

Begum Aizaz Rasul (United Provinces: Muslim): Sir, I come to give my whole-hearted support to the resolution moved by the Honourable Sardar Patel regarding the representation of the minority communities. Sir, I am sorry that I have to oppose the amendment moved by Mr. Ismail from Madras. The basis of his amendment is the retention of separate electorates. For my part I have from the beginning felt that in a secular state separate electorates have no place. Therefore the principal of joint electorates having once been accepted, the reservation of seats for minorities to me seems meaningless and useless. The candidate returned on the joint votes of the Hindus and Muslims in the very nature of things cannot represent the point of view of the Muslims only and therefore this reservation is entirely unsubstantial. To my mind reservation is a self-destructive weapon which separates the minorities from the majority for all time. It gives no chance to the minorities to win the good-will of the majority. It keeps up the spirit of separatism and communalism alive which should be done away once and for all. This reservation was for ten years only and to my mind these first ten years are the most crucial in the life of our country and every effort should be made to bring the communities together.

Sir, this is one ground on which I support the motion of the Honourable Sardar Patel. The second ground on which I support it is that there is still a feeling of separatism prevalent amongst the communities in India today. That must go. I feel that it is in the interests of the minorities to try to merge themselves into the majority community. It is not going to be harmful to the minorities I can assure them, because in the long run it will be in their interests to win the goodwill of the majority. To my mind it is very necessary that the Muslims living in this country should throw themselves entirely upon the good-will of the majority community, should give up separatist tendencies and throw their full weight in building up a truly secular state.

Sir, I will go into the history of the events of the last two years. It is a very sad history and no one can deny that the Muslims living in this country have been the greatest sufferers as a result of the events that have taken place. Not only have their lives and property been in danger and full of insecurity, but their very honour has been at stake and their loyalties have been questioned. This caused great sense of frustration and mental depression. We want to finish with the past and we want that a new page should be turned over in which all communities living in this country would feel happy and secure. There is some fear in the minds of the Muslims that by doing away with reservations they will not be returned to the legislature according to the members of their population. This fear to my mind is baseless because I feel that when we put the majority community on its honour, it will be up to it to retain its prestige and honour and return members of the minority community not only in numbers to which they are entitled on a population basis but perhaps in greater numbers. I do not visualise any political party in the future putting up candidates for election ignoring the Muslims. The Muslims comprise a large part of the population in this country. I do not think any political party can ever ignore them, much less the Indian National Congress which has stood for the protection of minorities. Sir, I feel that we Muslims should pave the way for not only the introduction but the strengthening of a secular democratic State in this country. The only way in which we can do it is by giving up reservations that are meant for us and by showing to the majority that we have entire confidence in them. Then only I feel that the majority will realise its responsibility.

Sir, I would like my Muslim friends to visualise this position : If reservation of seats for Muslims remains, it would be tantamount to an act of charity on the majority community. They will say : 'Let us give them so many seats.' We will get the seats, but there will not be much good-will on the part of the majority in giving that. The idea of separatism will remain—but if we agree to have no reservation, the honour and prestige of the community as well as of the party that will be contesting the elections will be on test and I do not think that any party can ignore or can afford to ignore the minorities, especially the Muslims. In that event I visualise the Hindus going about not only to the Muslims but to their own brethren asking them to vote for the Muslims and return the Muslim candidate set up in this or that constituency. Which would be better, I would like to know : this reservation of seats which keeps up a division between the two communities or to be returned by the majority of Hindu votes, not because a seat is reserved for us but because our Hindu brethren went about asking the Hindus to return Muslims? I therefore feel that it is in the interests of both the communities that this should happen and this is the only way in which good-will and friendship can be created between the two communities. Trust begets trust and when we place a sacred trust in the hands of the majority it is sure to realise its responsibility.

Sir, I come from the United Provinces where the Muslims are largest in numbers in any one province in India today. Having worked amongst the Muslim masses, men and women for ten years, I can claim to know something of the working of their minds. Muslims are backward educationally and economically, but as far as political consciousness is concerned they are very much alive today and have been so for sometime. I can say that the Muslims in the United Provinces understand the state of affairs very well. They have realised that the changed conditions demand a change in attitude on their part. Therefore I feel that I am not in any way betraying the confidence of my electorate when I say that this attitude that I am taking today is absolutely in their interests and I know that the majority of Muslims of the United Provinces are behind me in this matter.

Another point, Sir. There are some Hindus and some Muslims also who think and are exercised over the fact that some seats may be lost to them by the abolition of reservation for minorities. I am sorry that they should think on those lines. The advantages of this abolition of reservation far outweigh the disadvantages of the loss of a few seats. I do not myself visualise any loss of seats because, as I have said, the parties, out of concern for their honour and prestige, will put up more candidates than are warranted on the population basis in order to ensure that the right number is returned. Today everything is moulded by public opinion, and India with its declared objective of a secular democratic state cannot afford to have any complaints against it on these grounds. Therefore I feel that the minorities, especially the Muslims, do not stand to lose in any way. Our Hindu friends might think that they might lose a few seats on that ground. I feel that they are thinking on the wrong lines.

It is true that a much greater responsibility is now thrown upon the majority because now it is up to them to see that the Muslims and the other minorities are returned according to their quota, but the majority must bear this responsibility. I feel that this will work so much towards harmony and good-will between the communities that this risk should be taken. For those Muslims who think that this is going to be harmful to them, I say that it is not going to be harmful because it will create better relationship between the two communities. Even if a few seats are lost to the Muslims, I feel that sacrifice is worth while if we can gain the good-will of the majority in that way.

In spite of the great and able advocacy of Mr. Lari of the principle of proportional representation, I was not impressed by it. He quoted the example of other countries. Those countries are highly advanced, politically and educationally. They are much smaller in area and in numbers, and to compare India, with those countries is, to my mind, not a very feasible proposition. In India the principle of proportional representation and single transferable vote is understood by very few people. Even in the legislatures it cannot work properly because there are very few people who know how to work that out. Where there are lakhs and lakhs of voters, the principle of cumulative votes cannot work successfully because the electorate is so big and illiterate that it will be impossible to work that system out. The only solution to my mind is joint electorates without any reservation of seats. I feel that this is the only way in which we can get along together. We must once and for all give up all ideas of separatism and to my mind even this proposition of Mr. Lari keeps up that spirit alive. I feel, Sir, that there are so many evil forces at work in the world and in the world of Asia especially that these small things regarding reservations of seats will be very soon forgotten by us, because after all in the larger context of world affairs today, we have to see how India can retain its position of leadership in Asia as well as save itself from aggression and other subversive forces. We do not want our country to go the way China has done or the way Burma is threatened. Therefore we have to develop all our resources, material and moral, in order to make India a prosperous and strong country. Therefore, to my mind, these are matters which should be relegated to the background. We should now harness all our energies in order to make India prosperous and strong.