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Editorial

Dear Readers.

Today is the 110th Birth Anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. This event is one of the most important and the happiest events in the lives of 250 millions of dalits/Buddhists in India. This occasion is celebrated worldwide by the followers of Babasaheb Ambedkar. On this day in 1891 was born the man who changed the lives of millions of untouchables, who were oppressed and exploited under the yoke of Hindu caste system for centuries. Dr. Ambedkar's relentless struggle between 1916 till his death in 1956 has brought about this change. This day has already become one of the main festivals of the dalits.

We send the greetings to our readers on this happy and pleasant occasion. On this occasion we are pleased to bring out a special issue highlighting the multidisciplinary facets of the life of Dr. Ambedkar. Life and work of Dr. Ambedkar is a source of inspiration and forms the history of the liberation of millions of Dalits. A paper by Dr. Gail Omvedt which theorizes the work of Dr. Ambedkar as "Ambedkarism- the Theory of Dalit Liberation" is also included in this issue. This paper will establish that work of Dr. Ambedkar has entered the arena of an "ism".

Cheers

Raju Kamble

Editor Collective

(Ms.Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Dr.Raguthaman Opeh, Mr.Sashikanth Chandrasekharan)

‘Ambedkarism’ : The Theory of Dalit Liberation - I

-Dr. Gail Omvedt

(The article has been reproduced from the book, “Dalits and the Democratic Revolution” by Dr. Gail Omvedt)

‘Ambedkarism’ is today a living force in India, much as Marxism is: it defines the ideology of the Dalit movement and, to a large extent, an even broader anti-caste movement. Yet, just as ‘Marxism’ as a trend in the working class movement has to be distinguished from the actual theorizing of Karl Marx, so the urge to abolish the social and economic exploitation involved in caste and capitalism (which is the main significance of ‘Ambedkarism’ as a general movement ideology) must be distinguished from the complex grappling of an individual activist-theoretician with the interpretation of Indian reality.

Ambedkar's thought was not always consistent and it did not (and the same of course can be said for Marx) fully resolve the problems he grappled with. But some themes stand out:

First, *an uncompromising dedication to the needs of his people, the Dalits* (as he said once in response to a legislative council claim that he should think as 'part of a whole'- 'I am not a part of a whole; I am a part apart) which required the *total annihilation of the caste system and the Brahmanic superiority it embodied*:

Second *an almost equally strong dedication to the reality of India-- but an India whose historical--cultural interpretation he sought to wrest from the imposition of a 'Hindu' identity to understand it in its massive, popular reality*;

Third a conviction that the *eradication of caste required a repudiation of 'Hinduism' as a religion, and adoption of an alternative religion, which he found in Buddhism*, a choice which he saw as not only necessary for the masses of Dalits who followed him but for the masses in India generally;

Fourth, a broad *economic radicalism interpreted as 'socialism'* (state socialism' in some versions; 'democratic socialism' in others) mixed with and growing out of his democratic liberalism and liberal dedication to individual rights;

Fifth, a fierce *rationalism* which burned through his attacks on Hindu superstitions to interpret even the Buddhism he came to in rationalistic, 'liberation theology' forms;

And finally, a political orientation which linked a *firmly autonomous Dalit movement with a constantly attempted alliance of the socially and economically exploited (Dalits and Shudras, 'workers' and 'peasants' in class terms) projected as an alternative political front to the congress party he saw as the unique platform of 'Brahminism' and 'Capitalism'*.

However, Ambedkar, like Marx, did not spend the major part of his active life in research and writing, with political activism as a sideline; rather, the demands of leadership absorbed the major part of his time. The 1930s being a period of intense turmoil there was little space for writing. Though many of his crucial ideas were formed during the 1930s, almost all of his writings came in the 1940s and 1950s, when he was spending most of his time in Delhi, as Labour Minister and the general spokesman for the untouchables. During the 1930s he not only adopted but also sought to give a political embodiment to a general left ideology combined with the theme of caste annihilation. Yet the decade came to an end with the failure of a left alternative to the bourgeois- Brahmin Congress, and the 1940s were very different, an era of Congress hegemony was firmly established in the national movement at the same time as the traumatic transition to independence in a period of global upheavals overshadowed everything else. The particular characteristics of this latter epoch have to be understood as a background to Ambedkar's strategy and analysis.

THE CONTEXT OF STRATEGY AND THEORY

The 1940s were a period of brutal confrontation with the most reactionary social power known in the world up to that time, fascism; and they ended with the unleashing of atomic energies in the burning of two Japanese cities, forecasting the technological furies that would overshadow human development for decades. For many throughout the world, the peace that followed was a period of hope, with the emergence of newly liberated nations throughout Asia and Africa, and the achievement of socialism by many peoples of the world. That Stalin represented not only 'socialist' development but a brutal tyranny; that socialism came to vast areas not by working class revolt but with the march of the Red Army; that traditional (and sometimes new) elites remained firmly in control of independent Third World nations, all were debatable points that bothered very few in countries like India at the time. The final phases of the independence struggle represented for many as upsurge of hope and a direction towards a popular, socialistic independence.

Yet within India itself the period held a great deal of internal malaise. Several major characteristics defined it, and represented the context in which Ambedkar sought to win some share in liberation for the untouchable masses of India.

1. *The hegemony of Marxism on the left*. in India as in most of the world the liberation of exploited and oppressed groups was to be seen as being realized through socialism, defined in terms of collective ownership of the means of production and working class share in power as exercised through a party acting in its name. Yet this hegemony contrasted with an extreme immaturity and weakness of the communist movement in India, which could not exert any decisive influence on events. As in most other Third World countries, therefore, the hegemony of 'Marxism' evoked a situation in which 'collective ownership' was defined in terms of state ownership; the dominant nationalist party replaced the working

class party with claims to represent the oppressed masses; and 'socialism' came to mean public control and planning of an industrialization conceived on the model of western capitalism.

2. Hindu- Muslim communalism was the overriding political reality by the 1940s. The constitution of the 'Muslim community' and the 'Hindu community' as dominant social realities was correlated with the explicit or implicit acceptance of 'Hinduism' as the central religious-cultural identity of 'India'. The ideological approach of the Congress progressives was either to argue, with Gandhi, for a reformed Hinduism in which the two communities lived in harmony (i.e. interpreting the 'nation' as a federation of religious communities) or, with Nehru, for a secularism that exalted modernity and defined the 'nation', along with 'class', as transcending what were really feudal and backward religious and cultural identities. The communists essentially followed the Nehru line, with an even stronger emphasis on class. Both accepted the realities of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' identities, of course- thereby eclipsing issues of caste and linguistic/tribal nationalities. Both gave scope for Hindu nationalism because they did not confront the very basis of the 'Hindu' identity attributed to Indian tradition.
3. The event of independence and partition brought a near-complete marginalisation of Gandhi and Gandhism. With all the rhetoric of 'Panchayat raj' and khadi, it was 'Nehruism' that gained hegemony ideologically. This approach advocated a broad 'Third World alliance and made socialism and a heavy-industry oriented development-- dominated by planning and controlled by the public sector-- the theme of power. But with all its reasonableness and 'secular' focus in contrast to Gandhi's 'peasant backwardness', Nehruism, whose main tendency was to override, or at best to ignore, issues of caste and local identities, allowed even more for Brahman dominance. To a very large degree, even while representation in the political sphere broadened, the 'public sector' was to be a high-caste preserve. In this context, the Dalit movement under Ambedkar's leadership could only be a passive observer of most major events, at best exerting its minor influence to achieve some gains and concessions. The failure of Marxism in India to open itself to fertilization of theory and practice by the anti-caste movements, and the failure of Gandhism to go beyond a spiritualistic and Hinduistic interpretation of a decentralized and village-based development left the anti-caste movement in a vacuum. By the 1940s, it could effectively operate only as a pressure group.

CASTE, CLASS AND MECHANICAL MARXISM

Ambedkar had said, in his 1938 speech to the peasants marching to Bombay, that he felt the communist philosophy' to be 'closer than any other' (though significantly qualified this 'in regard to the class struggle of toilers'). It is undeniable that his class-caste' paradigm was basically formed during the 1930s in the course of his confrontation with Marxism, as it was presented to him in India, thus exerted as important and continuing influence not only over his economic theory but also over his interpretation of caste in society.

We have noted that during the 1920s Ambedkar had dismissed communism by saying that he agreed with the 'ends' of socialism but disagreed with the 'means' of violence. This theme was resurrected towards the end of his life as a major point of defense of Buddhism against Marxism. During the radical years of the 1930s, however, there was no such rejection of Marxism on the grounds of violence. The thrust of Ambedkar's attack was against the religious-inspired 'non-violence' of Gandhism. In fact the main point of his critique of violence was always that communist-led strikes and actions were often 'adventurous', that they needlessly harmed the weakest sections of the working class (Dalits) and sacrificed people's lives in campaigns that tried to be militant for the sake of militancy. In other words, it upheld non-violence more as a *strategy* than as a principle, and it specifically rejected Gandhian non-violence-as-religious-principle. The critique as such, then, is not a major point separating Ambedkar from 'the communist philosophy', though when it was linked to the denial of the leading role of the proletariat it did become so.

In fact, aside from adding 'caste' to 'class' and 'Brahminism' to 'capitalism' there were surprising similarities between the basic assumptions of Ambedkar and the leftists. In a situation in which communists and socialists alike took *no* official note of caste in the pre-independence period and simply assumed that radicalism required an explanation of all social problems in terms of their 'class' content, Ambedkar of course strongly insisted on the addition of 'caste' and 'Brahminism' as crucial social realities. Yet in doing so, he like most of his later followers accepted some crucial assumptions of the 'class' framework.

A serious critical article on Marxism appeared in a 1936 issue of *Janata* and was reprinted in 1938 as a front page article entitled 'The Illusion of the Communists and the Duty of the Untouchable Class'. In taking the relations of production as the basis of the 'economic interpretation of history', the article made a clever twist of reversal in the often-used architectural analogy of 'base and superstructure':

But the base is not the building. On the basis of the economic relations a building is erected of religious, social and political institutions. This building has just as much truth (reality) as the base. If we want to change the base, then first the building that has been constructed on it has to be knocked down. In the same way, if we want to change the economic relations of society, then first the existing social, political and other institutions will have to be destroyed.

The article went on to make other important reversals. To build the strength of the working class, the mental hold of religious slavery would have to be destroyed; the pre-condition of a united working class struggle was the eradication of caste and untouchability. Similarly, destruction of casteism could be taken as the main task of the 'democratic' stage of a two-stage revolution: it would not be fully anti-capitalist because capitalism would not be opposed to the eradication of caste as such (freeing potential workers from caste restrictions would increase the reserve army of labour) and, at the same time. Socialists should welcome the effort at uniting the working class. (Thus there was some unity of interests between the workers and the 'radical bourgeoisie' in the 'democratic' stage). The removal of untouchability and caste discrimination is thus the first stage in the struggle for the Indian revolution, and it is impossible for socialists to bypass it. However, expressing great disillusionment with the Congress socialists and Nehru, the article concluded that untouchables would have to pool all their strength into the fight against untouchability, without expecting much socialist help.

The positions taking here represented a reaction to and a sharing of the assumptions of a mechanical, economic form of Marxism. Only 'class' exploitation was seen as having a material base and as being part of the relations of production; caste and all other 'non-class' types of oppression (women's oppression, national oppression, etc.) were seen as primarily socio-religious, in the realm of consciousness and not material life. Ambedkar accepted this frame-work and simply reversed it to assert the causal importance of social-religious-political factors; he took a mechanical architectural analogy and turned it around to give primacy to the 'superstructure'. The logic of the process exemplifies the way in which a mechanical materialism fosters idealism. If caste oppression/exploitation was central (and Ambedkar and all Dalits and low caste activists could not but help understanding it as central) then the basic logic led them to argue that this could only mean that socio-religious factors, factors of 'consciousness', were important and even primary. In other words, there was no theoretical trend that sought to analyze a material base for caste as Phule had done at a primary level half a century before.

Just as clearly we can see in the argument the results of the often heard cliché that an anti-caste struggle is a part of the democratic revolution, not of socialist revolution. For communists this could not but mean (at some basic emotional level) that the issue was of secondary importance. Ambedkar of course saw it differently. In effect he was motivated to say: all right, if this is 'only' the democratic revolution this is what we have to be concerned about here and now; you far-sighted revolutionary leaders go ahead and worry about the socialist revolution, we have to get on with the immediate task (which you are not helping with in any case); it's all the more urgent to concentrate on this since no one else is around to do it. We will fight for the democratic revolution. This logic was what undoubtedly moved Ambedkar, after the 'years of radicalism' won no decisive gains, to put his efforts during the 1940s into the scheduled Caste Federation as a strong pressure group within a democratic framework, with an indefinite postponement of a broad revolutionary struggle.

Ambedkar's acceptance of many of the basic assumptions of a mechanical Marxism remained throughout his life and can be seen in his final writings on Buddha and Marx. Its most important aspect is the identification of economic exploitation with private property. Ambedkar's note took it as established that a great many errors in Marx's original analysis (including the concept of the inevitability of socialism, the vanguardship of the working class) made it invalid, but concluded,

What remains of Karl Marx is a residue of fire, small but very important...

- (i) the function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origins of the world,
- (ii) there is a conflict of interest between class and class,
- (iii) private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation,
- (iv) it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property.

Ambedkar went in this article to argue that Buddhism, in the Sangha abolished private property more thoroughly and without bloodshed and was therefore superior to Marxism, but that is beside the point. The point is that here he accepted the definition of class and exploitation as being a result of private property. This was the common theme of the Marxism of his time. It led to defining 'socialism' in terms of 'nationalism' in which collective ownership of the means of production (or the abolition of private property) could be achieved through state control; and it continued to accept the idea that modern factory production i.e, industrialization, constituted the economic basis of socialism. Thus, Ambedkar could term his own version of socialism as 'state socialism' and call for 'nationalization of land', or public control of the 'commanding heights' of the economy much as the Nehru socialists did without much concern for the structures of domination and exploitation embodied in state-owned properties.

Tasking standard left economic assumptions for granted had two consequences for Ambedkar and the Dalit movement: First, it led to attempts to formulate a historical theory of caste and social struggle in India that functioned primarily at the 'superstructural' level, stressing factors of political conflict and ideology apart from those of economic development. Second, it effectively suppressed any dialogue with alternative economic models and ignored the degree to which a state-controlled heavy industry would be effectively a Brahmin and high caste-controlled economy.

But was there any real alternative before Ambedkar at the time? His 'State socialism' was, after all, part of a very broad consensus that saw development in terms of industrialization and nationhood in terms of a centralized, strong, unitary state; Liberal capitalists shared this as much as socialists, and though they disagreed about whether private or state control would be most effective, all 'developmental economists' by the late 1940s and early 1950s accepted some major role for the state. Today this developmental movement with its rejection of Nehru's big dams as 'modern temples' to the farmers movement and women's movement, all putting forward calls for some kind of 'alternative development'. But in Ambedkar's time decentralized socialism did not appear as a political viable alternative. In India, a decentralized, village-based form of development was connected with the Gandhian tradition; to Ambedkar and militant Dalits or non-Brahmins this did not simply promote a village society and development along the lines of Indian tradition, it prompted Ram-raj; it was not simply critical of modern science and technology; it was soaked in Hindu religious themes, including the belief in chaturvarnya, the moralistic acceptance of brahmachari and a claimed principled belief in non-violence. These were not acceptable to Ambedkar nor could they meet the needs of low castes aspiring to liberation. The fact that no other tradition of an alternative decentralized socialism existed in India helped to push Ambedkar towards a bureaucratized state socialism, with all the dilemmas of Brahmanic statism that this involved.

THE ECONOMICS OF A FLEXIBLE SOCIALISM

Ambedkar's two major writings on economic issues appeared in the early 1920s, and while they bear the mark of a generally neo-classic economic theory, they also show both his general identification with the working classes and a harsh critique of imperialism.

'The Problem of the Rupee' though dealing with the general history of the state and currency in British India, was published in 1923 in the very specific context of a struggle between nationalist and the British government over the exchange rate. Following the war, the government had maintained a high official exchange rate of 2 shillings (2s) to the rupee, which was opposed fiercely by Indian businessmen with the backing of the Congress. They attacked it as overvalued, an 'enormous wrong and legalized plunder of Indian resources' which aided the British bureaucracy (whose salaries and pensions became more valuable in terms of the sterling) and British exporters to India at the expense of Indian producers and exporters. They agitated for a low exchange rate 1s.4d. The government appointed a royal commission; Ambedkar testified before it, broadly supporting devaluation but at a compromise ratio (1s.4d) which he argued would maintain the interests of the 'business classes' as well as the 'earning classes' who would suffer from the price rise brought about by devaluation.

The book itself was a scathing critical analysis of British currency policy over the years. Read in the context of current debates on economic policy, it shows Ambedkar as a modern supporter of devaluation and an economic who assumed that within an open economy India could well compete at the global level (he notes that Indian exports and manufactures gained at the expense of the British during the period of the low rupee). Yet there are qualifications: the concern for balancing capitalist and labour interests, the argument that Indian growth and exports were actually at the cost of falling real wages of the working class, and a tone

of hostility both to businessmen and commodity-producing peasants. His conclusion perhaps gives his perspective: with a high ratio, 'the burden... imposed upon the active and working element of a society would be intolerable' but a too-low ratio would put the burden on wage earners.

I myself would choose 1s.6d. as the ratio at which we should stabilize... (1) it will conserve the position of the investing and earning classes; (2) it does not jeopardize our trade and prosperity by putting any extra burden on the business class; and (3) being the most recent in point of time it is likely to give greater justice to the greater number of monetary contracts most of which must be recent in time.

And in fact it was the 1s.6d ratio which the British government accepted.

The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India, published in 1925, also condemns British imperialism in its description of the way in which British fiscal politics had impoverished India. Ambedkar attacked the irrationality of British taxation methods, charging that 'While the land tax prevented the prosperity of agricultural industry the customs taxes hampered the manufactures of the country. There were internal customs and external customs and both were equally injurious to trade and industry and that basic taxes like the salt tax and the form of the land tax itself lay most heavily on the poor. It was clear, he noted, that the British government was running India in the interest of British manufacturers.

Both the critique and the discussion in *The problem of the Rupee* were well within the framework of standard economics: that is, Ambedkar did not see the 'development' of a backward ex-colony as a problem, once the artificial barriers imposed by the colonial state were removed; many aspects of colonial rule were described as progressive (primarily those having to do with establishing the infrastructure for growth) and the primary barriers to progress seen as more social than economic. The British government, Ambedkar noted, not only exploited economically but it could not act against social evils:

It could not sympathize with the living forces operating in the Indian society, was not charged with its wants, its pains, its cravings and its desires, was inimical to its aspirations, did not advance Education, disfavoured Swadeshi and snapped at anything that smacked of nationalism...the Government of India dared not abolish the caste system, prescribe monogamy, alter the laws of succession, legalize intermarriage or venture to tax the tea planters. Progress involves interference with the existing code of social life and interference is likely to cause resistance..."

Ambedkar went on to argue that it would be social more than economic causes that led to nationalist revolt:

It is foolish to suppose that a people will indefinitely favour a bureaucracy because it has improved their roads, constructed canals on more scientific principles, effected their transportation by rail, carried their letters by penny post, flashed their messages by lighting, improved their currency, regulated their weights and measures, corrected their notions of geography, astronomy and medicines and stopped their internal quarrels. Any people, however patient, will sooner or later demand a government that will be more than a mere engine of efficiency.

This period, in other words, see Ambedkar as a general supporter of a capitalist organisation of the economy, assuming its inevitability and capability of providing growth and being amenable to a balancing of interests. In this model, the role of the state was to provide infrastructure and generally handle currency and exchange so as not to discriminate against any of the major business or agricultural classes of the country. Though he referred to Keynes, the period, is clearly as much pre-keynes and pre-'development' as pre-Marx. That capitalist economies could come into major crisis; that specific state-guided development and even state enterprises was necessary to lift Third World countries out of their poverty was not part of economic discourse at this time.

Then came the late 1920s and the 1930s, the depression, the new momentous force for change represented by the Russian revolution, the upsurge of the working class in India itself and Ambedkar's own theoretical and practical confrontation with Marxism. Not only did socialism, defined in terms of state ownership of the means of production, begin to appear as a viable reality for working class emancipation; it also began to seem to be the best route to development for an economically backward ex-colony. Even standard 'development economics' by the post-war period began to assume the necessity of a major role of the state. In the context of all of these developments, Ambedkar became a socialist, but not a socialist who had time to work out his economic theory. There were, in fact, no economic writings after the 1920s.

By the middle of the 1930s, he swung into an economic radicalism that included the main themes of his time: the exploitation of capitalists and landlords, the need for state control. His economic thrust underwent a major change. This could be seen especially in regards to agriculture. His early writings had expressed

support for small peasant property as the alternative to landlordism (in fact arguing that in terms of available capital equipment, farms were if anything too large); by the time of the Scheduled Caste Federation election manifestos he was arguing that for enhanced production agriculture had to be mechanised. This meant that large farms would replace small ones, and this could be most effectively done through cooperative or collective farms. The notion of state-guided development, oriented to industrialization, was taking precedence.

The climatic statement of this economic radicalism came in **States and Minorities**, written as a submission to the Constituent Assembly in 1948, and expressed in the form of proposed constitutional clauses. As a statement of a general economic and social programme, this is a somewhat eccentric form. In fact, only two years before Ambedkar had rejected the idea of a constituent assembly, in language that made it clear he did not see the constitution as a means for either establishing socialism or liberating the scheduled castes. He had said,

I must state that I am wholly opposed to the proposals of a Constituent Assembly. It is absolutely superfluous.... There are hardly any big and purely constitutional questions about which there can be said to be much dispute among Indians. It is agreed that the future Indian constitution should be federal. It is also more or less settled what subjects should go to the Centre and what to the Provinces. There is no quarrel over the division of Revenues between the Centre and the Provinces, none on Franchise, and none on the relation of the Judiciary to the Legislative and the Executive.... The only function, which could be left to a Constituent Assembly is to find a solution of the Communal Problem.

Yet, two years later he was submitting a memorandum that sought to make the constitution a means for the establishment of socialism! The economic section of States and Minorities calls for 'State socialism', including for the nationalization not only of basic industries but also of land and its working in collective farms, with peasants treated as tenants of the states. Arguing in terms of both developmental needs and protection of working class rights, Ambedkar wrote, "State Socialism is essential for the rapid industrialization of India. Private enterprise cannot do it, and if it did it, it would produce those inequalities of wealth which private capitalism has produced in Europe. He described pithily the effects of poverty as making 'Fundamental Rights' meaningless, and talks of capitalist tyranny:

Constitutional Lawyers... argue that where the state refrains from intervention in private affairs- economic and social- the residue is liberty. What is necessary is to make the residue as large as possible and State intervention as small as possible.... (But) to whom and for whom is the liberty? Obviously this liberty is liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rates of wages. It must be so. It cannot be otherwise. For in an economic system employing armies of workers, producing goods en masse at regular intervals some one must make rules so that workers will work and the wheels of industry run on. If the state does not do so the private employers will.... In other words, what is called liberty from the control of the state is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer.

Clearly Ambedkar, like all socialists and nationalists of his time, was conceiving 'socialism' as a regimented industrialized economy. Thus the basic proposals of 'state socialism' called for state ownership and management of 'key' industries and state ownership of 'basic' industries; a monopoly of insurance; and agriculture declared as a state industry, with the state to acquire (with compensation) rights to land, divide the land into farms of 'standard size' and let them out for cultivation to the residents of the village 'as tenants' to cultivate as a collective farm, in accordance with rules and directives issued by Government, with the produce to be distributed in shares among the tenants. It was added,

- (ii) The land shall be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed and in such manner that there will be no landlord, no tenant, and no landless labourer;
- (iii) It shall be the obligation of the state to finance the cultivation of the collective farm by the supply of water, draft animals, implements, manure, seeds, etc.

The state would then levy charges for the land revenue, to pay the compensation charges, and pay for the capital goods supplied.

Clause (iii) could be interpreted to argue that the state would provide the necessary inputs according to the wishes of the farming community, or simply provide financing for inputs that may be procured locally; but still there seems to be an assumption (as with private 'industrial-chemical agriculture') that inputs for state agriculture would come primarily from outside the village. Here is an assumption, not only that the state is benign but that agricultural production (like industrial production) can very well be managed and directed

from above. The fervour to abolish the inequalities of social relations of ownership is clear (though even here, in allowing compensation, Ambedkar is not going as far as the left radicals), but neither the problems of economic exploitation involved in state management nor those of the process of production in agriculture have been given any thought.

Following this, a completely separate section on the protection of scheduled castes as minorities describes their oppression by caste Hindus and argues strongly not only for a series of safeguards but also for separate electorates and separate village settlements, which the state is to set up by giving Dalits forest lands or wastelands. In regard to this, Ambedkar argues that the roots of discrimination lie in the village system itself:

So long as the present arrangement continues it is impossible for the Untouchables either to free themselves from the yoke of the Hindus or to get rid of their Untouchability. It is the close knit association of the Untouchables with the Hindus living in the same village which mark them out as Untouchables.... It is the system of the village plus the Ghetto which perpetuates Untouchability and the Untouchables therefore demand that the nexus should be broken and the Untouchables who are as a matter of fact socially separate should be made separate geographically and territorially also and be settled into separate villages exclusively of Untouchables.

While this passage is followed by a description of the dependence of Dalit labourers on caste Hindu peasants for wages, it makes no reference to a solution in terms of giving Dalits a share in the land in the same village (in fact the first paragraph rules this out by describing untouchability as a reality even beyond economic oppression) while the section on the 'nationalization of land' makes no mention of whether the nationalized villages of untouchables are to be separate. It is as if these are two parallel solutions to the problems of Dalits, one economic, one social, lines which never meet.

States and Minorities is in many ways a puzzling book though remarkable book. At one level it shows the heights of radicalism Ambedkar reached in terms of both economic and caste issues, with his calls for 'state socialism' on one hand and the path of protective measures, separate electorates and separate villages for Dalits on the other. Yet it also shows the disjuncture between these-- as if the programme for liberation was itself paralleling phenomena operating on different levels of social reality.

Not only is there no linkage between economic section and the scheduled caste-as-minority section of the book, there is also no linkage to strategy. Ambedkar discussed the fallacies of leaving the construction of socialism to 'the whims of a parliamentary majority', giving this as the justification for the necessity of writing the clauses into the constitution itself. But both in regard to state socialism and to the strong concessions to scheduled castes, was there any possible basis for thinking that the tremendous influence of landlords, capitalists and upper caste Hindus would admit such a constitution?

Ambedkar was after all a political realist. States and Minorities was, it must be concluded not intended as a serious political document outlining a programme but as a manifesto designed to be extreme and provocative, not so much to achieve the implementation of the points it set forth as to draw attention to it's author. Its focus was social equality, not a plan for organizing the economic production of a society. Whether or not he thought it was 'superfluous', a constituent assembly was being called; Ambedkar had not been included though he wanted to be, if only to ensure the continued provision of safeguards for the Dalits. States and minorities was designed to achieve this goal mainly, and secondarily to throw some ideas for the future of India before the public. It was a radical, idealistic manifesto aimed at some very partial but highly political goals.

In the end, what is striking about Ambedkar's economic radicalism is the extent to which it was interpreted in terms of the rationalistic 'modernism' of his time: it included a belief in the necessity of industrialization, and the guiding role of the state as inherently progressive if it could be shielded from the vagaries of often manipulated political majorities. By the time States and Minorities was written, Ambedkar was intensely pessimistic about these 'political majorities'; there was no organizing on general economic issues, and the non-Brahmin or Shudra worker-peasant masses seemed ready to identify as 'Hindus' in opposition to the Muslims and sometimes to the Dalits. State protection for Dalits had always been seen essential, even in his periods of greater faith in the majority; and now in an atmosphere in which India under Nehru appeared set to adopt planning and a 'socialist pattern of society' Ambedkar's main thrust was to look to this state-guided development as a solution.

On the whole, his socialism had grown out of his interpretation of democracy rather than, as with Marxism a belief in the revolutionary destiny and world-creating powers of the proletariat. Thus, while he shared the belief of both liberals and Marxists of his time in the progressive forces of industrialization, science and modernity, he distinguished his views from communism both in terms of the means necessary to achieve them and in terms of stressing democracy over the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. In a sense, 'state socialism' was aptly named in contrast to 'proletarian socialism'; it retained the belief in the state as a necessary phenomena in even a socialist society and sought a share in power of workers and Dalits without seeing this as creating any unique kind of state. From an orthodox Marxist point of view, this could justify a rejection of Ambedkar as essentially 'petty bourgeois', identifying the idealism (return to religion) and reformism presumed to be implicit in his theory with a kind of backward 'peasantist' consciousness; this has invariably been the response of even the most favourable left assessments. But this is not a very helpful classification and implies assumptions about the meaning of 'proletarian', 'peasant' etc., which do not stand the test of time very well.

In fact, the development of 'Ambedkarism' in India can be seen as the particular expression of a world-wide 'democratic revolution' indeed perhaps one possible in Indian conditions (certainly the most consistent than a 'proletarian socialism' which ignored cultural-caste issues and accepted identities such as 'Harijan' and 'Hindu') one which had grown out of the experiences and situations of the most oppressed sections of the people. 'Democratic revolution' in this sense almost invariably leads towards some kind of socialism, and this in fact was how Ambedkar saw it. As he wrote towards the end of States and Minorities,

The soul of Democracy is the doctrine of one man, one value. Unfortunately, Democracy has attempted to give effect to this doctrine only so far as the political structure is concerned by adopting the rule of one man, one vote....It has left the economic structure to take the shape given by those who are in a position to mould it. This has happened because Constitutional Lawyers.... never realized that it was equally essential to prescribe the shape and form of the economic structure of society, if Democracy is to live up to its principle of one man, one value. Time has come to take a bold step and define both the economic structure as well as the political structure of society by the Law of the Constitution....

Ambedkar's specific recommendations for 'prescribing the economic structure of society' was state ownership of basic industries and collective farms; this would be questioned by many today along with his faith in a centralized, industrial factory-based economy. But that the market by itself cannot guarantee equality, that the state must play a defining and guiding role--or rather that the members of society must act collectively through the state to regulate, limit and at points supercede the market--is a thesis that few (at least in the Third World) would question. This flexible 'socialism', coupled with political democracy and non-violent mass struggle, makes Ambedkar's economics still relevant today.

... to be continued in next months issue

Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Indian Buddhism:

Activities and Observances

-Dr. Eleanor Zelliott

(This paper has been taken from Dr.Eleanor Zelliott's book, "From Untouchable to Dalit. Dr.Zelliott holds a Ph.D from the University of Pennsylvania, which is one of the early Ph.Ds on Dr.Ambedkar's movement. Her findings of this paper are based on her field work in India till 1976. Though the movement with regard to Dr.Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism has spread steadily to other states in the last 25 years, this paper gives an insight into the growth of Buddhism in the 20 years after Dr.Ambedkar's Mahaparinirvana-- Editor)

The contemporary Buddhist conversion movement in India arose neither from a missionary enterprise which carried its own organizational structure and leadership nor from the Buddha-ization of a highly developed existent religious structure. Unlike any other mass conversion in history, this new religious movement was almost completely on its own. The massive conversion which began in 1956 largely affected low castes, particularly Mahars of Maharashtra, who had been involved for decades in battle for political, social and religious rights. Buddhism was chosen as the religion of conversion because of its qualities of rationality, equality and intellectual creativity—because it offered a way out of the psychological imprisonment of the Hindu caste system. Buddhism as an organized religion, however, was almost non-existent in India at that

time, and the ex-untouchables who chose to convert had to create leadership, structure, religious observances and activities from very indirect models and what they created had to be a religion that would fit their own needs.

The leader of this conversion movement, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, had been interested in Buddhism most of his adult life. He had read books on Buddhism which had become a minor part of India's discovery of her own past in the twentieth century; he had met some of the men who had, as individuals, become interested in Buddhism; he had traveled to Ceylon and Burma to see living Buddhist countries; and he had written *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, a rationalized life of the Buddha and a selection of texts, chiefly from Pali sources. Moreover, he had prepared his followers psychologically for a conversion from Hinduism from 1935 on, beginning with his own statement that he 'would not die a Hindu'. But the conversion was held suddenly, dramatically and without much organizational preparation on 14 October 1956, and within two months of it Ambedkar was dead. He had died a Buddhist, and he had set in motion a movement that soon involved over three million people. But although the inspiration of Ambedkar's own example and his invitation to others to follow him were powerful directives, the organization of the new religion was at a bare minimum.

The structural and leadership elements developed during the long struggle for social and political rights and for educational opportunities were pressed into service to provide the thrust and direction of the religious movement. Without the living example of a Buddhist society before them, the 'new Buddhists' had to create a meaningful religious life from the sources available to them: Dr.Ambedkar's precepts, traditional Buddhism with whom they came in contact. Most importantly, they had to build that Buddhist society in the light of the needs of the Buddhist converts, most of them from formerly Untouchable castes, in the context of a dominant society.

Now twenty years after the conversion, the movement has slowed in garnering numbers. There were 180,823 Buddhists in India in 1951, before the conversion; 3,250,227 Buddhists in 1961, and 3,812,325 Buddhist in 1971, according to the Indian Census. The great bulk of the Buddhists are in Maharashtra, 3,264,000 Buddhists, but there are sizable numbers in urban centres outside that state: 10,000 in Andhra Pradesh, 81,800 in Madhya Pradesh, 14,100 in Karnataka, 87,000 in the city of Delhi, 8,400 in Orissa, 1,300 in the Punjab, 3,500 in Rajasthan, 1,100 in Tamilnadu, 42,200 in Uttar Pradesh and 39,600 in West Bengal. There is no single leader, there is no overall organization, but there is flourishing, creative, controversial Buddhist society which has evolved patterns of Buddhism both innovative and traditional.

My purpose in this paper is to look at some of the visible elements of contemporary Buddhist society in India, i.e. the place of Dr.Ambedkar in their activities and observances; the buildings that house Buddhist activities; the leadership which teaches, preaches and conducts ritual; the sorts of public holidays and festivals which are observed. The Buddhist tradition, the Mahar tradition and the surrounding Indian tradition all have marked the practices of the Buddhist converts. Much that seems innovative to the Buddhist tradition will be found to be a necessary carry-over from the convert's past or an almost unconscious response to the prevailing Indian (largely Hindu) present. My observations were made in three separate year-long visits to India, 1964-5, 1971 and 1975-6. My perspective is limited to Maharashtra, although much of what I observed would also be found among Buddhist groups in number of cities outside that state.

The Role of Babasaheb Ambedkar

The presence of a picture of Dr.Ambedkar in all Buddhist viharas and at all Buddhist functions seems to set the Indian Buddhists apart from the main Buddhist tradition. The inclusion of 'Babasaheb' Ambedkar as an object of reverence is the most visible innovation in the practice of contemporary Buddhists in India. The Buddha and Babasaheb in plaster, stone, poster-art and painting, in song and drama and story, seemingly of near-equal importance, rarely one without the other, are continual evidence that contemporary Indian Buddhism proudly combines its own tradition with that of the main Buddhist tradition. Ambedkar is neither worshipped nor prayed to nor, of course, is the Buddha. No puja is performed, no navas (vows) are made to either figure, so their functions are not those of a Hindu god. But at every occasion, both figures are garlanded, the Buddha first; incense is lit; and Bhagwan Gautam Buddha and Parampujya Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar are addressed before the speaker acknowledges the Chairman of the function and 'Brothers and Sisters'.

Efforts have been made to place Dr.Ambedkar in the traditional Buddhist framework. Some Buddhists acknowledge Dr.Ambedkar as Boddhisatva in recognition of his role in bringing modern Indian converts into Buddhism, i.e. as a saviour. This use has been justified by, at least, one traditionally trained Theravada

Buddhist bhikshu. Other Buddhists reject the Bodhisatva concept as Mahayana Buddhism, which they see as inferior to the rational, non-supernatural, humanity-centered religion they believe the Buddha taught. Another broadly accepted way of honoring Ambedkar is to add the diminutive of his first name, Bhimrao, to the list of refuges, i.e. Bhimam sarnam gachchami, so that the 'Three Jewels' become four:

I go for refuge to the Buddha
I go to refuge to the Dhamma (doctrine)
I go to refuge to the Sangha (order of monks)
I go for refuge to Ambedkar.

These efforts to honor Dr. Ambedkar within the framework of the Buddhist tradition are an affront to some outside the conversion movement. Those who understand the importance of Dr. Ambedkar in the earlier struggle for political, social and religious rights are more charitable in accepting the continuing homage paid to him. That homage can best be understood by reference to the Indian tradition of the Guru (teacher or master) a concept most explicit in Hinduism but also found in heterodox sects and in secular life in India. The use of the term 'Bodhisatva', the inclusion of Ambedkar as a refuge, is an attempt to use Buddhist concepts for the basic Indian idea of the need for a teacher to show the way to religious insight and personal freedom. The old practice of guru-shishya (master-pupil) is often expanded in modern India to a generalized acceptance of the importance of one special person—parent, teacher, ideal, hero--- as a chief inspiration in life. The key is that the guru figure is the one who brings his disciple into self-realization, into freedom, i.e. the man who 'saves' him.

Ambedkar himself claimed that he had three gurus: The Buddha, the fifteenth century iconoclastic saint-poet Kabir, and the nineteenth century radical social reformer, Mahatma Jotiba Phule. In turn, his followers feel that he has been responsible for almost all the educational, social and political progress in their lives and in addition has shown them the way to a religion which is both honorable and honored, a religion which negates the religious concepts that made them untouchables in the eyes of society. Many feel that Ambedkar has quite literally saved them, and often highly educated Buddhists feel more strongly about Ambedkar as guru than those who have not benefited so much from the movement.

Ambedkar is by no means a guru in the way that Maharshi Mahesh Yogi or Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh or any of the many contemporary cult figures are gurus. He is a guru in a less specific but totally Indian way. One's guru does not need to be saintly in character or religious in profession; he needs only to be the one who points towards enlightenment. The picture of Dr. Ambedkar, usually clad in a blue business suit, a book in his hand, a fountain pen in his pocket, placed beside the picture of the yellow-robed Buddha, makes clear the very human sort of guru he was.

One of the many contemporary songs to folk tunes or film music by Buddhist singing groups illustrates the combination of social and religious enlightenment Ambedkar represents:

He gave us the conversion at Nagpur
He threw his light in the darkness
He never was the slave of anyone
He showed us the way of Buddha
He gave us salvation

The importance of this concept is also expressed in a more sophisticated way by Namdev Dhasal, a political radical and a poet of the new Dalit school of literature, which is briefly composed of educated Buddhists. In this context from one of Dhasal's poems, 'they' refers to the forefathers of today's ex-untouchables; 'fakir' is used in Marathi for a Muslim saint and Dhasal has used it here probably to avoid a reference to Hinduism:
Turning their backs to the sun, they journeyed through centuries;

Now, now, we must refuse to be pilgrims of darkness
After a thousand years we were blessed
with a sunflower-giving fakir;
Now, now, we must like sunflowers turn our face to the sun.

Whether he is called Bodhisatva, a refuge, a guru or a fakir, Ambedkar is honored as the one who in his lifetime showed the way and who continues after his death to be seen as the wisest and most inspiring of men.

The Vihara—Meeting place for Buddhists

The new buildings dedicated to the Buddhist religion in Maharashtra as well as the old buildings converted to Buddhist use are called Viharas, the technical term for the residence of the Buddhist monks. The words for temple in Marathi, deul and mandir are studiously avoided, and the only term for a gathering place in the old Buddhist tradition seemed to be vihara. The need of today's Buddhists, however, is not so much living quarters for bhikshus as a meeting place for the laity, a place where the image of the Buddha can be kept, the community can gather for lectures on Buddhism or for vandana and children can be instructed. As in the case of other lay elements in Buddhist structure, there was no living model for the place of gathering of the Buddhist community available in India, and so the multipurpose vihara came into being.

The vihara is most often a plain rectangular structure, embellished, where possible, with architectural detail from the most accessible models of Buddhist structures: the caves of Ajanta and the Stupa of Sanchi. These buildings are newly built whenever the Buddhists of some locality have the money and the cooperative spirit to create a symbol of their newly accepted faith. In many villages, the caudi (community hall) of the old Maharwada (the quarters of the Mahar, somewhat removed from the village proper), does double service as community meeting room and center for Buddhist activities. I have seen few Hindu temples converted to Buddhist use, probably because few were completely in the hands of those Mahars who converted.

No one has undertaken the immense amount of travelling over Maharashtra and in the cities of the Buddhist conversion elsewhere to record the presence of viharas, nor is there any organizational record, since the building of a Buddhist center is an entirely local matter. The ones I have seen range from a small community shrine, large enough only to accommodate a statue of the Buddha, in the slums of Delhi, to a large building with an elaborate stupa on top in Pulgaon, Maharashtra, where Buddhists constitute a large, economically secure, factory-worker community. Most viharas serve the Buddhist community in several ways, Daily or weekly vandana, memorial services and meetings for religious observances are held in the viharas, although few are large enough to accommodate all Buddhists in the locality and great occasions require that a pavillion be erected near the vihara. Many viharas are used for educational and social as well as religious purposes. In some, there are rooms for visiting or resident bhikshus. Others combine a room for the image of the Buddha with a room for a pre-school or a kindergarten. Such a vihara was dedicated in Wardha in May 1976. Residents of the area, many of them casual labor on the railway, collected money for some twenty years and then built a small building. The lower room is a balwadi (children's school) dedicated to Mahatma Phule; above, underneath a Sanchi like dome, is a small room dominated by a Buddha image brought from Thailand and a photograph of Dr.Ambedkar, with quotations from both the Pali scripture and Dr.Ambedkar painted on the walls.

The vihara of Buddhists today is not an imitation of a Hindu temple. There is no pujari or ritual priest, there is no stream of individual worshippers paying homage to the image. The vihara serves chiefly as a symbol of the community's faith and as a center for the community to gather as Buddhists. And since knowledge is seen as a Buddhist virtue, both Buddhist and secular education can easily be combined with its religious function.

The Leadership of the Buddhists

At the time of the conversion in 1956, there were few Buddhist bhikshus in India and none who spoke Marathi as their native tongue. The oldest Buddhist bhikshu then in India, Mahasthaveer Chandramani of Burma, came to Nagpur for the initial conversion ceremony and gave Dr.Ambedkar diksha. From then on, anyone who had converted to Buddhism during mass conversion at Nagpur could convert others, and the stress was on the individual's commitment in a public ceremony. Another huge ceremony was held in Bombay ten days after the death of Dr.Ambedkar in December 1956 and here Bhikshu Anand Kausalyayan, a Hindi-speaking monk, initiated thousands into the new religion through the use of the Three Jewels (or three refuges) and the oaths of declaration of acceptance of Buddhism. There were few trained bhikshus available for diksha and teaching, however, and the burden of leadership in the early days of the movement fell upon the political leadership from Ambedkar's Republican Party. Religious conversion from the hands of political leaders may have seemed strange to outsiders, but for those in the movement, these were the men who knew them, who had worked with Ambedkar, who had long ago given up Hinduism as a religion of inequality and superstition.

Another group of leaders soon rose at the local level. These were the students—young men and a few women trained in the colleges that Ambedkar had founded. Some had studied Pali, and had sought out some knowledge of Buddhism in the intense and joyful early days of the conversion. They conducted marriages and

memorial services in a simple ritual devised by Ambedkar, founded classes for children and study groups for adults, joined in Young Men's Buddhist Association and women's service groups. They published pamphlets on Buddhism in Marathi, wrote songs to be sung in community meetings, and, whenever they could, found a travelling Buddhist bhikshu or an educated sympathetic Hindu to speak on Buddhist ideology at public meetings.

The overall organization of the Buddhists in India was less effective than that at the local level. The Buddhist Society of India, centered in Bombay and led by Dr. Ambedkar's son, Yeshwant Ambedkar, was established by Dr. Ambedkar in 1955. Theoretically the center of Buddhist activities, the Buddhist Society of India has given little direction to the movement, and the ties between the center and its local branches are very loose. The center was dominated by political leaders, and as factions began to appear in Ambedkar's party, they affected the religious organizations also. The non-political leadership which arose on the local level could not effect a strong central leadership, but neither could the lack of a center affect the vitality of the new movement. The Buddhist Society of India has now completed the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Shrine, a multipurpose vihara on the seashore at Shivaji Park in Bombay, the site where Dr. Ambedkar was cremated. The viharas in the towns and the villages of Maharashtra, however, reflect local commitment and local leadership.

Now, after twenty years, it seems clear that Buddhism in India will continue its strong emphasis on the laity and lay leadership. It is still the lay leadership that performs most of the teaching and preaching, writes most of the religious material which continues to flow from the movement, collects the money and plans the vihara. But there are increasing numbers of Marathi-speaking bhikshus, appearing it seems not so much from the need of the community as out of their own individual commitment to Buddhism. Some go to Bodh Gaya or some other Buddhist center in North India for training, a few to Thailand and a few others to Ceylon. One young man is now in Japan with the Nichiren sect. Most of the Marathi-speaking bhikshus are young and highly educated; many are working on doctoral degrees in Pali, archaeology or some other field related to the Buddhist past. The only Maharashtrian center for the training of bhikshus is that at Nagpur under the care of Bhadanta Anand Kausalyayan, a former Punjabi Hindu who became a bhikshu in Ceylon in 1930. The Ven. Kausalyayan moved to Nagpur in 1970, has built a home and training center on the grounds where the 1956 conversion took place, and has educated dozens of young men, about fifteen of whom have been ordained as bhikshus.

The function of the bhikshu among the Buddhists in Maharashtra seems to be primarily teaching, although it seems also true that the very presence of a bhikshu is an important symbol of the identity of a Buddhist group. I have met many sorts of bhikshus during my visit to India. In the 1960s, the Ven. Sangharakshita of England and Kalingpong devoted half of each year to teaching in Maharashtra and Gujarat. He preached many sermons, his English being interpreted into Marathi by one of the young Buddhist students, and he also conducted samnera, a period of ten days or so in which Buddhist laity lived as monks. A Thai bhikshu, Vivekananda, also traveled widely in Maharashtra, giving simple lectures on Buddhist morality. A number of Thai bhikshus study at the University of Poona or Deccan College in Pune, and some of these establish working relationships with Maharashtrian Buddhists, particularly in Buddhist Sunday schools for children, but none are in India permanently. Some Tibetan monks have moved through Maharashtra, but those I met knew no English, Marathi or Hindi and so served the community by making clay images of the Buddha and reciting some texts in hastily learned Pali. In 1975 a Tamil speaking Bhikshu was teaching meditation and performing some medical service both in Bombay and in the railroad porters colony in Pune. Singhalese, Burmese and Japanese bhikshus have been of service to the community at various times, their effectiveness dependent upon their ability to communicate and their attitude towards the still generally economically and socially depressed community.

The appearance of Marathi-speaking bhikshus with roots in the community may create a situation in which religious leaders become more essential to the community. However, to be effective, they will have to be highly educated, able to preach and teach, totally ethical, willing to be completely identified with the community, and free from any political ambition.

Such a Sangha is now emerging, but there are not enough bhikshus to serve each Buddhist community. And along with the appearance of Marathi-speaking bhikshus, the creative lay leadership continues to function. Three examples will serve to indicate its direction: two dedicated professors teach Pali to over 2000 students at the complex of colleges in Aurangabad established by Ambedkar, and are deeply involved in plans for a Buddhist Center, with a resident bhikshu, which will reach far beyond the student body. Another striking example is that of a young woman in Pune who combines work as a clerk in a government office with study for a law degree. She performed so well in a class taught by Thai Bhikshus in her community that she was sent to a Buddhist conference in Thailand. Since her return she has participated in numerous weddings,

funerals and other ritual occasions, leading the vandana and giving talks on Buddhism. A third example of the lay leadership is the most ambitious of all. Waman Godbole, one of the planners of the Nagpur Conversion in 1956, called an All-India Buddhist Dharma Conference in Nagpur in December 1975. Eight bhikshus from many traditions and hundreds of lay leaders participated in the conference, with tens of thousands coming to the public sessions and taking part in processions. Godbole hopes for a structured organization that will unify all Buddhists in India. He recognizes that it took twenty years to plan such a conference, however, and is content to work slowly and patiently to build a functioning umbrella Buddhist organization. Godbole is a well educated Buddhist layman who continues with his railway job to support himself and who has not married in order to devote his life to the movement.

Leadership among Buddhist in Maharashtra has had to emerge out of a vacuum over the last twenty years. The Buddhist leaders are not related to the old Mahar religious leadership, which in any case lost its importance when Ambedkar's movement became committed to leaving Hinduism in the 1930s. The new Buddhist leader, whether a member of the Sangha or a lay person, is effective only if he or she can share a knowledge of Buddhism and if he or she is committed to the service of the community.

The Holy Days of the Maharashtrian Buddhists

The four great observances of the contemporary Buddhists in India---Dhamma Diksha Day, Buddha Jayanti, Ambedkar's death memorial day, and Ambedkar Jayanti--- reveal their determination to preserve hard-won glory of their past as well as to state their commitment to Buddhism. The anniversary of the day of conversion, 14 October, is celebrated as Dhamma Diksha Day. Those who can, return to the field in Nagpur where the 1956 conversion was held for a great ceremony; others hold local observances of varying sorts. In Aurangabad, the Buddhist caves just outside the city are the focus of a procession, Pali Vandana and later games for the children, while speeches and song services are held in the colleges. Buddha Jayanti, the day of observance of the Buddha's birth, has been observed since 1950, when Ambedkar arranged for the celebrations as a public occasion in Delhi. The Jayanti is a time for speeches, music drama on Buddhist themes and occasionally a solemn procession.

Ambedkar's death anniversary, 6 December, is a time for quiet and sorrowful gatherings, and talks or music by one of the many singers or singing groups in the community predominate. Ambedkar's birth anniversary, 14 April on the other hand, is a noisy and joyful occasion. Here the borrowings from the processions found in Hinduism, Islam, and Jainism are clear. As in the Muslim Moharram or the Hindu Ganapati festival, local groups form committees which plan their contribution to the cityside procession. In Pune, the central point is the statue of Dr.Ambedkar near the railway station, and groups of dancing, shouting youngsters and older men march from their scattered localities to Ambedkar Square. The Maharashtrian dance game legim is often played by the marchers, as in the Ganapati festival, although the Buddhists have at least one girl's group, which the Hindus do not. One group rented the city zoo's elephant in 1976 to carry Ambedkar's photograph in the procession, but generally the marchers try to out-do each other in spirit rather than constructing elaborate floats.

A Jayanti held at the Aundh Road Buddhist locality near Pune illustrates the mood of this day. Dozens of boys and a few older men drummed and danced their way the twenty miles to Ambedkar Square and back. A meeting then began at about 9 o'clock that night, presided over by one of the exhausted participants. Speeches were made by a young Marathi-speaking bhikshu from another slum locality in Pune, a Maratha caste convert to Buddhism who had just attended a Buddhist conference in Thailand and this American scholar who is considered an authority on Ambedkar's life. The speeches were followed by a local drama group. Every social group, male and female, and every political faction in the locality was invited to participate in an effort to unite the community, and no outside political leaders were asked to attend. The events of the day reached the children, the young people and the adults of the community in one phase or another. The procession was sheer fun, the speeches of the Bhikshus and the Buddhist converts contained heavy doses of ethics and morality, and the drama provided both entertainment and a glimpse of the Buddhist past.

While these observances bear some resemblance to Hindu or other Indian holy days or festivals, particularly in the idea of the public processions and the exhibiting of the photographs of the 'gurus', the Buddha and Dr.Ambedkar, they are unlike Hindu occasions in their emphasis on teaching and their rationality. There is no one astrologically timed sacred moment, no one hallowed sacred space. There is no need for a religious figure

to give an auspicious presence, blessing or rite. There is no spirit-possession, no religious ecstasy. These four observances are times for community spirit, for education, for remembrance.

The innovations of the contemporary Buddhist movement in India represent those elements in the past of the Buddhists which are important to their present progress; the work of Dr.Ambedkar, their social unity in the face of continued prejudice and occasional violence, their rejection of Hinduism as a religion of inequality, irrationality and superstition. Nevertheless, there is also some retention of Hindu or Indian elements among the modern Buddhists—the guru idea, the public processions, the days honoring the birth or death of great men. It must be remembered that the Buddhists of India are a minority in a dominant Hindu society, and as in the case of other minorities--- Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Jains---the ways of showing identity, loyalty and group spirit which are a part of Indian culture have colored Buddhist celebrations.

The outward symbols of traditional Buddhism most stressed are those which carry inner meaning of the conversion: honor, equality, rationality, humanism. The image of the Buddha used is a simple one; he is the enlightened one, not a god. The study of Pali is important not only as the language of the Thervada texts but as a symbol of commitment to the Buddhist world. Pali ritual phrases are used in group performance of vandana, partly to produce a moment of group unity and partly to show that this is the holy language of Buddhism, as Sanskrit is the holy language of Hinduism. The Buddhist art and holy places of the past are honored by contemporary Buddhists as proof of the past greatness and part of their own heritage. The decorated caves of Ajanta, Elora, Aurangabad, Nasik and Junnar are visited with reverence and awe, and many make pilgrimages to Sanchi Sarnath or Bodh Gaya.

Along with the amalgam of traditional Buddhism, the Mahar past and the socio-religious practices of Hindu society in general, the Buddhists of India seem to have created some new and interesting developments on their own. The multipurpose vihara and the initiative and responsibility of the lay leader are the most striking of these. Wherever it has gone, Buddhism has adapted itself to the needs of the surrounding culture. The contemporary Buddhists of India are not an exact copy of Singhalese, Burmese, Thai, Cambodian or Japanese Buddhists. As in those societies, Buddhism has retained some of its ancient lineaments while allowing those who claim commitment to it to change it in accordance with their own needs.

What path freedom ?

-Speech by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

In 1935 at Nasik district, Maharashtra, Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar had declared his firm resolve to change his religion. He had declared that he was born as a Hindu but will not die as Hindu. About a year later, a massive Mahar conference was held on May 30 and 31, 1936, in Mumbai, to assess the impact of that declaration on Mahar masses. In his address to the conference, Dr.Ambedkar expressed his views on conversion in an elaborate, well- prepared and written speech in Marathi. Here is an English translation of that speech by Mr.Vasant Moon, OSD to the committee of Govt. of Maharashtra for publication of Writings & speeches of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

Conversion is not a game of children. It is not a subject of entertainment. It deals with how to make man's life successful. Just as a boatman has to make all necessary preparations before he starts for voyage, so also we have to make preparations. Unless I get an idea as to how many persons are willing to leave the Hindu fold, I cannot start preparations for conversion.

For a common man this subject of conversion is very important but also very difficult to understand.

Class Struggle

There are two aspects of conversion; social as well as religious; material as well as spiritual. Whatever may be the aspect, or line of thinking, it is necessary to understand the beginning, the nature of Untouchability and how it is practised. Without this understanding, you will not be able to realise the real meaning underlying my declaration of conversion. In order to have a clear understanding of untouchability and its practice in real life, I want you to recall the stories of the atrocities perpetrated against you. But very few of you might have realised as to why all this happens! What is at the root cause of their tyranny? To me it is very necessary, that we understand it.

This is not a feud between rival men. The problem of untouchability is a matter of class struggle. It is the struggle between caste Hindus and the Untouchables. That is not a matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another. This "class struggle" has a relation with the social status. This struggle indicates, how one class should keep its relation with another class. This struggle starts as soon as you start claiming equal treatment with others...

Conversion not for slaves

The reason for their anger is very simple. Your behaving on par with them insults them. The untouchability is not a short or temporary feature; it is a permanent one. To put it straight, it can be said that the struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables is a permanent phenomena. It is eternal, because the religion which has placed you at the lowest level of the society is itself eternal, according to the belief of the Hindu caste people. No change, according to time and circumstances is possible. You are at the lowest rung of the ladder today. You shall remain lowest forever. This means the struggle between Hindus and Untouchables shall continue forever. How will you survive through this struggle is the main question. And unless you think over it, there is no way out. Those who desire to live in obedience to the dictates of the Hindus, those who wish to remain their slaves, they do not need to think over this problem. **But those who wish to live a life of self-respect, and equality, will have to think over this.** How should we survive through this struggle? For me, it is not difficult to answer this question. Those who have assembled here will have to agree that in any struggle one who holds strength becomes the victor. One, who has no strength, need not expect success. This has been proved by experience, and I do not need to cite illustration to prove it.

Three types of Strength

The question that follows, which you must now consider, is whether you have enough strength to survive through this struggle? Three types of strength are known to man: (i) Manpower, (ii) Finance and (iii) Mental Strength. Which of these, you think that you possess? So far as manpower is concerned, it is clear, that you are in a minority. In Mumbai Presidency, the untouchables are only one-eighth of the total population. That too unorganised. The castes within themselves do not allow them to organise. They are not even compact. They are scattered through the villages. Under these circumstances, this small population is of no use as a fighting force to the untouchables at their critical moments. Financial strength is also just the same. It is an undisputed fact that you at least have a little bit of manpower, but finances you have none. You have no trade, no business, no service, no land. The piece of bread thrown out by the higher castes, are your means of livelihood. You have no food, no clothes. What financial strength can you have? You have no capacity to get redress from the law courts. Thousands of untouchables tolerate insult, tyranny and oppression at the hands of Hindus without a sigh of complaint, because they have no capacity to bear the expenses of the courts. As regards mental strength, the condition is still worst. The tolerance of insults and tyranny without grudge and complaint has killed the sense of retort and revolt. Confidence, vigour and ambition have been completely vanished from you. All of you have become helpless, unenergetic and pale. Everywhere, there is an atmosphere of defeatism and pessimism. Even the slight idea, that you can do something does not enter your mind.

Muslim Example

If, whatever I have described above is correct then you will have to agree with the conclusion that follows. The conclusion is, if you depend only upon your own strength, you will never be able to face the tyranny of the Hindus. I have no doubt that you are oppressed because you have no strength. It is not that you alone are in minority. The Muslims are equally small in number. Like Mahar- Mangs, they too have few houses in the village. But no one dares to trouble the Muslims while you are always a victim of tyranny. Why is this so? Though there may be two houses of Muslims in the village, nobody dares to harm them, while the whole village practices tyranny against you though you have ten houses. Why does this happen? This is a very pertinent question and you will have to find out a suitable answer to this. In my opinion, there is only one answer to this question. The Hindus realise that the strength of the whole of the Muslim population in India stands behind those two houses of Muslims living in a village and, therefore, they do not dare to touch them. Those two houses also enjoy free and fearless life because they are aware that if any Hindu commits aggression against them, the whole Muslim community from Punjab to Madras will rush to their protection at any cost. On the other hand, the Hindus are sure that none will come to your rescue, nobody will help you, no financial help will reach you. Tahsildar and police belong to caste Hindus and in case of disputes between

Hindus and Untouchables, they are more faithful to their caste than to their duty. The Hindus practise injustice and tyranny against you only because you are helpless.

Outside Support

From the above discussion, two facts are very clear. Firstly, you can not face tyranny without strength. And secondly, you do not possess enough strength to face the tyranny. With these two conclusions, a third one automatically follows. That is, the strength required to face this tyranny needs to be secured from outside. How are you to gain this strength is really an important question? And you will have to think over this with an unbiased mind.

From this, you will realise one thing, that unless you establish close relations with some other society, unless you join some other religion, you cannot get the strength from outside. It clearly means, you must leave your present religion and assimilate yourselves with some other society. Without that, you cannot gain the strength of that society. So long as you do not have strength, you and your future generations will have to lead your lives in the same pitiable condition.

Spiritual Aspect of Conversion

Uptil now, we have discussed why conversion is necessary for material gains. Now, I propose to put forth my thoughts as to why conversion is as much necessary for spiritual wellbeing. What is Religion? Why is it necessary? ... 'That which govern people is religion'. That is the true definition of Religion. There is no place for an individual in Hindu society. The Hindu religion is constituted on a class-concept. Hindu religion does not teach how an individual should behave with another individual. A religion, which does not recognise the individual, is not personally acceptable to me.

Three factors are required for the uplift of an individual. They are: Sympathy, Equality and Liberty. Can you say by experience that any of these factors exist for you in Hinduism?

No Equality in Hinduism

Such a living example of inequality is not to be found anywhere in the world. Not at anytime in the history of mankind can we find such inequality, which is more intense than untouchability... I think, you have been thrust into this condition because you have continued to be Hindus. Those of you who have become Muslims, are treated by the Hindus neither as Untouchables nor as unequals. The same can be said of those who have become Christians...

That God is all pervading is a principle of science and not of religion, because religion has a direct relation with the behaviour of man. **Hindus can be ranked among those cruel people whose utterances and acts are two poles apart. They have this Ram on their tongues and a knife under their armpits. They speak like saints but act like butchers...**

Thus we are not low in the eyes of the Hindus alone, but we are the lowest in the whole of India, because of the treatment given to us by the Hindus.

If you have to get rid of this same shameful condition, if you have to cleanse this filth and make use of this precious life; there is only one way and that is to throw off the shackles of Hindu religion and the Hindu society in which you are bound.

The taste of a thing can be changed. But the poison cannot be made amrit. To talk of annihilating castes is like talking of changing the poison into amrit. In short, so long as we remain in a religion, which teaches a man to treat another man like a leper, the sense of discrimination on account of caste, which is deeply rooted in our minds, can not go. For annihilating caste and untouchables, change of religion is the only antidote.

Untouchables are not Hindus

What is there in conversion, which can be called novel? Really speaking what sort of social relations have you with the caste Hindus at present? You are as separate from the Hindus as Muslims and Christians are. So is

their relation with you. Your society and that of the Hindus are two distinct groups. By conversion, nobody can say or feel that one society has been split up. You will remain as separate from the Hindus as you are today. Nothing new will happen on account of this conversion. If this is true, then why should people be afraid of conversion? At least, I do not find any reason for such a fear...

Revolution – Not Reform

Changing a religion is like changing a name. Change of religion followed by the change of name will be more beneficial to you. To call oneself a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist or a Sikh is not merely a change of religion but also a change of name.. Since the beginning of this movement of conversion, various people have raised various objections to it. Let us now examine the truth, if any, in such objections...

A congenital idiot alone will say that one has to adhere to one's religion because it is that of our ancestors. No sane man will accept such a proposition. Those who advocate such an argument, seem not to have read the history at all. The ancient Aryan religion was called Vedic religion. It has three distinct characteristic (features). Beef-eating, drinking and merry-making was part of the religion of the day. Thousands of people followed it in India and even now some people dream of going back to it. If the ancient religion alone is to be adhered to why did the people of India leave Hinduism and accept Buddhism? Why did they divorce themselves from the Vedic religion?... Thus this Hindu religion is not the religion of our ancestors, but it was a slavery forced upon them...

To reform the Hindu society is neither our aim nor our field of action. Our aim is to gain freedom. We have nothing to do with anything else.

If we can gain freedom by conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility of reforming the Hindu religion? And why should we sacrifice our strength and property for that? None should misunderstand the object of our movement as being Hindu social reform. The object of our movement is to achieve social freedom for the untouchables. It is equally true that this freedom cannot be secured without conversion.

Caste can't be destroyed

I do accept that the untouchables need equality as well. And to secure equality is also one of our objectives. But nobody can say that this equality can be achieved only by remaining as Hindu and not otherwise. There are two ways of achieving equality. One, by remaining in the Hindu fold and another by leaving it by conversion. If equality is to be achieved by remaining in the Hindu fold, mere removal of the sense of being a touchable or an untouchable will not serve the purpose. Equality can be achieved only when inter-caste dinners and marriages take place. This means that the Chaturvarnya must be abolished and the brahminic religion must be uprooted. Is it possible? And if not, will it be wise to expect equality of treatment by remaining in the Hindu religion? And can you be successful in your efforts to bring equality? Of course not. The path of conversion is far more simpler than this. The Hindu society does not give equality of treatment, but the same is easily achieved by conversion. If this is true, then why should you not adopt this simple path of conversion?

Conversion is a simplest path

According to me, this conversion of religion will bring happiness to both the Untouchables as well as the Hindus. So long as you remain Hindus, you will have to struggle for social intercourse, for food and water, and for inter-caste marriages. And so long as this quarrel continues, relations between you and the Hindus will be of perpetual enemies. By conversion, the roots of all the quarrels will vanish... thus by conversion, if equality of treatment can be achieved and the affinity between the Hindus and the Untouchables can be brought about then why should the Untouchables not adopt the simple and happy path of securing equality? Looking at this problem through this angle, it will be seen that this path of conversion is the only right path of freedom, which ultimately leads to equality. It is neither cowardice nor escapism.

Sanctified Racism

Although the castes exist in Muslims and the Christians alike, it will be meanness to liken it to that of the Hindus. There is a great distinction between the caste-system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and

Christians. Firstly, it must be noted that though the castes exist amongst the Christians and the Muslims, it is not the chief characteristic of their body social.

There is one more difference between the caste system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and Christians. The caste system in the Hindus has the foundation of religion. The castes in other religions have no sanction in their religion ...**Hindus cannot destroy their castes without destroying their religion.** Muslims and Christians need not destroy their religions for eradication of their castes. Rather their religion will support such movements to a great extent.

Conversion alone liberates us

I am simply surprised by the question, which some Hindus ask us as to what can be achieved by conversion alone? Most of the present day Sikhs, Muslims and Christians were formerly Hindus, majority of them being from the Shudras and Untouchables. Do these critics mean to say that those, who left the Hindu fold and embraced Sikhism or Christianity, have made no progress at all? And if this is not true, and if it is admitted that the conversion has brought a distinct improvement in their condition, then to say that the untouchables will not be benefited by conversion, carries no meaning...

After giving deep thought to the problem, everybody will have to admit that conversion is necessary to the Untouchables as self-government is to India. The ultimate object of both is the same. There is not the slightest difference in their ultimate goal. This ultimate aim is to attain freedom. And if the freedom is necessary for the life of mankind, conversion of Untouchables which brings them complete freedom cannot be called worthless by any stretch of imagination...

Economic Progress or Social Changes ?

I think it necessary here to discuss the question as to what should be initiated first, whether economic progress or conversion? I do not agree with the view that economic progress should precede...

Untouchability is a permanent handicap on your path of progress. And unless you remove it, your path cannot be safe. Without conversion, this hurdle cannot be removed...

So, if you sincerely desire that your qualifications should be valued, your education should be of some use to you, you must throw away the shackles of untouchability, which means that you must change your religion... However, for those who need this Mahar Watan, I can assure them that their Mahar Watan will not be jeopardised by their conversion. In this regard, the Act of 1850 can be referred. Under the provisions of this Act, no rights of person or his successors with respect to his property are affected by virtue of his conversion...

Poona Pact

A second doubt is about political rights. Some people express fear as to what will happen to our political safeguards if we convert...

But I feel, it is not proper to depend solely on political rights. These political safeguards are not granted on the condition that they shall be ever lasting. They are bound to cease sometime. According to the communal Award of the British Government, our political safeguards were limited for 20 years. Although no such limitation has been fixed by the Poona Pact, nobody can say that they are everlasting. Those, who depend upon the political safeguards, must think as to what will happen after these safeguards are withdrawn on the day on which our rights cease to exist. We will have to depend on our social strength. I have already told you that this social strength is wanting in us. So also I have proved in the beginning that this strength cannot be achieved without conversion...

Political Rights

Under these circumstances, one must think of what is permanently beneficial.

In my opinion, conversion is the only way to eternal bliss. Nobody should hesitate even if the political rights are required to be sacrificed for this purpose. Conversion brings no harm to the political safeguards. I do not understand why the political safeguards should at all be jeopardized by conversion. Wherever you may go, your political rights and safeguards will accompany you. I have no doubt about it.

If you become Muslims, you will get the political rights as Muslims. If you become Christians, you will get the political rights as Christians, if you become Sikhs, you will have your political rights as Sikhs. In short, our political rights will accompany us.

So nobody should be afraid of it. On the other hand, if we remain Hindus and do not convert, will our rights be safe? You must think carefully on this. Suppose the Hindus pass a law whereby the untouchability is prohibited and its practice is made punishable, then they may ask you, 'We have abolished untouchability by law and you are no longer untouchables...

Looking through this perspective, conversion becomes a path for strengthening the political safeguards rather than becoming a hindrance. If you remain Hindus, you are sure to lose your political safeguards. If you want to save them, leave this religion. The political safeguards will be permanent only by conversion.

The Hindu religion does not appeal to my conscience. It does not appeal to my self-respect. However, your conversion will be for material as well as for spiritual gains. Some persons mock and laugh at the idea of conversion for material gains. I do not feel hesitant in calling such persons as stupid.

Conversion brings Happiness

I tell you all very specifically, religion is for man and not man for religion. To get human treatment, convert yourselves.

- CONVERT -for getting organised.
- CONVERT -for becoming strong.
- CONVERT -for securing equality.
- CONVERT -for getting liberty.
- CONVERT -so that your domestic life may be happy.

I consider him as leader who without fear or favour tells the people what is good and what is bad for them. It is my duty to tell you, what is good for you, even if you don't like it, I must do my duty. And now I have done it. It is now for you to decide and discharge your responsibility.

Ambedkar And Human Rights Education

Human Rights As A New Paradigm Of Education In India

- by Henry Thiagaraj

We are at a turning point in history. As we enter the 21st century and the new millennium, we are witnessing a historically significant period in which the world has become a global village. Yet with a mindset of people living in closed tribal society we are fighting for self-preservation and survival. We have inherited an oppressive historical past that liberation of our true self becomes elusive. The 50th anniversary of India's Independence was celebrated in 1997. During these celebrations there were some Dalits who paraded without shirts and wore black shirts on August 15, to show they have not got the benefits of freedom and courted arrest. The same period many newspapers and periodicals including the Economic and Political Weekly published articles by great scholars that the benefits of development and education has not reached the Dalits, who are the poorest of the poor in India. The 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations was celebrated during 1998-99. It is obvious that many Dalits in rural areas do not know the word Human Rights as they have been living in 'dehumanised' conditions for thousands of years.

Human Rights in India has been the pre-occupation of upper caste Hindus, lawyers and urban elitist scholars who are concerned with civil liberties. Till recently the societal violence inflicted on Dalits have not attracted the attention of the people dealing with Civil Liberties. When I researched for a World Human Rights Conference and prepared a poster, which said: every hour two Dalits are assaulted, everyday three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, and two Dalits houses are burnt. People who read the poster are shocked. The Hindu newspaper dated 11.08.97 mentioned that more than 300 Dalits were already killed in intercaste violence in the first six months of 1997. It was 490 in 1996. In other words, the societal violence on Dalits is increasing! I would like to recall here the words of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar:

"The Hindus practice injustice and tyranny against Untouchables only because they are weak. Firstly Untouchables cannot face social and religious persecution, so long as they remain weak and divided. Secondly, they do not possess enough strength to face the tyranny. With those two conclusions, the third one automatically follows. That is the strength required to face the tyranny needs to be procured from outside."

In my view, the strength required to face the tyranny of Hindu casteism comes from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the Magna Carta for all the humanity, a charter for tolerance, a guide to sane society free from violence. Human Rights are humanism, an expression of universality of human family. The United Nations accords high priority for independence of judiciary. I would like to share my personal self-growth and realization on the need of our people for liberation through education. After the completion of my college studies, I had the privilege of working on a fellowship at the UN Headquarters in New York and to participate in the Human Rights Commission meetings. Often I wondered the relevance of the UN, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to people in developing countries and to people in rural areas in our own country. Almost every year in the last 7 years I have been participating in the UN Human rights Commission Meetings in Geneva. When we come to grassroots realities, it is a sad experience and anguish for me. Last year I had an opportunity to visit some of the villages where violence was unleashed during the last Parliament elections. After a while I accompanied a foreign press reporter who asked me to be an English translator. During the visit to rural villages, the scenes I saw of the houses burnt, people grievously injured: young man's hand was cut off for voting to the candidate of his choice and another young man's leg was broken with the result he cannot walk, are just some examples of the many incidents of violence.

Societal violence on Dalits based on caste discrimination is peculiar to India. The Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu have been greatly affected by societal violence a few years ago. I visited Melavalavu Village, near Madurai, where the gruesome murder of the Panchayat President Murugesan with his six friends in broad daylight - the memory of which still haunts us. The plight of the seven widows was another story of sorrow. This may be pointed out the gap between the government, the police, and the judiciary and grassroots realities of some gruesome violence. Only people can check this with greater awareness of human rights. In order to eliminate of violence and violation of Human Rights a new mind set is required, a radical thinking is required to establish a new social order based on human dignity and human rights, which can come only from education. As I am convinced that the culture of violence is not going to solve any problem and the best way to prevent violence is educating the people at the grassroots. In this respect, I would like to quote a very encouraging message of Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations:

"Why is human rights education so important? Because, as it says in the Constitution of UNESCO, "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." The more people know their own rights, and the more they respect those of others, the better the chance that they will live together in peace. Only when people are educated about human rights can we hope to prevent human rights violations, and thus prevent conflict as well."

It is imperative to build a strong international network to support the Human Rights Movement among the Dalits of different cultural, political, religious and linguistic groups through education on Human Rights. By being united for Human Rights we can organise Dalits. This should be a priority declaration for each one of us to empower people to gain their legitimate rights through Human Rights Movement. Though casteism is unique and peculiar social phenomenon, it cannot be justified as a particular cultural problem. Nor its racial origins can be denied as varnashradharma clearly indicated colour and race as the origin of occupational difference and discrimination. All violence against Dalits and violations of Human Rights of Dalits came under the purview of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - which the United Nations insist is really universal and applicable to all countries irrespective of their particular cultures.

To me, Dr. Ambedkar is the true champion of Human Rights in India, and pioneer of human rights advocacy. When Baba Saheb said "educate", I am sure it is in broader sense of providing a humanistic education, not merely academic, but an education of life and for life that is education for human dignity, human rights, and justice in India, which will make Dalits restless or to agitate and to unite. The problem of Dalits, who are divided on the basis of occupation, community, culture, language, etc. can be resolved if the Dalits have learnt that we are human beings first, and we have to respect our fellow Dalits who are born as human beings and the paradigm of relationship is respect for human dignity and the paradigm for growth is respect for (human)

dignity of labour, which is naturally found in every Dalit Village. Prof. Kancha Illaiah once said that "Dalit village portrays equality centered productivity, an embryonic creativity, human values, a democratic civil society "- all of which need to be strengthened.

The UN General Assembly has passed a resolution in 1986 on the Right to Development. However it took nearly a decade for the UN to promote this idea of Right to Development in a big way. It was the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, who highlighted the importance of this resolution on the Right to Development and asked the member - States to implement it in all seriousness. The Right to Development of course includes the Right to Food, Right to Housing, Right to Employment which are the basic necessities for a human being to live with human dignity. When we have nearly one third (1/3) of the population living in poverty, realisation of the human rights for nearly 300 million people becomes a big task and has been a challenge for policy makers and development planners. The right to development includes the right to accessible drinking water, shelter, food, etc. On this criteria alone, Indian Dalit people who are denied of development opportunities for centuries, denied of access to drinking water, shelter, accessible roads, etc. can easily claim universal application of Human Rights to their life and insist on the right to development. We have to look ahead for the future of the world and future of our country. We see in the newspapers the big advertisements given by the Government how they provide drinking water to rural areas, how government provides housing for the rural poor, etc. But as NGOs working in rural poor areas we have found often these developments are in papers, or for publicity and the developments do not reach the rural poor. This has to be investigated properly. My plea is the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) should bring under its purview implementing the UN resolution on the Right to Development in our country and check on the govt. ministries which are spending large amount of money and find out where the money is going and ask the Government to produce statement of accountability on how the funds are utilised. We also know that in many ministries funds allotted to the uplift of the oppressed people were unutilised. Ms. Veena Nayyar, Member, National Commission for SCs and STs in New Delhi has estimated that several crores of rupees in different Govt. Departments/ Ministries have not been utilised to uplift the downtrodden or diverted. We plead the NHRC to take up the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the right to development to ensure an efficient governance and an effective implementation of poverty eradication programmes Thus the NHRC can prevent dehumanising conditions of the Dalit people and contain poverty. We are still facing extreme poverty, the plight of marginalised people and social imbalances. We are increasingly feeling the threat of globalisation, which increases the gap between the poor and the affluent. Yet, with some hope that educated people in this country can bring social changes necessary we have taken this task of educating people on human rights.

The United Nations is also dealing with contemporary forms of Slavery which includes agenda items like bonded labour, child labour, sexual exploitation of women and prostitution. It is estimated that two million children are working in hazardous industries and most of them are Dalit children. Whether it is child labour, bonded labour, sex-exploitation, prostitution, rape the most affected people are Dalits. Under the title of Contemporary Forms of slavery, discrimination of Dalits based on caste should be studied in the context of the Human Rights charter of the United Nations. Human Rights integrates democracy, development and environment. It has become a most powerful tool of education. It covers rights of child, rights of women, etc.

Mr. Feodor Starcevic, Director, United Nations Information Centre, Delhi recently in our Seminar at Mumbai said: "Human rights protection depends on proper information. People need to know what their rights are, and need to be able to report when they are infringed. They need to know what commitments their governments have made at international fora. Therefore, the human rights education is the first step towards a better world where human rights violations are not the norm".

Inspired by Babasaheb Ambedkar and our commitment to serve based on our Christian faith, we founded the Dalit Liberation Education Trust * in Chennai. Through the programmes and activities of our Trust, we provide Human Rights Education to our Dalit people, providing an awareness into human dignity, we provide an opportunity to create a new social order based on dignity of human life and respecting human rights, which we believe will bring the social revolution in India. In teaching Human Rights to Dalit people as a method as a method of adult education through the medium of street plays, cultural shows, songs etc. We find the shift from dehumanised condition to human dignity is fast. We noticed once Dalit women asserted that they are human beings and their dignity should be protected that they refuse to be sexually abused by their upper caste land owners - who kept them as bonded labourers. This type of grass-root human rights education will bring a social revolution faster to the satisfaction of our Dalit people. The right to knowledge and education and

researching into our own Dalit heritage, will open up new avenues of liberation from oppression. The indigenous wealth of spirituality, human dignity, environmental consciousness gives us a great sense of self-esteem and the ability to embrace all humanity. In order to create a casteless society and to find true liberation, first Dalits have to realise their humanity and human dignity and free themselves from many oppressing forces within and limiting controls of mind-set. Here I would like to recall the words of Baba Saheb Ambedkar on WHO IS A FREE MAN?

"One who is not a slave of usage, of customs, of meaningless rituals and ceremonies, of superstition and traditions, one who has not got blind faith in the teachers of saints and religious teachers, simply because these have been passed from generation to generation, whose flame of reason has not been extinguished, I call him a free man. He who has not surrendered his free will and abdicated his intelligence and independent thinking, who does not blindly act on the teachings of the others, who does not accept anything without critically analyzing and examining its veracity and usefulness in the light of the theory of the 'cause and effect', who is always prepared to protect his rights, who is not afraid of ridicule and unjust public criticism, who has a sound conscience and self-respect so as not to become a tool in the hands of others, I call him a free man. He who does not lead his life under the direction of others, who sets his own goal of life according to his own reasoning, and decides for himself as to how and in what way life should be led, is a free man. In short a man who is master of his own free will, him alone I consider a free man". I call him free who with his conscience awake, realises his rights, responsibilities and duties. He who is not a slave of circumstances and is always ready and striving to change them in his favour, I call him free".

BABA SAHEB Dr. B.R. AMBEDKAR Speech delivered on May 31, 1936 Mahar Conference held at Bombay The clarion call of Dr. Ambedkar is to take his mission to 21st Century, to view Dr. Ambedkar in futuro, to create a New India free from caste discrimination. In this mission we have a special task of making Babasaheb relevant to modern India and to the 21st century for which, it is my firm belief that the spirit of Babasaheb is more important than sticking on to the letters. Literal interpretation of scriptures promoted a fundamentalism and sectarianism, which divided people, and promoted in fighting very similar to the feuds of denominations in other religions. In fact we are all capable of overcoming our own parochialism and adhere to the teaching of Babasaheb to be united as educated people. We are all capable of creating a new humanity and a new world order based on the values of taught by Baba Saheb integrating with Human Rights Education to live in the emerging global village of the new millennium. In conclusion, I would like to quote Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar through his inspiring words: "Noble is your aim and sublime and glorious is your mission. Blessed are those who are awakened to their duty to those among they are born. Glory to those who devote their time, talents and their all to the amelioration of slavery. Glory to those who could keep their struggle for the liberation of the enslaved in spite of heavy odds, carping humiliations, storms and dangers till the downtrodden secure their Human Rights".

Dr. Ambedkar as Journalist

- by Raju Kamble

As part of his struggle spanning over 4 decades, Dr. Ambedkar always used print media of his own as one of the instruments to achieve his goal of emancipating the untouchables. Even in 1920 when he had just begun his struggle, he launched a Marathi fortnightly, "Mooknayak, (the leader of the dumb)". Dr. Ambedkar had written editorials for this magazine. This magazine survived just for about a year and half. The magazine could be started with the financial assistance from Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj of Kolhapur. In April 1927, Dr. Ambedkar started the magazine called "Bahishkrit Bharat (The Ostracized India)". This time he was more organised. He had bought over a printing press through public donations. The press was named as "Bharat Bhushan Printing press". During the publication of B.B, Dr. Ambedkar personally took lot of care to see that every issue has very high standard of writing. This magazine was published for about 2 years. In 1930, Dr. Ambedkar started a new journal named, "Janata (The People)". This magazine lived for 26 years. After that the magazine's name was changed to "Prabuddha Bharat (Enlightened India)". The names of the magazine which Dr. Ambedkar published had the reflection and the emphasis of the direction of his movement at a particular time. He changed the name of Janata to Prabuddha Bharat when he was in the process of launching the massive historic conversion to Buddhism.

Dr. Ambedkar, in spite of his busy schedule with the political activities and his various assignments as the member of Viceroy's Council, or as the Chairman of the Indian Constitution Drafting Committee, found time to write for his magazines. He even used to send editorials while he was overseas during the Round Table Conferences and during other tours outside India. The standard of the writing was of utmost importance to him. He used to prepare editorials by writing all through the nights; but never compromised on the quality of writing. A good deal of writing and research has been done on the journalistic aspect of Dr. Ambedkar. Two Ph.Ds have so far been awarded on the topic "Dr. Ambedkar and journalism". One to Dr.Gangadhar Pantawane of Aurangabad University in the late 1960s. and the second to Dr.Shoraj Singh Bechain of JNU, New Delhi. Dr. Bechain's research topic was "Effect of Dr. Ambedkar's Journalism on Dalit Literature". Numerous books e.g "Patrakar Ambedkar" by Dr.Gangadhar Pantawane, "Lokpatrakar Ambedkar" by Sukhram Hiwrale have been published. Dr. Ambedkar's editorials of B.B. have also been published in Marathi by Ratnakar Ganvir; so also the small articles ("sputh lekh" in Marathi).

Dr. Ambedkar and M.K.Gandhi were contemporary journalists. Gandhi used to write through "Young India" in the 1920s and then through "Harijan" in the 1930s, whereas Dr. Ambedkar has done his writing through "Mooknayak", Bahishkrit Bharat, Janata and Prabuddha Bharat during the same time. Many a times there have been cross writing by both of them referring to the writings of their respective journals.

Today dalit journalism/literature has grown considerably. The whole of it has originated from the writings of Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar is the sole originator of dalit journalism and dalit literature. He is indeed the single most inspiring factor for the statewide fast emerging dalit literature.

News in Brief

One million Dalits to embrace Buddhism Vizag to host Lumbini Festival

New Delhi, April 8: One million Dalits are expected to embrace Buddhism on October 14 in an articulation of anger strikingly similar to Black America's march against the White mainstream.

The day — 45 years ago on October 14, B.R. Ambedkar had renounced Hinduism and found solace in Buddhism — has been chosen with care to hammer home the Dalit rage against the social stratification.

The objective behind the mammoth conversion is not only to rebuff the caste Hindus and the Brahminical order but also to remove the internal contradictions dogging the Dalits, who are divided into various camps representing the Balmikis, Paswans the Chamars and so on.

The decision on mass conversion has been taken by the All-India Confederation of SC/ST organisations, which groups four million Dalits.

Ram Raj, the national chairman of the confederation, termed the conversion the "biggest cultural event in the world". He said "the most crucial decision" to embrace Buddhism has the concurrence of Dalits leaders from almost all Indian states.

Visakhapatnam, April 8: In an effort to highlight the tourism potential of Visakhapatnam and its surrounding areas, the State government would organise Lumbini Festival in the district on May 7 and 8.

The main aim of the festival is to attract local and foreign tourists towards the Buddhist sites in the district. Similar festival is being held on Buddha Purnima day at Hyderabad every year. This year it will be extended to Visakhapatnam also.

The government has also decided to invite some 40 Buddhist monks from Srilanka and Japan to participate in the Buddhist festival.

Buddhist history and detailed information on other buddhist sites in the State would be shown during the two-day Lumbini Festival. As part of the festival, package tours would be organised to Buddhist sites like Thatlakonda, Bavikonda, Bojjannakonda and Pavuralkonda , which date back to third and seventh century BC.

Thatlakonda and Bavikonda would be the major venues of the festival. Thatlakonda and Bavikonda, located on the Bhimili Beach Road had no road communication facility till last year and Visakhapatnam Urban Development Authority constructed two roads on the ghat s to enable the tourists to reach the sites. One km long ring road was laid by Vuda to have a panoramic view of the Bay of Bengal from the hill top.

75,000 reserved seats in Indian universities lying vacant

A body of academicians has berated the Central and state governments for making a mockery of the reservation policy by leaving vacant a whopping 75,000 reserved teaching posts in universities all over the country.

Of the 75,000 teaching posts for SCs/STs lying vacant in various varsities, the Delhi University tops the list with a backlog of 1400, says a report of Forum of Academics for Social Justice.

"It clearly shows that over the past 45 years, excuses were found to deprive SCs/STs of their dues," says the report.

Forum's national chairman Hansraj Suman said there are 256 varsities and over 11,115 colleges in the country. More than 8 million students take admissions annually in these institutions and over 342,000 teachers are recruited to teach them.

"As per the reservation policy, 22.5 per cent of the teaching posts, which is 78,450 posts, should have been reserved for SCs/STs. However, not even two per cent of these posts have been filled," he said.

CM urged to fill up backlog vacancies

State Finance Commission Chairman T N Narasimhamurthy today appealed to Chief Minister S M Krishna to fill up the backlog vacancies in government departments at the earliest and to find a permanent solution to the recurring problem.

Speaking to reporters here, Mr Narasimhamurthy said the backlog vacancies in government departments had put the educated unemployed into hardship as well as crippled the functioning of government machinery. Referring to the fast-unto-death agitation undertaken by the SC/ST Unemployed Engineers' Union in Gulbarga to protest against the Government's delay in filling up 25,000 backlog vacancies, Mr Narasimhamurthy urged the Chief Minister to depute one of its ministers to persuade the agitators to withdraw the strike.

NCW Project on Devadasis

JWP Bangalore is conducting an evaluation study of the Devadasi Rehabilitation Programmes that are being conducted by the Karnataka State Women's Development Corporation Karnataka. These programmes are a combination of two strategies awareness generation and economic development.

Apart from these, there are social programmes for Devadasis including formation of self help groups, health check ups, etc. The SC/ST Corporation has two main programmes:

- Housing programme for rehabilitation of devadasis
- Training programmes like mat weaving, knitting, etc. for economic empowerment of the Devadasi women
- The need for this evaluation study has arisen in view of the fact that these programmes were launched in 1991-92 and have been implemented and are in the withdrawal phase. The duration of the study will be six months.

Boy sacrificed to please god

Jagdapur, April 2. (PTI): In a horrific incident, a four-year-old boy was strangled and his tongue chopped off by his neighbour to propitiate the gods in a village in Kanker district of Chhattisgarh, police said here today.

The incident took place on March 26, they said, adding the neighbour, Nohar Ram, resorted to the gruesome act to solve his family difficulties.

The boy, son of Rajendra Sahu, was strangled. Later, his tongue was chopped off, and the body offered as a human sacrifice in a temple in village Sarandi, police said.

My final words of advice to you are **educate, agitate and organize**; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is battle for freedom. It is the battle of reclamation of human personality.

-Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Buddha And His Dhamma

By- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Part I - From Birth to Parivraja

10. The Failure of the Women to Win the Prince

11. The Prime Minister's Admonition to the Prince

12. The Prince's Reply to the Prime Minister 13, Initiation into the Sakya Sangh

§ 10. The Failure of the Women to Win the Prince

1. Having heard these words of Udayin, the women strung to the heart, rose even above themselves for the conquest of the prince.
2. But even with their brows, their glances, their coquetries, their smiles, their delicate movements, the girls of the harem did not feel sure of themselves.
3. But they soon regained their confidence through the command of the family priest and the gentle temperament of the prince, and through the power of intoxication and of love.
4. The women then set upon their task and made the prince wander in the woods like an elephant in the forests of Himavat, accompanied by a herd of females.
5. Attended by women, he shone in that pleasant grove, as the sun surrounded by Apsaras in his royal garden.
6. There, some of them urged by passion, pressed him with their full, firm bosoms in gentle collisions.
7. Others violently embraced him after pretending to stumble, then leaning on him with their shoulders drooping down, and with their gentle creeper-like arms.
8. Others with their mouths smelling of spirituous liquor, their lower lips red like copper, whispered in his ear, "Let my secret be heard."
9. Others, all wet with unguents, as if giving him a command, clasped his hand eagerly and said, "Perform thy rites of adoration here."
10. Another with her blue garments continually slipping down in pretended intoxication, stood conspicuous with her tongue visible like the night with its lightning lashing.
11. Others with their golden ones tinkling, wandered about here and there, showing him their bodies veiled with thin cloth.
12. Others leaned, holding a mango bough in hand, displaying their bosoms like golden jars.
13. Some, coming from a lotus bed, carrying lotuses and with eyes like lotuses, stood like the lotus goddess Padma, by the side of that lotus-faced prince.
14. Another sang a sweet song easily understood and with the proper gesticulations, rousing him, self-subdued though he was, by her glance, as saying, "O how thou art deluded ! "
15. Another, having armed herself with her bright face, with its brow drawn to its full, imitated his action, as playing the hero.
16. Another, with beautiful, full bosoms, and having her earrings waving in the wind, laughed loudly at him, as if saying, " Catch me, sir, if you can ! "
17. Some, as he was going away, bound him with strings of garlands, others punished him with words like an elephant-driver's hook, gentle yet reproachful.
18. Another, wishing to argue with him, seizing a mango spray, asked, all bewildered with passion, "This flower, whose is it?" 19. Another, assuming a gait and attitude like that of a man, said to him, " You who are conquered. by a woman, go and conquer this earth! "
20. Then another with rolling eyes, smelling a blue lotus, thus addressed the prince with words slightly indistinct in her excitement :
21. " See, my lord, this mango covered with its honey-scented flowers, where the bird kokila sings, as if imprisoned in a golden cage.
22. "Come and see this Asoka tree, which augments lovers' sorrows, where the bees make a noise as if they were scorched by fire.
23. " Come and see this Tilaka tree, embraced by a slender mango branch, like a man in a white garment by a woman decked with yellow unguents.
24. " Behold the kurubaka in flower, bright like fresh resin-juice, which bends down as if it felt reproached by the colour of women's nails.
25. " Come and see this young Asoka, covered all over with new shoots, which stands as if it were ashamed at the beauty of our hands.
26. " See this lake surrounded by the Sinduvara shrubs growing on its banks, like a fair woman reclining, clad in fine white cloth.

27. " See the imperial power of females, yonder Ruddygoose in the water, goes behind, his mate following her like a slave.
28. "Come and listen to the notes of the intoxicated Cuckoo as he sings, while another cuckoo sings as if consenting wholly without care.
29. " Would that thine was the intoxication of the birds which the spring produces, and not the thought of a thinking man, ever pondering how wise he is !
30. Thus these young women, their souls carried away by love, assailed the prince with all kinds of stratagems.
31. But although thus attacked, he, having his sense guarded by self-control; neither rejoiced nor smiled.
32. Having seen them in their real condition, the Prince pondered with an undisturbed and steadfast mind.
33. " What is it that these women lack that they perceive not that youth is fickle ? For old age will destroy whatever beauty has."
34. This round of blandishment went on for months and years with no results.

§ 11. The Prime Minister's Admonition to the Prince

1. Udayin realized that the girls had failed and that the Prince had shown no interest in them.
2. Udayin, well skilled in the rules of policy, thought of talking to the prince.
3. Meeting the prince all alone, Udayin said : " Since I was appointed by the king as a fitting friend for thee, therefore, I wish to speak to thee in the friendliness of my heart." So began Udayin.
4. "To hinder from what is disadvantageous, to urge to do what is advantageous and not to forsake in misfortune, these are the three marks of a friend.
5. " If I, after having promised my friendship, were not to heed when thou turnest away from the great end of man, there would be no friendship in me.
6. " It is right to woo a woman even by guile, this is useful both for getting rid of shame and for one's own enjoyment.
7. " Reverential behaviour and compliance with her wishes are what bind a woman's heart; good qualities truly are a cause of love, and women love respect.
8. "Wilt thou not then, O large-eyed prince, even if thy heart is unwilling, seek to please them with a courtesy worthy of this beauty of thine?
9. " Courtesy is the balm of women, courtesy is the best ornament ; beauty without courtesy is like a grove without flowers.
10. " But of what use is courtesy by itself ? Let it be assisted by the heart's feelings ; surely, when worldly objects so hard to attain are in the grasp, thou wilt not despise them. II. "Knowing that pleasure was the best of objects, even the god Purandara (Indra) wooed in olden times Ahalya, the wife of the saint Gautama.
12. "So too Agastya wooed Rohini, the wife of Soma ; and therefore, as Sruti saith, a like thing befell Lopamudra.
13. "The great ascetic Brihaspati begot Bharadvaja on Mamata the daughter of the Maruta, the wife of Autathya.
14. "The Moon, the best of offerers, begat Buda of divine nature on the spouse of Vrihaspati as she was offering a libation.
15. "So too in old times Parasara, overpowered by passion on the banks of the Yamuna, lay with the maiden Kali who was the daughter of the son of Varuna.
16. "The sage Vasishtha through lust begot a son Kapinglada on Aksh mala, a despised low-caste woman.
17. "And the seer-king Yayat, even when the vigour of his prime was gone, sported in the Kaitratha forest with the Apsara Visvaki.
18. "And the Kaurava king Pandu, though he knew that intercourse with his wife would end in death, yet overcome by the beauty and good qualities of Madri, yielded to the pleasures of love.
19. " Great heroes such as these, pursued even contemptible desires for the sake of pleasure, how much more so when they are praiseworthy of their kind?
20. " And yet thou, a young man, possessed of strength and beauty, despisest enjoyments which rightly belong to thee and to which the whole world is devoted. "

§ 12. The Prince's Reply to the Prime Minister

1. Having heard these specious words of his, well-supported by sacred tradition, the prince made reply, in a voice like the thundering of a cloud :
2. "This speech manifesting affection is well-befitting in thee ; but I will convince thee as to where thou wrongly judgest me.
3. " I do not despise worldly objects, I know that all mankind is bound up therein. But remembering that the world is transitory, my mind cannot find pleasure in them.

4. "Yet even though this beauty of women were to remain perpetual, still delight in the pleasures of desires would not be worthy of the wise man.
5. "And as for what thou sayest as to even those great men having become victims to desire, do not be led away by them ; for destruction was also their lot.
6. " Real greatness is not to be found there, where there is destruction, or where there is attachment to earthly objects, or a want of self-control.
7. " And when thou sayest, ' Let one deal with women by guile,' I know about guile, even if it be accompanied with courtesy.
8. " That compliance too with a woman's wishes pleases me not, if truthfulness be not there ; if there be not a union with one's whole soul and nature, then ' out upon it ' say I.
9. " A soul overpowered by passion, believing in falsehood, carried away by attachment and blind to the faults of its objects, what is there in it worth being deceived ?
10. " And if the victims of passion do deceive one another, are not men unfit for women to look at and women for men?
11. " Since then these things are so, thou surely would not lead me astray into ignoble pleasures."
12. Udayin felt silenced by the firm and strong resolve of the prince and reported the matter to his father.
13. Suddhodana, when he heard how his son's mind turned away from all objects of sense, could not sleep all that night. Like an elephant with an arrow in his heart, he was full of pain.
14. He and his ministers spent much of their time in consultation hoping to find some means to draw Siddharth to the pleasures of carnal life and thus to dissuade him from the likely turn which he may give to his life. But they found no other means besides those they had tried.
15. And the seraglio of women wearing their garlands and ornaments in vain, with their graceful arts and endearments all fruitless, concealing their love deep in their hearts, was disbanded.

...to be continued

Riddle In Hinduism

Riddle No. 4

Why Suddenly The Brahmins Declare The Vedas To Be Infallible And Not To Be Questioned?

To say that the Vedas occupy a very high position in the Religious literature of the Hindus is to make an understatement. To say that the Vedas form the sacred literature of the Hindus will also be an inadequate statement. For the Vedas besides being a sacred literature of the Hindus is a book whose authority cannot be questioned. The Vedas are infallible. Any argument based on the Vedas is final and conclusive. There is no appeal against it. This is the theory of the Vedic Brahmins and is accepted by the generality of the Hindus.

I

On what does this theory rest? The theory rests on the view that the Vedas are Apaurusheya. When the Vedic Brahmins say that the Vedas are Apaurusheya what they mean is that they were not made by man. Not being made by man, they are free from the failings, faults and frailties to which every man is subject and are therefore infallible.

II

It is difficult to understand how such a theory came to be propounded by the Vedic Brahmins. For there was a time when the Vedic Brahmins themselves thought quite differently on the question of the authority of the Vedas as being final and conclusive. These Vaidik Brahmins are no other than the authors of the various Dharma Sutras.

The following are the views expressed by the Dharma Sutras on question of the authority of the Vedas: To begin with the Gautama Dharma Sutra. It lays down the following rule on the question of the infallibility of the Vedas. "The Veda is the source of the sacred law" 1-1.

"And the tradition and practice of those who know the Veda" I-2. "

"If authorities of equal force are conflicting, (either may be followed at) pleasure" I-4.

The Vashishta Dharma Sutra propounds the following view:

"The sacred law has been settled by the revealed texts i.e., Vedas and by the tradition of the sages" I-4.

" On the failure of (rules given in) these (two sources) the practice of Shishtas (has) authority" I-5.

The views of Baudhayana are given below:

Prasna I, Adhyaya I, Kandika I.

(1) The sacred law is taught in each Veda.

(2) We will explain (it) in accordance with that.

(3) (The sacred law), taught in the tradition (Smriti) stands second.

(4) The practice of the Shishtas (stands) third.

(5) On failure of them an Assembly consisting at least of ten members (shall decide disputed points of law).

The view taken by the Apastamba Dharma Sutra is clear from the following extract from that Sutra:

"Now, therefore, we will declare the acts productive of merit which form part of the customs of daily life" 1-1.

"The authority (for these duties) is the agreement (samaya) of those who know the law". 1-2.

"And (the authorities for the latter are) the Vedas alone" 1-3. With regard to the Shishtas both the Vashishtha Dharma Sutra and also the Baudhayana Dharma Sutra have taken particular care to define who can be regarded as Shishtas.

The Vashishta Dharma Sutra says:

"He whose heart is free from desire (is called) a Shishta". I-6. Baudhayana goes into much greater details about the qualification of the Shishtas. This is what he says:

"5. Shishtas, forsooth, (are those) who are free from envy, free from pride, contented with a store of grain sufficient for ten days, free from covetousness, and free from hypocrisy, arrogance, greed, perplexity and anger."

" 6. Those are called Shishtas who, in accordance with the sacred law, have studied the Veda together with its appendages, know how to draw inferences from that (and) are able to adduce proofs perceptible by the senses from the revealed texts. "

Baudhayana has also something very interesting to say about the assembly whom he authorises to decide. The following are his views on the matter:

"8. Now they quote also (the following verses): 'Four men, who each know one of the four Vedas, a Mimamsaka, one who knows the Angas, one who recites (the works on) the sacred law, and three Brahmanas belonging to (three different) orders, constitute an assembly consisting at least of ten members. "

"9. There may be five, or there may be three, or there may be one blameless man, who decides (questions regarding) the sacred law. But a thousand fools (can) not do it). "

"As an elephant made of wood, as an antelope made of leather, such an unlearned Brahmana; those three having nothing but the name (of their kind)".

This review of Dharma Sutras' [f19] shows that the (1) Veda, (2) Tradition (Smriti), (3) Practice of Shishta and (4) Agreement in an assembly were the four different authorities which were required to be referred to in the decision of an issue which was in controversy. It also shows that there was a time when the Vedas were not the sole infallible authorities. That was the time represented by the Dharma Sutras of Vashishta and Baudhayana. Apastambha does not invest the Vedas with any authority at all. Knowledge of Vedas is made by him as an electoral qualification for membership of the Assembly whose agreed decision is the law and the only law. The Veda was not at all regarded as a book of authority and when the only recognized source of authority was an agreement arrived at in an Assembly of the learned. It is only in the time of Gautama that the Vedas came to be regarded as the only authority. There was a time when an agreed decision of the Assembly was admitted as one source of authority. That is the period represented by Baudhayana.

...to be continued

Readers Views

"these articles(articles on Women's rights/liberation in our last edition Ed/-) are infuriating."

"women's liberations have to do with the institutionalization of these laws in governance on the macro level and the practice in homes, and offices and dalit e-forums on the micro level...this article is too simplistic in its analysis."

yours,

Meera V.

Editor: Please send your comments on our articles, they are very valuable to us to improve the quality of this magazine.

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Thus Spoke Ambedkar, Quotations of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Otherwise both will wither and die.

The conception of secular state is derived from the liberal democratic tradition of west. No institution which is maintained wholly out of state funds shall be used for the purpose of religious instruction irrespective of the question whether the religious instruction is given by the state or any other body.

If you ask me, my ideal would be the society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. An ideal society should be mobile and full of channels of conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts.

A historian ought to be exact, sincere and impartial; free from passion, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment or affection; and faithful to the truth, which is the mother of history the preserver of great actions, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past, the director of the future.

You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon god or a superman. Remember that it is not enough that a people are numerically in the majority. They must be always watchful, strong and self-respecting to attain and maintain success. We must shape our course ourselves and by ourselves.

Untouchability shuts all doors of opportunities for betterment in life for Untouchables. It does not offer an Untouchable any opportunity to move freely in society; it compels him to live in dungeons and seclusion; it prevents him from educating himself and following a profession of his choice.

Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set in the preamble of the Constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion denies them.

Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self.