

D-Mag

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**44th DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SAVIOUR OF
INDIA'S MOST OPPRESSED MINORITY**

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*"Thought without practice is empty. Action without thought is blind."
- Kwame Nkrumah. Premier of Ghana*

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Editorial Collective:

Dear Friends,

Wish you a Happy New year!!!!

We, the members of the Editorial Collective welcome you to a new News Magazine 'D-Mag'.

The 'D-Mag' is aimed at the discerning public who are in touch with the problems pertaining to oppression of minority groups in the Indian Subcontinent, with accent on the Dalits of India.

Being a net mag, we will welcome messages and articles from other oppressed groups and sub-nationalities the world over.

We also hope to make 'D-Mag' a source of information for those research workers and students of doctorate courses on topics connected with oppressed minorities and Dalits of India.. The sources of information are mostly buried in the memory of a large number of people. Now and then very revealing information comes from people like Jamnadas, Bagul in their letters to various forums.

Though we do not promise to avoid showers of fire and brimstone at times.

We do promise a feedback column for the readers.

Welcome to the D-Mag!

Dr. R. Opeh.
for The Editorial Collective.*

*(Ms. Thenmozhi, Rajkumar Kamble, Sashikanth Chandrasekharan and Dr R.Opeh.)

Nation Pays Homage to Dr Ambedkar.

44th Mahaparinirvana Day of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar. This day is commemorated by millions of his followers as "Day of Dedication". The day goes with recollecting the memories of the lifelong struggle of Babasaheb against the tyranny of the Hindu caste system. At the same time it is also the time to look at the unfulfilled mission of Babasaheb. Here are few statements of Babasaheb:

The Last message to his people:

"Whatever I have done, I have been able to do after passing through crushing miseries and endless struggle all my life and fighting with my opponents. With great difficulty I have brought this caravan where it is seen today. Let the caravan march on despite the hurdles that may come in its way. If my lieutenants are not able to take the caravan ahead they should leave it there, but in no circumstances should they allow the caravan to go back. This is the message to my people"

It is worthwhile reviewing whether the caravan which Babasaheb had referred to has moved forward or backward in the last 44 years.

Here is another statement which encourages the activists of our mission:

"Noble is your aim and sublime and glorious is your mission. Blessed are those who are awakened to their duty to those among whom they are born. Glory to those who devote their time, talents and their all to the amelioration of slavery. Glory to those who would keep their struggle for the liberation of the enslaved in spite of heavy odds, carping humiliation, storms and dangers till the downtrodden secure their human rights.

So to secure the human rights to all the downtrodden people was the ultimate dream of Babasaheb. Has that dream been fulfilled after 44 years after his death?

Here is another statement of Babasaheb about the dalit employees of his time:

"There is some progress on education in our society. By acquiring education some people have reached to the higher positions; but these educated people have deceived me. I was hoping from them that after acquiring higher education they will serve the society; but what I am seeing is that a crowd of small and big clerks has gathered around, who are busy feeding themselves and their families".

Please note Babasaheb made these remarks during his public speech at Agra on 18 March 1956. Has the situation changed today? Babasaheb wanted our people to contribute 5% of their resources (time and financial) for the cause of the upliftment of our society. Do we do it?

Politics:

In political field, Babasaheb said way back in 1924 that "Write down on the walls of your houses that we want to be the ruling race".

Have we grabbed any political power? Even in Maharashtra for the last 3 decades or so we have not been able to elect more than one or two MLAs through RPI, the party which Babasaheb himself was to launch (the constitution of RPI was written by Babasaheb). I hope we do not mistook the MLAs and MPs who are elected through Congress, BJP etc as the real representatives of our society. This can be easily verified from their performance in the assemblies and parliament. The only success in this direction is through BSP in U.P.

Buddhism:

Babasaheb wanted to make India a Buddhist country. Till date we have not converted more than 1% of India's population to Buddhism. A dismal performance of the organisations, like Buddhist Society of India, which Babasaheb formed exclusively to work for the propagation of Buddhism.

An all round review of his mission and its achievements and to rededicate to complete the unfulfilled dream of Babasaheb, is the real homage to this great victorious revolutionary, the only of its kind in the last 2000 years.

Raju Kamble

Gandhi & Ambedkar - A comparative study by Ramachandra Guha.

'Inside every thinking Indian there is a Gandhian and a Marxist struggling for supremacy,' says noted historian and biographer RAMACHANDRA GUHA in the opening sentence of this publication, which has just been released. A significant portion of the book expands on this salvo. In short, it examines and discusses all those who comprise the life of thinking Indians today. Exclusive extracts from the book released yesterday .

MAHATMA GANDHI was not so much the Father of the Nation as the mother of all debates regarding its future. All his life he fought in a friendly spirit with compatriots whose views on this or that topic diverged sharply from his. He disagreed with Communists and the bhadralok on the efficacy and morality of violence as a political strategy. He fought with radical Muslims on the one side and with radical Hindus on the other, both of whom sought to build a state on theological principles. He argued with Nehru and other scientists on whether economic development in a free India should centre on the village or the factory. And with that other giant, Rabindranath Tagore, he disputed the merits of such varied affiliations as the English language, nationalism, and the spinning wheel.

In some ways the most intense, interesting and long-running of these debates was between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi wished to save Hinduism by abolishing untouchability, whereas Ambedkar saw a solution for his people outside the fold of the dominant religion of the Indian people. Gandhi was a rural romantic, who wished to make the self-governing village the bedrock of free India; Ambedkar an admirer of city life and modern technology who dismissed the Indian village as a den of iniquity. Gandhi was a crypto-anarchist who favoured non-violent protest while being suspicious of the state; Ambedkar a steadfast constitutionalist, who worked within the state and sought solutions to social problems with the aid of the state.

Perhaps the most telling difference was in the choice of political instrument. For Gandhi, the Congress represented all of India, the Dalits too. Had he not made their cause their own from the time of his first ashram in South Africa? Ambedkar however made a clear distinction between freedom and power. The Congress wanted the British to transfer power to them, but to obtain freedom the Dalits had to organise themselves as a separate bloc, to form a separate party, so as to more effectively articulate their interests in the crucible of electoral politics. It was thus that in his lifetime, and for long afterwards, Ambedkar came to represent a dangerously subversive threat to the authoritative, and sometimes authoritarian, equation: Gandhi = Congress = Nation.

Here then is the stuff of epic drama, the argument between the Hindu who did most to reform caste and the ex-Hindu who did most to do away with caste altogether. Recent accounts represent it as a fight between a hero and a villain, the writer's caste position generally determining who gets cast as hero, who as villain. In truth both figures should be seen as heroes, albeit tragic ones.

The tragedy, from Gandhi's point of view, was that his colleagues in the national movement either did not understand his concern with untouchability or even actively deplored it. Priests and motley shankaracharyas thought he was going too fast in his challenge to caste - and why did he not first take their permission? Communists wondered why he wanted everyone to clean their own latrines when he could be speaking of class struggle. And Congressmen in general thought Harijan work came in the way of an all-out effort for national freedom. Thus Stanley Reid, a former editor of the Times of India quotes an Indian patriot who complained in the late thirties that "Gandhi is wrapped up in the Harijan movement. He does not care a jot whether we live or die; whether we are bond or free."

The opposition that he faced from his fellow Hindus meant that Gandhi had perforce to move slowly, and in stages. He started by accepting that untouchability was bad, but added a cautionary caveat - that inter-dining and inter-marriage were also bad. He moved on to accepting inter-mingling and inter-dining (hence the movement for temple entry), and to arguing that all men and all varnas were equal. The last and most far-reaching step, taken only in 1946, was to challenge caste directly by accepting and sanctioning inter-marriage itself.

The tragedy, from Ambedkar's point of view, was that to fight for his people he had to make common cause with the British. In his book, *Worshipping False Gods*, Arun Shourie has made much of this. Shourie takes all of 600 pages to make two points: (i) that Ambedkar was a political opponent of both Gandhi and the Congress, and generally preferred the British to either; (ii) that Ambedkar cannot be called the "Father of the Constitution" as that implies sole authorship, whereas several other people, such as K. M. Munshi and B. N. Rau, also contributed significantly to the wording of the document. Reading *Worshipping False Gods*, one might likewise conclude that it has been mistakenly advertised as being the work of one hand. Entire chapters are based entirely on one or other volume of the *Transfer of Power*, the collection of official papers put out some years ago by Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

The editor of that series, Nicholas Mansergh, might with reason claim co-authorship of Shourie's book. In a just world he would be granted a share of the royalties too.

Practised in the arts of over-kill and over-quote, Shourie is a pamphleteer parading as a historian. He speaks on Gandhi only as "Gandhiji" and of the national movement only as the "National Movement", indicating that he has judged the case beforehand. For to use the suffix and the capitals is to simultaneously elevate and intimidate, to set up the man and his movement as the ideal, above and beyond criticism. But the Congress' claim to represent all of India was always under challenge. The Communists said it was the party of landlords and capitalists. The Muslim League said it was a party of the Hindus. Ambedkar then appended a devastating caveat, saying that the party did not even represent all Hindus, but only the upper castes.

Shourie would deny that these critics had any valid arguments whatsoever. He is in the business of awarding, and more often withholding, certificates of patriotism. The opponents of the Congress are thus all suspect to him, simply because they dared point out that the National Movement was not always as national as it set out to be, or that the Freedom Struggle promised unfreedom for some. But how did these men outside the Congress come to enjoy such a wide following? This is a question Shourie does not pause to answer, partly because he had made up his mind in advance, but also because he is woefully ill-informed. Consider now some key facts erased or ignored by him.

That Ambedkar preferred the British to the Congress is entirely defensible. Relevant here is a remark of the 18th-Century English writer Samuel Johnson. When the American colonists asked for independence from Britain, Johnson said: "How is it that we hear the greatest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?" Untouchability was to the Indian freedom movement what slavery had been to the American struggle, the basic contradiction it sought to paper over. Before Ambedkar, another outstanding leader of the lower castes, Jotiba Phule, also distrusted the Congress, in his time a party dominated by Poona Brahmins. He too preferred the British, in whose armies and factories low castes could find opportunities denied to them in the past. The opening up of the economy and the growth of the colonial cities also helped many untouchables escape the tyranny of the village. The British might have been unwitting agents of change; nonetheless, under their rule life for the lower castes was less unpleasant by far than it had been under the Peshwas.

Shourie also seems unaware of work by worthy historians on low-caste movements in other parts of India. Mark Juergensmeyer has documented the struggles of untouchables in Punjab, which under its remarkable leader Mangu Ram, rejected the Congress and the Arya Samaj to form a new sect, Adi-Dharm, which was opposed to both. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has written of the Namasudras in Bengal, who like Ambedkar and his Mahars, were not convinced that a future Congress government would be sympathetic to their interests. And countless scholars have documented the rise of the Dravidian movement in South India, that took as its point of departure Brahmin domination of the Congress in Madras: the movement's founder, E. V. Ramaswami "Periyar", also fought bitterly with Gandhi.

The leaders of these movements, and the millions who followed them, worked outside the Congress and often in opposition to it. Enough reason perhaps for Shourie to dismiss them all as anti-national. Indeed, Shourie's attitude is comparable to that of White Americans who question the patriotism of those Blacks who dare speak out against racism. For asking Blacks to stand up for their rights, men of such stature as W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson were called all kind of names, of which "anti-American" was much the politest. Later, the great Martin Luther King was persecuted by the most powerful of American agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, whose director, J. Edgar Hoover, equated patriotism with acquiescence to White domination.

Much of the time, Shourie writes as if there is a singular truth, with him as its repository and guarantor. Time and again he equates Ambedkar with Jinnah as an "accomplice of Imperial politics". He dismisses all that Ambedkar wrote about Hinduism "caricature" and "calumnies". Not once does he acknowledge that there was much truth to the criticisms. There is not one admission here of the horrendous and continuing sufferings of Dalit as the hands of caste Hindus that might explain and justify Ambedkar's rhetoric and political choices. For Shourie, the fact that Ambedkar disagreed long and often with Gandhi is proof enough that he was anti-national. He even insinuates that Ambedkar "pushed Gandhi to the edge of death" by not interfering with the Mahatma's decision to fast in captivity. Of the same fast other historians have written, in my view more plausibly, that by threatening to die Gandhi blackmailed Ambedkar into signing a pact with him.

Somewhere in the middle of *Worshipping False Gods*, the author complains that Ambedkar's "statues, dressed in garish blue, holding a copy of the Constitution - have been put up in city after city." However, this aesthetic distaste seems rather pointless. For the background to the statues and the reverence they command lies in the continuing social practices of the religion to which Shourie and I belong. If caste lives, so will the memory of the man who fought to annihilate it. The remarkable thing is that 50 years after independence, the only politician, dead or alive,

who has a truly pan-Indian appeal is B. R. Ambedkar. Where Gandhi is forgotten in his native Gujarat and Nehru vilified in his native Kashmir, Ambedkar is worshipped in hamlets all across the land. For Dalits everywhere he is the symbol of their struggle, the scholar, theoretician and activist whose own life represented a stirring triumph over the barriers of caste.

Shourie's attacks on Dalits and their hero follow in quick succession the books he has published attacking Communists, Christians and Muslims. Truth be told, the only category of Indians he has not attacked - and going by his present political persuasion will not attack - are high-caste Hindus. Oddly enough, this bilious polemicist and baiter of the minorities was once an anti-religious leftist who excoriated Hinduism. To see Shourie's career in its totality is to recall these words of Issac Deutscher, on the communist turned anti-communist.

He brings to his job the lack of scruple, the narrow-mindedness, the disregard of truth, and the intense hatred with which Stalinism has imbued him. He remains sectarian. He is an inverted Stalinist. He continues to see the world in black and white, but now the colours are differently distributed ... The ex- communist ... is haunted by a vague sense that he has betrayed either his former ideals or the ideals of bourgeois society ... He then tries to suppress the guilt and uncertainty, or to camouflage it by a show of extraordinary certitude and frantic aggressiveness. He insists that the world should recognise his uneasy conscience as the clearest conscience of all. He may no longer be concerned with any cause except one - self- justification.

Ambedkar is a figure who commands great respect from one end of the social spectrum. But he is also, among some non-Dalits, an object of great resentment, chiefly for his decision to carve out a political career independent of and sometimes in opposition to Gandhi's Congress. That is of course the burden of Shourie's critique but curiously, the very week his book was published, at a political rally in Lucknow the Samajvadi Party's Beni Prasad Verma likewise dismissed Ambedkar as one who "did nothing else except create trouble for Gandhiji". This line, that Ambedkar had no business to criticise, challenge or argue with Gandhi, was of course made with much vigour and malice during the national movement as well.

I think, however, that for Ambedkar to stand up to the uncrowned king and anointed Mahatma of the Indian people required extraordinary courage and will-power. Gandhi thought so too. Speaking at a meeting in Oxford in October 1931, Gandhi said he had "the highest regard for Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter. That he does not break our heads is an act of self- restraint on his part." Writing to an English friend two years later, he said he found "nothing unnatural" in Ambedkar's hostility to the Congress and its supporters. "He has not only witnessed the inhuman wrongs done to the social pariahs of Hinduism", reflected this Hindu, "but in spite of all his culture, all the honours that he has received, he has, when he is in India, still to suffer many insults to which untouchables are exposed." In June 1936 Gandhi pointed out once again that Dr. Ambedkar "has had to suffer humiliations and insults which should make any one of us bitter and resentful." "Had I been in his place," he remarked, "I would have been as angry."

Gandhi's latter-day admirers might question Ambedkar's patriotism and probity, but the Mahatma had no such suspicions himself. Addressing a bunch of Karachi students in June 1934, he told them that "the magnitude of (Dr. Ambedkar's) sacrifice is great. He is absorbed in his own work. He leads a simple life. He is capable of earning one to two thousand rupees a month. He is also in a position to settle down in Europe if he so desires. But he does not want to stay there. He is only concerned about the welfare of the Harijians."

To Gandhi, Ambedkar's protest held out a lesson to the upper castes. In March 1936 he said that if Ambedkar and his followers were to embrace another religion, "We deserve such treatment and our task (now) is to wake up to the situation and purify ourselves." Not many heeded the warning, for towards the end of his life Gandhi spoke with some bitterness about the indifference to Harijan work among his fellow Hindus: "The tragedy is that those who should have especially devoted themselves to the work of (caste) reform did not put their hearts into it. What wonder that Harijan brethren feel suspicious, and show opposition and bitterness."

The words quoted in the preceding paragraphs have been taken from that reliable and easily accessible source: the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. The 100 volumes of that set rest lightly on my shelves as, going by other evidence, they rest on the shelves of the man who compiled *Worshipping False Gods*. Perhaps the most perverse aspect of an altogether perverse book is that Shourie does not once tell us what Gandhi said or wrote about his great adversary. A curious thing or, on reflection, a not-so-curious thing: for if that scholarly courtesy was restored to, the case that Ambedkar was an anti-national careerist would be blown sky- high.

One of the few Gandhians who understood the cogency of the Dalit critique of the Congress was C. Rajagopalachari. In the second half of 1932, Rajaji became involved in the campaign to allow the so-called untouchables to enter the Guruvayoor temple in Kerala. The campaign was led by that doughty fighter for the rights

of the dispossessed, K. Kelappan Nair. In a speech at Guruvayoor on December 20, 1932, Rajaji told the high castes that it would certainly help us in the fight for Swaraj if we open the doors of the temple (to Harijans). One of the many causes that keeps Swaraj away from us is that we are divided among ourselves. Mahatmaji received many wounds in London (during the Second Round Table Conference of 1931). But Dr. Ambedkar's darts were the worst. Mahatmaji did not quake before the Churchills of England. But as repressing the nation he had to plead guilty to Dr. Ambedkar's charges.

As it was, the managers of temples across the land could count upon the support of many among their clientele, the suvarna Hindus who agreed with the Shankaracharyas that the Gandhians were dangerous revolutionaries who had to be kept out at the gate. Unhappily, while upper-caste Hindus thought that Gandhi moved too fast, Dalits today feel he was much too slow. The Dalit politician Mayawati has, more than once, spoken of the Mahatma as a shallow paternalist who sought only to smooth the path for more effective long-term domination by the suvarna. Likewise, in his book *Why I am Not a Hindu* Kancha Illiah writes of Gandhi as wanting to "build a modern consent system for the continued maintenance of brahminical hegemony" - a judgment as unfair as Shourie's on Ambedkar.

Whereas in their lifetime Gandhi and Ambedkar were political rivals, now, decades after their death, it should be possible to see their contributions as complementing one another's. The Kannada critic D. R. Nagaraj once noted that in the narratives of Indian nationalism the "heroic stature of the caste-Hindu reformer", Gandhi, "further dwarfed the Harijan personality" of Ambedkar. In the Ramayana there is only one hero but, as Nagaraj points out, Ambedkar was too proud, intelligent and self-respecting a man to settle for the role of Hanuman or Sugreeva. By the same token, Dalit hagiographers and pamphleteers generally seek to elevate Ambedkar by diminishing Gandhi. For the scriptwriter and the mythmaker there can only be one hero. But the historian is bound by no such constraint. The history of Dalit emancipation is unfinished, and for the most part unwritten. It should, and will, find space for many heroes. Ambedkar and Gandhi will do nicely for a start.

An Anthropologist Among The Marxists And Other Essays, Ramachandra Guha, Permanent Black 2001, New Delhi, Rs. 450.

Ramachandra Guha is a historian, biographer and cricket writer. Once a visiting professor at Stanford University, Oslo University and the University of California at Berkeley, he is now a full-time writer based in Bangalore. His books include *The Unquiet Woods* and *Environmentalism: A Global History*. He is the editor of the forthcoming Picador Book of Cricket.

Ambedkar The Movie - a review.

Amberish K Diwanji (www.rediff.com)



Some movies become classic epics.

These are movies in which the subject shown or its production values become benchmarks of our times.

As Dev Anand once said, the 20th century is unique because it can capture on celluloid the great stories of our times.

The life of Babasaheb Ambedkar is one such great story.

It is the saga of one of India's greatest men, who perhaps is the most misunderstood of them all. Ambedkar was hailed as saviour and simultaneously reviled as a traitor. He was the messiah for millions and a charlatan for a million others.

Among his most staunch opponents in India's struggle for freedom were none other than the Mahatma himself: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Ironically, the two have something in common: Both inspire complete reverence or a total lack of it among different sections of people. A few years ago, Arun Shourie wrote the book *Worshipping False Gods* wherein he claimed that Ambedkar spent his time colluding with the British rather than fighting them! Not surprisingly, Dalits in India, who worship Ambedkar, took umbrage and the debate degenerated into a mud-slinging match.

There is no doubting the fact that great effort has gone into the making of *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*. Art director Nitin Desai deserves praise for sets that have been painstakingly constructed to recreate the era of the early 20th century, whether it is New York (where the film begins), London, Bombay, Baroda or Delhi. Film director Dr Jabbar Patel is well known in Marathi stage circles for his outstanding direction in theatre and films. He is especially known for his direction of the play, *Ghasiram Kotwal*.

If this film is to be remembered for one and only one aspect, it will be for the sterling performance by Mammooty, who plays the lead role of Dr Ambedkar. A superstar in Kerala with over 300 films under his belt, Mammooty was chosen by Patel to play the role for his resemblance in looks and build to Ambedkar.



There is no doubt that Mammooty, who was initially hesitant to do the role, has breathed life into Ambedkar's character; bringing out the pain and angst of a scholar who was born an untouchable and denied even the most elementary rights, such as the right to drink water!

Incidentally, Mammooty bagged the best actor award for his work in *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar* at the 31st International Film Festival's Indian Panorama section.

The second outstanding performance is the portrayal of Rama Ambedkar by Sonali Kulkarni. She is the long-suffering wife of Ambedkar who lived in the one-room chawl while Ambedkar went abroad for his studies. She lost four children before the fifth survived and bore the brunt of her husband's neglect when his destiny took him elsewhere.

In an era when physical contact, even between husband and wife, was limited, her eyes speak of the longing she feels for her *saheb*. Hers is an Oscar-worthy performance!

The movie covers the most important events in Ambedkar's life. His stint at New York's Columbia University, his tryst in London, his return to Bombay and Baroda, his plunge into reform activities, his epic battle with the Mahatma over separate electorates, and his appointment as chairman of the Constitution drafting committee are all chronicled. The obstacles in his path and the conviction for his cause are well etched.

However, the movie has its weaknesses. Perhaps the most glaring one is the obsessive attempt by Jabbar Patel to show Ambedkar as staunchly opposed to the British. Clearly, Patel is attempting to set the record straight with Ambedkar's critics by stressing on Ambedkar's anti-imperialistic stance. What this does, however, is take away precious time from a movie that is already very long.

Ambedkar's patriotism needs no defence, but his struggle against the world's most iniquitous society needs to be highlighted. And this struggle is not brought out in the proper context. For instance, not many viewers may have been aware of the problem at the Mahad water tank *satyagraha*, Ambedkar's first campaign which established him as the undisputed leader of the depressed classes.

The Mahad water tank was out of bounds for the 'untouchables,' a fact that is made clear through speeches rather than shots. A scene bringing out this cruel practice would have had a better impact in defining how critical the moment was when Ambedkar drank water from the tank.

While Ambedkar's battle with Gandhi over separate electorates is brought out well, his last battle with Hindu orthodoxy over the Hindu Code Bill leaves a viewer no wiser.

What the viewer understands is that certain orthodox Hindus were against the bill. What he does not comprehend is the radical and democratic changes that Ambedkar wanted to bring about and why these changes were resisted. Also missed is the point that it was the denial of this very social justice that catalysed Ambedkar into embracing Buddhism.

Perhaps the movie's long length left Patel with little time to bring out the context, but in the end it leaves the viewer somewhat uninformed about why Ambedkar was fighting so vigorously for his causes.

The movie contains a few songs (of famous saints such as Kabir and Tukaram), and though they add to the length of the film, they are most pleasing to the ear. The lyrics chant against casteism, against impotent Gods for not helping the Untouchables, and curse the horrendous ability of man to inflict untold misery on his fellow men.

All in all, *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar* is a film that is definitely worth viewing. Anyone who believes in 'Equality and Justice for All' -- whether in India or any other land -- this film is a must see. Mammooty, Jabbar Patel, Sonali Kulkarni and others are to be hailed for this epic movie.

Participation is new mantra of Dalit writers

<http://www.expressindia.com/newsline/daily/20001207/ige07175.htm>
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 6: From literary works and scholarships for Dalit students, from social integration and representation in the media and education sectors to social injustices, the 16th Dalit writers' conference discussed it all. The two-day session concluded in the city today and one of the main issues raised was the need for Dalits to participate in mainstream society.

This conference, an annual feature, provides a platform for Dalits from various parts of the country to get together and exchange ideas and information. Attended by 13,000 writers and representatives from 26 districts, the conference aimed to spread awareness about the various education and social welfare schemes being offered by the government to Dalits and make them aware of their rights.

One suggestion that came up asked Dalits to have an active relationship with the middle classes. Says Chandrabhan Prasad, Dalit writer and activist, "Only an articulate middle class can help form a fair and free society. Today's Dalit middle class is in the formative stage and most of it is in the government sector. As a result they cannot make any controversial statements. We need people in media and education among others fields since though Paswan and Kanshi Ram are covered they are hardly the intellectuals of our society."

Another question is of identity and assertion says Prasad, adding that they have to fight against the identity of "untouchables" given to them. "We also need to fight the identity of others, that is: Why should someone else be called a Brahmin and given preferential treatment because of that?" Need for representation in the private sector, including the MNCs, as well as the public sector, was another issue that came up in the conference.

"Moreover," said Prasad, "we even object to the term reservation when it was never used in the Constitution. We need a representation in different sectors of society and not any reservation." On mainstream literature, the participants believed it did not reflect or even knew how to reflect their expressions. As a result they stressed that there was a strong need for a parallel literary movement through poetry, book writings and readings to present an alternative world view. The aim is to make it so strong that the mainstream model is forced to consider it.

Participant Karan Singh from Nainital touched upon something that Dalit writers at the district level often encounter. "Whenever we send in articles or stories, they are completely turned around, giving the wrong impression," he said, looking a bit worried about how this quote may be twisted around.

In another situation Shyam Lal Rathi from Haryana narrated what children have to go through to get an education. Education of the girl child is technically free. But, says Rathi, girl children in his district end up paying through categories of building funds and even have to pay for their books.

Raw deal for women, SCs/STs in judiciary

<http://www.timesofindia.com/today/08colu4.htm>

NEW DELHI: Women, like the backward classes, get a rough deal when it comes to appointment as high court and Supreme Court judges and are often denied the right to administer justice. Since the inception of the Supreme Court in 1950, only three women judges have adorned the Bench. Fathima Beevi was followed by Sujata V Manohar and now Ruma Pal, a sitting judge.

Women lawyers' demand for reasonable representation on the Bench remains a far cry. The issue arose during the recent Law Day function when Supreme Court Bar Association president R K Jain advocated the women's cause.

“This is not a very happy state of affairs”, Jain said addressing among others law minister Arun Jaitley and chief justice A S Anand. “Serious efforts will have to be made to select talent from amongst the women lawyers and judicial officials for their appointment to the Supreme Court and high courts... At least 10 per cent women lawyers should be appointed to these posts in order to strengthen the movement for women empowerment.”

Jaitley contended that the government had little say in the appointments of judges but Justice Anand assured that henceforth women would get a fair chance to serve the judiciary.

No reservation has been made in judicial appointments as such high posts are governed by a Constitutional provision. Members of the scheduled castes and tribes seldom get a chance to be elevated to the Bench.

A Parliamentary committee said there were only 15 SC and five ST judges among the 481 high court judges in the country on May 1, 1998 and there was no judge from this particular social group in the Supreme Court (before the appointment of Justice K G Balakrishnan in July this year).

The committee says: “It is astonishing that there has been not only no representation for SCs and STs in the appointment of officials and staff of the Supreme Court but also no appointment rules have been finalised during the last 50 years.

It ventures to say: “Judges take oath that they (will) uphold the Constitution and the laws. But the Supreme Court and a few high courts by claiming power over the Constitution, practice untouchability and are disobeying the Constitution with regard to Articles 16 (4) and 16 (4a)”.

Is the judiciary “infected by ancient prejudices and dominated by notions of gradations in life?” The report said the class prejudices of the judges did not allow full play of their intellectual honesty and integrity in their decisions. Their judgments very often betrayed a mind set more useful to the governing class.”

Is judiciary a “super speciality service with merit as its bedrock?” The reports says: “To argue that only those with merit have found a berth in the judiciary is specious. Such a notion presupposes that those drawn from the weaker sections do not have enough merit. There is no scientific basis for such a view which can only be held by an incorrigible bigot”.

The committee headed by a BJP MP and tribal leader Karva Munda says the judges from the elite group may find it their filial duty to defend a system established by their forefathers, even at the cost of truth and universal values, but it asks as to how can such judges claim to have a right to sit in judgment over the issue of the right of the backward classes?

The Vajpayee government, on the other hand, asserts that it has no intention to control the judiciary and is rather opposed to any such move.

New demand for SC/STs, to kick off new controversy

<http://www.indian-express.com/ie/daily/20001207/ina07059.html>

SHARAD GUPTA

NEW DELHI, DEC 6: A new controversy is likely to be kicked off soon, with the Parliamentary Forum for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes demanding reservation in admissions and jobs in institutions thriving on Government aid. The forum consists of over 160 MPs from all parties.

The demand was made in a resolution passed at a meeting of the forum chaired by BJP Rajya Sabha member Sanghpriya Gautam last night. They will submit a memorandum to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in this regard next week.

“A number of educational institutions as well as private banks and other establishments thrive on Government land bought on subsidised rates. They also take a number of other concessions from the Government. Why shouldn't they be forced to implement the quota for SC and STs, applicable so far (only) in Government bodies,” asked Gautam.

The forum was set up in 1962 to monitor implementation of Government policies for the welfare of SC/STs, said treasurer Ashok Pradhan, adding that the other bodies like the SC/ST Commission and Joint Parliamentary Committee, set up for the welfare of SC/STs in 1970, are toothless, merely meant to investigate and report atrocities on Dalits. Sometimes, even their reports are not placed in Parliament.

The forum also demanded a Constitutional amendment to make SC/ST quota unchallengeable in court, a special recruitment drive by the Government to clear backlog in vacancies for SC/STs, a special cell for SC/STs headed by the Prime Minister, proper utilisation of the SC/ST welfare fund allocated to states in the special component plan by the Planning Commission and revival of B.R. Ambedkar Foundation lying defunct for past some years.

In 1935, Ambedkar had favoured reservation for SC/STs since they were economically not at par with other castes and had almost no representation in politics, Gautam said, adding that the situation had not changed much even after 53 years of independence.

He said that the forum is constituted soon after every Lok Sabha election and lasts till the Upper House's tenure. Gautam, who was unanimously elected chairman of the forum in its first meeting during Parliament's monsoon session, announced his executive yesterday.

It consists of veterans like P.A. Sangma, H. Hanumanthappa, Buta Singh, R.S. Gavai, Bali Ram Kashyap and Sushil Kumar Shinde, all of whom have been appointed co-conveners.

Constitution review to be resisted

<http://www.the-hindu.com/stories/14072183.htm>

NEW DELHI, DEC. 6.

The Bahujan Samaj Party today vowed to continue with its agitation to oppose the review of the Constitution and said it would not rest till the whole review process was "withdrawn" by the BJP-led NDA Government.

Speaking at a largely attended public rally held behind the Red Fort here to show its strength against the review, senior BSP leaders also used the occasion to lambast the Jana Shakti leader and Union Communication Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, for playing into the hands of the BJP to cut into BSP votes.

Addressing the party workers who had converged at the venue from various parts of the country, the BSP president, Mr. Kanshi Ram, said the "review is an attempt by the BJP to thwart the basic fabric of the Constitution drafted by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar".

Arguing that the Constitution was considered as a hurdle by the "manuvadi parties" for continuance in power, Mr. Ram said: "These parties, led by the BJP, are now trying to change this to suit their selfish interests. We will not let this happen and continue to oppose this move tooth and nail".

The BSP secretary, Ms. Mayawati, asserted there was nothing wrong with the Constitution. It had served the country well for the past 50 years. "The fault lies with those parties which are or were in power and implemented it to suit their own petty ends," she added.

She said the Constitution provides opportunities to the people from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes to get political power. She alleged that the review of the Constitution was an attempt to keep them out of power. "The BJP is against this Constitution. They do not want the Bahujan Samaj to get political power'. We will continue to oppose this until this process is withdrawn."

She criticised Mr. Paswan for floating Jan Shakti. "By doing so, he is being a party to the BJP's gameplan to attract SC, ST and Backward Class votes. But, as in the past, even this strategy of the BJP would not yield any result," Ms. Mayawati asserted.

"The BJP is propping up this habitual defector with an eye on the next years's Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh," she said. Later speaking to reporters, Ms Mayawati ruled out an alliance with any other party in the U.P. Assembly polls and said they would go alone.

Ms. Mayawati refuted that the rally was to counter Mr. Pawan's rally held in the Capital recently. ``This rally is was to oppose the review of the Constitution. This has nothing to do with Mr. Paswan's rally. Any how his party is not going to have any impact on our performance," she said.

SC judgement on promotion set back for Dalits: Assn.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/dec06/dtju.htm>

BIJAPUR, Dec 5 (DHNS)

"It is unfortunate for Dalits that the Supreme Court has given a judgement that seniority in service is a criterion for promotion of Dalits`` opined Gopal Atharga, Karnataka Dalit Government and Semi-Government Employees` Association president.

The constitution has granted reservation facilities for Scheduled Caste engineers to encourage service motive by giving them time-to-time promotion according to the reservation policy, he said, in a statement released in this regard.

Reservation facilities in the State for the Scheduled Caste employees should not be given up, appealed the office bearers Ravi Yalladagi, Annappa Wade, Y M Valikar, Gopala Atharga and Nadagiri in a joint statement.

"Dalits have been denied opportunities in all the fields. In spite of 18 per cent reservation, no government has attempted to fill the complete quota by backlog. How can they secure high posts when they are denied higher and technical education? That is why reservation should be the criterion for promotion,`` they stated.

Unjust films and injustice to women

<http://www.the-hindu.com/>

IMAGINE that you had been brutally gang-raped. Imagine that the justice system was so heavily weighed against you that the perpetrators of the crime went scot free. Imagine the humiliation, hurt, anger that you have to live with for the rest of your life. Imagine what it would be like if your story is made into a film - without your consent. Would you feel angry, sad, defeated, insulted? Or would you shrug your shoulders and hope that someone will learn something from the story shown in the film?

We are familiar with these questions because of the heated debates and legal battles that followed the making of Shekhar Kapoor's "Bandit Queen", the story of Phoolan Devi. In the end who won and who lost is not entirely clear. Shekhar Kapoor has become a big name in cinema; Phoolan Devi has established herself as a politician and MP.

But the recent film by Mr. Jagmohan Mundra, better known for his failed film "Monsoon", on the life of Bhanwari Devi has so far not encountered too many questions or controversies. Mr. Mundra probably hopes he will get around this by stating that although his film is based on a true story, it is fiction. Thus, by changing the name Bhanwari to Sanwari and her husband's name Mohan to Sohan, he thinks the problem is solved.

Unfortunately, it is not. Bhanwari Devi is an incredibly brave woman. As a saathin, part of the now virtually defunct but once path-breaking Women's Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan, she bravely stood up to the dominant Gujjar caste in her village and challenged traditions like child marriage. For this she was punished - by being gang-raped by four men of the village, including the village priest. Her story has been written about in the media in India and abroad. She has received awards for her courage in speaking out and taking the case to court.

After all that, Bhanwari quietly continues to work as a saathin. She has to face the taunts of people in the village who often call her a whore to her face and in front of her children. She has little money; her award money has been spent in fighting her case which is now in the High Court. And she is deeply worried about the impact of Mr. Mundra's film "Bawandar" (Sandstorm) on her life, on the life of her children and on the on-going battle in court.

The film, of course, is not as bad as it could have been. Nor is it a particularly good film. The real problem with it lies in the ethics of making films based on people who are still alive without getting their informed consent. The

script writer apparently met Bhanwari and even has a photograph to prove that he did. But the very fact that neither Bhanwari, nor the women's groups who have supported her, are acknowledged in the film proves that the film-maker did not consult them fully.

While Bhanwari Devi's case drew together a wide coalition of women's and human rights groups across the country, the film depicts women's groups as superficial, society women for whom travel on work is coterminous with shopping expeditions. Why should a film-maker, who claims he wants to show the "real" struggle of a "real" woman portray women activists in this unreal light? While it is true that these days, well-funded NGOs are giving the general public the impression that working with an NGO is as good as being a part of the corporate sector, the majority of activists still struggle against the state and other entrenched groups. There is little glamour in the work they do. Was the director attempting to "balance" the male villains in the film with some female villains?

Even if such pointless stereotyping could be overlooked, Mr. Mundra has committed a far more serious crime. In a scene in which these Delhi-based society types, in their silk sarees and shawls, visit Sanwari in her village to extend their support, one of them asks for the blouse that Sanwari had worn on the day she was raped, inspects it and asks, "Why is it in one piece?" She then proceeds to tear it and to virtually manufacture evidence.

While doing so, she states that the end is what is important and not the means. Given that the case is still in court, such a depiction is the height of irresponsibility by a person who claims that he is truly concerned about Bhanwari Devi's future.

But having said all this, the film is tolerable because of Nandita Das. This talented young actress has given a superb, controlled performance in the lead role. She has put a great deal of sincerity and conviction into the role, something that clearly comes from within as Nandita is a feminist and has openly associated with groups fighting for women's rights and social justice. Supporting her is Raghbir Yadav, another remarkable actor who is not seen often enough in films.

Also to his credit, Mr. Mundra has not exploited the rape scene as would most Bollywood directors. He has also not stinted in exposing the political-caste nexus that led to Bhanwari Devi losing her case in the lower court. For this he might have to face the wrath of powerful caste groups in Rajasthan.

"Bawandar" is unlikely to be a box office hit. It might just slip away without creating too many ripples. On the other hand, despite its shortcomings, it might move people, open their eyes to the reality of our unjust justice system that traumatises the victims rather than giving them solace and justice.

But sadly, for the woman on whose life the film is based, none of this will be of much comfort if in the end the distortions of her story work against her as she continues her battle through the courts.

KALPANA SHARMA

Buddha And His Dhamma

By Dr. BR Ambedkar

INTRODUCTION

Indications of a growth in the volume of interest in Buddhism are noticeable in some sections of the Indian people. Along with it there is naturally a growing demand for a clear and consistent statement of the life and teachings of the Buddha.

Anyone who is not a Buddhist finds it extremely difficult to present the life and teachings of the Buddha in a manner which would make it a consistent whole. Depending on the Nikayas, not only the presentation of a consistent story of the life of the Buddha becomes a difficult thing and the presentation of some parts of his teachings becomes much more so. Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to say that of all the founders of religions in the world the presentation of the life and teachings of the founder of Buddhism presents a problem which is quite puzzling if not baffling. Is it not necessary that these problems should be solved and the path for the understanding of Buddhism be made clear? Is it not time that those who are Buddhists should take up these problems at least for general discussion and throw what light they can on these problems ?

With a view to raise a discussion on these problems I propose to set them out here. The first problem relates to the main event in the life of the Buddha, namely, Parivraja. Why did the Buddha take Parivraja? The traditional answer is that he took Parivraja because he saw a dead person, a sick person and an old person. This answer is absurd on the face of it. The Buddha took Parivraja at the age of 29. If he took Parivraja as a result of these three sights, how is it he did not see these three sights earlier? These are common events occurring by hundreds and the Buddha could not have failed to come across them earlier. It is impossible to accept the traditional explanation that this was the first time he saw them. The explanation is not plausible and does not appeal to reason. But if this is not the answer to the question, what is the real answer?

The second problem is created by the four Aryan Truths. Do they form part of the original teachings of the Buddha ? This formula cuts at the root of Buddhism. If life is sorrow, death is sorrow and rebirth is sorrow, then there is an end of everything. Neither religion nor philosophy can help a man to achieve happiness in the world. If there is no escape from sorrow, then what can religion do, what can Buddha do to relieve man from such sorrow which is ever there in birth itself? The four Aryan Truths are a great stumbling block in the way of non-Buddhists accepting the gospel of Buddhism. For the four Aryan Truths deny hope to man. The four Aryan Truths make the gospel of the Buddha a gospel of pessimism. Do they form part of the original gospel or are they a later accretion by the monks ?

The third problem relates to the doctrines of soul, of karma and rebirth. The Buddha denied the existence of the soul. But he is also said to have affirmed the doctrine of karma and rebirth. At once a question arises. If there is no soul, how can there be karma? If there is no soul, how can there be rebirth ? These are baffling questions. In what sense did the Buddha use the words karma and rebirth ? Did he use them in a different sense than the sense in which they were used by the Brahmins of his day? If so, in what sense? Did he use them in the same sense in which the Brahmins used them ? If so, is there not a terrible contradiction between the denial of the soul and the affirmation of karma and rebirth? This contradiction needs to be resolved.

The fourth problem relates to the Bhikkhu. What was the object of the Buddha in creating the Bhikkhu ? Was the object to create a perfect man ? Or was his object to create a social servant devoting his life to service of the people and being their friend, guide and philosopher? This is a very real question. On it depends the future of Buddhism. If the Bhikkhu is only a perfect man he is of no use to the propagation of Buddhism because though a perfect man he is a selfish man. If, on the other hand, he is a social servant he may prove to be the hope of Buddhism. This question must be decided not so much in the interest of doctrinal consistency but in the interest of the future of Buddhism.

If I may say so, the pages of the journal of the Mahabodhi Society make, to me at any rate, dull reading. This is not because the material presented is not interesting and instructive. The dullness is due to the fact that it seems to fall upon a passive set of readers. After reading an article, one likes to know what the reader of the journal has to say about it. But the reader never gives out his reaction. This silence on the part of the reader is a great discouragement to the writer. I hope my questions will excite the readers to come and make their contribution to their solution.

PROLOGUE

" from time to time men find themselves forced to reconsider current and inherited beliefs and ideas, to gain some harmony between present and past experience, and to reach a position which shall satisfy the demands of feeling and reflexion and give confidence for facing the future. If, at the present day, religion, as a subject of critical or scientific inquiry, of both practical and theoretical significance has attracted increasing attention, this can be ascribed to (a) the rapid progress of scientific knowledge and thought ; (b) the deeper intellectual interest in the subject ; (c) the widespread tendencies in all parts of the world to reform or reconstruct religion, or even to replace it by some body of thought, more ' rational ' and ' scientific ' or less ' superstitious ' ; and (d) the effect of social, political, and international events of a sort which, in the past, have both influenced and been influenced by religion. Whenever the ethical or moral value of activities or conditions is questioned, the value of religion is involved ; and all deep-stirring experiences invariably compel a reconsideration of the most fundamental ideas, whether they are explicitly religious or not. Ultimately there arise problems of justice, human destiny, God, and the universe ; and these in turn involve problems of the relation between ' religious ' and other ideas, the validity of ordinary knowledge, and practicable conceptions of 'experience' and 'reality.'

-From " Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics," Vol. X, p. 669.

BOOK I
SIDDHARTH GAUTAMA—HOW A BODHISATTA BECAME THE BUDDHA

Part I—From Birth to Parivraja

Part II—Renunciation for Ever

Part III—In Search of New Light

Part IV—Enlightenment and the Vision of a New Way

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Part VI—The Buddha and His Contemporaries

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PART I : FROM BIRTH TO PARIVRAJA

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3. His Birth

4. Visit by Asita

5. Death of Mahamaya

6. Childhood and Education

7. Early Traits

8. Marriage

9. Father's Plans to Save His Son

10. The Failure of the Women to Win the Prince

11. The Prime Minister's Admonition to the Prince

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§ 1. His Kula

1. Going back to the sixth century b.c., Northern India did not form a single Sovereign State.

2. The country was divided into many States, some large, some small. Of these some were monarchical and some non-monarchical.

3. The monarchical States were altogether sixteen in number. They were known by the name of Anga, Magadha, Kasi, Kosala, Vriji, Malla, Chedi, Vatsa, Kuru, Panchala, Matsya, Saurashtra, Asmaka, Avanti, Gandhara and Kambhoja.

4. The non-monarchical States were those of the Sakyas of Kapilvatsu, the Mallas of Pava and Kushinara, the Lichhavis of Vaisali, the Videhas of Mithila, the Koliyas of Ramagram, the Bulis of Allakapa, the Kalingas of Resaputta, the Mauriyas of Pippalvana and the Bhaggas with their capital on Sumeru Hill.

5. The monarchical States were known as Janapada and the non-monarchical as Sangh or Gana.

6. Not much is known about the nature of the polity of the Sakyas of Kapilvatsu, whether it was republican or oligarchic.

7. This much, however, is definitely known, that there were many ruling families in the Republic of the Sakyas and that they ruled in turns.

8. The head of the ruling family was known as Raja.

9. At the time of the birth of Siddharth Gautama it was the turn of Suddhodana to be the Raja.

10. The Sakya State was situated in the northeast corner of India. It was an independent State. But at a later stage the King of Kosala had succeeded in establishing his paramountcy over it.

11. The result of this paramountcy was that the Sakya State could not exercise certain sovereign powers without the sanction of the King of Kosala.

12. Of the kingdoms then in existence, Kosala was a powerful kingdom. So was the kingdom of Magadha.

Pasandhi, King of Kosala and Bimbisara, King of Magadha, were the contemporaries of Siddharth Gautama.

§ 2. His Ancestry

1. The capital of the Sakyas was the city called Kapilavatsu, perhaps after the name of the great Rationalist Kapila.
2. There lived in Kapilavastu a Sakya by name Jaya Sena. Sinahu was his son. Sinahu was married to Kaccana. Sinahu had five sons, Suddhodana, Dhotodana, Sakkodana, Suklodana and Amitodana. Besides five sons, Sinahu had two daughters, Amita and Pamita.
3. The Gotra of the-family was Aditya.
4. Suddhodana was married to Mahamaya Her father's name was Anjana and mother's Sulak-shana. Anjana was a Koliya and was residing in the village called Devadaha.
5. Suddhodana was a man of great military prowess. When Suddhodana had shown his martial powers he was allowed to take a second wife and he chose Mahaprajapati. She was the elder sister of Mahamaya.
6. Suddhodana was a wealthy person. The lands he held were very extensive and the retinue under him was very large. He employed, it is said, one thousand ploughs to till the land he owned.
7. He lived quite a luxurious life and had many palaces.

§ 3. His Birth

1. To Suddhodana was born Siddharth Gautama and this was the manner of Gautama's birth.
2. It was a custom among the Sakyas to observe an annual midsummer festival which fell in the month of Ashad. It was celebrated by all the Sakyas throughout the State and also by the members of the ruling family.
3. It was the usual practice to celebrate the festival for seven days.
4. On one occasion Mahamaya decided to observe the festival with gaiety, with splendour, with flowers, with perfume, but without drinking intoxicants.
5. On the seventh day she rose early, bathed in scented water, bestowed a gift of 4,00,000 pieces of money as alms, adorned herself with all precious ornaments, ate choicest food, took upon herself the fast-day vows, and entered the splendidly adorned royal bedchamber to sleep.
6. That night Suddhodana and Mahamaya came together and Mahamaya conceived. Lying on the royal bed she fell asleep. While asleep she had a dream.
7. In her dreams she saw that the four world-guardians raised her as she was sleeping on her bed and carried her to the tableland of the Himalayas, placed her under a great sal tree and stood on one side.
8. The wives of the four world-guardians then approached and took her to the lake Mansarovar.
9. They bathed her, robed her in a dress, anointed her with perfumes and decked her with flowers in a manner fit to meet some divinity.
10. Then a Bodhisatta, by name Sumedha, appeared before her saying, " I have decided to take my last and final birth on this earth, will you consent to be my mother?" She said, "Yes, with great pleasure." At this moment Mahamaya awoke.
11. Next morning Mahamaya told her dream to Suddhodana. Not knowing how to interpret the dream, Suddhodana summoned eight Brahmins who were most famous in divination.
12. They were Rama, Dhaga, Lakkana, Manti, Yanna, Suyama, Subhoga and Sudatta and prepared for them a befitting reception.
13. He caused the ground to be strewn with festive flowers and prepared high seats for them.
14. He filled the bowls of the Brahmins with gold and silver and fed them on cooked ghee, honey, sugar and excellent rice and milk. He also gave them other gifts such as new clothes and tawny cows.
15. When the Brahmins were propitiated, Suddhodana related to them the dream Mahamaya had, and said, " Tell me what it means."
16. The Brahmins said: " Be not anxious. You will have a son, and if he leads a householder's life he will become a universal monarch, and if he leaves his home and goes forth into a homeless state, and becomes a sanyasi, he will become a Buddha, a dispeller of illusions in the world." 17. Bearing the Bodhisatta in her womb like oil in a vessel for ten lunar months, Mahamaya, as her time of delivery was coming nearer, desired to go to her parents' home for delivery. Addressing her husband, she said : " I wish to go to Devadaha, the city of my father."
18. "Thou knowest that thy wishes will be done," replied Suddhodana. Having seated her in a golden palanquin borne by couriers, he sent her forth with a great retinue to her father's house.
19. Mahamaya, on her way to Devadaha, had to pass through a pleasure-grove of sal trees and other trees, flowering and non-flowering. It was known as the Lumbini Grove.
20. As the palanquin was passing through it, the whole Lumbini Grove seemed like the heavenly Cittalata grove or like a banqueting pavilion adorned for a mighty king.
21. From the roots to the tips of the branches the trees were loaded with fruits, flowers and numberless bees of the fine colours, uttering curious sounds, and flocks of various kinds of birds, singing sweet melodies.
22. Witnessing the scene, there arose a desire in the heart of Mahamaya for halting and sporting therein for a while. Accordingly she told the couriers to take her in the sal-grove and wait there.
23. Mahamaya alighted from her palanquin and walked up to the foot of a royal sal tree. A pleasant wind, not too strong, was blowing and the boughs of the trees were heaving up and down and Mahamaya felt like catching one of them.

24. Luckily one of the boughs heaved down sufficiently low to enable her to catch it. So she rose on her toes and caught the bough. Immediately she was lifted up by its upward movement and being shaken, she felt the pangs of childbirth. While holding the branch of the sal tree she was delivered of a son in a standing position.
25. The child was born in the year 563 b.c. on the Vaishakha Purnima day.
26. Suddhodana and Mahamaya were married for a long time. But they had no issue. Ultimately when a son was born to them his birth was celebrated with great rejoicing, with great pomp and ceremony by Suddhodana and his family and also by the Sakyas. 27. At the time of the birth of the child it was the turn of Suddhodana to be the ruler of Kapilavatsu and as such was in the enjoyment of the title of Raja. Naturally the boy was called Prince.

To be continued....

Riddle In Hinduism

By Dr. BR Ambedkar

RIDDLE No. 1: THE DIFFICULTY OF KNOWING WHY ONE IS A HINDU

India is a congeries of communities. There are in it Parsis, Christians, Mohammedans and Hindus. The basis of these communities is not racial. It is of course religious. This is a superficial view. What is interesting to know is why is a Parsi a Parsi and why is a Christian a Christian, why is a Muslim a Muslim and why is a Hindu a Hindu? With regard to the Parsi, the Christian and the Muslim it is smooth sailing. Ask a Parsi why he calls himself a Parsi he will have no difficulty in answering the question. He will say he is a Parsi because he is a follower of Zoraster. Ask the same question to a Christian. He too will have no difficulty in answering the question. He is a Christian because he believes in Jesus Christ. Put the same question to a Muslim. He too will have no hesitation in answering it. He will say he is a believer in Islam and that is why he is a Muslim.

Now ask the same question to a Hindu and there is no doubt that he will be completely bewildered and would not know what to say.

If he says that he is a Hindu because he worships the same God as the Hindu Community does his answer cannot be true. All Hindus do not worship one God. Some Hindus are monotheists, some are polytheists and some are pantheists. Even those Hindus who are monotheists are not worshippers of the same Gods. Some worship the God Vishnu, some Shiva, some Rama, some Krishna. Some do not worship the male Gods. They worship a goddess. Even then they do not worship the same Goddesses. They worship different Goddesses. Some worship Kali, some worship Parvati, some worship Laxmi.

Coming to the Polytheists they worship all the Gods. They will worship Vishnu and Shiva, also Rama and Krishna. They will worship Kali, Parvati and Laxmi. A Hindu will fast on the Shivaratri day because it is sacred to Shiva. He will fast on Ekadashi day because it is sacred to Vishnu. He will plant a Bel tree because it is sacred to Shiva and he will plant a Tulsi because it is dear to Vishnu.

Polytheists among the Hindus do not confine their homage to the Hindu Gods. No Hindu hesitates to worship a Muslim Pir or a Christian Goddess. Thousands of Hindus go to a Muslim Pir and make offerings. Actually there are in some places Brahmins who own the office of a hereditary priesthood of a Muslim Pir and wear a Muslim Pir's dress. Thousands of Hindus go to make offerings to the Christian Goddess Mant Mauli near Bombay.

The worship of the Christian or Muslim Gods is only on occasions. But there are more permanent transfer of religious allegiance. There are many so-called Hindus whose religion has a strong Muhammadan content. Notable amongst these are the followers of the strange Panchpiriya cult, who worship five Muhammadan saints, of uncertain name and identity, and sacrifice cocks to them, employing for the purpose as their priest a Muhammadan Dafali fakir. Throughout India many Hindus make pilgrimages to Muhammadan shrines, such as that of Sakhi Sarwar in the Punjab.

Speaking of the Malkanas Mr. Blunt says that they are converted Hindus of various castes belonging to Agra and the adjoining districts. chiefly Muttra, Ettah and Mainpuri. They are of Rajput, Jat and Bania descent. They are reluctant to describe themselves as Musalmans, and generally give their original caste name and scarcely recognize the name Malkana. Their names are Hindu; they mostly worship in Hindu temples: they use the salutation Ram-Ram: they intermarry amongst themselves only. On the other hand, they sometimes frequent a mosque, practise circumcision and bury their dead: they will eat with Muhammadans if they are particular friends.

In Gujarat there are several similar communities such as the Matia Kunbis, who call in Brahmans for their chief ceremonies, but are followers of the Pirana saint Imam Shah and his successors, and bury their dead as do the

Muhammadans: the Sheikhas at their weddings employ both Hindu and a Muhammadan priest, and the Momans who practise circumcision, bury their dead and read the Gujarati Koran, but in other respects follow Hindu custom and ceremonial.

If he says that "I am a Hindu because I hold to the beliefs of the Hindus" his answer cannot be right for here one is confronted with the fact that Hinduism has no definite creed. The beliefs of persons who are by all admitted to be Hindus often differ more widely from each other than do those of Christians and Muhammadans. Limiting the issue to cardinal beliefs the Hindus differ among themselves as to the beliefs which are of cardinal importance. Some say that all the Hindu scriptures must be accepted, but some would exclude the Tantras, while others would regard only the Vedas as of primary importance; some again think that the sole essential is belief in the doctrine of karma and metempsychosis.

A complex congeries of creeds and doctrines is Hinduism. It shelters within its portals monotheists, polytheists and pantheists; worshippers of the great Gods Shiva and Vishnu or of their female counterparts, as well as worshippers of the divine mothers or the spirits of trees, rocks and streams and the tutelary village deities; persons who propitiate their deity by all manner of bloody sacrifices, and persons who will not only kill no living creature but who must not even use the word 'cut'; those whose ritual consists mainly of prayers and hymns, and those who indulge in unspeakable orgies in the name of religion; and a host of more or less heterodox sectaries, many of whom deny the supremacy of the Brahmins, or at least have non-Brahmanical religious leaders.

If he says that he is a Hindu because he observes the same customs as other Hindus do his answer cannot be true. For all Hindus do not observe the same customs.

In the north near relatives are forbidden to marry; but in the south cousin marriage is prescribed, and even closer alliances are sometimes permitted. As a rule female chastity is highly valued, but some communities set little store by it, at any rate prior to marriage, and others make it a rule to dedicate one daughter to a life of religious prostitution. In some parts the women move about freely; in others they are kept secluded. In some parts they wear skirts; in others trousers.

Again if he said that he is a Hindu because he believes in the caste system his answer cannot be accepted as satisfactory. It is quite true that no Hindu is interested in what his neighbour believes, but he is very much interested in knowing whether he can eat with him or take water from his hands. In other words it means that the caste system is an essential feature of Hinduism and a man who does not belong to a recognized Hindu Caste cannot be a Hindu. While all this is true it must not be forgotten that observance of caste is not enough. Many Musalmans and many Christians observe caste if not in the matter of inter-dining certainly in the matter of inter-marriage. But they cannot be called Hindus on that account. Both elements must be present. He must be a Hindu and he must also observe caste. This brings us back to the old question who is a Hindu? It leaves us where we are.

Is it not a question for every Hindu to consider why in the matter of his own religion his position is so embarrassing and so puzzling? Why is he not able to answer so simple a question which every Parsi, every Christian, and every Muslim can answer? Is it not time that he should ask himself what are the causes that has brought about this Religious chaos ?

To be continued....

News in Brief

<http://www.ambedkar.org> gets linked to BBC website

Award winning website Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and His People, www.ambedkar.org, has become an referral website to www.bbc.com relating Ambedkar. On 16 January, 2001 BBC published a movie review of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in their website and provided a link to www.ambedkar.org a related website.

Some facts about www.ambedkar.org, you can place matrimonial ads for free. You can check the weather of any city in the world. You can get your own free email id like yourname@ambedkar.org and ofcourse you can get the latest news regarding Dalits.

150 dalit families rendered landless

The Times of India News Service, 19 December 2000
LUCKNOW: An entire hamlet of 150 dalit families in Ambedkar village, located in Udham Singh Nagar, has been forcibly evicted from their land in utter violation of rules and despite the intervention of the high court.

More on this:

<http://www.ambedkar.org/News/h/dalitfamilies.htm>

Separate corpns. for SCs, STs

NEW DELHI, DEC. 6. The Union Cabinet has decided to split the National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation into two, on the ground that the needs of SCs and STs varied and consequently a single organisation was not able to do justice to either of the weaker sections adequately.

Announcing this, the Union Minister and Cabinet spokesperson, Mr. Pramod Mahajan said while the new corporation for SCs would be under the control of the Social Justice Ministry, that for STs would be under the charge of the Tribal Affairs Ministry.

The Cabinet, which met here last night, also decided to introduce the much-awaited fiscal responsibility and budget management bill in Parliament in the next few days. The Bill, which is aimed at imparting discipline to Government finances, would, among other things, seek to effect a 10 per cent statutory cut on Government expenditure and borrowing annually from next year, besides bringing down revenue deficit to zero level in three years.

According to official sources, the Bill would seek to provide for setting up a high-power panel headed by the Finance Minister to monitor steps to curb expenditure and borrowing by both the Central and State Governments.

Dalit beaten up for seeking money back

VADODARA, DEC 21: A 16-year-old dalit youth was allegedly assaulted by a Rajput youth. A delegation of Bharatiya Dalit Panthers on Thursday submitted a memorandum to Police Commissioner J. Mahapatra demanding registration of a case of atrocity and attempt to murder on the life of the dalit youth Santosh Chaudhary, a resident of Sanjay Nagar on Sama Road. The youth was attacked, according to Parmar, for his temerity to demand back Rs. 5,000 which his mother given to the Rajput youths. According to Panthers president Arvindbhai Parmar, the youth was assaulted with sharp-edged weapons on September 29. He received more than a dozen injuries on chest, eyes, stomach, arms and legs and had to be given 37 stitches by doctors in the SSG Hospital.

He was so seriously injured that he was kept on oxygen for seven days and admitted in hospital for 40 days. He had to be administered 40 bottles of blood.

Parmar said that though a case was registered against the accused, only sections 226 and 114 of IPC and 135 of Arms Act was booked. Parmar demanded registration of an attempt to murder and atrocity against the accused.



For more details visit <http://www.ambedkar.org/seminar/>

This magazine comes from Dalit E-Forum, a web based group of Ambedkarites from around the world interacting on a day-to-day basis to exchange Information regarding the atrocities, development and society in general.

D-Mag welcomes photographs and original articles in text mode please. Please give the collective some freedom to edit grammatical and spelling errors that may have inadvertently crept into the original.

Please give ref when "quotes" or passages are taken from another source to help the research workers rummaging through for information. Send all your materials to d-mag@ambedkar.org - Ed Coll.