

# Servant of India

Editor : S. G. VAZE.

Office : SERVANTS OF INDIA SOCIETY, POONA 4.

VOL. XX, No. 6. } POONA—THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1937. { INDIAN SUBSN. Rs. 6.  
FOREIGN SUBSN. 15s.

## CONTENTS.

	Page
TOPICS OF THE WEEK ... ..	57
ARTICLES :—	
Rural Uplift and Indian Scientists. ... ..	59
Indians in Fiji. ... ..	60
REVIEWS :—	
Urban Handicrafts. By Prof. K. S. Venkataraman, M. A. ... ..	61
Indian Federal Constitution. By Principal D. G. Karve, M. A. ... ..	62
MISCELLANEOUS :—	
Our Hill Tribes : Mr. Venkata Raman's Views. ... ..	62

## Topics of the Week.

### Assembly Questions.

Having suppressed, to their own satisfaction, the evil of adjournment motions, the Government were busy last week in grappling with the menace of questions. Their complaint is two-fold, (1) that too many questions are asked giving occasion for endless supplementary questions and (2) that the asking of them is confined only to a few members, causing unfairness to the rest. It may perhaps be admitted that with the entry of Congressmen into the Assembly the number of questions has grown. But one cannot persuade oneself, as the Government seems to have done, that the increase amounts to a menace which must be urgently met. It is also possible the privilege was occasionally misused. But is that a sufficient reason for penalising the whole body of members of the Assembly for the sins of a few? Was the method of persuasion through party leaders at all tried and if so, with what effect?

To these very pertinent and pointed questions put by Mr. Joshi no satisfactory reply was forthcoming from Government. Nor was such a thing as making out a case for the proposed step seriously attempted by them. But why should they do so when in the Assembly, depleted of Congress strength as it is, they can have things their own way? As a matter of fact they have succeeded in restricting the number of questions to be put by a member on any day to five and would have been better pleased if the number had been still further reduced. The result is that no member can hereafter orally ask more than five questions on any day, though he is not prevented from sending in more of them.

WHAT happens to the surplus? Are they to be taken as having lapsed or only a written answer is to be considered sufficient in their case? The Government would have lost nothing by agreeing to the second course but they successfully voted down an amendment to that effect, which constitutes an eloquent commentary on their solicitude for public enlightenment, for which purpose the right of asking questions is avowedly conferred on non-official members.

A GREAT deal was said on behalf of Government about the desirability of approximating the practice in regard to Assembly questions to that in the House of Commons. Was this plea put forward in wilful ignorance of the difference in the conditions of the two legislatures? While the much larger membership of the House of Commons might make a restriction on the number of questions to be orally asked not only desirable but necessary, a similar restriction on the members of the Assembly is greatly to be deprecated as being calculated to curtail their rights and reduce their public utility. But where the main consideration is bureaucratic convenience and not public interest, nothing better could be expected.

### Misleading.

In his recent speech at Coimbatore Mr. C. Rajagopalachariar used words which are capable of giving rise to the impression that no other party but the Congress was anxious to get the new constitution substituted by a better one. "Other parties" he said "that had now ranged themselves against the Congress did not propose to get rid of the constitution." As if to make his meaning clearer he added: "They (Congressmen) were going with the distinct feeling to remove this Act from the statute book." Does this not mean that the so-called wrecking policy of the Congress will manifest itself in efforts to secure for India a better constitution? If that is the objective of the Congress, one wonders if Mr. Rajagopalachariar was right in saying that no other party except the Congress wanted to get rid of the constitution. In saying this was he not altogether oblivious of the existence of the Liberal party? That party is pledged to work for the replacement of the Hoare constitution by one more in accord with popular sentiment. In fact its principal object in working the reforms is to accelerate a wholesale revision of the India Act of 1935. The resolutions passed by the party conferences and the declarations of its leaders from time to time have placed the matter beyond the possibility of a doubt. If the Congress wants to get rid of the constitution, no less does the Liberal party.

### Railway Committee.

THE Government demand for supplementary railway grants in the Assembly last week was utilised by non-official members to vent their resentment at the non-inclusion of an Indian in the Railway Committee. The problems engaging the attention of the Committee are closely interlinked with problems of Indian finance. As such the work of the Committee is bound to have a far-reaching influence on the future of this country. In fact circumstanced as we are, it would be no exaggeration to say that it is our railways that will make or mar our future. It was thus meet and proper for the Government to have included in the Committee at least one Indian non-official of recognised status and sufficiently long and wide experience in the business world. But the ways of the Government are sometimes inscrutable and we have the spectacle of a Committee wholly non-Indian in personnel going into the Indian railway problem in the same way as the wholly British Simon Commission tried to go into the Indian problem, and failed to suggest a satisfactory solution. One can well understand, even without enlightenment from official quarters, that the Committee would have associated with it in its work some Indian officials connected with railway administration. But it is obvious that such association of Indian officials with the Committee can never be made to do duty satisfactorily for the inclusion in it of Indian non-officials with the same status as its European members. If it is said that Indians of requisite authority could not be found, all we can say is that it is making too heavy a call on Indian credulity and is an insult to Indian intelligence.

IN the course of his speech Mr. Joshi drew attention to the pressing problem of third class passengers in railways. It is a matter of common knowledge that it is this class which contributes the most to the profits of railways and yet it is this class which is, strangely enough, invariably allowed to suffer in the cold of neglect. Those who have any experience of railway travel in India need not be told that while very little consideration is shown to this class of railway passengers, the comfort and convenience of the higher class passengers is scrupulously attended to by railway authorities. The practice of bringing experts from outside was also severely criticised by Mr. Joshi. Not that he would never have foreign experts for dealing with Indian problems. What he meant was that their importation should be resorted to only as an exceptional measure and that every such departure should be justified by Government to the satisfaction of the Indian Legislature.

### Iraq Indians' Difficulties.

THE exchange difficulties experienced by our countrymen in Iraq in the matter of remittances to India formed the subject of a recent interpellation in the Legislative Assembly. It would appear that these difficulties have their origin in the enforcement of the regulations framed under the exchange control law enacted in Iraq. Its object, so far as one can gather, is the prevention of money earned in Iraq being sent out to a very considerable extent. To this end remittances by foreigners having direct commercial relations with public institutions are restricted to ten per cent. of profits on any transaction. Similarly, foreigners in the service of any public institution are debarred from remitting abroad more than half of their salary. A strict limit on the importation of newspapers into Iraq is also likewise operated by the meagre supply of exchange made available for payment of their subscriptions.

THESE restrictions are naturally found very irksome by our countrymen in Iraq. But the inconvenience caused by them is as nothing to that due to the absence of any provision for the supply of exchange for remittances to cover the expenses of the education of their children in India. The hardships to which dependants in a far-off country are subjected due to non-receipt of the regular monthly remittances from their bread-winners can be easily imagined by anybody. And yet the Iraq Government have enacted a law which does not allow of remittances for such a very necessary purpose! The information vouchsafed by the Foreign Secretary in the Assembly that this law is applied without discrimination to all and sundry can bring no solace to those who are thus suffering from its enforcement. The Government of India appear to be in a fix as to their course of action in the face of the existence of this law on the Iraq statute book. Their course appears to us to be clear. In view of the hardships to their nationals referred to above, they should not hesitate to press on the Iraq Government the desirability of so modifying the law itself or the regulations framed under it, as may be the case, as to facilitate remittances home for purposes of children's education.

### Indian Situation in Kenya.

IN the course of a press statement, Mr. J. B. Pandya, member of the Kenya Legislative Council, gives the Indian public some idea of the direction in which there might be a possible worsening of the Indian situation. The Kenya whites have only suspended their agitation for their wider demand for effective control over the affairs of the Colony and are waiting for a favourable opportunity to press it. Meanwhile Mr. Pandya fears there is great danger of our countrymen suffering a set-back in another direction. The re-organisation of the Executive Council of Kenya whose membership of four contains an Indian is at present under the consideration of the Colonial Office. And Mr. Pandya is greatly apprehensive that the occasion might be seized by the Europeans for insisting that the Council should be denuded of even this Indian representation. The Kenya Europeans have always harped upon the exclusion of Indians from the Executive Council. Will they remain quiet when the reorganisation of the Council is in the air? Whether the Colonial Office or the Kenya Government will give sympathetic consideration to their anti-Indian agitation is more than can be said. But that the Europeans will avidly catch at the opportunity goes without saying, and Mr. Pandya must be thanked for giving India a timely warning of this danger.

IN the difficult situation which confronts our countrymen in Kenya they naturally expect the support of the Indian Government and people. We need not say they will have it in full measure. They will themselves leave no stone unturned to prevent any backsliding and Mr. Pandya says that they will soon take steps to acquaint the new Governor with their case for the maintenance of the status quo. There is no doubt that the situation is full of dangerous possibilities and needs to be carefully watched.

### Ticketless Travel.

THE bill to check the evil of ticketless travel was referred to a Select Committee last week. During the long period of nearly ten months that the legislation has been before the country grave doubts have been entertained as to its efficacy for the purpose for which it is intended. Ticketless travel has been estimated

to mulct Indian railways of their legitimate dues to the extent of Rs. 50 lakhs every year. Will its operation succeed in enriching Indian railways to this extent? Experience alone can furnish an answer to this question.

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THE bill makes a departure from the well established principles of jurisprudence in that it trans-

fers the onus of proof from the prosecution to the accused. This feature of the bill has naturally encountered strenuous opposition from all sections of non-official opinion both inside and outside the Assembly. It is to be hoped that the Select Committee will give careful consideration to all objections urged by public opinion against the measure and try its best not to leave any ground for them.

## RURAL UPLIFT AND INDIAN SCIENTISTS.

THAT the presidential address of the last session of the Indian Science Congress should have been devoted to the subject of the past, present and the future of the Indian village is at once a striking and a hopeful occurrence. It is not frequent among scientists, at any rate among the devotees of the natural sciences, to concern themselves primarily with the solution of pressing practical problems. The compelling and all-engrossing nature of many of the present evils with which humanity has been afflicted has induced a welcome change in the attitude of scientists. At several recent sessions of the British Science Association the correlation of science to human life has come in for prominent and useful discussion. It is very satisfactory that the Indian scientists have also realised the great need of bringing their trained minds to bear on the most urgent problems of life in India. Unless science is pressed into the service of humanity no far-reaching progress is possible.

Indian scholarship both in the past and the present has been too prone to be abstract and general. It is highly encouraging that Rao Bahadur T. S. Venkat Raman, the president of this year's Science Congress, marked the Indian scientists' appreciation of their nearer responsibilities by choosing the Indian village as the subject of his address. Rao Bahadur Venkat Raman was particularly concerned over the tendency to leave the village for the town evinced not only by the more enterprising but also by the more well-to-do portion of the village population. In so far as the village has not enough scope to offer to the enterprise and labour of its inhabitants a migration to the town was not only necessary but mutually helpful. But the complete snapping of the bond between the emigrant and his erstwhile village is not quite a welcome sign. The material and intellectual equipment gathered by its more enterprising sons must in some shape return to the village, to nourish similar qualities among the rest.

More disconcerting is the tendency of the well-to-do villager to seek residence in a town and to be to his village no more than an absentee landlord. The loss to the village in the shape of technical assistance, social leadership and economic demand caused by this process must be considerable. If the intellectualised, enterprising and well-to-do classes are lost to the villages the process of the rustication of the latter must be well nigh complete. If, as Rao Bahadur Venkat Raman suggests, the amenities in the villages by way of sanitary and medical services, educational

facilities, transport and lighting, are improved and modernised this undesirable denuding of the village of its valuable assets will cease. In fact, with an improvement in village amenities more people from towns may be prepared to seek either a permanent or a temporary home in the villages.

The provision of amenities is dependent in a large measure on the local resources in men and money. It is commonly held that the financial resources of villages are very slender, and the popular belief, which in fact is no more than a general impression, that agricultural production has not increased even in proportion to the population lends further support to this view. The position is rendered almost tantalising by what the Rao Bahadur says about the possibility of an acre supporting under proper scientific tillage as many as 35 persons. One would have liked to know in detail what these reforms are which would enable the villager not only to finance his already rising scale of needs, but to increase the attractions of his place by an addition to its varied amenities. It is a matter for some satisfaction that the attention of the scientists has been now attracted by the village problem. It is very much to be hoped that the detailed problems of intensive tillage will be soon attacked with vigour and success.

Nobody can contend that our villages are suffering for lack of man power, though there is a curious inconsistency in two mutually contradictory slogans, viz., that the pressure on land has increased and that our villages are not by any means as populous now as they were in days of old. The president of the Science Congress proposes to meet the involuntary idleness of the villager by promoting more continuous cultivation such as that of sugarcane or by diversification of crops and establishment of village industries. The problems created by these suggestions, which latter are familiar to all students of Indian rural conditions, have yet to receive authoritative notice from the scientific bodies. Water supply, soil and climatic conditions have to be brought under intensive scientific investigation which must give us a lead as to which of these reforms are practicable and in what way all or any of them can be successfully introduced. The results of scholarly research on soils, irrigation, dry farming and crop breeding are being expectantly watched by the nation. If the lead of the last Congress is followed in later years by a more practical and detailed statement of results the country will have cause to be grateful to our scientists.

The concern of the Indian villager for his cattle is proverbial. Equally well-known is the prejudice against using cattle, even inefficient cattle, for other than agricultural and dairy purposes. While the villager is unwilling to part with an emaciated animal, which is little more than a hideful of bones, he is not alert to see that the bones are covered with flesh and that the cattle is maintained in an efficient state. Science may be expected to be of help in this respect in the field both of veterinary and dairy reform. Castration of inefficient cattle and more selective breeding are now being popularised. Fodder problems which the scientist is in a better position to solve have not attracted the attention they deserve. The loss of business caused by bus and railway transport can adequately be made good only by developing dairying and breeding. Though practical work in both these lines is of great importance the scientist also has a very extensive field of patriotic service here.

Since the inauguration of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, and since in particular the problem of animal husbandry has begun to attract attention from the highest quarters in the land, many of the important aspects of the rural and agricultural life are receiving trained attention. The improvement in seed and the wider distribution of the better variety have undoubtedly helped to improve both the quality and yield of our crops. The results of this process of selective sowing are cumulative, and with the increase in the acreage under improved seed further striking progress may be confidently expected. The improvement in cattle breeding is only recent and it will be some time before noticeable results on a large scale are forthcoming. The dairy industry requires a more organised and powerful push than it has received as yet. The co-operation of the wealthier mercantile community might easily be secured if the highest placed officials evince the same sustained interest in this branch of rural reform as they have been evincing in some others.

The mental and moral equipment of the average Indian villager is not well suited to make him an active agent of the new processes of reform. Sometimes it is alleged that even as the passive subject of the reforming activity of others he is not exactly helpful. A wider diffusion of primary education, especially with a rural and practical bias, has often been suggested as a remedy to improve the mental outlook of the villager. Since the establishment of popular ministries in the provinces progress along these lines has been striking, though recently it has been checked on account of the financial difficulties of provincial governments. Whether in this field students of theoretical and applied psychology have any efficacious remedies to suggest would be interesting to know. At the best of times we must utilise our resources in men, money and material in the most economical fashion. If cheaper and more effective methods of spreading enlightenment, especially on a large scale, are devised by scientists, the administrators and the reformers should be ready to benefit by them. Reform of the villages to be lasting must be

based on the reformed villagers, and any town bred scheme of reform with an outside flavour must for the present be considered as absolutely necessary. But even with a completely transformed villager the responsibility of scientific leadership will remain with the professional scientist, who for the most part can have his being in urbanised areas. We fervently hope that the growing interest of the scientists of India in the practical problems of our country's life will bear richer and more varied fruit in years to come.

### INDIANS IN FIJI.

THE report on the census of Fiji taken last year is now available. From this it is interesting to watch the remarkable growth in our numbers in that Colony. As elsewhere the census has been a ten-yearly affair in Fiji, though this one was taken after an interval of fifteen years from the last one of 1921. Why this unusually larger interval was allowed between these two censuses it is difficult to say. Curiously enough, the report offers no explanation for this extraordinary phenomenon. But this is by the way.

The first reliable census was taken in Fiji in 1881 when the total population was found to be 127,486. At the last census it had risen to 198,379 or roughly to two lakhs. Very nearly one half of this, 49.22 per cent, to be exact, is Fijian, Indians coming next with 42.85 per cent, while the Europeans are slightly in excess of 2 per cent., their number being about 4,000 out of two lakhs. Of all important sections of the population the Indian shows the largest increase during the fifteen years which passed between the last two censuses. It mounted up at the rate of over 400 per 1000, while the proportion was 155.97 in the case of natives. In the case of Europeans it was only 38.68. In 1881 the Europeans numbered 2,671. The number increased by about 1,200 in a generation and stood at 3,878 in 1921. During the last fifteen years their number increased only by 150 as against 24,328 in the case of Indians and 13,176 in that of natives.

Indians in Fiji were an inconceivably tiny group in 1881. They then numbered only 588! During the next ten years their number grew to 7,468, due to natural increase in population and the influx from the mother-country. The next decade witnessed a rise of more than 100 per cent.—from 7,468 to 17,105. The rate of increase was even higher during the next decade, 1901 to 1911, in which year the Indian population stood at a little over 40,000. For the next ten yearly period the increase was only 50 per cent., the Indian population figure having gone up from 40,000 to 60,000. The last fifteen years record a growth of nearly 25,000 and bring the figure to 85,000, nearly 71,000 being Hindus, 11,000 Mahomedans, 1,000 Sikhs and 1,500 Christians. Over 60,000 of the total Indian population or 71.59 per cent. was born in the colony itself and over 24,000 or 28.41 per cent. elsewhere. The census report mentions the interesting fact that Indians in Fiji have to some extent taken to the natural food of the Fijians, which consists largely of root crops. Whether due to this

cause or to the healthy climate of the colony—there is no malaria and no serious epidemic during the inter-censal period—the rising generation of Indians is described as being physically better built than its predecessor.

According to the 1936 census figures, the sex ratio for the whole colony was 852 females per 1,000 males. The proportion was 950 for the Fijians, showing a rise of nearly 100 during a period of twenty-five years and 722 for Indians. In their case too it is showing a consistently upward tendency. In 1891, it was 494 females for every 1,000 males, i.e. less than one female for every two males; in 1901 the proportion rose to 506; in 1911 to 545; in 1921, 652 and in 1936, 722. The report also gives separate statistics about the sex ratio, among the Fiji-born Indians and those born elsewhere. These statistics relate only to the last three censuses and while it would be unsafe to draw any general conclusion from such insufficient data, the almost stationary position of the sex ratio in both cases seems unmistakable. It was 953 in 1911 and 952 in 1936 in the case of Fiji-born Indians and 407 in 1911 and 413 in 1936 in the case of those born elsewhere. In this connection it may be noted that what are known as child marriages in this country are unknown in Fiji owing to the fact that the legal age for marriage for Indians has been laid down as 16 for males and 13 for females. It may not be generally known that Fiji does not boast of any large towns. The largest town Suva, the capital of Fiji, has a population of only a little over 8,000 or of 15,522 with its suburbs. Levuka, the former capital, has sunk into comparative insignificance and has a population of only 1,083.

Out of a total of 47,458 Indians over 15 years of age 23.8 per cent. are returned as literate and 7.3 per cent. state that they can speak English. Literary in Fiji means ability to read and write one language and this only applies to persons over 15 while ability to speak English applies to all ages and means ability to understand and be understood in simple English. But we are really concerned with the level literacy in the rising generation. And the position from that point of view hardly seems encouraging. Out of a total number of 23,608 children between 5 and 15 (12,177 boys and 11,431 girls) only 5,037 or 3,607 boys and 1,430 girls were attending school. Seeing that the whole of the European school-age population is already at school and that the level of literacy among Fijians is higher than that of Indians, it behoves the Fiji Government to take special steps to raise the level of literacy amongst Indians.

## Reviews.

### URBAN HANDICRAFTS.

URBAN HANDICRAFTS OF THE BOMBAY DECCAN. By N. M. JOSHI. (Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona 4.) 25cm. 1936. 207p. Rs. 2-8-0.

HANDICRAFTS are usually the most neglected and perhaps forgotten forms of economic enterprises to many modern economists. They grapple with more fascinating subjects and seldom descend to the level of the humble or the humdrum. Politicians champion the cause of the handicrafts occasionally more for expediency than out of love or conviction. The

laymen, staggered by the rapid industrial and scientific advances everywhere, believe that the days of the handicrafts are numbered and they contemplate how to give them a decent burial. Under these depressing circumstances if one comes out with a publication pointing out to the vitalities of the handicrafts, it is not surprising that some conclude that he is either a fool or a knave. Mr. Joshi is certainly neither. He has no axe to grind, no aspirations for a political or a business career. So there can be no knavery. And a careful and dispassionate study of his book will show that he is not a fool or a sentimental idealist either. The present book is at once academical and practical. Mr. Joshi is concise and clear in the presentation of his thesis.

Mr. Joshi starts with a search for the implications and import of the handicrafts and after critically reviewing the contents of the different terms employed in different countries adopts his own (page 7). Then follows a brief survey of the evolution of handicrafts and industries from the stage of *usufacture*. This discussion on the theory of handicrafts closes with a discussion on the classification of handicrafts (page 17) and their structure (page 19). Section 2 of chapter I deals with the types of Indian handicrafts, the causes of their decay and of their survival, and a brief note on their structure and organisation.

Chapter II is historical. This survey covers a period of half a century from 1880 to 1930. It deals with the five main handicrafts industries of the Bombay Deccan viz. textile, metals, (brass and copper and precious metals), leather, paper and calico-printing. This chapter, in particular, is copiously documented and it is not too much to claim, as is done in the foreword, that "it is an important contribution to recent Indian Economic History". In page 96 Mr. Joshi gives examples of gross inaccuracies in the census and industrial census (1921) statistics; and one cannot but pity the lot of the research student in India with the present standard of statistical intelligence provided by the Imperial and Provincial Governments.

To those interested in the revival of handicrafts the concluding three chapters of the book deserve careful reading. The organisation of handicrafts in regard to finance, systems of production and sale, etc., and the economic conditions of the different classes of handicraftsmen particularly with reference to their income, indebtedness, hours of work and housing are fully dealt with and amply illustrated with specific references. Then follows a categorical statement of the problems (pages 134-35) which must be tackled in any scheme of development. The author does not paint too rosy a picture of the possibilities of the handicrafts of the Deccan; yet he considers—rightly so—that it is worth the labour and money involved in their resuscitation. In chapter IV he makes a pointed reference to the halting State policy of the Government of India in general and of the Government of Bombay in particular with reference to handicrafts and industries. The progress of co-operation, the extent of financial and technical assistance provided by the Government, the existence of facilities for technical and commercial education, etc., in Bombay and other provinces in India are compared and this comparison is undoubtedly no credit to the Government of Bombay. Even other provincial Governments and the Government of India have no reason to flatter themselves on their work and achievements if they know anything of the State policy in foreign countries in regard to handicraft industries. The author describes at some length the efforts made in different directions by foreign Governments (pages 167-177). This chapter is the most informing part of the book. The author concludes: "whether it is social

legislation, financial or technical help, industrial training or co-operation, the State is most active in all foreign countries where handicraft survivals are considerable". The problem of the handicraft reconstruction comes up for discussion in the last chapter. The author makes very useful and constructive suggestions for reducing the cost of production, changing the existing types of production, improving the business methods and developing scientific management and guild and chamber organisation and improving the social and economic conditions of the handicraftsmen by education, voluntary effort and State legislation. While one is not optimistic about the success of the many lines of legislative measures suggested by the author, e. g. child labour, sweating and apprenticeship and while one may doubt the desirability of the wholesale adoption of policies followed in other countries, there is no escape from the fact that something has to be done for the handicrafts, nay for agriculture, industry and commerce, and that can be done only with the help of the State. And this in this country with all the fashioning and refashioning of the constitution seems to be crying for the moon.

The readers of this book will be grateful to Mr. Joshi and the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics for bringing out this useful publication.

K. S. VENKATARAMAN.

### INDIAN FEDERAL CONSTITUTION.

**INDIA AS A FEDERATION.** By K. V. PUNNAIAH. (B. G. Paul & Co., Madras.) 1936. 22cm. 228p. Rs. 3-8-0.

THE inauguration of a federal constitution for the whole of India is an epoch-making event in the political history of this country and the prolonged and prolific deliberations by which it has been preceded have quite naturally given rise to a mass of descriptive and analytical literature on the subject. Some of the studies written by members of the Andhra University have brought to this discussion a much needed scientific and historical talent. Mr. Punnaiah's treatise on the federal aspects of the new constitution is well worth the attention of all students of federalism.

Mr. Punnaiah has been critical of the theoretical blemishes of the whole scheme. In fact the Indian constitution to be is so studded with 'special' features that one drawing his ideas of federality from past experience cannot but notice these. The author, however, is quite appreciative of the high purpose of men

like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, who against great odds succeeded in initiating what after all is a necessary stage on the way to the realisation of Indian Swaraj. That the units of the Indian federation represent differing political principles, that they occupy differing status in the federation, that the future development of the constitution is beset with almost impossible legal requirements, that the second chamber in the federation is a concession to vested interests, and that generally differences rather than unities are most in evidence at the present moment are all admitted facts. The author has brought these out vividly and has quite correctly interpreted their constitutional significance.

Among Indian politicians there is quite a natural tendency to refuse to see any good in coming constitutional changes and to harp on their shortcomings. Scientific opinion on constitutional matters cannot, however, justly stop at fault-finding. Historically the present stage of Indian nationalism is so incomplete that a constitution like the present may well be voted progressive. The nation as a whole is neither ripe for rendering autonomy inevitable nor are the politically conscious forces as yet welded into a unified constitutional opinion. Under these circumstances the reserve, and in fact the substance, of authority is bound to remain with the British Parliament and its agents. Subject to this governing consideration, constitutional forms are being developed and it is the part of scholarship to see how the conflicting internal and external interests are being welded into a common whole.

In such a system differences and restrictions are bound to be more prominent than unities and powers. Judging from the past history of this and other countries, the crucial question is whether such integration accompanied by the modicum of powers that the new Act contains has within it seeds of greater nationalism and autonomy, or are these retrograde steps calculated to perpetuate and harden a restrictive polity? Though there is reason to believe that an all-India federation is in one sense premature the step itself cannot but be considered a progressive one. Out of the experiences gained under the new constitution will arise a vigorous national mind which may justly hope to find expression in a theoretically less objectionable constitution than the present one.

Mr. Punnaiah's study is a lucid, scholarly and penetrating analysis of the new Indian constitution and deserves a place on the shelf of every careful student of the subject.

D. G. KARVE.

## OUR HILL TRIBES.

### PLEA FOR BETTER TREATMENT.

#### MR. VENKATA RAMAN'S VIEWS.

*Mr. S. R. Venkata Raman, member, Servants of India Society and Secretary, Harijan Sevak Sangh, Delhi, has contributed to the press an informative article dealing with the problem of hill tribes in India. He says:*

**T**HE problem of our Forest and Hill tribes, or Aborigines, or Primitives, numbering as many as 25 millions out of 350 millions, is not yet tackled in a serious manner either by the representatives of the nation or by the Government as a whole. In race and culture they are slightly different from those of the Aryan race and though assimilation of a few of these tribes with Hindu society has taken place in some parts of the country in the past, a wholesale identification, not to speak of complete assimilation, of these tribes with the nation as a whole has not yet been brought about. Neither the Congress with its Mass Contacts Committee nor the other political parties have yet touched the problem.

Nor even the leading philanthropic agencies of the country have devoted any thought to their welfare and uplift. No doubt Christian missionaries with their vast resources of men and money have been at work among these tribes since the middle of the last century, converting a large number of these tribes to the Christian faith, because they found that these tribes were completely unsophisticated and untouched by Hindu culture and civilization. It is the design of this article to examine the most numerous and important tribes in the various provinces of the country to find out what social and political work is possible among them, and what efforts on the part of the nation and the State are necessary to bring them up to the level of the average citizen.

In these days of motor bus and railways, very few parts of the country are now inaccessible. Nor are these tribes still so wild and fierce, or untouched by or removed from civilising influences as to make the approach to them difficult. Moreover, the occupation of their hills and forests by the Forest Depart-

ment for exploiting timber and other forest produce has driven large numbers of them from their secluded homes to the plains, where they are thrown willy-nilly into the vortex of a comparatively busy life, where they have to work harder for their maintenance. Thus large numbers of Bhils of Gujerat and Khandesh, Gonds of the C. P., Santals of North Bihar, Oraons and Mundas of the Chhota Nagpur plateau, and Khasis and Kacharis of the Brahmaputra Valley have come down and settled in plains as ordinary tillers of the soil. Though these are enumerated as aborigines or primitives for census purposes, they are not at all different in culture and civilization and outlook on life from the ordinary Hindu peasant population. Thus, strictly speaking, not more than one-half of the census enumerated aborigines or primitives—perhaps it may be even one-third—can be said to live in the hills. The Indian Census Commissioner, Dr. J. H. Hutton, himself believes that though it is possible to give the exact numbers of a particular tribe, it will not be as easy to state definitely how far that unit "still retained primitive character". He says:—

The Census Commissioner in 1921 roughly estimated the strength of the Hill and Forest tribes at 16 millions, but his estimate was based apparently on the figure of major tribes of which a number are recorded in section 87 (i. e. elsewhere.) It is, therefore, now possible to give accurate numbers of any identifiable tribal units, though it is less easy to indicate the extent to which such a unit remains primitive in its habits. (Italics mine.)

After making detailed calculations of the different tribes enumerated in all the provinces and States he comes to the conclusion that their total number is 24.6 millions including 2.8 millions in Burma. Thus, their total numbers in British India and the States are 18.5 and 3.5 millions respectively, or roughly speaking, about 22 millions.

These hill tribes have long been neglected for reasons which no longer hold good. They are nowadays easily approachable and receptive to new ideas, if properly handled. In view of the fact that these tribes still retain a sort of tribal organisation among themselves and are far below the general provincial average in the matter of literacy and education, they are sometimes called Backward Tribes. What is needed is an organization of the right kind with sufficient financial backing of the public at large and the State.

#### ASSAM.

Let us first take Assam, a small province of 92 lakhs of people. The Brahmaputra Valley with its population of 47 lakhs contains the most numerous of primitive tribes with a population of 17 lakhs. This part of North East India can be said to be a museum of hill tribes. The Assam Government has published through MacMillan & Company several monographs on the primitive tribes of Assam, which are well-known to anthropologists and ethnologists. Separate volumes have been written dealing with each of the sub-castes of Angami, Sema, Lhota and Ao belonging to the one genus the Naga tribe.

The tribes in Assam roughly fall into two groups: (1) The tribes who still live in the hills and are practically untouched by outside influences like Hinduism and (2) those who have come down to the plains and have become Hinduised to a certain extent. Many Miris, a tribe belonging to the latter category, have become disciples of Assamese Gossains, but a Miri is not regarded as a Hindu by a high caste Hindu, because he still keeps pigs and fowls. But as the Miris are fairly prosperous, the Assamese villagers are afraid of them, but this is only peculiar to Upper Assam. In Lower Assam the Kacharis can become Hindus in three stages, finally merging with the lowest strata of Hindu society in Assam called the Koches. The reason for this rigidity in Upper Assam and flexibility

in Lower Assam is assigned to the remoteness of Sibsagar, the old social capital of Assam from Lower Assam and its proximity to Upper Assam.

Let us now turn our attention to those tribes who are still residing in the hills. It is not true to say that these hill tribes are still closed to all outside influences. Traders and people of other Provinces have penetrated the hills. Of the two, the influence of the outsider, may he be an administrator or missionary, has been always "to the detriment of their pride in their customs and history". Illness, prostitution, venereal disease, tuberculosis, drink, and opium-eating have become rampant among these tribes. Here are a few extracts from a note on page II of Appendix A by Mr. J. P. Mills, I.C.S., in the Assam Census Report for 1931. Regarding opium-eating he says: "A few years ago a village founded by the American Baptist Mission, as a Christian village, contained more opium addicts than the whole of the rest of the tribe. The reason was the Mission had forbidden alcoholic liquor and their converts had taken to opium as a substitute." The Mikirs, another tribe of aboriginals in Assam, are badly addicted to opium-eating and it is a pity that in spite of the efforts of the Government of Assam to severely restrict the consumption of opium, the evil has not yet shown any signs of abatement. With regard to prostitution, the same author says:

The opening up of the cart road to Manipur has undoubtedly led to an increase in prostitution. Except to a limited extent among the eastern Angamis, prostitution in the sense of women selling themselves for money to all and sundry is not an indigenous Naga or Kuki custom. . . . Foreigners coming into the hills by the cart road often demand women and where there is a demand a supply is apt to be forthcoming. . . . Far more serious in this respect is the presence in Kohima of a large number of unmarried foreigners including the unmarried men of a battalion of Assam Rifles and of Naga subordinates living away from their villages. A population is growing up of persons with no tribe or customary law and religion and their settlement is a plague spot. Any girl who quarrels with her parents in a Naga village and can bolt to this sink of iniquity can find an old hag ready to take her in and start her without delay on a career which can end in disease and misery.

The Christian missionary in these hills comes in for severe criticism at the hands of the writer mentioned above. The education imparted to the Naga has given him a false sense of values; he despises manual labour. The Church has disregarded and uprooted the native customs and environments of the Nagas. He says with reference to the American Baptist Church:

As religion plays a part in every Naga ceremony and as that religion is not Christianity, every ceremony must go. Such ceremonies as the great Feasts of Merit, at which the whole village, rich and poor alike, is entertained, and of which the religious aspect is far less important than the social, have not been remodelled on Christian lines, but have been utterly abolished among converts. This has been the fate too of all village sacrificial feasts. . . . The suppression among Baptists of the ancient feasts in which all joined is not only a loss to the would-be hosts, but to the village as a whole, and not the least to the poor, who always get their full share of good cheer at animist festivals. To abolish these feasts is to do away with the very few occasions on which the awful monotony of a village life is broken. They are, too, the natural Naga and Kuki way of distributing wealth. "The suppression of the wearing of all ornaments, or tribal finery, of dancing, singing (except hymns,) of village feasts and of all artistic outlet is spreading an unspeakable drabness over village life. Old songs and old traditions are being rapidly forgotten. Told year in and year out, that all the past

history. all the strivings, all the old customs of this tribe are wholly evil, the Naga tends to despise his own race.

There are very few indigenous agencies working among the people in Assam for their moral and material welfare. The Brahma Mission has been catering to the religious and educational needs of the Khasis. Early in 1936, the Harijan Sevak Sangh started a welfare centre for the Kacharis in Kamrup District. An Ashram with a hostel for boys studying in the middle schools was started at Barama. Besides, the centre is running a number of primary schools for the children of Kacharis and rendering medical aid in two centres. These two agencies are a drop in the ocean, and especially in Assam which is virgin forest for the planter, exploiter and social worker and the philanthropist alike there is scope, ample scope for many such agencies.

#### BIHAR AND ORISSA.

The old province of Bihar and Orissa, according to the 1931 Census, had a population of 4.23 lakhs of people. Of these, the primitive and aboriginal tribes numbering 24 in all had a population of 67 lakhs, the largest number of aboriginals found in any single province of India. The Santals, the most important of the aboriginal tribes, came first with 17 lakhs of people, second Oraons with 6 lakhs, third the Mundas with 5½ lakhs, and the Hos with 5 lakhs. All these important major aboriginal tribes are to be found in one compact area on the Chhota Nagpur plateau.

One part of this plateau is called Santal Parganas by reason of the large number of Santals resident therein. The ordinary economic pressure has forced the Santals to emigrate to a distant province like Assam, in search of employment, not to speak of their emigration in large numbers to such important industrial centres like Jamshedpur in the province itself. They are efficient workmen and they have, it is said, successfully replaced the foreign imported costly experts in the Tata Iron and Steel Works.

In the matter of literacy, the Oraons maintain the same proportion of literacy both among the Hinduised Oraons and those adherents of the tribal religion as among the general masses. But the Santals as a whole have not yet readily taken to education as the other aboriginal tribes of the province. These primitive tribes have not been free from the exploitation of the various proselytising religions of the land like Islam and Christianity. No doubt a sort of gradual absorption of aboriginals in the Hindu fold has been taking place for some time past, not as a result of coercion or desire to profit materially, but as a result of the constant intercourse with the Hindu society at large; but it cannot be said that the aboriginal is totally Hinduised. He may adopt certain Hindu customs and yet adhere to his own tribal beliefs and usages. The Hindu Mission of Bengal has been working among them for some years now, but even its work has not touched the entire aboriginal population for obvious reasons.

Christian missions have been working among these people for a much longer time than any other religious organisation. This is borne out by the fact that out of a total Indian Christian population of 4 lakhs in the Province, 96 per cent. are to be found in the Chhota Nagpur plateau alone. Ranchi district alone, the stronghold of the Christian missions, contains 2½ lakhs or 65 per cent. of the Indian Christian population.

#### BOMBAY.

The total population of the 24 main aboriginal tribes in the Bombay Presidency was 28 lakhs according to the 1931 Census. The most important of these,

the Bhils and their sub-sects, number over 5 lakhs in the Bombay Presidency proper; in the Baroda State there is a population of 54,000. They occupy the western parts of the Presidency; the largest number of them is found in Khandesh and the Panchmahals districts. Besides, they are scattered over the wild forest regions in Central India, Rajputana, in Marwar and the Southern States and in South Sind. The Bhils of Gujerat claim descent from Rishi Valmiki, the composer of Shri Ramayana and as such claim to be Hindus. Shabari, from whose hands Shri Rama ate berries, was a Bhil woman. The Bhils are thus an ancient race, though we know them today as only forest dwellers. The Hindu epics Ramayan and Mahabharat are replete with references to this tribe and we read of the wonderful communal organisation that prevailed among them. Later on, in Moghul times, the Bhil Chiefs were granted a number of villages by Akbar as service grants for keeping watch over the Ghat roads through the Satpura hills against the attack of robbers.

There are among Bhils as many as 74 clans. Child marriage is very rare among them and members of the different clans intermarry with each other with a few exceptions. The Bhils are a nomadic people and are averse to occupations of a strenuous nature. Their chief occupation is agriculture of a sort. They supplement their income by selling forest produce, such as sealing gum, honey, grass, etc. They earn their living by carting, rope-making, quarrying stones and as carpenters. They suffer from many social and economic disabilities, and spending money on liquor at the time of death or marriage and on festive occasions is very common among them. They are thus forced to borrow money at usurious rates of interest ranging from 25 per cent. to 100 per cent. Of late there has been a tremendous increase in the amount of 'dej', i. e., bride's price which the fathers of the girls demand from the bridegrooms.

In the matter of literacy they are very backward. Steeped in ignorance and poverty, unconscionable of their rights and privileges and responsibilities, it is no wonder that they do not readily take to education. The Bombay Census figures of literacy for 1931 show that the number of literate males among the Bhils was only 10 in every 1,000 males. But the Baroda figures for the same year show that the number of literates among the Bhils was 82 per 1,000. It is tragic and unfortunate that such a large mass of useful citizens should be allowed to grow in utter darkness and thereby act as a dead weight on the progress of the nation as a whole. The Bombay Government has not made any serious attempt to bring these Bhils to the level of the average citizen. Their attempts, if any, have been half-hearted and perfunctory. In this connection, it is worthwhile to refer to the work of the Bhil Seva Mandal, a non-official organisation which has been working for the uplift of the Bhils for the last 15 years under the inspiring and capable guidance of Mr. A. V. Thakkar. The Mandal is running a number of schools and hostels for the Bhil children, boys and girls. Besides, the Medical Department of the Mandal is attending to the physical ailments of the Bhils at its dispensaries. Every effort is made to persuade the Bhils to give up drink and to be thrifty. Religious preachings and social uplift programmes have formed an important part of the Mandal's activity.

Another institution, that deserves mention, is the Committee appointed by the Gujerat Provincial Congress Committee to work among the Rani Parajs or Kali Parajs for their educational and religious uplift.

( To be continued. )