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## **Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar- Founding Father of Civilization in the History of India**

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**Abstract:**

*Father of Indian Civilization Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was not only championed the cause of social justice for the untouchables, women, shudras and underprivileged sections of Indian society, but also Founding Father of modern civilization in the history of India. Baba Saheb Dr B R Ambedkar had worked vigorously throughout his life to challenge the authority of orthodox uncivilized Hindu Religious theories and practices that upheld violence, untouchability, vertical hierarchies, wicked human relations in an institutionalized manner with barbarian practices. The Ambedkar's mission was to annihilate the Hindu religion in order to create a civilized society like white Christian societies which hold the strong modern liberal democratic ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. Research paper analyzes the contribution of Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in founding the modern civilization which is new to Indian society till the arrival of civilized white western colonial rulers in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Baba Saheb Dr B R Ambedkar was fought for the human rights of civilized Untouchables, uncivilized Shudras and unskilled higher caste Hindu women throughout his life. Ambedkar fought against uncivilized Hindu religion which uphold violence through its caste system and finally converted to Buddhism, which has less evils compared to his forefathers' religion. Baba Saheb Dr B R Ambedkar was a greatest organic intellectual and liberal thinker who liberated the social status of not only untouchables and Shudras but also unskilled-non-intellectual higher caste Hindu women in society. Research paper also analyzes the relevance of his greatest ideas in the contemporary modern discourse on equality, liberty and fraternity under the uncivilized practices of Indian social-economic-religious norms. Baba Saheb Dr B R Ambedkar's main argument is that Hinduism is the main root cause for all social-economic-spiritual-religious evils in India.*

**Keywords:** *Father of Indian Civilization Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, annihilation of caste, Hindu unscientific practices, inequality, Hindu social order*

### **1. Father of India's Civilization Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar**

The Father of India's Civilization *Babasaheb* Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar<sup>1</sup> was one of the most remarkable men of his time, and the story of his life is the story of how exceptional talent and outstanding force of character succeeded in overcoming some of the most formidable obstacles that an unjust and oppressive society has ever placed in the way of the individual. Born in Mhow in central India in 1891, he was the fourteenth child of parents who belonged to the very lowest stratum of brahmanical uncivilized Hindu society.

According to orthodox uncivilized Hindu tradition, he was not entitled to receive an education or to acquire property, he could engage only in the most menial and degrading work and he could not come into physical contact with members of the higher castes. In short, *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was born an Out-Caste or Untouchable in uncivilized Hindu society. He was expected to wear cast-off clothes, to eat the leavings of his higher caste masters, to be humble and obedient, and to accept his lot as the well-deserved punishment for sins committed in a former existence. Fortunately for him, his father had served in the Indian Army therefore he acquired a certain amount of formal education in both Marathi and English.

This enabled him to teach his children, especially *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar, and to encourage them in their own pursuit of knowledge. specificities of the experience of undergoing formal education rather than education as a process inclusive of all contexts of socialization - as expounded by theorists like Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron<sup>2</sup>. In 1908 the young *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar passed the matriculation examination of Bombay University, and so uncommon was such an achievement on the part of an Untouchable boy that the event was celebrated with a public meeting. Four years later he graduated

<sup>1</sup>So much so, that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar formed a political organization in 1936 (Independent Labour Party) in order to "advance the welfare of the labouring classes." Eleanor Zelliott argues that this party represented "Ambedkar's realization that the needs of the Depressed Classes were in economic as well as the social and religious fields." Eleanor Zelliott, "Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement," PhD thesis, university of Pennsylvania (1969), 246-9.

<sup>2</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, (London, 1977), pp. 5-6. Bourdieu and Passeron define education to include pedagogic action as exerted by all the educated members of a social formation as well as family education in course of uprising within the family structure.

from the same university with Politics and Economics as subjects and soon afterwards entered the service of the Baroda State, the ruler of which had awarded him a scholarship. At this point his father died (his mother had died when he was five) and four months later the reaped son left India to continue his studies at Columbia University (USA) on a further scholarship from the same liberal-minded ruler. Though he had climbed higher up the ladder of academic achievement than any other Hindu or Untouchable, Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar was far from being satisfied. Convinced as he was that knowledge is power, he knew that without that power in full measure, he had little hope of breaking the bonds that kept millions of Untouchables in a state of virtual slavery – and how strong those bonds were his own bitter personal experience had already taught him.

There is thus a tension between state provision of education that might have such a potential, and the desire of ruling groups to maintain subordinate groups in a state of subordination. Education can implant in peoples ideas that further the hegemony of the ruling classes in subtle ways, e. g The belief in the naturalness of social hierarchy, in which only those with high educational qualifications deserve to succeed in life, and in which the majority drop by the wayside and deserve their subordinate status. The ways in which hegemony operates are often very pernicious; hierarchical notions are installed as a matter of common sense.

The concept of hegemony of the dominant classes was first theorized by Gramsci, who showed how people inculcate dominant values in ways that are hard to resist. He revealed the ways in which political structures of power reproduced themselves through pedagogical practices, relations and discourses. In this, culture cannot be separated from systemic relations of power, or politics from the production of knowledge and identities<sup>3</sup>. He thus affirms the inter-linkage between political hegemony and pedagogic practices. For Gramsci the 'pedagogical' was inextricably grounded in a notion of hegemony, struggle, and political education articulated through a normative position and project aimed at overcoming the stark inequalities and forms of oppression suffered by subaltern groups<sup>4</sup>.

From 1913 to 1917, and again from 1920 to 1923, Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar was in the Christian Western world where he was surrounded by full of knowledge creation unlike his non-productive and non-intellectual Hindu society in India, and when at the age of 32 he finally returned to the country of his birth, which was full of irrational thinking and a society with full of barbaric praxis, it was as one of the most highly qualified men in public life in India. During his three years at Columbia University with full of Christian philosophers and intellectuals, he studied Economics, Sociology, History, Philosophy, Anthropology, and Politics, and was awarded a Ph.D. for the thesis, which he eventually published in book form as *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*. His first published work, however, was a paper on 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development' which he had originally read at an Anthropology seminar conducted by one of his Christian Professors.

After completing his studies in Christian country United States of America, Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar left New York for another Christian country Great Britain, where he was admitted to the London School of Economics and Political Science and to Gray's Inn where he became a great reader like his Christian friends and excelled as a topmost anti-caste Intellectual when he return to his homeland-India, a land for non-intellectual society. A year later his scholarship came to an end and it was only in 1920 that, having taught in a Bombay college and started a Marathi weekly called *Mooknayak* or 'Leader of the Dumb', he was able to return to London and resume his studies there. In the course of the next three years he completed his thesis on *The Problem of the Rupee*, for which the University of London awarded him a D.Sc. and was called to the Bar. Before leaving England he spent three months in Germany, where he engaged in further studies in Economics at the University of Bonn.

Thus the man who returned to India, an unproductive intellectual country, in April 1923 to continue his fight on behalf of the Untouchables and, indeed, all the Depressed Classes, was uniquely well equipped for the task, and from this time onwards it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the biography of Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar from the history of modern India.

During his three year absence in Great Britain the Indian political scene had changed dramatically. The demand for independence from Britain had grown louder than ever: MK Gandhi had started advocating a policy of non-cooperation with the Government and only a year before Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar's return had launched the first of his campaigns for mass civil disobedience. But though Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar was a staunch patriot, and though initially he was of the opinion that only political independence would bring social equality within the reach of the Depressed Classes, he was emphatic that if – as Gandhi and the Congress Party maintained – no country was good enough to rule over another it was equally true that no class was good enough to rule over another class. Certainly the Caste Hindus were not good enough to lord it over the Depressed Classes, and while Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar remained sharply critical of British rule, it was for the removal of the social, economic, educational, and legal disabilities of the Depressed Classes that he devoted the major part of his energies.

As early as 1920 he had realized, however, that the interests of the Depressed Classes would have to be safeguarded by means of separate electorates, at least for a period, and it was his increasing insistence on this point that eventually brought him into open conflict with MK Gandhi and the Congress Party, as well as with practically the whole of Hindus in India.

This conflict did not come to a head until 1932. In the meantime Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar established himself in Bombay, built up his legal practice, taught in college, gave evidence before various official bodies, started a newspaper, and was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council, in whose proceedings he at once took a leading part. He also attended the three Round Table Conferences that were held in London to enable representatives of the various Indian communities and the three British political parties to consider proposals for the future constitution of India. One of his most significant achievements during the years immediately following his return to India in 1923 was the formation of the *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* or Depressed Classes Welfare Association, the objects of which were to promote the spread of education and culture among the Depressed Classes, to improve their economic condition, and to represent their grievances.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13,53-56 as quoted in Henry Giroux, 'Rethinking Cultural Politics and Radical Pedagogy in the work of Antonio Gramsci', in Carmel Borg, Joseph Buttigieg, Peter Mayo (eds), Gramsci and Education (Lanham, Md.; Oxford, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup>Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, p. 103-4 and in Giroux, 'Rethinking Cultural Politics,' p. 56.

## 2. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Democratic Struggles for the Entry of Hindu Kalaram Temple and Chowdar Tank Entry for Drinking Water for Untouchables

In his statement on the Temple Entry Bill in 1933, Ambedkar pointed out those untouchables "think that the surest way for their elevation lies in higher education, higher employment and better ways of earning a living"<sup>5</sup> Emancipation, for the young untouchables in the 1930s, came to mean hoping for a better job. To secure that better job, they considered three avenues - credit, education and political power. These grievances were serious enough. The Untouchables were not allowed to enter Hindu temples, they could not draw water from public tanks or wells, they were denied admittance to schools, and prevented from moving about freely in public places – and so on.

Between 1927 and 1932 *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar therefore led his followers in a series of non-violent campaigns assert the right of the Untouchables to enter Hindu places of worship and to draw water from tanks and public wells. Two of these campaigns were of special importance. These were the campaigns against the exclusion of Untouchables from the *Kalaram* Temple, Nasik, and from the *Chowdar* Tank, *Mahad*, both of which involved tens of thousands of Untouchable *satyagrahis* or 'passive resisters', provoked a violently hostile reaction from the Caste Hindus and, in the case of the *Chowdar* Tank campaign, resulted in a legal as well as a moral victory for the Depressed Classes only after years of litigation. The *Chowdar* Tank campaign also saw the ceremonial burning of the *Manusmriti* or 'Institutes of Manu', the ancient Hindu law book that bore much of the responsibility for the cruel and degrading treatment that the Untouchables had hitherto suffered at the hands of the uncivilized Caste Hindus. By committing the much-revered volume to the flames the Depressed Classes were serving notice to the orthodox Hindu community that in future they intended to be treated as human beings.

## 3. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Ramsay Mac Donald Award for the Upliftment of Untouchables and M.K. Gandhi's Conspiracy to Remain Untouchables as Untouchables under the Fold of Uncivilized Hindu Religion

Unpopular as *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar's activities had already made him with the Caste Hindus, during 1931 and 1932 he became more unpopular still. In his own words, he became the most hated man in India – hated, that is, by the Caste Hindus and by the Congress Party, which they dominated. The cause of the trouble was *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar's continued insistence on the necessity of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. MK Gandhi and the Congress Party were opposed to separate electorates for the Depressed Classes (though not for the Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Europeans), and *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar and Mr Gandhi had clashed on the subject at the Second Round Table Conference, when the Mr Gandhi went so far as to challenge the right of *Babasaheb* Ambedkar to represent the Untouchables. *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar's arguments did, however, convince the British Government, and when Ramsay Mac Donald published his Communal Award the following year the Depressed Classes were given the separate electorates for which they had asked. Gandhi's response was to go on a fast to the death for the abolition of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. Since he was the acknowledged leader of the independence movement his action created consternation throughout India.

*Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was reviled as a traitor and threats were made against his life. But though unmoved by the pressure that was brought to bear on him *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was not unwilling to negotiate and eventually agreed to exchange separate electorates for joint electorates and a greatly increased number of reserved seats. This agreement was embodied in a document that became known as the Poona Pact, the signing of which by *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar marked his emergence as the undisputed leader of the Depressed Classes.

In the mood of relief that swept the country when the weak and ailing MK Gandhi ended his fast there was even a little sympathy to spare for the wretched Untouchables, but it did not last long, and soon *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was as much hated as ever. Partly as a result of the opposition he had encountered over the question of separate electorates, partly because of the continued exclusion of Untouchables from Hindu temples, *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar now began to think that the Caste Hindus were not going to mend their ways. He therefore changed his tactics – though not this strategy – and started exhorting his followers to concentrate on raising their standard of living and gaining political power through acquiring English education. He also began to think that there was no future for the Untouchables within Hinduism and that they should change their religion.

These thoughts found dramatic expression at the 1935 Depressed Classes Conference, when he made his famous declaration, that though he bore a Hindu he did not intend to die one – a declaration that sent shock waves through Hindu India. In the same year *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was appointed principal of the Government Law College, Bombay, built a house for himself and his books, and lost his wife Ramabai. They had been married in 1908, when he was sixteen and she was nine and she had borne him five children, of whom only one survived. Though the demands of public life had left him with little time for his own domestic affairs, *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was deeply attached to the gentle and self-effacing woman and mourned her bitterly.

When he had recovered from his grief he plunged back into his customary activities and soon was busier than ever. In the course of the next few years he founded the Independent Labor Party, took part in the provincial elections that were held under the Government of India Act, 1935, was elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly, pressed for the abolition of agricultural serfdom, defended the right of industrial workers to strike, advocated the promotion of birth control, and addressed meetings and conferences all over the Bombay Presidency. In 1939 World War II broke out in Europe and the fact that Britain was locked in a life-and-death struggle with Nazi Germany soon had its effect on the political situation in India. According to Gandhi and the Congress Party, Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity, and from 1940 they adopted a policy of non-cooperation with the Government's war effort.

<sup>5</sup>Ambedkar, "What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to Untouchables," BAWS, p.110.

*Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar did not agree with this attitude. Not only was he not a pacifist, but he regarded Nazi ideology as a direct threat to the liberties of the Indian people. He therefore exhorted them to help defeat Nazism by supporting the Government, and himself encouraged the Untouchables to join the Indian Army. In 1941 he was appointed to the Defense Advisory Committee and in the following year joined the Viceroy's Executive Council as Labour Member, a post he occupied for the next four years. During the same period he transformed the Independent Labour Party into the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation, founded the People's Education Society, and published a number of highly controversial books and pamphlets. Among the latter were *Thoughts on Pakistan*, *What Congress and Gandhi have Done to the Untouchables*, and *Who Were the Shudras?*

In a democracy, politicians have access to power, albeit power which has been given to them by the very people who envied them that power - their constituency. It became very clear to the untouchables that education would not necessarily offer them a future; their numerical power was a weapon which they could wield over the heads of those who needed their support. As early as the late 1930s, this feeling of being a 'vote bank' was evident. In response to this feeling, Dr. Ambedkar called for representation on political bodies and for a united workers' and untouchables' front to secure power and to counter both Capitalism and Brahmanism (through his Independent Labour Party). In the 1930s, Ambedkar reached out to all untouchable leaders in order to form an alliance which could not be dismissed by the British and the Congress. The Congress realized the consequences of such an alliance, and in response to this they developed untouchable leaders to counter this independent initiative.

In a biting indictment, Ambedkar argued that Gandhian political initiatives "collected a swarm of grateful Untouchables who are employed to preach that Mr. Gandhi and the Hindus are the saviors of the Untouchables." Gandhians tried to "create a slave mentality among the Untouchables" and to "kill the spirit of independence from among the Untouchables." Under the "pretense of service" and by its "petty services," the Gandhian political initiatives made the untouchables into "mere recipients of charity"<sup>6</sup> The patronage which the Congress, the HSS and the other nationalist organizations offered was small; so much so that when Mr. Birla offered some seats to untouchables on the Raghmal Charity Trust in Delhi "there was such a rush on the part of members of the depressed classes to get on board." It was left to the benevolence of Birla to take untouchables onto the coveted junket<sup>7</sup>. The untouchable as spokesmen for the Congress was the focus of Bhim Pahalwan's poem: *Bhangi ki kimat bhang hai, bole vacan bharbhang*. "The price of the Bhangi is defeat simple promises are completely broken." Bhangis can be bought off, he said, and their very act of sale is the end of his community<sup>8</sup>. As a young untouchable man told me, "there are no elders here, only old people." The elders, those who should be respected, are not educated; the older educated are so concept that they are not respected, only old<sup>9</sup>

In 1947 India achieved independence and *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar, who had already been elected a member of the Constituent Assembly, was invited by JL Nehru, the first prime minister of the country, to join the Cabinet as Minister for Law. A few weeks later the Assembly entrusted the task of framing the Constitution to a Draft Committee, and this committee elected *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar as its chairman. For the next two years he was hard at work on the Draft Constitution, hammering it out article by article and clause by clause practically single handedly. While he was thus engaged the country was passing through a period of turmoil. Independence had been won only at the cost of partition, partition had led to the wholesale slaughter of Hindus by Muslims and Muslims by Hindus, and at the beginning of 1948 MK Gandhi was assassinated.

Besides being deeply concerned about the fate of the Untouchables living in what was now Pakistan *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar had troubles of his own to face. His health had been deteriorating for some time, and now gave him because such grave concern that on the day following his fifty-eighth birthday, he married a Brahmin woman doctor whom he had met in hospital and who would, he hoped, be able to provide him with the care he needed.

Despite his ill health *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar managed to complete the Draft Constitution by the beginning of 1948 and later that year, when it had been before the country for six months, had the satisfaction of introducing it in the Constituent Assembly. Thereafter he piloted it through its three readings with his usual competence and in November 1949 it was adopted by the Assembly with very few amendments. The new Constitution gave general satisfaction and *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was warmly congratulated by friend and foe alike. Never had he been so popular. The press hailed him as the Modern Manu<sup>10</sup>, and the irony of the fact that it was an Untouchable who had given Free India its Constitution was widely commented upon.

<sup>6</sup> Ambedkar, "What Congress and Gandhi," 266-67 and 25 1.

<sup>7</sup> G.D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma* (Bombay 1953), 74-5

<sup>8</sup> Bhim Pahalwan, 20 March 1993, Pahargunj, New Delhi.

<sup>9</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London 1936), 588-90

<sup>10</sup> Ancient Manu is an uncivilized Hindu Brahmin who had given a barneric rules and regulations for the Hindu men to suppress Untouchables, Shudras( for example agriculture communities such as Reddy, Kamma, Kapu, Velama in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and similar agriculture castes in other parts of India) and Women. Anciant Manu had compared Shudras and Women as four legged animals. But still uncivilized higher caste women was remained as she was whereas *Baba Saheb* Dr B R Ambedkar had given a Christian based Constitution for the uncivilized Hindu-Indian society where every one including sub-subaltern castes and genders can enjoy the freedom of equality, liberty and fraternity like their fellow human beings in civilized white western Christian as well as European Christian societies. Despite the Ambedkar's egalitarian Constitution, Dalits and women are still killed, raped and humiliated by the uncivilized Hindus particularly by the agrarian based Shudras(Agriculture or Peasantry Castes) in India

Though he lived for seven more years, it was as the Architect of the Constitution and the Modern Manu that he was destined to pass into official history. When his statue came to be erected outside the parliament building after his death, it was therefore as the Modern Manu that he was depicted, holding the Constitution underneath his arm and pointing in the direction of the parliament building. But though by 1948 *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar had achieved so much, and though today he is most widely remembered as the author of the Indian Constitution, his greatest achievement was in fact still to come.

#### **4. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Hindu Code Bill for Uneducated/Uncivilized Higher Caste Hindu Women**

This achievement was an essentially spiritual when he had spent several years in the political wilderness after failing to secure the passage of the Hindu Code Bill. The Bill represented a putting into shape by *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar of work accomplished during the previous decade by a number of eminent Hindu lawyers and dealt with such matters as marriage and divorce, adoption, joint family property, women's property, and Succession. Though it was a reforming rather than a revolutionary measure, the Bill met with violent opposition both inside and outside the Assembly, and even within the Cabinet. *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was accused of trying to destroy Hinduism and there were angry exchanges on the Assembly floor between him and his orthodox opponents. In the end the Bill was dropped after only four clauses had been passed and in September 1951, tired and disgusted, Ambedkar resigned from the Cabinet. In his resignation statement (which he was prevented from making in the Assembly itself) he explained that he had left the Cabinet for five reasons. The second of these was that it was apathetic to the uplift of the Scheduled Castes, the fifth that JL Nehru had failed to give adequate support to the Hindu Code Bill.

*Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar's resignation from the Cabinet marked the virtual end of his political career. In the general elections of January 1952 he failed to win a seat in the *Lok Sabha* or House of Representatives, and was equally unsuccessful when he contested a by-election the following year. Towards the end of March 1952 he was, however, elected to the *Rajya Sabha* or Council of States as one of the seventeen representatives of the State of Bombay, and was soon vigorously attacking the Government. But while he continued to participate in the proceedings of the *Rajya Sabha*, and was to do so until the end of his life, from now onwards *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar's energies were increasingly devoted to more important things. Ever since the 1935 Depressed Classes Conference, when he had shocked Hindu India with the declaration that though he had been born a Hindu he did not intend to die one, he had been giving earnest consideration to the question of conversion.

#### **5. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Chowdar Tank Campaign for Human Rights of Untouchables in 1927**

1927 was the year of the *Chowdar* Tank campaign, which at least in its opening phases was a complete success. The background of the campaign was what was known as the Bole resolution. This was a resolution moved in the Bombay Legislative Council by S.K. Bole, the social reformer, to the effect that the untouchable classes be allowed to use all watering places, wells, and *dharamsalas* which were built and maintained by the Government or created by statute, as well as public schools, courts, offices, and dispensaries. After being adopted by the Council the resolution was accepted, with some reluctance, by the Bombay Government. Heads of departments were directed to give effect to the resolution so far as it related to public places and institutions belonging to and maintained by the Government, and Collectors were requested to advise the local public bodies in their jurisdiction to consider the desirability of accepting the recommendation made in the resolution so far as it related to them.

One of the local public bodies, thus advised was the *Mahad* Municipality, and one of the amenities administered by the Mahad Municipality was the *Chowdar* Tank. This tank was a rectangular artificial lake of the traditional type, and the Caste Hindus were accustomed to draw water from it for household purposes. The Untouchables were not allowed anywhere near the tank. Even when the *Mahad* Municipality, in compliance with the Bole resolution, threw the tank open to the Untouchables the latter were unable to exercise their moral and legal right to draw water from the tank owing to the hostility of the Caste Hindus. This state of affairs lasted for three years. Then in March the Depressed Classes of Kolaba district, in which Mahad was situated, decided to call a two-day conference to deal with the situation. The conference was held on the outskirts of Mahad, 10,000 untouchable representatives from all over the Bombay Presidency attended, Ambedkar delivered a stirring speech, resolutions were passed, and on the second day the conference formed itself into a procession which marched four abreast through the streets of Mahad to the *Chowdar* Tank. There Ambedkar, who was in the forefront of the procession, took water from the tank and drank it and the rest followed his example. Having thus demonstrated their right the percussionists returned to the conference venue in the same peaceful manner that they had set out and started making preparations to leave for home.

They were not allowed to enjoy their victory for long. A rumor having gone round the town to the effect that the Untouchables were planning to enter the *Vireswar* temple, a crowd of infuriated Caste Hindus burst into the conference venue and proceeded to be labour the delegates who still remained there with heavy bamboo sticks. Soon the whole town was in an uproar, and had Ambedkar not succeeded in restraining his most militant supporters a full scale riot would probably have ensued. As it was, twenty Untouchables were seriously injured, and numerous others were assaulted by gangs of orthodox Caste Hindus as they made their way out of the town. Belatedly, the police arrested nine of the troublemakers and three months later five of these were sentenced to four months rigorous imprisonment. Ambedkar remarked that had the principal officers of the district not been non-Caste Hindus justice would not have been done to the Untouchables, adding that under the Peshwa rule, a ruling period of uncivilized regime, he himself would have been trampled to death by an elephant.

But the Caste Hindus of Mahad were still far from having learned their lesson. In their eyes, as in the eyes of the vast majority of Caste Hindus throughout India, the action of the Untouchables in taking water from the *Chowdar* Tank had polluted the tank and rendered its water unfit for consumption. What had been polluted could, however, be purified, and what more effective means of purification was there than the five products of the cow, that is, milk, curds, clarified butter, urine, and dung? Earthenware pots of water having been drawn from the tank, a corresponding number of pots containing a mixture of these five products were

therefore emptied into it to the recitation of mantras by Brahmins and the water of the tank were declared to be again fit for Caste Hindu consumption.

This so-called purification of the Chowdar Tank was deeply offensive to the Untouchables, and Ambedkar decided to continue the struggle and establish their right to draw water from the tank once and for all. In December of that year, after extensive preparations, a second conference was therefore called at Mahad. On this occasion 15,000 people attended, 4,000 of whom, in response to Ambedkar's appeal, declared their readiness to take water from the tank regardless of consequences. By this time, however, a group of Caste Hindus had filed a suit claiming that the Chowdar Tank was private property, an injunction had been issued restraining Ambedkar and his principal lieutenants from approaching the tank or drawing water from it, and the town was bristling with police. Ambedkar was in a quandary. On the one hand, he wanted to demonstrate the right of the Untouchables to draw water from the tank; on the other, he had no wish to break the law or antagonize the Government. In the end, after much anxious debate, a compromise was reached. On Ambedkar's recommendation the conference decided to postpone the struggle until the courts had settled the question of whether or not the Chowdar Tank was private property, but it also decided to go in procession to the tank and to march round it carrying banners and placards. The authorities having been notified, this was accordingly done and after Ambedkar had addressed a meeting of the town's Chamar or cobbler community the conference came to an end.

The right of the Untouchables to draw water from the Chowdar Tank was not finally established until 1937, when the Bombay High Court gave judgment in their favour. By that time the Mahad campaign had been overshadowed by other events. Even in 1927 itself, the first conference's action in taking water from the Chowdar Tank had been over-ruled, before the year was out, by the still more revolutionary proceedings of the second conference. That conference having repudiated those Hindu scriptures which preached the gospel of social inequality, and reaffirmed its opposition to applying them to the present social order, on the night of 25 December Ambedkar and his followers publicly and ceremonially burned one of the most celebrated of all such scriptures, the notorious Manusmriti 'Institutes of Manu', which had governed the life of the Hindu community for fifteen hundred years and which, in the words of the conference, 'decried the Shudras, stunted their growth, impaired their self-respect, and perpetuated their social, economic, religious and political slavery'. It was one of the great iconoclastic acts of history, and the greatest blow orthodox Hinduism had suffered for more than a thousand years. So far-reaching were the consequences that Ambedkar's burning of the Manusmriti has been likened, by some of his admirers, to Luther's burning of the Pope's bull of excommunication against him. The comparison would have been still more apt if what Luther had burned at Wittenberg had been not the Pope's bull of excommunication but the Bible, for the Manusmriti was as much loved and revered by the Caste Hindus as it was hated by the Untouchables. Ambedkar himself, interviewed in 1937, emphasized the essentially symbolic nature of the burning of the Manusmriti. 'It was a cautious and drastic step,' he declared, 'but it was taken with a view to forcing the attention of Caste Hindus. At intervals such drastic remedies are a necessity. If you do not knock at the door, none opens it. It is not that all parts of the Manusmriti are condemnable, that it does not contain [any] good principles and that Manu himself was not a sociologist and was a mere fool. We made a bonfire of it because we view it as a symbol of injustice under which we have been crushed across centuries.'

## 6. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Political Education for the Untouchables & Uncivilized Hindu Castes

For Ambedkar, political education was an urgent need for people of all castes and communities, and in particular the untouchables<sup>11</sup>. Instead of leaving untouchables to the mercy of higher castes, Ambedkar wanted political power for Dalits, in order to assert their rightful place in society<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the nature and purpose of schooling must be addressed as part of a broader, comprehensive politics of social change for Dalit communities. In an analogous manner, schooling for Gramsci, was always part of any larger ensemble of relationships headed and moved by authority and power. 'He talks of a subaltern cultural sphere' in which resistance can be rooted<sup>13</sup>. This is analogous to the concept of counter public spheres' as analyzed by Nancy Fraser. There are numerous meetings, speeches, documentaries and songs recorded on audio, videocassettes, and CDs that are a testimony to the growing and strengthening counter public spheres of Dalits. Following this, I submit that resistance for the lower classes and for Dalits has also to be rooted in public counter-spheres. The struggle over schooling must be inextricably linked to the struggle against abusive state power and to the battle for creating 'more equitable and just public spheres within and outside the educational institutions'<sup>14</sup>.

Ambedkar grappled with the issue of discrimination for Dalits within schools. Instead of advocating separate schools. He demanded that they attend normal schools, so that they could learn to assert themselves in their everyday life and thus lose their sense of inferiority<sup>15</sup>. He stated: 'Their status would be raised and their powers would be stimulated'<sup>16</sup>. Addressing the annual

<sup>11</sup> Ambedkar, 'Evidence before the Southborough Committee, 27 January 1919, 'BAWS, Volume 1. p. 265.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Giroux, 'Rethinking cultural politics, ' p. 56, and original in Edward Said, *The world, the text, and the critic* (Cambridge, MA., 1983), p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Giroux, 'Rethinking cultural politics., p. 56; also see Chandra T. Mohanty, 'On Race and Voice: Challenge for Ilberal Education in the 1990s', *Cultural Critique*, 14, *The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division II* (Winter, 1989-1990), pp. 179-208, esp. p. 192. This article has been published in many versions.

<sup>15</sup> like Ambedkar, Gramsci also underscored the importance of 'common schools.

<sup>16</sup> Ambedkar, 'Evidence before the Southborough Committee, 27 January 1919, 'BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 277. In a similar vein, Gramsci also reinforced the importance of 'common schools' for all classes in order to wipe out ranking. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*; p. 31

gathering of the Rajararn College in Kolhapur on 24 December 1952, he said, 'knowledge is the foundation of a man's life and every effort must be made to maintain the intellectual stamina of a student and arouse his intellect. He asked the students to develop their thinking power and make use of the knowledge they had gained'<sup>17</sup>. He stated: Coming as I do from the lowest order of the Hindu society, I know what is the value of education. The problem of raising the lower order is deemed to be economic. This is a great mistake. The problem of the lower order is to remove from them that inferiority complex, which has stunted their growth and made them slaves to others, to create in them the consciousness of the significance of their lives for themselves and for the country, of which they have been cruelly robbed by the existing social order.

Nothing can achieve this except the spread of higher education. This in my opinion is the panacea of our social troubles'<sup>18</sup>. The clarion call of Ambedkar 'to educate the children' was chanted and followed like a mantra by his followers. However, Ambedkar's ideas come into conflict with the postulates of Gandhi.

### 7. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Mr. Gandhi Debate on Identity of Hindu Religion

The Ambedkar-MK Gandhi debate over myriad issues is controversial and a much contested issue to date amongst Indians, more precisely Dalits. As it is many Dalits detest the postulates of Gandhi even after so many years. In order to understand this want to highlight the split between the agenda of nationalism and of radical caste movements that nurture divergent understandings of caste relations. I draw upon some conjectures of Gandhi with regard to untouchables and their education. Unlike Christian converted *Mahatma* Jothibha Phule, Buddhist converted *Baba Saheb* Dr B R Ambedkar and other non-Brahman leaders such as atheist *Periyar* EV Ramasamy, Gandhi believed that, 'caste has nothing to do with religion; moreover Hindu society has been able to stand because it is founded on the caste system'<sup>19</sup>. For Gandhi, the caste system was a natural order of society and the callings of a Brahman-spiritual teacher-and a scavenger were 'equal,' and their due performance carried equal merit before God. Thus Gandhi reiterated his belief in the swadharma of the followers of caste duties, whether Brahman, farmer, scavenger and so on'<sup>20</sup>. For Gandhi, caste had a ready-made means for spreading primary education. He said that 'each one of us has to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling'<sup>21</sup>. In other words, Gandhi advocated that an 'untouchable could become a skilled scavenger.' I stand by Ambedkar and underscore that all this represented a cruel joke on the helpless classes. He criticized Gandhi bitterly for calling scavenging a 'noble' profession for the scavenger and thus helping to perpetuate it. Gandhi not only demanded that people follow their caste callings, but he also desired a return to romantic, idealized villages that in practice perpetuated caste oppression. Ambedkar, by contrast, gave a clarion call for Dalits to move to the cities, a modern space in which caste discrimination was comparatively much weaker. In his 1939 lecture on 'Federation versus freedom' Ambedkar pronounced: 'in my mind, there is no doubt that Gandhi age is the dark age of India. It is an age in which people instead of looking for their ideals in the future are return to antiquity'<sup>22</sup>. Gandhi proclaimed that all should work together in the national cause, and he discouraged any fragmentation of the movement. However, he was unable to escape his own biases in favour of caste Hindus. For example, during the deliberations over separate electorates for Dalits in 1932, Gandhi confided to Patel and Mahadev Desai that political separation will lead to bloodshed. Untouchable hooligans will make common cause with Muslim hooligans and kill caste Hindus'<sup>23</sup>. Eventually Gandhi modified his views and advocated a more radical attack on the system of untouchability. He agreed with Ambedkar that untouchability was and is eroding Hinduism and stated that the moment that untouchability was eradicated, the caste system would be purified. He said in 1935, that 'caste has to go' as it was degrading modern India'<sup>24</sup>. He admitted that the Hindus made their brethren crawl on their bellies, and it was high time for them to purify themselves. They should revere one another and purge Hinduism of this 'device of Satan.' He put pressure on caste Hindus to open up access for untouchables to public wells, tanks, roads, schools, temples and cremation grounds and in response to Ambedkar, extended his battle for the untouchables into the civil sphere. Ultimately, Gandhi accepted that the 'untouchables had to exercise power themselves [emphasis mine] if they were to better their position in any meaningful way, just like Ambedkar. Despite this, the Ambedkar-Gandhi conflict continues to this day'<sup>25</sup>.

### 8. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Sickness of Uncivilized Hindu India

B. R. Ambedkar spoke about the 'sicknesses' of a barbarian Brahmanical Hinduism that regarded the low in the hierarchy as polluted and beyond the pale'<sup>26</sup>. This particular 'sickness' has not only continued to infect the body politic of modern India, but

<sup>17</sup> Ambedkar, as in Keer, p. 443.

<sup>18</sup> Ambedkar, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1950, as quoted in People's Education Society's 60 Years of Existence (1945-2005) Magazine issued on the 61<sup>st</sup> Foundation Day (8 July 2005), p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Gandhi, in Harijan, 18 July 1936, as in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 83

<sup>20</sup> Gandhi, as quoted in BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 83, and also in Rodrigues, Valerian, 'Gandhism-the doom of the untouchables,' in The essential writings of B.A. Ambedkar (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 149-172, and Gail Omvedt, Ambedkar. - towards an enlightened India (Viking, c2004), p. 71

<sup>21</sup> Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar Indictment-II, ' Harijan, 18 July 1936 as in BAWS, Vol. 19p. 83 and also available in CWMG, 288, Vol. 69 (May 16 1936-19 October 1936), as available online on <http://www.gandhiserve.org/Cwmg/VOL069>

<sup>22</sup> Ambedkar, BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 352.

<sup>23</sup> Gandhi, 21 August 1932, CWMG, Vol. 50, p. 469. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>24</sup> Gandhi, 'Caste must go, 9 Harijan, 16 November 1935, as in the CWMG, Vol. 68, p. 152

<sup>25</sup> I am following David Hardiman, Gandhi in His time and ours (Delhi, 2003), p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Ambedkar has called Hindus the 'sick-men' of India, whose sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians. BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 26.

it has in recent times, like a cancerous growth, recurred in new malignant forms. In 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru had written that the emerging Indian regime must strive to achieve social equality. This did not, he said, stop at the provisions of legal equality, but had to translate into 'a realization of the fact that the backwardness or degradation of any group is not due to inherent failings in it but principally to lack of opportunities and long suppression by other groups'<sup>27</sup>. The upper castes did not on the whole embrace this vision with any commitment. In fact, they continued for the most part to regard SC groups with deep disgust, seeing them as 'dirty, 'polluted, 'lazy, ' and the like. Caste-based divisions continued to dominate in housing, marriage, employment and general social interaction--divisions that have been time and time again reinforced through economic boycotts and physical violence. Marc Galanter showed on the basis of legal evidence that 'from the late 1950s, the government's many programs for the amelioration of the untouchables' condition continued in force, but were not significantly augmented'<sup>28</sup>.

### 9. Baba Saheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Conversion to Buddhism and Tit for Tat for Barberian Praxis in Hindu Religion

*Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar with the time and energy for his greatest achievement, the ground was already well prepared. In 1954 he twice visited Burma, the second time in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955 he founded the *Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha* or Indian Buddhist Society and installed an image of the Buddha in a temple that had been built on Dehu Road, near Poona. Addressing the thousands of Untouchables who had assembled for the occasion, he declared that henceforth he would devote himself to the propagation of Buddhism in India. He also announced that he was writing a book explaining the tenets of Buddhism in simple language for the benefit of the common man. It might take him a year to complete the book, but when it was finished he would embrace Buddhism. The work in question was *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, on which he had been working since November 1951 and which he completed in February 1956. Not long afterwards *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar, true to his word, announced that he would be embracing Buddhism in October of that year. Arrangements were accordingly made for the ceremony to be held in Nagpur, and on 14 October 1956 the Untouchable leader took the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk in the traditional manner and then in his turn administered them to the 380,000 men, women, and children who had come to Nagpur in response to his call.

After further conversion ceremonies in Nagpur and Chanda, *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar returned to Delhi knowing that the Wheel of the Dharma had again been set in motion in India. A few weeks later he travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal for the fourth conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and addressed the delegates on 'The Buddha and Karl Marx'. On his way back to Delhi he made two speeches in Benares and visited Kusinara, where the Buddha had died. In Delhi he took part in various Buddhist functions, attended the Rajya Sabha, and completed the last chapter of his book *The Buddha and Karl Marx*. On the evening of 5 December he asked for the Preface and Introduction to the *Buddha and His Dhamma* to be brought to his bedside, so that he could work on them during the night, and the following morning he was found dead. It was 6 December, he was 64 years and 7 months old, and he had been a Buddhist for only seven weeks.

But though *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar had been a Buddhist for only seven weeks, during that period he had probably done more for the promotion of Buddhism than any other Indian since Ashoka. At the time of his death three quarters of a million Untouchables had become Buddhists, and in the months that followed hundreds of thousands more took the same step – despite the uncertainty and confusion that had been created by the sudden loss of their great leader. So much was this the case that when the results of the 1961 census were published it was found that in the course of the previous decade the number of Buddhists in India had risen by a staggering 1,671 per cent and that they now numbered 3,250,227, more than three quarters of whom lived in the State of Maharashtra. This was *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar's last and greatest achievement, so that even though it was as the Architect of the Constitution of Free India and the Modern Manu that he passed into official history and is today most widely remembered, his real significance consists in the fact that it was he who established a revived Indian Buddhism on a firm foundation.

It is therefore as the Modern Ashoka that he really deserves to be known, and the statue standing outside the parliament building in Delhi should really depict him holding *The Buddha and His Dhamma* underneath his arm and pointing – not for the benefit of the Untouchables only, but for the benefit of all mankind – in the direction of the Three Jewels. In order to appreciate the nature of *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar's achievement, and thus the real significance of the man himself, it will however be necessary for us to take a look at the diabolical system from which he sought to deliver the Untouchables, as well as to trace the successive stages of the road by which he – and his followers – travelled from Hinduism to Buddhism. We shall also have to see the way in which Ambedkar discovered his spiritual roots, explore his thoughts on the subject of the Buddha and the future of his religion, survey the historic occasion on which he and 380,000 Untouchables were spiritually reborn, study his posthumously published magnum opus and, finally, see what happened after his death.

But before that, a few personal recollections may not be out of place. From 1908 to 1917 the future leader of the Untouchables was fully absorbed in his studies, first in India itself and afterwards in America and England, and during this period there was nothing to indicate that he was moving in the direction of Buddhism or even that he was giving any special thought to the Buddha's teaching. It was only in the middle and late twenties, after his second sojourn in England and his re-emergence into Indian public life, that there occurred any more of those incidents which, as we can now see, were milestones in his – and his community's – progress to Buddhism.

But though *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar may not have been moving in the direction of Buddhism during the period of his graduate and post-graduate studies he was nevertheless developing an outlook and even a philosophy that was, in certain essential respects, thoroughly Buddhist. This was evident as early as 1918, when he wrote a review article on Bertrand Russell's *The*

<sup>27</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (New York, 1946), pp. 532-3.

<sup>28</sup> Marc Galanter, *Law and society in modern India* (Delhi; New York, 1989), p. 292



Principles of Social Reconstruction, published the previous year. Since the article was written in a journal of economics *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar was obliged to confine himself to Russell's analysis of the property, but before dealing with this topic he discussed the question of how the philosophy of war was related to the principles of growth as expounded by the English philosopher. Characteristically, *Babasaheb* Dr B R Ambedkar agreed with Russell that there is more hope for a nation that has the impulses that lead to war than for a nation in which all impulse is dead, observing, 'The gist of it all is that activity is the condition of growth. Mr Russell, it must be emphasized, is against war, but is not for criticism; for, according to him, activity leads to growth and criticism is but another name for death. To express it in the language of Professor Dewey he is only against "force as violence" but is all for "force as energy". It must be remembered by those who are opposed to force, as such, that without the use of it all ideals will remain empty just as without some ideal or purpose (conscious or otherwise) all activity will be no more than mere fruitless fooling'<sup>29\*</sup>

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