

A Journey for Destination

CONTD.FROM PAGE NO.03- On his report to the Viceroy about Bombay Presidency election, the Governor of Bombay, Lord Brabourne said that:Dr. Ambedkar's boast of winning, not only the 15 seats which are reserved for the Harijans, but also a good many more looks like completely falsified, as I feared it would be. Ambedkar published his book *The Annihilation of Caste* in the same year. This strongly criticised Hindu orthodox religious leaders and the caste system in general. Ambedkar served on the Defence Advisory Committee and the Viceroy's Executive Council as minister for labour. In his work *Who Were the Shudras?*, Ambedkar attempted to explain the formation of Untouchables. He saw the Shudras, who form the lowest caste in the ritual hierarchy of the Hindu caste system, as being separate from Untouchables. Ambedkar oversaw the transformation of his political party into the Scheduled Castes Federation, although it performed poorly in the elections held in 1946 for the Constituent Assembly of India. In his 1948 sequel to *Who Were the Shudras?*, which he titled *The Untouchables: A Thesis on the Origins of Untouchability*, Ambedkar said that: *The Hindu Civilisation ... is a diabolical contrivance to suppress and enslave humanity. Its proper name would be infamy. What else can be said of a civilisation which has produced a mass of people ... who are treated as an entity beyond human intercourse and whose mere touch is enough to cause pollution?* Ambedkar was also critical of Islam and its practices in South Asia. While justifying the Partition of India, he condemned the practice of child marriage, as well as the mistreatment of women, in Muslim society. No words can adequately express the great and many evils of polygamy and concubinage, and especially as a source of misery to a Muslim woman. Take the caste system. Everybody infers that Islam must be free from slavery and caste. Much of its support was derived from Islam and Islamic countries. While the prescriptions by the Prophet regarding the just and humane treatment of slaves contained in the Koran are praiseworthy, there is nothing whatever in Islam that lends support to the abolition of this curse. But if slavery has gone, caste among Musalmans [Muslims] has remained. Role in drafting India's Constitution Upon India's independence on 15 August 1947, the new Congress-led government invited Ambedkar to serve as the nation's first law minister, which he accepted. On 29 August, Ambedkar was appointed Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, charged by the Assembly to write India's new Constitution. Granville Austin has described the Indian Constitution drafted by Ambedkar as 'first and foremost a social document'. 'The majority of India's constitutional provisions are either directly arrived at furthering the aim of social revolution or attempt to foster this revolution by establishing conditions necessary for its achievement.' The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar argued for extensive economic and social rights for women, and also won the Assembly's support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs in the civil services, schools and colleges for members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, a system akin to affirmative action. India's lawmakers hoped to eradicate the socio-economic inequalities and lack of opportunities for India's depressed classes through these measures. The Constitution was adopted on 26 November 1949 by the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet in 1951 following the stalling in parliament of his draft of the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to expound gender equality in the laws of inheritance and marriage. Ambedkar independently contested an election in 1952 to the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha, but was defeated. He was appointed to the upper house, of parliament, the Rajya Sabha in March 1952 and would remain as member till death. Ambedkar was an economist by training and until 1921 his career was as a professional economist. It was after that time that he became a political leader. He wrote three scholarly books on economics: *Administration and Finance of the East India Company*, *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*, and *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), formed in 1934, was based on the ideas that Ambedkar presented to the Hilton Young Commission. Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, claims that Ambedkar is my Father in Economics. He is true celebrated champion of the underprivileged. He deserves more than what he has achieved today. However he was highly controversial figure in his home country, though it was not the reality. His contribution in the field of economics is marvelous and will be remembered forever. After the completion of the drafting of India's constitution, Ambedkar went to Bombay for treatment. There he met Dr. Sharada Kabir, a Saraswat Brahmin, whom he married on 18 April 1947, at his home in New Delhi. She adopted the name Savita and took care of him for the rest of his life. Ambedkar discovered from his research on ancient India and anthropology that the Mahar people were an ancient Buddhist community of India who had been forced to live outside villages as outcasts because they refused to renounce their Buddhist practices. He considered this to be why they became untouchables and he wrote a book on this topic, entitled *Who were the Shudras?*. Dikhambhumi, a stupa at the site in Nagpur, where Ambedkar embraced Buddhism along with many of his followers. Ambedkar studied Buddhism all his life, and around 1950s, Ambedkar turned his attention fully to Buddhism and travelled to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) to attend a convention of Buddhist scholars and monks. While dedicating a new Buddhist vihara near Pune, Ambedkar announced that he was writing a book on Buddhism, and that as soon as it was finished, he planned to make a formal conversion back to Buddhism. Ambedkar twice visited Burma in 1954; the second time in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in community of Ruining India and were then Rangoon. In 1955, he founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha, or the Buddhist Society of India. He completed his final work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, in 1956. It was published posthumously. After meetings with the Sri Lankan Buddhist monk Hammalawa Saddhatissa, Ambedkar organised a formal public ceremony for

himself and his supporters in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Accepting the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk in the traditional manner, Ambedkar completed his own conversion, along with his wife. He then proceeded to convert some 500,000 of his supporters who were gathered around him. He prescribed the 22 Vows for these converts, after the Three Jewels and Five Precepts. He then traveled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference. His work on *The Buddha or Karl Marx and Revolution and counter-revolution in ancient India* "remained incomplete. Bust of Ambedkar at Ambedkar Museum in Pune Since 1948, Ambedkar had been suffering from diabetes. He was bed-ridden from June to October in 1954 owing to side-effects from his medication and failing eyesight. He had been increasingly embittered by political issues, which took a toll on his health. His health worsened during 1955. Three days after completing his final manuscript *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar died in his sleep on 6 December 1956 at his home in Delhi. A Buddhist cremation was organised for him at Dadar Chowpatty beach on 7th December, attended by hundreds of thousands of people. A conversion program was supposed to be organised on 16 December 1956. So, those who had attended the cremation were also converted to Buddhism at the same place. Ambedkar was survived by his second wife, who died in 2003, and his son Yashwant (known as Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar). Ambedkar's grandson, Ambedkar Prakash Yashwant, is the chief-adviser of the Buddhist Society of India, leads the Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh and has served in both houses of the Indian Parliament. A number of unfinished typescripts and handwritten drafts were found among Ambedkar's notes and papers and gradually made available. Among these were *Waiting for a Visa*, which probably dates from 1935-36 and is an autobiographical work, and *The Untouchables*, or *The Children of India's Ghetto*, which refers to the census of 1951. A memorial for Ambedkar was established in his Delhi house at 26 Alipur Road. His birthdate is celebrated as a public holiday known as Ambedkar Jayanti or Bhim Jayanti. He was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, in 1990. Many public institutions are named in his honour, such as the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University in Hyderabad; B. R. Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur; the Dr. B. R. Ambedkar National Institute of Technology, Jalandhar; Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Technological University, Lonere, Maharashtra; the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in Aurangabad, Maharashtra; the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport in Nagpur, otherwise known as Sonagaon Airport; the Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University in Tamil Nadu; DR. Ambedkar Law Collage in Nagpur; Dr. Ambedkar Government Law College in Chennai, Tamil Nadu; and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar College of Law, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam. A large official portrait of Ambedkar is on display in the Indian Parliament building. On the anniversary of his birth (14 April) and death (6 December), and on Dhamma Chakra Pravartan Din (14 October) at Nagpur, at least half a million people gather to pay homage to him at his memorial in Mumbai. Thousands of bookshops are set up, and books are sold. His message to his followers was **Educate!, Organize!, Agitate!.** Ambedkar's legacy as a socio-political reformer, had a deep effect on modern India. In post-Independence India his socio-political thought has acquired respect across the political spectrum. His initiatives have influenced various spheres of life and transformed the way India today looks at socio-economic policies, education and affirmative action through socio-economic and legal incentives. His reputation as a scholar led to his appointment as free India's first law minister, and chairman of the committee responsible to draft a constitution. He passionately believed in the freedom of the individual and criticised equally both orthodox casteist Hindu society. His condemnation of Hinduism and its foundation of caste system, made him controversial and unpopular among the Hindu right. His conversion to Buddhism sparked a revival in interest in Buddhist philosophy in India and abroad. Ambedkar's political philosophy has given rise to a large number of Mass political parties, publications and workers' unions that remain active across India, especially in Maharashtra. His promotion of the Buddhist movement has rejuvenated interest in Buddhist philosophy among sections of population in India. Mass conversion ceremonies have been organised by human rights activists in modern times, emulating Ambedkar's Nagpur ceremony of 1956. Outside India, at the end of the 1990s, some Hungarian Romani people drew parallels between their own situation and the situation of the downtrodden people in India. Inspired by Ambedkar's approach, they started to convert to Buddhism. Several movies, plays, and other works have been based on the life and thoughts of Ambedkar. These include: Jabbar Patel directed the English-language movie, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, in 2000. This biographical depiction was sponsored by India's National Film Development Corporation and the Ministry of Social Justice. David Blundell, professor of anthropology at UCLA and historical ethnographer, has established 'Arising Light' a series of films and events that are intended to stimulate interest and knowledge about the social and welfare conditions in India. *Arising Light* is a film on the life of Dr B. R. Ambedkar and social welfare in India. The play 'Ambedkar Aur Gandhi', directed by Arvind Gaur and written by Rajesh Kumar, tracks two prominent personalities of history Mahatma Gandhi and Bhimrao Ambedkar.



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