

UNHEARD VOICES

14 NOVEMBER 2022 | Year 2 | Vol. 8



**Do we need
reservation for
converts?**





Reservation for converts : A wake up call

The issue of reservation for former Dalits, who have converted to either Islam or Christianity has gained space on national agenda. This demand has suddenly become more aggressive or vocal in the past few years. The issue has several aspects including sociological, political, economic, national integration and constitutional. Currently, the matter is pending before the Supreme Court as Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) has filed a petition. Central government has filed an affidavit on the issue, which has opposed extension of reservation to former Dalits, who are currently either Muslim or Christian. The Union Government also has set up a commission, headed by former Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan to examine the matter. The commission has been asked to submit its report in two years.

Reservation has become more political. It is unlikely to end to be a political issue unless all political parties seriously shun to use caste as a political card to win the electoral battle. Caste and reservation have become effective tools of political parties to push their narrow agenda, which is hampering national unity in the long run.

The demand for reservation for SCs, who have converted to Islam or Christianity is not merely expected to open Pandora's box but to disturb social equilibrium. Conversion from one religion to another has several implications. Conversion has been debated for a long time – since the pre-independence era. While the Indian Constitution ensures religious freedom, religious conversion fraud, force, inducement and allurement is also banned. Lack of education, poverty and force are said to be major reasons for religious conversion in India. Conversion to Abrahamic religions is always seen with suspicion. This does not happen when conversion takes place to any other religion like Buddhism or Sikhism. This happens because conversion to Abrahamic religion is certainly motivated by foreign forces while Sikhism and Buddhism are the religions of India soil. We have to admit a historical fact that Dr. Babasaheb

Ambedkar preferred Buddhism when he was invited by two Abrahamic religions. What was his reasoning behind this decision? Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, himself, has thrown light on this. He says, "What the consequences of conversion will be to the country as a whole is well worth bearing in mind. Conversion to Islam or Christianity will denationalise the Depressed Classes. If they go to Islam the number of Muslims will be doubled and the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real. If they go to Christianity, the numerical strength of Christians becomes five to six crores. It will help to strengthen the hold of the British on this country". Dr. Ambedkar has expressed fear that depressed people will be 'denationalized' if they convert to Islam or Christianity. Philosophical foundations of Abrahamic religions and religions of Indian soil are extremely different, a fact admitted by Dr. Ambedkar. This was the reason why Dr. Ambedkar preferred Buddhism. Reservation for converts has no place in the constitution. The argument by litigants that converts continue to face discrimination is not logical. How Hindus can be held responsible for discrimination in Islam or Christianity.

We must seriously look at the intentions of the people, asking for reservations for converts. Why is an attempt being done to rotate society in an anti-clock direction? Benefits of genuine Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people are likely to be snatched away if reservation for converts is granted. This will cause another serious problem. Two Abrahamic religions always claim that their religion has no place for discrimination. Why are they making this demand now? What is the propriety to ask for a constitutional amendment now? People from Abrahamic religions are already getting several benefits because of their minority status. Asking for reservation is not only encroachment upon the rights of genuine depressed people but also against the ethos of constitution and philosophy of Dr Ambedkar. This is also time for Hindus, who still believe in the caste system, to have deep introspection. Caste system, no doubt, does not work to strengthen society.

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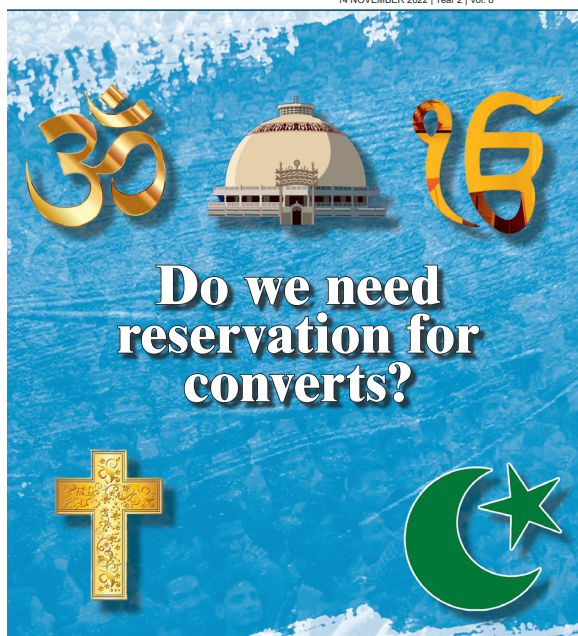


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Appeal for financial assistance



Social Studies Foundation (SSF) is working with the prime objective of conducting social studies and research of the society in a multi-disciplinary fashion. SSF focus, however, is on those people, who have been facing discrimination and are deprived of benefits of the development and democratic process. SSF logo, thus says, "Knowledge for Empowerment".

"UNHEARD VOICES" is a small step in this direction. It provides a platform to all those people, who have to be listened to by the Indian citizens to make this country united and integral. We will raise the voice of these people fearlessly. Social Studies Foundation has currently a small set-up to carry out its objectives. We, however, need financial support from our well-wishers, who agree with our objectives. We appeal to the readers and well-wishers to donate generously to the foundation.

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On the occasion of the death anniversary of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, which falls on December 6, Unheard Voices publishes two of these opinion pieces. Dr. Ambedkar has expressed his views on conversion and democracy in these pieces. They have been published in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, a Government of India publication.



Dr. Ambedkar spoke about conversion and denationalisation

It seems very unlikely that the Depressed Classes will formulate a new religion. Most probably, they will embrace one of the existing faiths. At any rate the Hindus can well proceed on that assumption. The first question is what is the faith that the Depressed Classes are likely to embrace? Obviously, the one most advantageous to them. There are three faiths from among which the Depressed Classes can choose. (1) Islam, (2) Christianity and (3) Sikhism.

Comparing these three, Islam seems to give the Depressed Classes all that they need. Financially, the resources behind Islam are boundless. Socially, the Mohammedans are spread all over India. There are Mohammedans in every Province and they can take care of the new converts from the Depressed Classes and render them all help. Politically the Depressed

Classes will get all the rights which Mohammedans are entitled to. Conversion to Islam does not involve loss of such political rights as the right to special representation in the Legislatures, right to services, etc.

Christianity seems equally attractive. If Indian Christians are too small numerically to provide financial resources necessary for the conversion of the Depressed Classes, the Christian countries such as America and England will pour their immense resources in if the Depressed Classes show their readiness to embrace Christianity. Socially, the Christian community is numerically too weak to render much support to the converts from the Depressed Classes but Christianity has the Government behind it. Politically, Christianity will give them the same rights



which Islam gives. Like the Muslims, Indian Christians are also recognised by the Constitution for special representation in the Legislature and in the services.

Compared to Christianity and Islam, Sikhism has few attractions. Being a small community of forty lakhs, the Sikhs cannot provide the finance. They are confined to the Punjab and as far as the majority of the Depressed Classes are concerned, the Sikhs can give them no social support. Politically, Sikhism is at a positive disadvantage as compared with Islam or Christianity. Outside the Punjab, the Sikhs are not recognised for special representation in the Legislature and in the services.

The second question is, looking at these three alternative faiths purely from the standpoint of the Hindus, which is the best—Islam, Christianity or Sikhism? Obviously Sikhism is the best. If the Depressed Classes join Islam or Christianity, they not only go out of the Hindu religion but they also go out of the Hindu culture. On the other hand,

if they become Sikhs they remain within the Hindu culture. This is by no means a small advantage to the Hindus.

What the consequences of conversion will be to the country as a whole is well worth bearing in mind. Conversion to Islam or Christianity will denationalise the Depressed Classes. If they go to Islam the number of Muslims will be doubled and the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real. If they go to Christianity, the numerical strength of Christians becomes five to six crores. It will help to strengthen the hold of the British on this country. On the other hand, if they embrace Sikhism, they will not harm the destiny of the country but they will help the destiny of the country. They will not be denationalised. On the contrary they will be a help in the political advancement of the country. Thus, it is in the interest of the country that the Depressed Classes, if they are to change their faith, should go over to Sikhism.

PROSPECTS OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

The subject assigned to me is, "What are the prospects of democracy in India"? Most Indians speak with great pride as though their country was already a democracy. The foreigners also, when they sit at a dinner table to do diplomatic honour to India, speak of the Great Indian Prime Minister and the Great Indian Democracy. From this, it is held without waiting to argue that where there is a Republic, there must be democracy. It is also supposed that where there is Parliament which is elected by the people on adult suffering age and the laws are made by the People's Representatives in Parliament elected after every few years, there is democracy. In other words, democracy is understood to be a political instrument and where this political instrument exists, there is democracy. Is there democracy in India or is there no democracy in India? What is the truth? No positive answer can be given unless the confusion caused by equating democracy with the Republic and by equating democracy with Parliamentary Government is removed.

Democracy is quite different from a Republic as well as from Parliamentary Government. The roots of democracy lie not in the form of Government, Parliamentary or otherwise. A democracy is more than a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society. What does the word 'Society' connote? To put it briefly when we speak of 'Society,' we conceive of it as one by its very nature. The qualities which accompany this unity are a praiseworthy community of purpose and desire for welfare, loyalty to public

ends and mutuality of sympathy and cooperation. Are these ideals to be found in Indian Society? The Indian Society does not consist of individuals. It consists of an innumerable collection of castes which are exclusive in their life and have no common experience to share and have no bond of sympathy. Given this fact it is not necessary to argue the point. The existence of the Caste System is a standing denial of the existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy.

Indian Society is so embedded in the Caste System that everything is organized on the basis of caste. Enter Indian Society and you can see caste in its glaring form. An Indian cannot eat or marry with an Indian simply because he or she does not belong to his or her caste. An Indian cannot touch an Indian because he or she does not belong to his or her caste. Go and enter politics and you can see caste reflected therein. How does an Indian vote in an election? He votes for a candidate who belongs to his own caste and no other. Even the Indian Congress exploits the Caste System for election purposes as no other political party in India does. Examine the lists of its candidates in relation to the social composition of the constituencies and it will be found that the candidate belongs to the caste which is the largest one in that constituency. The Congress, as a matter of fact, is upholding the Caste System against which it is out worldly, raising an outcry against the existence of caste.

Go into the field of industry. What will you find? You will find that all the topmost men drawing the highest salary belong to the caste of the particular industrialist, who owns the industry. The rest hang



on for life on the lowest rungs of the ladder on a pittance. Go into the field of commerce and you will see the same picture. The whole commercial house is one camp of one caste, with no entry board on the door for others.

Go into the field of charity. With one or two exceptions all charity in India is communal. If a Parsi dies, he leaves his money for Parsis. If a Jain dies, he leaves his money for Jains. If a Marwadi dies, he leaves his money for Marwadis. If a Brahmin dies, he leaves his money for Brahmins. Thus, there is no room for the downtrodden and the outcastes in politics, in industry, in commerce, and in education.

Evil effect in the Caste System accompanied by inequality. This manifests itself in the fact that the stimulus and response between two castes is only one-sided. The higher caste act in one recognised way and the lower caste must respond in one established way.



There are other special features of the Caste System which have their evil effects and which militate against Democracy. One such special feature of the Caste System lies in its being accompanied by what is called 'Graded Inequality'. Castes are not equal in their status. They are standing one above another. They are jealous of one another. It is an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt. This feature of the Caste System has the most pernicious consequences. It destroys willing and helpful co-operation.

Caste and class differ in the fact that in the Class System there is no complete isolation as there is in

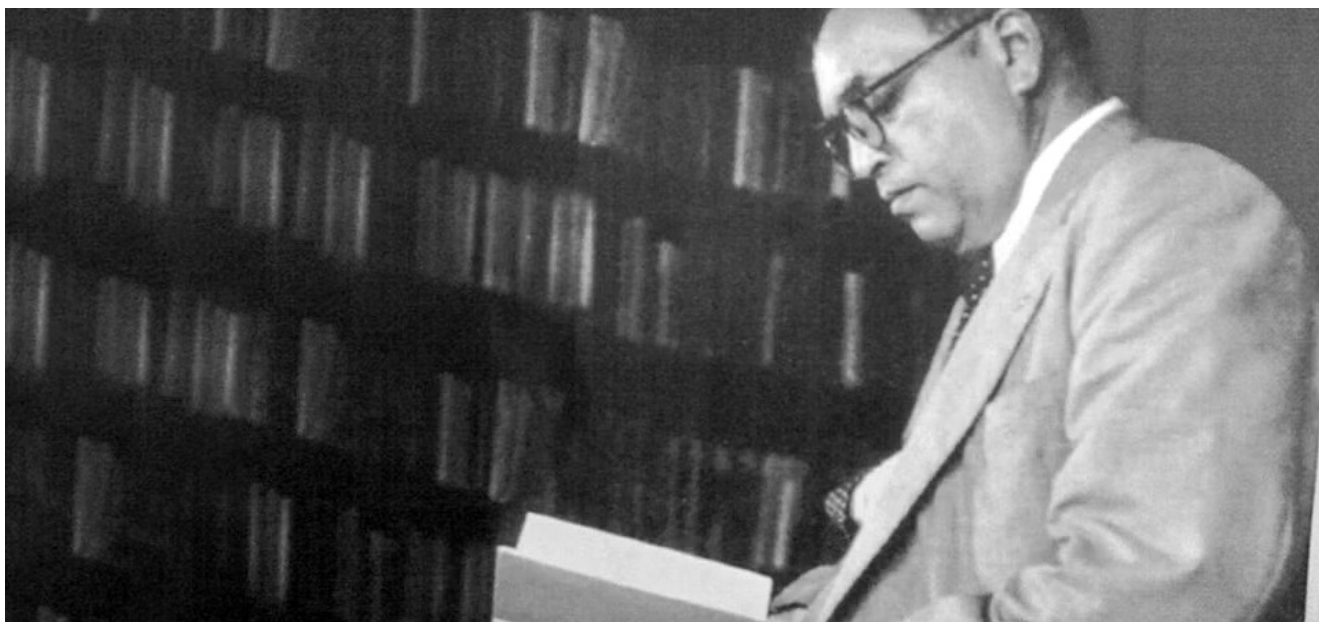
the Caste System. This is the second evil effect in the Caste System accompanied by inequality. This manifests itself in the fact that the stimulus and response between two castes is only one-sided. The higher caste act in one recognised way and the lower caste must respond in one established way. It means that when there is no equitable opportunity to receive the stimulus from and to return the response from different caste, the result is that the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves.

The experience of each party loses its meaning when the free interchange of varying modes of life experience is arrested. It results in a separation of society, into a privileged and a subject class. Such a separation prevents social endosmosis. There is a third characteristic of the Caste System which depicts the evils thereof which cuts at the very roots of democracy. It is that one caste is bound to one occupation. Society is no doubt stably organized when each individual is doing that for which he has aptitude by nature in such a way as to be useful to others; and that it is the business of society to discover these aptitudes and progressively to train them for social use. But there is in a man an indefinite plurality of capacities and activities which may characterize an individual. A democratic society to be democratic should open a way to use all the capacities of the individual. Stratification is stunting the growth of the individual and deliberate stunting is a deliberate denial of democracy.

How to put an end to the Caste System? The first obstacle lies in the system of graded inequality which is the soul of the Caste System. Where people are divided into two classes, higher and lower, it is easier for the lower to combine to fight the higher, for there is no single lower class. The class consists of lower and lower. The lower cannot combine with the lower. For the lower is afraid that if he succeeds in raising the lower, he may well himself lose the high position given to him and his caste.

The second obstacle is that, the Indian Society is disabled by unity in action by not being able to know what is its common good. Plato has said that the organization of society depends ultimately upon knowledge of the end of existence. If we do not know its end, if we do not know it's well, we shall be at the mercy of accident and caprice. Unless we know the good of the end, we have no criterion for rationally deciding what the possibilities are which we should promote. Question is, can the Indian Society in its caste-bound state achieve what is the ultimate question?

We come upon the most insuperable obstacle that such knowledge is not possible save in a just and harmonious social order. Can there be a harmonious Social Order under the Caste System? Everywhere the mind of the Indians is distracted and misled by false valuations and false perspectives. A disorganised and factional society **(Contd. on page 17)**



Vision of Dr. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar's whole life is the continuous, unending, and courageous struggle he had to make against social injustice, inhuman, unequal treatment. Dr. Ambedkar was a spokesperson of the ignored community. It is necessary to remember his role in the other arenas during the crucial period when modern India was taking shape. "We are Indians firstly and lastly" is yet to be realized.

Vijendra



Dr. Ambedkar was a great national leader, who made an outstanding contribution towards making of the constitution of India. Dr. Ambedkar was a religious man but never wanted any hypocrisy in the name of religion. To him, religion was morality and it should cover the life of each individual character, actions, responses, likes and dislikes.

He experienced the bitterness of the caste system in Hinduism and criticized it. He renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism as a religious solution to the problems of Untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar rejected Islam, Sikhism and Christianity and preferred Buddhism because of two reasons. Firstly, Buddhism has its roots in the Indian soil and secondly, it is the religion of ethics, morality and learning which has no place for caste system. He brought a great revolution in the life of the depressed, suppressed, and oppressed castes in India.

Dr. Ambedkar had a clear perception of the mutuality of the three pillars of State—the legislature,

the executive, and the judiciary. At the same time, he was aware of the limitations of these three pillars of democracy and of the importance of the role of citizens. The following observation he made is significant:

The Constitution is a fundamental document. It is a document which defines the position and power of the three organs of the State—the executive, the Judiciary and the legislature. It also defines the powers of the executive and the powers of the legislature as against the citizens, as we have done in our chapter dealing with Fundamental Rights. In fact, the purpose of a constitution is not merely to create the organs of the State but to limit their authority, because, if no limitation was imposed upon the authority of the organs, there will be complete tyranny and complete oppression."

We shall do well to remember that the methods for the redressal of grievances available in a parliamentary democracy are efficacious and must be used, avoiding other methods. The march towards a casteless and classless society should be through dialogue and discussion, education, and legislation. This requires not just statesmanship



but sagacity.

In the perspective of a profoundly significant tradition of seers and reformers in India, Dr. Ambedkar helped the people of India to open their eyes and become aware of many cruel distortions and injustices that had become institutionalized over the centuries -encrusting and debilitating Indian society.

Dr. Ambedkar's struggle may be seen as a missionary effort by an enlightened guide persevering in the noble task of leading a vast and ancient nation to the right path of humanism, peace, brotherhood and progress. The Constitution of India bears the impression of Dr. Ambedkar's thought as a key instrument for national reconstruction. In an important way, Dr. Ambedkar thus gave expression to an inner need in India for a just social condition; on such a basis alone can national well-being

Dr. Ambedkar indeed falls into the list of great men who have served India since time immemorial. But it's a tragedy that Dr. Ambedkar has been reduced to a Dalit icon. Dr. Ambedkar's contribution in shaping the modern India is not limited to framing the constitution or championing the rights of Dalits & socio-religious reforms.

be secured in tune with our ancient ideals. Dr. Ambedkar's ideas not only emphasised the central theme of upgrading the conditions of the Depressed Classes but also encapsulated the points, based on which India could be reconstructed. The attainment of political independence was interpreted by Dr. Ambedkar as not a sufficient condition for the regeneration of our society. He stressed the need for the economic emancipation of the underprivileged people. He firmly believed that political freedom cannot be sustained without the infrastructure that guarantees the minimum needs of the people.

Therefore, extensive industrialisation, progressive agrarian restructuring, State ownership of industries and the principle of State management were emphasised by him as the crux of the developmental process. Dr. Ambedkar also underlined the need for reduction in the defence budget so that resources could be channelised for productive purposes. In the prevailing world of increased strategic tensions, there is an increasing emphasis on the need to reduce military expenditure and to create confidence-building measures. The idea of Dr. Ambedkar is, therefore, even more relevant in the present-day context.

Dr. Ambedkar was fully aware of the challenges posed to the ideal of equality in India on both social

and economic planes. Today we are the Indians are proud of our constitution proud of our democracy for which credit can be attributed among others to Bharat Ratna Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as he was architect of our constitutions. He observed democracy is a form of government by which revolutionary changes are brought about the economic and social life of peoples without bloodshed. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was of firm belief that that two basic deficiencies in the Indian Society i.e the complete absence of equality and deficiency in recognition of the principle of fraternity shall be biggest hindrance in achieving the Justice. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity for unity and integrity of the Indian Union. So, he warned in Constituent Assembly its self,

"On the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has not laboriously built up."

Dr. Ambedkar indeed falls into the list of great men who have served India since time immemorial. But it's a tragedy that Dr. Ambedkar has been reduced to a Dalit icon and is remembered only as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee of India. But Dr. Ambedkar's contribution in shaping the modern India is not limited to framing the constitution or championing the rights of Dalits & socio-religious reforms. He believed that if the downtrodden are allowed to realize their aspirations without any delay, the country and the people would benefit and strengthen the independence and the democratic structure of the country. Dr. Ambedkar's whole life is the continuous, unending, and courageous struggle he had to make against social injustice, inhuman, unequal treatment. Dr. Ambedkar was a spokesperson of the ignored community. So, it is pertinent to raise some questions to reflect on Dr. Ambedkar's legacy. Have his projects shaped out as he would have wished? Has India moved in the direction that he thought optimal? Have his inheritors embalmed his ideas in dogma or extended them while confronting new predicaments? Therefore, it is necessary to remember his role in the other arenas during the crucial period when modern India was taking shape. "We are Indians firstly and lastly" is yet to be realized.

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Nearly 1.3 Lakh cases were registered in different states between 2018 and 2020 on Dalits. NCRB indicates that more than 90% of the crimes against SCs' are pending in the court. If a Dalit victim is lucky enough to escape or overcome these hurdles, as is the case with a small percentage of cases that reach the court, the victim's feeling that all are not equal before the law is reinforced by the courts misinterpretation of the spirit of SC/ST (PoA) Act.

Poor implementation of Atrocities Act

Ritik



Born as a Dalit in India, the first question arises in my mind is – whether I should have pride or feel shame. This is the question as a law student as well. Constitution of India ensures justice, liberty, equality, fraternity but why Dalit need some special provisions? Is it that the constitution or its arms like executive, legislature and judiciary fail to secure rights of Dalits?

The word Dalit stands for oppressed, broken or crushed people. It refers to those formerly known by the dehumanizing term "Untouchables". Dalits, officially known as SC's and ST's, the meaning assigned to them respectively under clause (24) and clause (25) of Article 366 of the Constitution. There are 200 million Dalits in India out of 1.3 billion which constitute more than a fifth of India's population. Article 14-18 Fundamental Rights of Constitution contains the right to equality provision. These articles influence equality based on faith, opportunity in

employment and demolition of untouchability. Article 17 aims to demolish untouchability in India.

In 1955 under Article 35(a)(2), the untouchability act was passed. This amendment is under the Untouchability Amendment and Provision Bill, passed by the parliament and enforced from 1976, is known as Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955. When it became clear that existing laws had not made a desired impact against the oppression of Dalits by upper caste and by the state apparatus even 40 years after independence, 'The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocity) Act, 1989' was passed by the Parliament.

The Object and Reason of 'The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989' was enacted with a view to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to establish Special Court for the trial of such offences and for providing relief and rehabilitation of the victims of such offences.

When we talk about enforcement mechanism



it is universally accepted that the success of the special act which deals with social offences goes to the enforcement to which it is entrusted. First Information Report (FIR) is the necessary initial step to commence the legal process when an atrocity takes place or untouchability is practiced. But the implementation is pathetic. Sakshi Human rights Watch in Andhra Pradesh monitored the action in 103 cases during 1999 to 2003. It found that FIRs were correctly filed under the relevant provisions of the law only in 18 cases while in remaining 85 cases, 29 were never even brought within the preview of the law due to police failure to register cases. It reflected negligence on the part of police officials and colluding with the dominant caste. Notably, where a lower-ranked police official refuses to register a FIR, Rule 5(3) SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) does provide Dalits with the avenue of filing a complaint with the Superintendent of Police. In other words, such negligence of the erring official is punishable under Section 4 SC/ST (PoA) Act. In reality rarely such actions are being taken against the erring police official for negligence of duties.

There is indication of nepotism in judicial appointments. More than 70 percent of the judges are connected in one way or another to 132 families. The Supreme Court has put a ceiling of 50% reservation for 82% of the population, thereby providing an open field of 50% reservation to the already dominant 18%.

Lutheran George of Tadepudi village in Athreyapuram mandal of East Godavari district, a watchman guarding shrimp ponds, was murdered on 23 June 2001 on suspicion of his having misappropriate produce from the shrimp ponds. Despite pressure brought to bear by the shrimp pond owner and prime accused, the deceased's wife eventually filed a complaint with the support of people's organization. However, the police did not take any action and no FIR was registered (Case 7, 'Dalit Human Rights Monitor, 2000-2003, Andhra Pradesh')

Another factor is the increasing number of false counter cases being filed against Dalit victim of atrocities by the dominant-caste perpetrators. While Dalit in Pitchatoor filed a case against the dominant caste for attacking the Dalits and destroying three houses, police took no action on the Dalit's complaint. However, based on a false complaint against the Dalit by the dominant caste people, a counter case was filed against the Dalit victim. (Case 31, 'Dalit Human Rights Monitor, 2000-2003, Andhra Pradesh'). Nearly 1.3 Lakh cases were registered in different states

between 2018 and 2020 on Dalits. NCRB indicates that more than 90% of the crimes against SCs' are pending in the court. If a Dalit victim is lucky enough to escape or overcome these hurdles, as is the case with a small percentage of cases that reach the court, the victim's feeling that all are not equal before the law is reinforced by the courts misinterpretation of the spirit of SC/ST (PoA) Act.

In "Ramaswamy and Ors. Vs. state by: Inspector of Police (1997 (2) Crimes 684), the Madras High Court granted anticipatory bail on the grounds the crime was not committed on the basis of the victim's caste, hence ignoring the prevailing caste tension and discrimination by the dominant caste - Thevars and Dalit". It shows that judicial opinion as to the validity of section 18 SC/ST (PoA) Act seems to be split, with about half of the cases in favour and half against granting of bail. It shows that not only dominant caste perpetrators abuse the law but also the very official entrusted to uphold the law and main order throughout the country.

When we talk about the Indian Judiciary system, it can be inferred that due to the non-representation of SCs and STs in the top judiciary, there must be glaring holes in the deliverance of justice. In 24 High Courts in India, there is not a single Adivasi Chief Justice. No Dalit Judge has been elevated to the Supreme Court since K.G. Balakrishnan in 2010. According to an Indian Express report, the Supreme Court collegium responsible for the appointment of judges and promotion to the superior courts does not have clarity on the rules and criteria. There is indication of nepotism in judicial appointments. More than 70 percent of the judges are connected in one way or another to 132 families. The Supreme Court has put a ceiling of 50% reservation for 82% of the population, thereby providing an open field of 50% reservation to the already dominant 18%. A large percentage of this 18% have a grip over resources, jobs and ownership and use their caste network so that these continue to circulate among themselves generation after generation. It shows that the concept of reservation and good governance adopted while framing an Indian Constitution is completely myth without equal representation.

Dr. Ambedkar remind us that "Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic and without annihilation of caste and class we build a palace on a dung heap". When we used to talk about the rights of the Dalits, we always remember that the rights they want to acquire that is in the hand of the social dominant evils of the society. For acquiring that right, Dalit not fight for the existing law which were govern to them, they should fight for securing the dominant position. Only representation in the field of law and justice can save Dalits from the hands of injustice society.

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Sumantai More From waste to best

Sumantai More is Chairperson of Swach Sahakari Sanstha, which, through the network of its 3,500 strong waste handler members, collects waste generated at 8.5 lakh houses in Pune. Though educationally disadvantaged, she has attended seminars and workshops on issues faced by waste collectors in various countries including Switzerland, Nepal and South Africa. She is a recipient of 22 awards instituted by various organisations including Hirkani Award of Maharashtra Government's Sahyadri Channel and Vasundhara Award. She is also the Brand Ambassador of Pune Municipal Corporation's cleanliness drive. Vijendra talks to her.

VS: Please tell us about memories of your childhood prior to your migration to Pune.

Sumantai: I was born in a family struggling with disadvantages. My parents used to make brooms for their livelihood. They would go to the forest, fetch palm leaves, dry them out and make brooms. I would see my parents' visiting villages, carrying loads of brooms on their heads to sell the goods. Nobody would purchase such items by paying money in those days. Instead, the practice was to barter the goods for food. My parents would bring home the food obtained in exchange for the brooms and we would survive on that. My parents were unable to enrol us with even the schools. My native Gondavade village is in Kalamb tehsil of drought affected Beed district of Maharashtra.

VS: Your family consisted of who all?

Sumantai: My family consisted of seven persons including my parents, my grandmother and we siblings. Myself, two sisters and a brother. My father was the only son of his parents. He had four sisters. They were all married.

VS: When did you get married? What was your age at that time?

Sumantai: I was about 11- to 12-year-old when I got married. I had not become mature when I got married. My husband had lost his first wife. She died after giving birth to two children.

VS: What occupation did your in-laws pursue for their livelihood?

Sumantai: My father-in-law was about four- to five-year-old when his father died. He had one brother and one sister. The sister was married and the two brothers would rear cattle for their sustenance.

VS: Has your husband or any member of his family pursued any formal education?

Sumantai: No. Neither my husband, nor my brother-in-law, or my sisters-in-law, or my mother-in-law were educated. Our families were totally illiterate. Our children are of the first generation in our families to pursue formal education.

VS: In which year did you migrate to Pune?

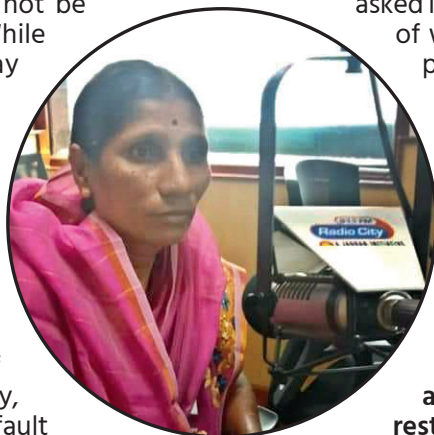
Sumantai: I do not know when we migrated to Pune. In fact, my wedding took place in Pune. There was a slum near Nigdi. Our relatives lived there. My paternal aunt as well as my brother-in-law used to live there. Therefore, the wedding too took place there. I was at my native village when I gave birth to



my two eldest children.

VS: You used to work near Shivaji Statue. Please tell us your memories of those days.

Sumantai: I used to pick up recyclable waste like papers from garbage dumps. I would rise early in the morning and go waste picking. Then, after the offices would open at 9 am, I would go and sweep some offices to make some additional earnings. Once, I got ill and had to take rest at home for four days. It was week-end after a period of four days. I went back to work on Monday. Unfortunately, an office which I used to sweep, had been burgled on Saturday. I was totally unaware about it. Inquiry was conducted with all other workers, but I could not be contacted as I was not working. While sweeping at the office on Monday morning, I found a bundle of currency notes lying under the photocopying machine. Immediately I summoned the cashier and brought it to his notice. Initially I suspected it was a trick employed to test me and said, "I am not going to work here if you have suspicions about me. Just because you are suspicious, you may put money like this and if someone else finds it and takes it away, I would be branded as a thief for no fault of mine." He convinced me from walking out and made a call to the owner to summon him. When the owner arrived, I took the bundle of notes still wrapped in paper to his cabin. He asked me if I had touched the notes. I told him that though I had not touched the notes, the cashier had handled them. Then he let me go.



VS: Did this incident prove to be a turning point?

Sumantai: We would face a lot of issues. Policemen would harass us out of suspicion. As we went picking waste, dogs would charge at us and we could not even run fast because we would be carrying heavy bags. Initially, when we got organised, we became associated with Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat. Then the harassment reduced a bit. We demanded Identity Cards issued by the Municipal Corporation for ourselves.

VS: Do you notice any change in the lives of waste pickers?

Sumantai: Yes, earlier we did not have access to education. There was discrimination too. Now children of all waste pickers are studying. Children of a few waste pickers have even gone abroad to study. Children of waste pickers have joined various jobs and professions like medicine, law, engineering etc. The waste pickers now are able to provide education for their children.

VS: What are the health-related issues faced by waste handlers?

Sumantai: Indeed, the waste handlers face health related issues too. However, now the Municipal Corporation provides assistance of Rs 5,000 towards

reimbursement of medical bills if we are required to be hospitalized. The Municipal Corporation has also provided us accident insurance cover of Rs 1 lakh.

VS: Has the standard of life of waste handlers changed?

Sumantai: Yes. In earlier days, we would be afraid to even talk to people. Now we are gaining confidence. When the Municipal Corporation undertook the mission to make the city garbage free by collecting waste through containers at doorsteps, we were afraid that we would be left jobless. Then, there were talks between the organisation and the Municipal Corporation. The Municipal Corporation asked if we were willing to work on collection of waste. After a series of meetings, the plan was worked out.

VS: What are the responsibilities that you handle personally in the Swach Sahakari Sanstha?

Sumantai: I am chairperson of the organisation. I address the issues involving the citizens and waste handlers which the supervisors fail to resolve.

VS: You had addressed the World Environment Conference advocating that the funds allocated to restrict carbon footprints must reach the grass root level. Would you please elaborate on this?

Sumantai: We had a hygiene company in Hadapsar which operated an incinerator. The government allocates funds for the hygiene companies operating incinerators to burn the waste. Waste handlers all over the world work for the cause of cleanliness, hygiene and health. Why are no funds allocated for their welfare? Just like the companies, funds must be provided for the waste handlers. Assistance is needed for the education of our children. We do not have money to provide good quality education to our children. We too want to enrol our children with a world class institute.

VS: What are the hurdles that the Swach Sanstha faces? Are there any issues which need to be addressed?

Sumantai: A pension scheme has been promised. But it has not materialised yet. We have been demanding pensions for women over the age of 50 or 60 who are unable to work anymore as waste handlers. We work on the basis of a contract for tenure of five years. That reduces expenditure of the Municipal Corporation besides ensuring cleanliness and hygiene in the city. We do not receive salaries for that. Corporation only provides us carts etc. For our earnings, we need to charge the citizens. However, when the tenure of the contract expires, the contract is not renewed immediately. It takes a lot of negotiations and meetings.

*As told to Vijendra
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Bharatiar: a voice of the unheard

Bharatiar wanted Bharat Mata to be free from the shackles of caste system. In his eyes, all human beings were considered as equals and there was only one caste system that is man and woman. In order to showcase his stand against caste system, he even performed ‘upanayanam’ (adoring sacred thread) for a young Dalit boy and made him a Brahmin. At the same time, he himself had removed and abandoned his sacred thread. Entry to Dalits in the temple was another revolutionary activity taken up by Bharathi. He openly criticized the preachers for mixing their individual thoughts while teaching the Vedas and Gita.

Dr. Divya



As we look back into the age-old history of our nation, no justice will be done if Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi is not remembered. Born on 11 December 1882, Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi is also known as Bharathi and Bharathi. Bharathi was born into a Brahmin family to the couple Chinnaswami Subramania Iyer and Lakshmi Ammal in the village of Ettayapuram, Tamil Nadu. His life and literary works will be all time inspiration to the Indians although he lived for a very short time as he died at the age of 39 only.

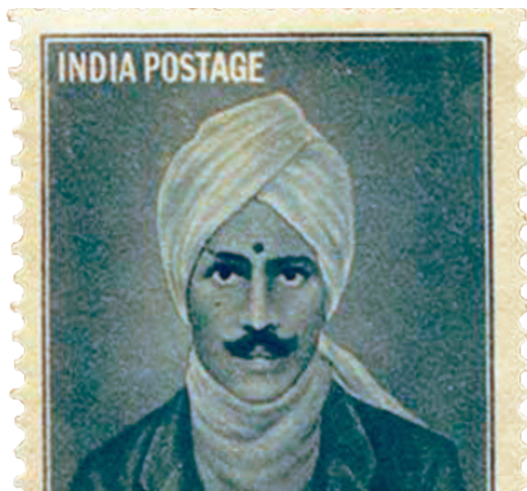
Bharathi was a phenomenal poet, writer, scholar, social enthusiast, Indian independence activist, journalist and youth icon. Even after decades of his demise, his thoughts and opinions still remain relevant to our motherland, irrespective of the language or religion barriers.

Bharathi was a man of great wisdom and vision. He fought against caste system, social



injustice, child marriage, and many social evils and also the foreign invasions. Bharathi was able to perceive the importance of social, political and ethical needs of the Indian. He cried for the social disadvantages and miseries of the common people and the ruthless exploitation faced by them.

He was also able to ignite patriotism in the minds of many as he penned flavours of patriotism in his works. He propagated many social themes which continue to influence generations irrespective of their gender, religion, caste, colour and creed. He wanted Bharat Mata to be free from the shackles of caste system. In his eyes, all human beings were considered as equals and there was only one caste



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But is our Bharat Mata free from these shackles?

Sadly, we have to say no to this query. In spite of having educated people and a socially progressed community, the evil of casteism is still prevalent in many parts of our country. Having lived in a socially segregated society, Bharathi was very adamant in throwing away the social segregation and had always tried to advocate a social cohesion. This can be verified by considering the fact that he had advocated the backward community as an equal in the society and his willingness to mingle with the other religious sects in the society. In spite of facing opposition from his neighbours, he used to take tea sold in shops run by Muslims. He along with his family members attended church on all festival occasions. Bharathi was a Hindu. But his spirituality was not limited to Hinduism. He embraced all religions equally. He sang to the Hindu deities, and at the same time he wrote songs of devotion to Jesus Christ and Allah. Bharathi was very clear that unless Indians unite as children of Bharat Mata, they could not achieve freedom.

Women empowerment is much talked about in the present century and it was strongly advocated by Subramania Bharathi. He believed in women's rights, gender equality and women emancipation. He opposed child marriage, dowry and supported widow remarriage. Through his literary works, Bharathi tried to motivate women to think beyond traditional teachings. He propagated that a nation can be fully independent in the real sense only when women are empowered for which Bharathi dreamed of an Independent India with a 'Pudumaip Penn' meaning a Neo Modern Woman in line with dharmic principles. The new age woman as visualized by Bharathi is "with upright heart and steadfast look and ideals that are not afraid of anyone in the world- the woman does not falter as she has the possession of wisdom".

The present scenario prevailing in our country is not much different from what existed centuries back. Though we have seen leaps and bounds in terms of development and progress, there are still many social evils prevailing in our motherland. It is in this context that the life and literary works of Bharathi can be considered guiding principle for future growth and progress of our motherland, for complete eradication of casteism, child marriage and ensuring women empowerment and social cohesion. Let us remember an excerpt from his story "Chakkaravarthini" where he penned "Love is not bothered about religious differences. Love rejected casteism and religious fundamentalism."

He promoted two castes- Men and women, he advocated temple entry to Dalits. His thoughts on achieving the desired social, economic, or political freedom, all citizens need to unite as children of Bharat Mata.

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Great Sant Ravidas : the worshipper of social integrity

Dr. Ashok Kumar

To overcome caste based and gender-based inequality that plagues our society even today, we must assign the topmost priority to social integrity to achieve our goals of national unity, comprehensive development, and development of a healthy society. The key to doing this is in spreading awareness about philosophy of Sant Ravidas that proclaims that one's deeds and not the birth determines his worth.

The entire life of Sant Ravidas, a spiritual devotee who has dedicated himself to the social integrity, is a story of challenges and incessant struggle to overcome them. He had to face torture, pains, insult, hate, indifference, and inequality at every stage of his life right from his birth till he breathed his last. Being a member of Shudra Community, Sant Ravidas incessantly struggled against various forms of social, economic and educational adversities. However, he understood the true meaning of human dignity. Explaining the same to the untouchables, he stressed, "You are inseparable from the Hindu community. Instead of living a life full of exploitation, atrocities and distress, you must struggle for the cause of human rights." Sant Ravidas was born in the times when the Indian society was plagued with anger, unrest and conflicts. The entire society was in a directionless state due to the extremist aggressions.

It was the time when India was divided into tiny princely states, warring with each other out of vain pride and conceit. The social structure was dilapidated due to rituals, customs, superstitions, fakery, hypocrisy and phylactery. Entire society was ridden with unscientific



and inappropriate concept of untouchability. The society was facing ills of extreme internal clashes, class struggles, casteism, inequality, social injustice and limitless struggle. The upper classes had deprived the distressed class of its human rights and forced them to live a subhuman life. Under such adverse conditions, the enlightened Saints launched their spirited mission for revival. Sant Ravidas was a flag bearer in that crusade.

Unfortunately, right assessment of entire spiritual work of Sant Ravidas has not been done till this date. However, his personality and life's work were full of astonishing and greatly miraculous incidences. He understood the quintessence of the pain and agony the society was suffering and came forth with a practical solution to end the miseries, quintessence of which he explained in a language of the masses. His preaching mainly stressed on the public welfare. He was not a sage who would sit in a remote cave and meditate for his own benefit. The philosophy he propagated was not defeatist. He believed that only the one who has experienced the ultimate truth, who has risen above his own self to relate himself with it and who works incessantly for well-being of the people can be called righteous. Musings of Sant Ravidas aims at self-help to relate ourselves with the God and appetency for public welfare. Anybody can get drawn to the God. What matters is attaining divinity in one's life in the form of devotion to God expressed without any pretention through pure love.

Modesty and humility personalised, spiritual musings of Sant Ravidas are auspicious for all and a proclamation of what is eternally auspicious. They propagate that a man becomes great not by birth, but by his virtuous deeds and spiritual achievements. The liberal and human approach he adopts is crystal clear, and indeed appreciable.

Although Sant Ravidas did not make any scientific definition of religion or its practice, he minced no words while launching a frontal attack on untouchability, inequality, discrimination, injustice, exploitation and malpractice that plagues the social system and criticising the violence, rituals, superstitions and baseless customs being exercised in the name of religion. However, his criticism contains no contortion, confusion, awkwardness, riotousness or pretention of knowledge. Nor does it recognise the bounds of class or caste.

While opposing the unscientific perversion of untouchability that blocks the progress of the society, while blocking the process of integration modestly but firmly, Sant Ravidas stressed the need to form society firmly rooted in equality which would not tolerate any untouchability, caste-based indiscriminate, inequality and communal hate. Although Sant Ravidas freely professed practical solutions to the issues faced by the society in his time, he did not oppose any community. Instead, he aimed at awakening the inner self and advocated mutual harmony and fraternity. Professing unique oneness

in essence of all religions, he wrote, "Krishna, Karim, Ram, Hari, Raghav, Jab Lag Ek N Pekha. Ved, Kateb, Quran, Puranan, Sahaj Ek Nahi Dekha." (Krishna, Karim, Ram, Hari, Raghav, all are the names of the same God and all scriptures including the Vedas, Quran, Puranas praise the same God.)

Sant Ravidas was born at Varanasi in the Samvat 1456 in a poor family belonging to the Charmakar (Cobbler) community. His father Raghu Ji was a shoe-maker. Sant Ravidas was drawn towards spirituality since his early age. He would say, "Reining in the mind is the real meditation. Slavery to the bodily cravings results in downfall of earthly wealth."

An ardent advocate of pure benevolence, Sant Ravidas would insist that the mighty ones should share their wealth with the ones lacking the means. If not done so, the excessive wealth proves to be a calamity.

Sant Ravidas had made it his daily routine to donate a pair of shoes crafted by him to the needy without any discrimination. His father would disapprove the charity. He was disowned by the family. However, Sant Ravidas held no grudge and kept himself focussed on doing his work of crafting beautiful footwear, which he treated life his worship to the God. Thanks to the magnanimity of his devotion and meditation, the Royal family of Kashi, Queen of Chittor Jhali Rani and Meerabai willingly treated him as their mentor. This was a grand achievement for Sant Ravidas in his era. Resultant, he was accepted by the masses as a leader who was devotion and dedication personified. Nabhadass writes in his book Bhaktamal that the pure teaching of Sant Ravidas, who was a disciple of Ramanand, was the key to remove doubts and suspicion. Several contemporary saints too praised Sant Ravidas. Sant Kabir wrote, "Ravidas is Saint of all Saints." Forty hymns penned by Sant Ravidas were included in Guru Granth Sahib, the religious scripture of Sikhs. He would say, "Great deeds make a man great. One does not achieve greatness by virtue of his caste. Those who indiscriminate on basis of caste will never be close to the God because the God has made us all."

Though, poor, Sant Ravidas was a proud man. On one occasion, a sage who intended to assist him, brought an Elixir (Paras Mani) that turned iron into gold by its touch to his hut. However, Sant Ravidas modestly refused to accept the Elixir (Paras Mani), saying he had found the real Elixir (Paras Mani) in the form of the God which turns even the most sinful into a saint. He said for him, the name of Lord Hari itself was like a Tree of Heaven (Kalpavriksha), Cow of Plenty (Kamdhenu) and the divine gem that satisfies desires (Chintamani) and that he did not need any Elixir (Paras Mani).

Sant Ravidas, who followed the rules of behaviour for the Saints, would never accept any gift for his personal use. However, the sage hid the Elixir (Paras Mani) in the thatch roof of the hut of Sant Ravidas and went away. When he returned a few days later,



he was surprised to find out that there had been no change in the financial conditions of Sant Ravidas. When he asked Sant Ravidas about the Elixir (Paras Mani), Sant Ravidas replied saying look for it where you had left it. The sage found the Elixir (Paras Mani) as he had left it. Impressed, he praised Sant Ravidas for his stoicism. Bhakta Meerabai too had expressed her wish to gift a priceless gem to Sant Ravidas to help him overcome his poverty. However, Sant Ravidas did not accept that gift. He had refused to accept gift of gold coins from Jhali Rani too, saying he already possessed ample of wealth and needed no earthly gift.

Sant Ravidas felt finding God is the purpose of human life. Since the life is ephemeral, one must strive to make the life meaningful by refraining himself from worldly passions and reciting name of God. He laid stress on equality among all human beings. He stated the company one keeps makes him get drawn to God or the evil. He opposed the sacrifices of animals, slaughtering violence to force religious conversion and propagated for freedom from all addictions. He would advocate morality in financial business, dignity of labour and respect for women. Wishing for well-being of all, goodwill for all and respect for all are highlights of the philosophy professed by Sant Ravidas. He wrote, "Aisa Chahu Raaj Main Jahan Mile Saban Ko Anna, Chot Bade Sab Sam Base, Ravidas Rahe Prasanna." (I wish that everybody gets adequate food, all are treated with dignity and respect. Such

condition would make me happy.) Sant Ravidas, who was an ardent believer of oneness, preached that inequality was baseless as the same God was at the core of self of every human being.

Unfortunately, even in the present-day context, the Dalits are treated as untouchables, which is a blot on the modern educated and developed society. Incidents of exploitation of Dalits, injustice meted out against them, torture of depressed classes, crimes against women, murders are reported across the country on daily basis. Our country is often described as the country of incarnations of God, saints and great men as well as the land where trees, birds and animals, insects and even stones are worshipped as God. However, unfortunately it is still ridden with the untouchability.

Indeed, the philosophy of Sant Ravidas is a treasure meant for well-being of the entire mankind. Therefore, we must assign the topmost priority to social integrity to achieve our goals of national unity, comprehensive development and development of a healthy society. We must get rid of caste-based discrimination and follow laws prohibiting casteism in letter and spirit. Moreover, we must work on spreading social awareness about philosophy of Sant Ravidas that proclaims that one's deeds and not the birth determines his worth.

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PROSPECTS OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

(From page 6) sets up a number of different models and standards. Under such conditions it is impossible for an individual Indian to reach consistency of mind on the question of caste.

Can education destroy caste? The answer is 'Yes' as well as 'No'. If education is given as it is to-day, education can have no effect on caste. It will remain as it will be. The glaring example of it is the Brahmin Caste. Cent percent of it is educated, nay, majority of it is highly educated. Yet not one Brahmin has shown himself to be against caste. In fact, an educated person belonging to the higher caste is more interested after his education to retain the Caste System than when he was not educated. Education gives him an additional interest in the retention of the Caste System namely by opening additional opportunities of getting a bigger job.

From this point of view, education is not helpful as a means to dissolve caste. So far the negative side of education. But education may be solvent if it is applied to the lower strata of the Indian Society. It would raise their spirit of rebellion. In their present state of ignorance, they are the supporters of the Caste System. Once their eyes are opened, they

will be ready to fight the Caste System. The fault of the present policy is that though education is being given on a larger scale, it is not given to the right strata of Indian Society. If you give education to those strata of Indian Society which has a vested interest in maintaining the Caste System for the advantages it gives them, then the Caste System will be strengthened. On the other hand, if you give education to the lowest strata of Indian Society which is interested in blowing up the Caste System, the Caste System will be blown up. At the moment the indiscriminate help given to education by the Indian Government and American Foundation is going to strengthen the Caste System. To make the rich richer and the poor poorer is not the way to abolish poverty. The same is true of using education as a means to end the Caste System. To give education to those who want to keep up the Caste System is not to improve the prospect of Democracy in India but to put our Democracy in India in greater jeopardy.

Source : Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches, Vol. 17 Part I & III.



All records suggest that the new religion rapidly became popular. The absence of any organized form of religious life till this point of time may have been one of the major factors that contributed to this rapid popularity. Furthermore, it seems that the people followed the lead of their king: first it was the immediate family and the attendants of the king; subsequently it was people at large of the island. Numerous important Buddhist sites developed in the country over the period of time.

Buddhism in Sri Lanka

Dr. Manjiri Bhalerao



Buddhism reached Sri Lanka in the third century BCE, during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa, a contemporary of King Ashoka in India. King Ashoka is famous for restoring the monastic order of Buddhism by convening the third Sangiti - the religious conference at Pataliputra. It is believed that after this conference nine monks were sent out by Ashok to spread the religion. One of them was his own son Mahendra, who was sent to Sri Lanka. At that time the local king of Sri Lanka was Devanampiya Tissa. Although this particular event is described as the first-ever introduction of Buddhism to the country, many historians believe that Mahendra's arrival was only the official introduction of Buddhism, and that it is very likely that people knew about Buddhism earlier.

It is said that the king and Mahendra met at Mihintale, a place east of Anuradhapura. Having listened to the Dhamma taught by Mahendra the king and his group took refuge in the Triple Gem (Trisharana or Triratna - Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), the formal procedure of becoming a follower of the Buddha. All records suggest that the new religion rapidly became popular. The absence of any organized form of religious life till this point of time may have been one of the major factors that contributed to this rapid popularity. Furthermore, it seems that the people followed the lead of their king: first it was the immediate family and the attendants of the king; subsequently it was people at large of the island.

Numerous important Buddhist sites developed in the country over the period of time. The first ever stupa and monastic complex –Thuparama – was constructed at Anuradhapura that contained





the bodily relics of the Buddha. At the same time, a branch of the Bodhi tree under which Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment at Bodhi Gaya, was planted in Anuradhapura. Stupas and viharas (monk residences) were built at many places. Caves were also excavated. The most notable of these are the caves at Dambulla in central Sri Lanka. They are popularly known as the Rangiri Dumbulla Guha Temple of Dumbulla Cave Vihar.

These caves are located 148 km east of Colombo and 72 km North of Kandy where Buddha's tooth is located. Monks have lived in this group of caves since 3rd century BC. These caves are situated on a small hill. It has a reputation as one of the most remarkable caves in the whole of South - East Asia. They are decorated with exquisite sculptures and paintings.

Another site that developed as a very important site is that of Kandy. It is located in the heart of the Central Provinces. This is a very important political as well as religious place. This is the capital of the Central Provinces and the administrative headquarter. Located on the high lands, this city has been an attraction for the devotees of Buddhism all over the world.

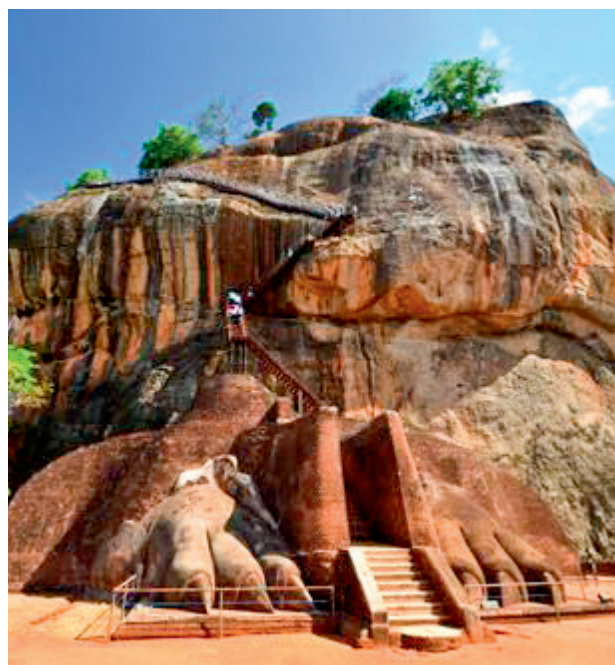
Shri Dalada Maligawa (The Temple of Tooth Relic of the Buddha), is world famous and is also a World Heritage Site. The legend tells us that the tooth relic was hidden in the Kalinga Desha (Odisha) and then it was secretly taken out to Sinhala Desha by Princess Hemamali and her husband Dantha. It was enshrined by the king and from then onwards, it has been the responsibility of the king to take care of the tooth relic. This is a very sacred site for the pilgrims, all around the world.

Polonnaruwa is another site which is a very popular destination. This is a complex site with the remains of various types of architecture. The most important monument here is the Vatadage, which is a peculiar type of architecture in Sri Lanka. There is a stupa at the centre and a protection wall around it. There are steps to enter it from all cardinal directions.

The Cholas controlled a lot of territory in Sri Lanka. The chola ruler Rajendra 1 shifted the capital from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa. But Vijayabahu 1 defeated the Cholas and took control of the land. His grandson Parakramabahu 1 undertook a lot of development activities. He constructed a huge lake called Paraakramsamudra. Here he constructed the palace, fortification wall around the city hospitals, bathrooms gardens and viharas. His son in law Nissankamalla 1, came to power after his father-in-law. He wrote many inscriptions. One of them is at Polonnaruwa. He brought a gigantic slab from Mihintale. 72 lined inscriptions were written there describing the greatness of the king. This is called Galapotha by the local people. On the smaller side is carved a Gajalakshmi along with some swans. This is a beautiful site and sculpture with a long inscription.

Sigiriya is also known as Sinhagari. It is located in the Northern part of Matale district. This site

was selected by King Kashyap for his new capital in the fifth century AD. He not only established his capital on the hill but also constructed numerous structures at the base of the hill. He dug canals, constructed structures to fortify the habitation from the enemy. The very concept of converting a 184 mtr steep rock into an inhabitable place was unique. Further technological advance, human skill and determination made it all possible and this out of the world monument came into being. Not only was this but a brick wall constructed parallel to the rock face. The wall was neatly plastered and polished to the extent of giving the impression of a mirror. Hence this wall is called the mirror wall. Paintings of beautiful ladies are also made on the rock faces of this tall hill. The pathways were made along the wall to reach the top of the hill. Numerous steps were carved in the rock in such a way that one has to go through the lion's paws to go to the higher level. On

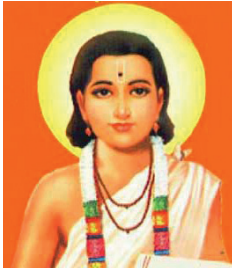


the top of the hill many buildings were constructed for the royal family as well as the officers of the king. Gardens, lakes etc. were also created that added to the beauty of the location. One can visualize the 1500 years old capital at this point.

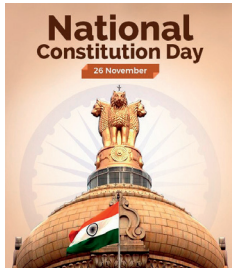
Later on, with the changing political scenario some Buddhist monasteries were constructed there and were given to the monks. In this way, Buddhism not only reached Sri Lanka but also established itself as a very popular religion. Today also the government is officially the Buddhist government and is known as the Ministry of Buddhadasana. There are many sites worth visiting in Sri Lanka but we have taken an account of the most significant heritage sites.

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DIN VISHESH



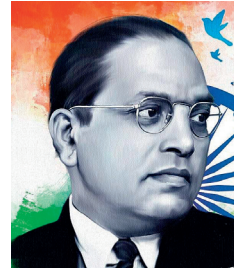
22nd November
Sant Dnyaneshwar
Death Anniversary



26th November
Constitution Day



30th November
Sant Ravidas
Death anniversary



6th December
Dr. Ambedkar
Death Anniversary



11th December
Subramanya Bharathi
Birth Anniversary



28th November
Mahatma Phule
Death anniversary

Remembering Mahatma Phule

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was the most remarkable thinker, social reformer and social activist of 19th century, who relentlessly fought for the application of democratic norms of the hierarchy-ridden Hindu social structure. His anti-caste struggles should be understood considering social conditions prevailing in his time. At that time the society was divided vertically into caste and sub-castes. Unlike other social reformers of his time, Mahatma Phule did not believe in reforming Hindu religion and society for he considered it to be a pointless, waste of time and energy. He brought out journals, magazines and pamphlets, wrote books after books, founded primary schools and mobilised the masses. Incidentally, in the teeth of opposition from the learned upper caste leaders and their henchmen, Phule was the first to start schools for girls in Maharashtra. It is one of the history's ironies that it was in Phule's school that upper caste girls in orthodox Pune first learnt Marathi Alphabets. To him, the caste system was the antithesis of the principle that all men are equal, and the caste hierarchy was the assertion of the inequality of man. He dismissed all religions and the dominant religious traditions of India. His convictions and work were directed towards redeeming the depressed classes from the bondage of slavery and discrimination. Phule's economic and political ideas were radical and revolutionary directed towards liberating the downtrodden from exploitation and oppression.