war cooperation abroad. During these foreign tours, he presented the suffering and untouchability of the Indian Dalits in the meetings of the East India Association with great vehemence. Not only this, it also narrates the history of how the Mahar soldiers cooperated with the British government since their arrival in India. But in return, he also made aware of how the British government did injustice to the Dili Mahar soldiers by disbanding the Mahar platoon.

On January 25, 1944, Bhole gave a lecture in the British Parliament reviewing the political situation in India. In his insightful speech, he says that the Congress is rich and of course it is a favourite principle of the Congressmen to tie up the mouths of the newspapers by giving them money. When you hear things in England, they are either incomplete and monotonous, and being untouchable poor, our voice cannot come across the Arabian Sea. So I consider it my utmost duty to explain to you what is the other side, what is the struggle of the untouchables for. The number of untouchables in India is over five to six crores. However, their condition is very poor. In such a situation it is absolutely impossible to get the untouchables their rights. The unfortunate thing is that in every town or village the untouchables are a very small minority. Hindus are outnumbered anywhere. However, whenever attempts are made by the untouchables to claim their rights, they are well rebuffed by the majority Hindu thugs. Untouchables are attacked with ingratitude, social exclusion is resorted to... I am very happy to state before this House that now the untouchables are fully aware of their rights, they have developed self-respect that they are human beings and they are now making a strong demand for the

same. Untouchables need legal protection to fulfil their fundamental rights. It is never possible to elect a true representative of the untouchables through joint voting.⁹

Referring to such speeches of R. R. Bhole in this foreign tour, a member of the Central Council of India asked the question that MLA Bhole has gone to give information about war cooperation or to tell the British people about untouchables? This shows how intense Gole's passion for the untouchables was.

In 1944, the Dalit Sangh of Bhor Sansthan¹⁰ honored him with a certificate of honor to honor his work. Also in 1945, a certificate of honor was given to RR Bhole by the untouchables of Pune district.¹¹ In the following period, R. R. Bhole also contributed to the work of the People's Education Institute established by Babasaheb.

Thus, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Independent Labor Party raised its voice on most of the Dalit-oppressed issues like Mahar Watan, Khoti system, education, prohibition of alcohol, labor issues etc. Party workers from Pune district supported him wholeheartedly in this work. Also, RR Bhole, MLA of this party, who was elected from Pune division, has played an important role in this work.

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