

Bombay Home Rule Series No. 4.

Indentured

Indian Labour.

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*For Favour of Review.*

*Report of the Mass Meeting*

HELD ON

*Sunday the 11th February, 1917.*

*Under the presidentship of*

**Mahatma Gandhi**

—:O:—

*Price Annas Two only.*

# Home Rule League for India.

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## OBJECTS.

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1. To secure Home Rule for India through all law-abiding and constitutional activity.
2. To maintain the connection with Great Britain, by becoming a Free Nation within the British Empire, under the Imperial Crown of His Majesty the King-Emperor George V and his successors.
3. To support and strengthen the National Congress, which has laboured for thirty years to lay the foundations of Indian Self-Government.
4. To carry on a continuous educative propaganda on the necessity of Home Rule for India.

## MEMBERSHIP.

Membership is open to all men and women over 18 years of age, who accept the above objects.

School students are not admitted to Membership, but undergraduates may become Associates for purposes of study, etc.

On ceasing to be undergraduates, Associates may, without further fee, become full Members.

## Subscription of the Bombay Branch.

Every Member Associate shall pay Re. 1 as admission fee to the League. The amount of annual subscription, payable to the Branch by the Members is as follows:—

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} **Umar Sobani,**  
**Shankerlal G. Bankar,**  
*Jt. Hon. Secretaries, Bombay Branch.*

# REPORT

OF THE

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE MASS MEETING

HELD TO PROTEST AGAINST

### Indentured Indian Labour.

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*On Sunday the 11th February, 1917.*

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A mass meeting of the citizens of Bombay was held in the open space behind Shantaram's Chawls, Mugbhat, to consider the question of Indentured Labour. Resolutions condemning the system and praying for a speedy termination of the same were passed at the meeting; and these resolutions are now to be forwarded to H. E. the Viceroy. The meeting had been called by the two Home Rule Leagues in Bombay and was presided over by Mr. M. K. Gandhi. More than ten thousand people attended the meeting and the whole proceedings were conducted in excellent order amid great enthusiasm. The meeting gave unmistakable expression to the deep public feeling about the matter and showed that there was a determination on the part of the people to exert themselves to put an end to this cruel system.

In making his speech **Mr. Gandhi** said:—

I doubt if my speech will be heard in this huge crowd. It is well that the speeches today are to be delivered in the vernaculars more than all other matters, we must, first of

all, respect our mother tongue. Our unprotected and uneducated brothers and sisters are taken away from this country to the Fiji Islands and there they have to go through many troubles. They come to this state because of their being uneducated. They have to suffer because of their ignorance. This system of sending them to the colonies under indenture must hereafter be stopped. And the date for ending it has been fixed by us to be the 31st May. After that day not a single labourer must go abroad. You must have the strength to carry this out. Do not think that by merely clapping here, our work will be done. When you go home, consider how this system can be stopped and take to action. I request Mr. B. G. Tilak to propose the first resolution.

#### RESOLUTION I.

That this meeting is of opinion that the system under which British Indians are sent to distant Colonies under indenture is cruel, bears the taint of slavery, is immoral, its evil effect is not confined merely to the indentured labourers but it permeates India herself, that it has been productive of no good whatsoever to India. This meeting, therefore, respectfully trust that the Government of India will unconditionally and without delay abolish it on or before the 31st May next, the date before which the Conference alluded to by H. E. the Viceroy will have met.

- (a) This meeting hopes that in order that Indian interest may be properly safeguarded at the said Conference, representatives selected by the public bodies of India will be appointed thereat.
- (b) This meeting hopes that any recommendations made by the said Conference will be placed before the Indian public, and that the Government of India will be pleased not to act thereof until such

public bodies have expressed their opinion upon these recommendations.

- (c) This meeting hopes that in the event of any indentured labourers being sent to the Colonies in question, during the intervening period before 31st May, they will be bonafide families, and that single men and women will not be sent; also that the terms under which such labourers may be allowed to proceed to their destination shall be fully explained to them in their own mother-tongues.

In moving this resolution **Mr. Tilak** said:—

I realise that in a vast assembly like this my voice will not be heard, yet, if you all keep quiet I hope, you will be able perhaps to follow me.

You know what the subject is. Last week there was a big meeting and its subject was the same. At that time the speeches of the speakers were in English. It is not that we are to say something more than what they did. But the reason why this meeting should be held is that thousands should know about this thing. We know that here there are people who know English. But there are also people who, because of their not knowing English, are not satisfied with the meeting of the last week. That they might also understand the object of this meeting, that is why this meeting is held. One or two such meetings will not do. There must be several such meetings. There might be more than a lac of labourers and workmen working in mills at other places, they must be persuaded to hold meetings. There might be in this city thousands of merchants, clerks, etc., they too must hold meetings. Such meetings will on the other hand help government. All must form an unanimous

opinion and must astonish the Government. It is necessary to hold many such meetings to compel Government to do what it cannot. We have gathered here to pray for the speedy termination of the system of indentured labour, a system which the Viceroy himself does not like and to which he is opposed. H. E. The Viceroy says in his speech "I cannot do it with a stroke of the pen." Is it a good thing that they take away men and women from here by offering temptations, by deceiving them in all sorts of ways and if cruelties are inflicted on them, if they are most horribly treated, even then they must bear it quietly, they cannot return even if the period is over, then too they must stay there, such are their laws. There is not a single representative of the British Government there who can speak out for India. Therefore whatever the troubles to be endured, whatever the cruelties, whatever might happen, there will be no remedy there. There the honour of our women is violated (Shame; Shame!) whether one is black or white, rich or poor, the honour of the women is the same to all. That holy responsibility is for all. What must be the relations between labourers and their employers, what are the powers of the master, there is no law for it there. One may go anywhere for the sake of livelihood. But the way in which our men and women of the labour class are taken to the Fiji Islands, and the laws that are framed for them, are things which are nowhere else possible. There is no hope that the labourer will return after the fixed period. It is said that there is no slavery under British Rule, but there is no harm in saying that this is legally established slavery. (Shame, Shame!) The employer can ask the labourer to do any amount of work, and they can pay only the fixed wages, they can keep them without food, and they can beat them. All this happens in the Fiji Islands. One woman to 10 men, such is the state of affairs there—What a horrible

thing! Considered from the industrial standpoint, or the moral for the maker of that,\* from any standpoint, who will not find this system worthy of condemnation? But this state of affairs is well known to the Government of India. It is not that they do not know. They also desire that the system be stopped soon. Then who brings obstruction in the way? There is power in their hands, there is authority, there is everything, then why don't they end it? We are informed that obstructions are put in the way by those who have become rich by this system, and whose wealth has increased thereby. They are trying to have this system continued for another five years. You are all of opinion that this system must be ended. The Government of India is of the same opinion, but some other people are coming in the way. Serious efforts are being made to have this immoral system to be continued for another five years! (shame shame!). What is the use of crying "shame, shame!" Shame to you and not to the Government, because you are not doing your duty. You don't feel ashamed, you are quiet, that's why the government is also quiet. If you had spirit in you, the government would have heard you. What work have you done that the government should listen to you? There is the desire of the government of India, but where is your pressure, where are your efforts like those of the colonies? What is the use of blaming the government unnecessarily? The mind of the Government is divided on the one hand, the fear of the colonies is coming in the way.

You must bring more pressure to bear upon the government and more the colonies by more vigorous efforts.

Today's resolution has been passed by the committee and is now put before you. If you ask the opinion of anybody in this country whether of the labour class or of

the leaders, it would be against this system. Leave aside the question of continuing this system for five years, but it must be stopped before the 31st of May. The Government says that it has to consider many things, but we say this that first of all, stop this system, and then consider. If you like consider for six months, or from year to year, but first of all stop this system. Then do later on what is necessary. If you understand that this system is censurable, wicked, what keeps you from stopping it? After stopping the system, if you like you might hold courts, arrange for commissions, or do what you like; only this must end before the 31st May. Then you can hold a commission. We see that when there is any disturbance, the Government first stops it, and then inquires into it. Then how would it do to shut your eyes and close your ears to this disturbance spread all over India? Why not stop it and see? Then later on there will be inquiries, then there are our local governments, our Provincial Governments, who will take up that work. This is within the powers of the Government. It must only take it into its mind. If once it enters into the head of the Government, that a particular thing is to be done, it does not bother about considering, but it does it at once. My first request to you is that you will pass this resolution, and second that you will not sit idle after asking the government to do this, but you will do what is in your hands. At every place there must be formed societies and they must take up this question, they must prepare our men. When any agent is trying to turn the mind of some labourer, these men must be on their guard, and stop him. If the government is not ready to stop him, we must be. Many different associations must be formed, and they must keep an eye on the agents. There were many associations formerly to look after the interests of the poor people of the labourers, but what is



the use? If they do not come forward to help such a cause, how are they useful? Must you sit quiet when your mothers and sisters are being wronged! Why do you show that you are weak? It is not that there will not be found a hundred or two of volunteers for this work.

The colonies are using all their influence for this work, their efforts are powerful, this hinders our Government. The Government does not want this system. That is why we must help the Government. If any one were to say that he will help the Government to success within two months, the Government will not be against him. We must remove this obstruction from the way of the Government. We must see what we can do by requests, but if they fail, we must ourselves take the work of stopping it. It will have to be stopped because of your efforts. It is only from Oudh, Madras, etc., that many labourers are taken by false temptations. The work of stopping them from being induced away must be taken up by young men, and by the Social Service League. If eight thousand labourers come to Bombay, it is not that they will not find work here. People in the districts, how do they know that there are no facilities for work out here? They must be thrown where these facilities are. Every body must plainly say that first of all stop this system and then consider. Still there are two to three months, then form bands and go about in cities like Ajodhya, Madras following the Agents—you must shadow them just the same way that you are shadowed by C. I. D. and whatever information you can collect you must send it to the chief office. To tell the Government our views plainly, and to be ready ourselves—these two things must be done.

You know the story of the lark and its young ones. You must not be content with speaking out, but you must take to work. You must form societies and prove a match

to the Agents in the manner I have described, and then Government is bound to take your side. If you want a proof, we have it in our President to day. You know well what sufferings he had undergone in South Africa, and how he got himself heard. If such societies are formed, our President will not fail to be their leader. I tell you plainly, take to work. If the young men were to give two years of their lives to this work, good result is likely to come. If they determine, success is sure to follow. It will not make their education suffer by two years, harm will never be done by giving two years to this holy work. What does it matter if they lose two years of education when our mothers, and our sisters, are dishonoured, wronged? Would it not be possible to educate yourselves later on? We must remove all difficulties lying in the way of the Government. It is not only necessary for the young men to strive for the honour of the country. This work is of greater importance than success in ten examinations. This sort of power must arise everywhere. This is such an occasion.

The Maharaja of Bikaner, Sir S. P. Sinha and Sir. J. Meston are going to sit in the Conference. Sir James Meston is to go. You know that he is not ours. What is the work of barristers? To speak on behalf of those who pay. To applaud those who feed. Who is ours in that Conference? This is the situation.

After this Mr. Tilak read the Resolution.

In seconding the resolution in a brief speech, **Mr. Polak** said that it had a fourfold significance. In the first place, they were asked to vote for the total and unconditional abolition of the system of indenture, a system that imposed the crushing burden of slavery upon their brothers and sisters; a system that destroyed the manhood of the men, that defiled the honour of the women, and that

doomed the children to a life of squalor and vice, in which they would be ashamed of their mothers and only too often be ignorant of their fathers; a system that was infecting the life of the people with moral disease just as a filthy sewer infected them with the germs of physical disease. And they were demanding that abolition of this diabolical system should be effected by the 31st May next, when the Conference was to hold its sessions in London. But they were also voting with a determination that it should be ended for ever, whether that Conference had reported or not, and no matter what was the nature of its report.

In the second part of this resolution, they were demanding that an effective voice should be given to Indian popular opinion on the subject, so that the Indian representatives would be able to say across the table to the representatives of the Crown Colonies that they were decided and determined, once for all, that the system of indenture must be finally brought to an end and this last remnant of slavery removed. They would also tell those other representatives that just as the latter would not think of submitting their mothers and wives and sisters to the pollution of the indenture system so the people of India were determined not to permit this any longer.

Thirdly, they gave notice that they expected to see the report of the Conference, whatever it might be, before any action was taken upon it. They had to safeguard themselves against the substitution of any scheme, that would be as bad as indenture, under another name, such as would make possible such conditions as permitted, in Ceylon, the shooting of a "free" coolie woman by an Afghan over-seer, because she had not gone to work, and his conviction, not of murder, but of a "rash act", for which he was fined a paltry Rs. 100.

And fourthly, they had to see that, in the intermediate period, between now and the 31st May, only families were recruited, and not single women, to be prostituted, or single men, to prostitute them.

They had a fivefold duty to perform. They had first a duty to those who were already the victims of this abominable system, so that they might feel themselves at last free men and women, and so that their children might be able to shake off the taint of the unutterable past. Secondly, they had a duty to those of their country men and women, who might otherwise fall victims of the system that they were condemning. Thirdly, they had a duty towards their country, which it was their business to redeem from shame and dishonour, and whose status they had to raise. Fourthly, they had a duty towards the Government, whose hands they had to strengthen, for the contest against the Colonial representatives next May, and so that the Government might act as energetic spokesmen voicing the intensity of Indian feeling against the retention of this system. And lastly, they had a duty towards themselves, for if they failed in the task appointed for them, if the system was not, in fact, abolished by the 31st May next, the blame, the shame, would be theirs, and on their heads the curse of the victims would fall, whilst they would have to answer to their own consciences, and the judgment of God would fall heavy upon them, if they failed in their duty and betrayed the trust imposed upon them.

**Mr. Syud Hossain**, in supporting the resolution said :-

From one point of view, one could not help marvelling that these protest meetings should have been called for in regard to an abuse so gross and so universally condemned. The Government themselves had admitted the evil: What then was the point of all this agitation? The point was that

it is necessary to bring home to the authorities that this was emphatically not a matter in respect of which the admission of the principle could be divorced from an immediate and logical application of the same. Why should there be any difficulty about it ?

The Home Government no less than the Government of India had committed themselves to the view that the nefarious and devilish devices which have so long found protection under the name of indenture should cease. Why then is it not terminated ? Because, for sooth the "vested inerests" that have been battenning on the degradation of Indian men and the prostitution of Indian women are likely to squeal. Whatever may be the duty of others in this matter, the duty at least of His Excellency the Viceroy is clear; he is here as the representative of the King-Emperor, and his position is that of the supreme custodian of India's interests. If the Government of India, as is so generally claimed, exists for the benefit of the people of India, then their main concern should be to safeguard the honour of India on so clear and important a question.

There are people, said Mr. Hossain, who ask for time, who talk of time, regarding the continuation of an abomination which ought never to have begun (cheers). Is it conceivable, asked the speaker, that the Government of any other part of the British Empire, say of Canada or Australia, would tolerate for a moment, or for that matter permit in the first instance such degradation of any section of the people for whom, and to whom, it was responsible. Why then should the Government of India be less sensitive and less solicitous on behalf of the people of India ?

The Government of India was not in being for the protection of the financial or other interests of those for whom it was sought to prolong the system of indenture.

They had many and various powerful patrons, and subsidised supporters, and did not need any commiseration at the hands of our Government. They should certainly be shown not one atom of consideration. In this matter the people of India had the right of first claim upon the attention and intervention of the Government of India; the more so as the instant ending of the hateful system could be achieved by them, by statue, completely and finally without reference to any one. The matter was essentially one for India to decide, and the Government of India were called upon to decide it in the interest of India, and in pursuance of the principle which they had themselves admitted. The continuation of the humiliation of Indians, in respects so grave and grievous, would not redound to the credit of the Government.

In conclusion Mr. Syud Hossain said the resolution was not one that called for any support. It was sufficiently clear and convincing. None the less, such protest meetings were necessary, as this was pre-eminently a matter in regard to which the Government should be left in no doubt as to the force, intensity and unanimity of public feeling. It was the clearest duty of every one who had access to, or influence with, the Government to let the authorities know, that every section of the Indian community was passionately opposed to any continuation of the execrated system of indenture. If those, who called themselves leaders of the people failed to do their duty in this matter, both by the Government and even more by the people, they would never be forgiven. The Government must realize the situation.

In further supporting the Resolution **Mr. Jamnadas Dwarkadas** said :—

PRESIDENT, SISTERS & BROTHERS,

I rise to support (in Gujarati) the Resolution that has been moved by Lokmanya Tilak (in Marathi) and Seconded

and Supported by Mr. Polak and Mr. Hossain ( in English ) respectively. The resolution has been read out to you and you must have realised before this all that it implies. You are aware that the labourers of our country are taken away to Fiji under false temptations and you well know what our brothers and sisters, particularly the latter, have to suffer there. I do not want to excite your sensitive feelings often by speaking more on this point. Would it not be enough to tell you that in those islands one woman is given over to about ten men ?

What horrible situation must result from this I leave it to you to imagine, but I want to speak a little about your responsibilities, your duty, even though much has already been said about it. If you will allow this system to continue ( I say ) you will have failed in your duty. Have you really grown so callous that when the honour of your sisters, when their purity as women is forcibly violated and when it is in your hands to put an end to this situation, you will not do anything ? If your efforts can put an end to this situation, you will not do anything ? If your efforts can put an end to this situation, will you let it continue (No ! No ! ). I tell you that it rests with you and me to abolish or continue this system. The Government is anxious to abolish it, but as Lokmanya Tilak has said it, the Government is in need of your assistance. How are you going to satisfy that need ? There is to be held a conference before the 31st May to consider this matter, and we have asked in this resolution for the right of sending representatives at it. These representatives must be asked to demand openly in co-operation with the Government of India at this Conference that we cannot continue this system of indentured labour even for a day, and that we will stop it at once. But it has also been said in this resolution, that the Government

should not accept the decision arrived at ( after discussion ) by this Conference whatever might be the value of it, but must place it before the people, and I confidently assert that if it is in the slightest degree opposed to our demands, we will not accept it. If the decision of the Conference be against us, and if, God forbid, Government cannot help us, what will you do ? I tell you that if your determination be firm, you will be able to stop the system. And how shall you do it ? Will you, when the necessity arises, take to action so heartily as you now applaud the speakers ? If India stands at a high level today, when other ancient Empires, have been shattered to pieces, it is because of her ' Dharma. ' If you, in this matter, do not act upto your Dharma, you will drag India to a lower stage. If you have feelings for India, if you are true sons of your motherland, take vow that you will be ready to give all (the assistance that) might be needed to abolish this system. (Ready, Ready.) It is not a very difficult task. In South Africa our own countrymen had suffered to serve our sisters and brothers. You also, be ready to do the same. Whatever you might have to suffer, whatever you might have to sacrifice, for the sake of your motherland, for the sake of your mothers, and sisters, for the preservation of our ' Dharma, ' be ready to take to action. Then only you will be deemed fit to call yourselves the true sons of India. With these words I beg to support the Resolution.

In putting the Resolution before the meeting **Mr. Gandhi** said:—

You will express your opinion on this resolution only after realising the responsibility of working for the question of this resolution. It is said in our shastras, that you must not undertake to do anything, and if you do, you must



carry it through. You will support this resolution only if you are ready—even to die if necessary for this work.

The resolution was passed unanimously.

## RESOLUTION II.

That this Meeting advises and requests the Bombay Imperial Citizenship Association, the Allahabad and Madras Anti-Indentured Leagues, the Madras Indian Colonial Society, and such other special bodies, to take before the 31st May such steps as are necessary to educate public opinion on this question, to strengthen the hands of the Government, and to keep it on the alert.

In moving this Resolution **Mr. P. K. Telang** said:—

“With regard to the principal question, which is before this gathering, a great deal of discussion has taken place upto now and even to day there has been considerable discussion and explanation. But the time has now come when we have to perform actions in accordance with the discussion. Mr. Tilak and Mr. Gandhi have already told us that we shall have to perform actions of very serious import. There does not seem to be any reason to entertain any doubt about this. Appearances on the whole seem to be of that nature. But that time has not yet quite arrived. Till the 31st May at least there is an interval. But even during that interval we must not sit idle. The action which seems suitable at present, we must keep on doing. We have held meetings here; there will be meetings at other places also; memorials will be sent; discussion will go on in newspapers and protest will be expressed. But institutions have been established for carrying on this very work in other ways. They have been named in the resolution and the purpose of the resolution is that these institutions should be recommended—nay ordered—to remain about with regard

to their task up till the 31st May. The object of these institutions is to give information to the people regarding the principal question before this meeting, to organise public opinion on the basis of that information and to place such public opinion before the government in a clean form. These institutions have the capacity, from the point of view both of means and men to carry out this work in an authoritative manner. But we have always seen that institutions of this nature, after working for some time, for some reason or other, cease from work or take to some quite different work or at least begin to show neglect of their duties. There are many causes that lead to such a condition ; but this is not time to consider these. Keeping in mind the fact that such a condition does arise, this resolution has been placed before you. This is an urgent request to these institutions from this meeting to keep alive public feeling in this question to place the real character of public feeling before the Government. And I feel sanguine that these institutions will achieve work in accordance with it.

In seconding the resolution (**Pundit Neki Ramji Sharma**) said :—

This most holy land of India, where it is a great sin for women even to be touched by the shadow of a man other than the one to whom they are bound by the tie of marriage arranged by their fathers or other authorised persons in the presence of the Sacred Fire; whose women burned themselves in thousands to ashes in the fire of the funeral pyres in Chitoor, the crown of Bharat for the preservation of their chastity; where a Kshatriya lady fought heroically on days of festival and preserved her womanly honour against a Mahomedan bearing foul intent; alas! how woefully shameful is the treatment which is today meted out in the colonies to the women of this very sacred India.

This evil system is evil not to any particular caste only but in its operation humanity itself is murdered and human duty itself has its throat cut with a knife.

Gentlemen, once the wicked attempt was made to remove by force the clothes from a body of a woman and on that occasion because of the realisation of the dignity of human beings the blood of armies numbering of eighteen Akshouhinis was made to flow in this Indian land. But today before the very eyes of thirty crores, horrible treatment is being inflicted upon our sisters and mothers. So long as this cooly system is not established or so long as we on our own part do not devise suitable measures this horrifying treatment will not be stopped.

The late popular Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, had created in us the assurance that this dishonourable system would soon be abolished; but we have heard with pain that there is to be a continuation of it for a period of five years. Dear countrymen, if this happens that will be a great injustice. This is not the time to sit silent. This evil system must be abolished before the 31st of May. Let the British Government do whatever it wishes to do in its own way, but do not you sit waiting in expectation of its (of the system) abolition by its (the Government's) laws. If you have grown up by playing about on this soil of Bharata, if you are proud of being the children of the Rishis and if you have the smallest drop of the blood of your ancestors in your bodies, then take some form of action. Mere crowded meetings or mere articles in the newspapers will not do the work. Those who, fall into the temptations, held forth by the low-born agents of the cooly depots, become the victims of these horrors. Do not read the Kesari, the Sandesh or the Bombay Chronicle. Just now Lokmanya Tilak has told us that many persons go from Madras and

Oudh. It is necessary for us that we should visit these poor people who do not get enough food from morning till evening, in their tumbled-down houses and dilapidated huts, and explain to them in the most loving manner what evil dealings are carried out in the colonies with Indians. When the real condition is understood, no one will go there and then these agents, engaged in selfish pursuits, will cease their activities in disgrace and helplessness.

Rise, oh true sons of heroic India ; realising your duty, rise for the preservation of your greatness. Make the British Government and Indian Government think that we are much grieved with this disastrous cooly system, this unjust slavery. All over India in every place there must be an agitation against it. Thirty-three crores must raise one united loud cry and such efforts must be made at the sacrifice of body, mind and wealth that this evil system would be destroyed. I heartily support the resolution moved by Mr. P. K. Telang and hope that there will be work done in accordance with it.

In supporting the Resolution **Mr. S. Kaujalge** said :—

This Resolution which seeks to do away once for all with the pernicious regulations regarding the system of indentured labour—a system that makes our kith and kin labour under a state of semi-servitude, a system that has brought down upon our holy nation the disgrace and shame of being termed as “a nation of coolies,” a system that provides for the satiation of the atanic greed of the colonials and has been a standing stigma on British justice, is one that can be passed but not carried out by merely crying out “shame shame.” Introspect your hearts and ascertain how far your feelings are intense. If they do not burn your hearts, all words are nothing but mere waste of breath. I am sure you have not become so spirit-

less, and hence I am exhorting you. How can you hope, by merely passing resolutions to stop the violation of the chastity of our mothers and sisters of our beloved nation—the nation in which to save a single woman from shame, millions of lives were lost and a powerful king like Ravana had to lose his vast kingdom and life? You can do it only by actively helping the institutions that have been or will be started for working in this direction.

Our worthy Viceroy Lord Chelmsford asks you to wait and be patient lest some worse sort of thing may come about if the annual supply to the colonies of 8000 coolies is abruptly stopped. In his opinion a thorough moderate like Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya is “impatient”. Why? Because he proposes a bill for the abolition of this system in the Council. They ask us to wait, to wait for months that we might lose sight of this question and they on their part make it a settled fact.

Gentlemen, can we not find food for 8000 of our brethren in our own country where we actually feed five million beggars? Let us frankly say to the Government that we are ready to take care of our country-men and that they need not be sent abroad. Our people are to make manure of their blood and raise rich crops and the whites are to reap its fruit; they are to lie in their cots and roll in luxury. How long are you going to tolerate this state of things?

On the one hand the Government are unable to dissatisfy the colonials, on the other hand the colonials themselves are trying to bring all weight of their influence to bear upon this question. If, we for ourselves are incapable of bringing in greater weight, let us at least make a big request to the Government. The angle of vision has changed. We have

assurances from high authorities to that effect. In view of the fact that our soldiers are shedding their blood in distant lands side by side with other subjects of His Majesty, no such distinction as "white and black" exists; and hence the Government need not care for the displeasure of the white-skinned. Let us tell the Government "stop this system and we will supply you with as many men as you require for the War." The only thing is we must have the courage to say so boldly. However, you must bear in mind the Government will care not for your words but for your acts. Nothing will be got unless and until you act-up to your words. If you fail in this, if you fail to put all your energies and efforts in this direction, the question will not only be delayed for months but perhaps shelved for years together. Look to this *Mahatma* (great souled) Gandhi. He has sacrificed his all for this cause. Consider his lean and care-worn figure. For his sake, for the sake of the cause he fought for, for the sake of your suffering mothers and sisters, gird up your loins and begin to work. Shadow the recruiters that are sent by the colonials to seduce your countrymen to distant lands to work under a system worse in some respects than slavery. Exhort them not to fall a prey to the allurements of these emissaries of satan. If hunger and starvation force your people to sell themselves into slavery, give them food. Raise funds that you may be able to give. Why need we three hundred million wait till 31st May to save 8000 from submitting to slavery? If there be no patriotism in you, if at the thought of this abhorant system you do not shudder, if its excesses fail to stir up your blood to boiling heat, then, I say, you are hardly men. To put it in the eloquent words of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, men of India, "let the raging fire that has been kindled in your hearts be the funeral pyre of this indentured system."

In further Supporting the resolution **Kumari Goudavaribai** said :—

It is my sacred duty to obey the command of our President to say a few words on the subject under discussion. The revered president, Lok. Tilak and other worthy gentlemen have explained to you adequately the purpose for which we have assembled here today and their work which we must hereafter do. It is not necessary for me now to explain that any more since I cannot say anything more than they have done. But, brothers and sisters, our brothers who go to the island of Fiji are turned into slaves and thrown into a sea of miseries. We have gathered here today to lift them out of that slavery and that sea of pain. Therefore it is the sacred duty of every person present here, be he great or small, to express his feelings of pain caused by the miserable condition of our brothers who have gone to other countries and his feelings of shame caused by their dishonour. This treatment which is given to our brothers who have gone to Fiji, is such, as to bring discredit upon the whole human race. This fact even those who behave in this way, themselves realise. But the overpowered by selfishness they do not care for it. Thousands of our brothers and sisters go there under the temptation of wealth and as soon as they take their places in the ships, they are deceitfully deprived of their religion, their comfort and their moral ways of life. But the most painful and disgraceful fact of all is that there the chastity of women is broken. This thing must bring the deepest shame upon this Aryan land where for the preservation of the chastity of but one Padmini thousands of heroes shed their blood, hundreds of Padmini's sisters from this very Bharat have their chastities spoiled in a foreign country. Our brothers do not pay as much attention to this dreadful systems as it is necessary to give.

The women of India too, the sisters of those Indian women who are bearing the shameful treatment accorded to India in the island of Fiji, must protest against this insufferable dishonour in a public fashion and in strong language.

Meetings of women must be called and our grief and indignation must be expressed. Then alone will the Government of India realise that those who raise their voices against this matter are not only five or ten educated people but that the whole of India and women also are immeasurably incensed with this law. If the women of India, who do not like to raise a cry to reach the ears of Government on ordinary matters, will make their cry of pain about this serious matter reach the ears of Government, it would certainly produce the desired effect on Government. Therefore this is my request to my educated sisters that they also will call together assemblies of women in this way and inform Government that the dishonour which is being done to Indian women in the island of Fiji has become unbearable to the women of India. If the men and women of India will in this way make an effort by the expenditure of all physical, mental and financial strength, then the object which we desire will certainly be achieved.

### RESOLUTION III.

That the chairman be and is authorised to send a copy of the Resolutions and proceedings of this meeting together with an English translation thereof to H. E. the Viceroy and Governor General of India.

In moving this resolution **Mr. G. Deshpande** said:—

This resolution, as it was first framed had the appearance of a formal resolution, but because of the important change that has been made therein, it is no longer so. The change is this that we will send to the Viceroy not only a copy of the Resolution, but we will send the translation of all the speeches—the whole proceedings. To speak in the military terms of the present times, this is a sort of an ultimatum from us to the Viceroy. It means that if this system of indentured labour is not ended by the 31st of May, we are going to act up to all that we said in the speeches and the Resolutions. You will therefore bear in mind that if there is great strength and force in this resolution, it is because of this that there is an equal responsibility



on us. Messrs. Gandhi and Tilak alone will not suffice. I say how long are Messers. Gandhi and Tilak to help us? Are you never going to give them rest? Will there not come out from us, such a bold man who can tell them:—"Gentlemen, hereafter we will take up your work. You will take rest and look on how we work and give us only your blessings."

In seconding the resolution. **Mr. N. B. Vibhakar** said :

In seconding this resolution I have to present two stand-points in only two minutes. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had only recently brought a resolution about this matter in the Viceregal Council, and in that connection Lord Chelmsford had remarked that in taking up this question so early the Pandit had shown impatience! Lord Chelmsford is surprised at the impatience of the Pandit. India is much more surprised at the ease and patience of Lord Chelmsford. That the Government of India does not shudder at the thought of this disgraceful condition is an evidence of the most surprising tolerance. At such a time to give lessons of patience instead of taking to speedy action shows an extraordinary spiritual courage.

Why is the Indian Government so considerate about the convenience of the colonies, why it is so anxious about the colonies? And at the same time why is there such indifference and apathy for the burnings of those millions of whose lives, honour, and prestige they are appointed to be the trustees.

We are told by way of consolation that we must bear this shameful slavery, this trafficking in our lives for only five years. But why? The reason is this that if you hurry, the colonies will be inconvenience that their trades and industries will be disorganised—that they will have to suffer losses of money. The only answer of the Indians to this shame faced plea is that Devil take the convenience and comforts of the colonies. Devil take their trades and industries and devil take their wealth—the wealth that depends upon this system of indenture that hurts our

manhood, that degrades our citizenship, that destroys our nationality. Is the business of a handful of colonial shopkeepers more precious, does it deserve greater protection and respect than the honour and prestige of India, than the brilliance and glory of the British Empire, than the liberty and civilisation of humanity?

If five years of life have to be given for the interests of the Empire, it would be the proud privilege of those who offer. But it is impossible to see with toleration the prestige of our motherland, crushed and down trodden, even for five seconds. The government of India has not to forget that this is not a question of the convenience of the colonies nor of their revenues, nor is it a question of controversial politics. This is a question of the unity of the Empire—of the freedom of India—of the Status of India in the nations of the world—of the immemorial morality of the civilised world. And therefore it would be a shame to the Empire as well as to India to bear this intolerable condition not for five years—but even for five seconds.

The resolution was then put before the meeting and passed unanimously.

In winding up the proceedings of the meeting **Mr. Gandhi** said :—

“I tell you again and again that do not forget the 31st of May. Today we have only made the beginning of the work. Do not forget our responsibilities of carrying out the work successfully or else to give our lives for it.

**Mr. G. B. Vaidya** after praising the sublime character and life of the President, proposed a vote of thanks to him on behalf of the meeting and offered him garland and flowers.

In seconding the proposal for a vote of thanks **Dr. Velkar** said that the appeal of **Mr. Tilak** will not have gone forth in vain if there would come forward from the City of Bombay at least 200 volunteers for the work suggested by **Mr. Gandhi** and **Lokamānya Tilak**.

(The Meeting then dispersed.)