



Ambedkar Times

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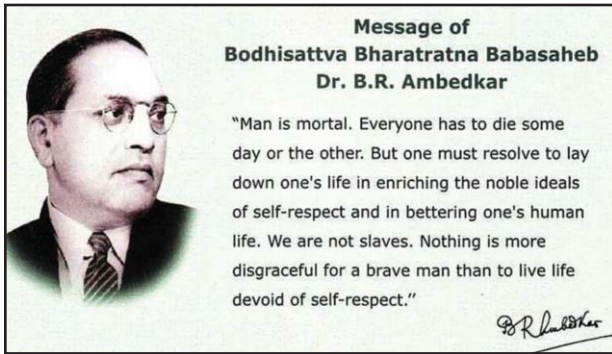
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Message of
Bodhisattva Bharatratna Babasaheb
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

"Man is mortal. Everyone has to die some day or the other. But one must resolve to lay down one's life in enriching the noble ideals of self-respect and in bettering one's human life. We are not slaves. Nothing is more disgraceful for a brave man than to live life devoid of self-respect."

B.R. Ambedkar

Heartiest congratulations to all on Bharat Rattan Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's 123rd birth anniversary

Prem Kumar Chumber, Editor-In-Chief: Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba

LIFE OF BABASAHEB DR. BHIMRAO RAMJI AMBEDKAR

Gautam Chakaravarty
General Secretary

Ambedkar Memorial Trust, London

The importance that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had in the shaping of modern India should not be forgotten. He led millions of the oppressed to a life of self-respect, dignity, and responsibility. Babasaheb always stressed the importance of better education, so that our position in society can be uplifted. It was he who was primarily responsible for the Constitution, adopted after India became independent. Babasaheb began the revival of Buddhism in India that has grown tremendously after his death, and continues to grow today among his countless followers.

This book briefly outlines the history of his life, showing how he overcame all the difficulties facing the oppressed in India, to become one of the greatest men of modern times.

His Birth and Greatness Foretold

On April 14th, 1891 a son was born to Bhimabai and Ramji Ambedkar. His father Ramji was an army officer stationed at Mhow in Madhya Pradesh - he had risen to the highest rank an Indian was allowed to hold at that time under British rule. His mother decided to call her son Bhim. Before the birth, Ramji's uncle, who was a man living the religious life of a sanyasi, foretold that this son would achieve worldwide fame. His parents already had many children. Despite that, they resolved to make every effort to give him a good education.

Early Life and First School

Two years later, Ramji retired from the army, and the family moved to Dapoli in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, from where they came originally. Bhim was enrolled at school when he was five years old. The whole family had to struggle to live on the small army pension Ramji received.

When some friends found Ramji a job at Satara, things seemed to be looking up for the family, and they moved again. Soon after, however, tragedy struck. Bhimabhai, who had been ill, died. Bhim's aunt Mira, though she herself was not in good health, took over the care of the children. Ramji read stories from the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana to his children, and sang devotional songs to them. In this way, home life was still happy for Bhim, his brothers and sisters. He never forgot the influence of his father. It taught him about the rich cultural tradition shared by all Indians.

The Shock of Prejudice - Casteism

Bhim began to notice that he and his family were treated differently. At

high school he had to sit in the corner of the room on a rough mat, away from the desks of the other pupils. At break-time, he was not allowed to drink water using the cups his fellow school children used. He had to hold his cupped hands out to have water poured into them by the school caretaker. Bhim did not know why he should be treated differently - what was wrong with him?

Once, he and his elder brother had to travel to Goregaon, where their father worked as a cashier, to spend their summer holidays. They got off the train and waited for a long time at the station, but Ramji did not arrive to meet them. The station master seemed kind, and asked them who they were and where they were going. The boys were very well-dressed, clean, and polite. Bhim, without thinking, told him they were Mahars (a group classed as 'untouchables'). The station master was stunned - his face changed its kindly expression and he went away.

Bhim decided to hire a bullock-cart to take them to their father - this was before motor cars were used as taxis - but the cart-men had heard that the boys were 'untouchables', and wanted nothing to do with them. Finally, they had to agree to pay double the usual cost of the journey, plus they had to drive the cart themselves, while the driver walked beside it. He was afraid of being polluted by the boys, because they were 'untouchables'. However, the extra money persuaded him that he could have his cart 'purified' later! Throughout the journey, Bhim thought constantly about what had happened - yet he could not understand the reason for it. He and his brother were clean and neatly dressed. Yet they were supposed to pollute and make unclean everything they touched and all that touched them. How could that be possible?

Bhim never forgot this incident. As he grew up, such senseless insults made him realise that what Hindu society called 'untouchability' was stupid, cruel, and unreasonable. His sister had to cut her hair at home because the village barbers were afraid of being polluted by an 'untouchable'. If he asked her why they were 'untouchables', she could only answer - that is the way it has always been." Bhim could not be satisfied with this answer. He knew that -it has always been that way" does not mean that there

is a just reason for it - or that it had to stay that way forever. It could be changed.

An Outstanding Scholar

At this time in his young life, with his mother dead, and father working away from the village where Bhim went to school, he had some good fortune. His teacher, though from a 'high' caste, liked him a lot. He praised Bhim's good work and encouraged him, seeing what a bright pupil he was. He even invited Bhim to eat lunch with him - something that would have horrified most high caste Hindus. The teacher also changed Bhim's last name to Ambedkar - his own name. When his father decided to remarry, Bhim was very upset - he still missed his mother so much. Wanting to run away to Bombay, he tried to steal his aunt's purse. When at last he managed to get

hold of it, he found only one very small coin. Bhim felt so ashamed. He put the coin back and made a vow to himself to study very hard and to become independent. Soon he was

winning the highest praise and admiration from all his teachers. They urged Ramji to get the best education for his son Bhim. So Ramji moved with his family to Bombay. They all had to live in just one room, in an area where the poorest of the poor lived, but Bhim was able to go to Elphinstone High School - one of the best schools in all of India.

In their one room everyone and everything was crowded together and the streets outside were very noisy. Bhim went to sleep when he got home from school. Then his father would wake him up at two o'clock in the morning! Everything was quiet then - so he could do his homework and study in peace.

In the big city, where life was more modern than in the villages, Bhim found that he was still called an 'untouchable' and treated as if something made him different and bad - even at his famous school.

One day, the teacher called him up to the blackboard to do a sum. All the other boys jumped up and made a big fuss. Their lunch boxes were stacked behind the blackboard - they believed that Bhim would pollute the food! When he wanted to learn Sanskrit, the language of the Hindu holy scriptures, he was told that it was forbidden for 'untouchables' to do so. He had to study Persian instead - but he taught himself Sanskrit later

in life.

Matriculation and Marriage

In due course, Bhim passed his Matriculation Exam. He had already come to the attention of some people interested in improving society. So when he passed the exam, a meeting was arranged to congratulate him - he was the first 'untouchable' from his community to pass it.

Bhim was then 17 years old. Early marriage was common in those days, so he was married to Ramabai the same year. He continued to study hard and passed the next Intermediate examination with distinction. However, Ramji found himself unable to keep paying the school fees. Through someone interested in his progress, Bhim was recommended to the Maharaja Gaekwad of Baroda. The Maharaja granted him a monthly scholarship. With the help of this, Bhimrao ('Rao' is added to names in Maharashtra as a sign of respect) passed his B.A. in 1912. Then he was given a job in the civil service - but only two weeks after starting, he had to rush home to Bombay. Ramji was very ill, and died soon afterwards. He had done all he could for his son, laying the foundations for Bhimrao's later achievements.

Studies in the USA and the UK

The Maharaja of Baroda had a scheme to send a few outstanding scholars abroad for further studies. Of course, Bhimrao was selected - but he had to sign an agreement to serve Baroda state for ten years on finishing his studies.

In 1913, he went to the USA where he studied at the world-famous Columbia University, New York. The freedom and equality he experienced in America made a very strong impression on Bhimrao. It was so refreshing for him to be able to live a normal life, free from the caste prejudice of India. He could do anything he pleased - but devoted his time to studying. He studied eighteen hours a day. Visits to bookshops were his favourite entertainment!

His main subjects were Economics and Sociology. In just two years he had been awarded an M.A. - the following year he completed his Ph.D. thesis. Then he left Columbia and went to England, where he joined the London School of Economics. However, he had to leave London before completing his course because the scholarship granted by the State of Baroda expired. Bhimrao had to wait three years before he could return to London to complete his studies.

Return to India - Nightmare in Baroda

So he was called back to India to take up a post in Baroda as agreed. He (Contd.. on Page 4)



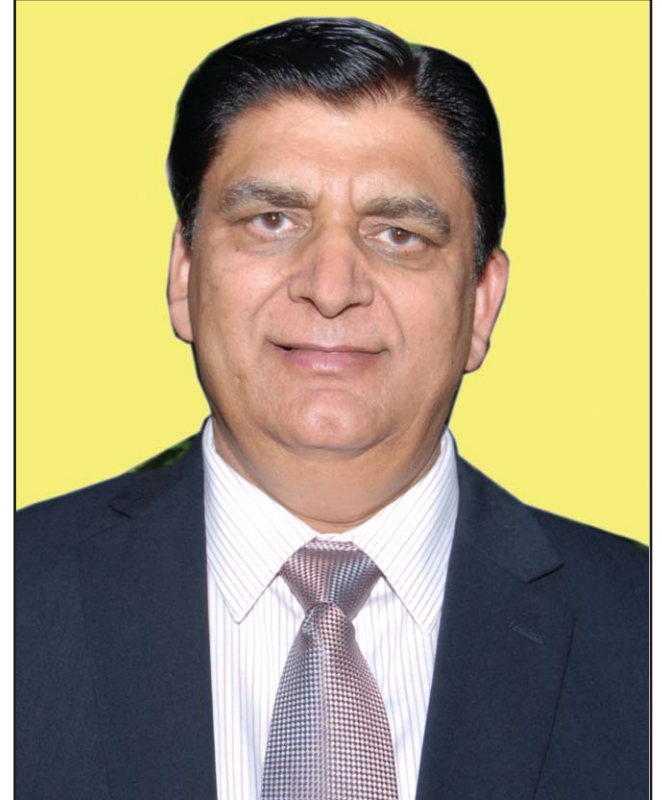
Gautam Chakaravarty
General Secretary
Ambedkar Memorial Trust,
London

We congratulate to all on Dr. Ambedkar's 123rd birth anniversary & we would like to request you all to join us to celebrate Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar's 123rd birth anniversary at 6:00pm, Venue: Veteran's Memorial Community Building, 1425 Veteran's Memorial Circle, Yuba City (California) 95991 on April 20, 2014



Ram Murti Saroay

V K Chumber



Our great leader and savior, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar fought his entire life for the economic, social and political equality and justice for all mankind. He continuously endeavored for the upliftment of poor, oppressed, downtrodden and economically disadvantaged people of India. In order to carry forward his mission and to accomplish our goals, he wanted us to "Educate, Agitate and unite."

-Amrik Chand, CPA

We feel ourselves honored by being the service to serve the community by performing our duties for the cause, which reflects the very soul and spirit of Dr. Ambedkar Babasahib's stress was not only on equality in religion and power in political but also on education. We should encourage our children to become doctors, lawyers,engineers and scientists, which in its ultimate and logical sequence will create a very respectable and invulnerable place for us in our society.

- Ram Murti Saroay



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**Dilwinder
Ralh
Treasurer**



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on Dr. Ambedkar's 123rd
birth anniversary

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LIFE OF BABASAHEB DR. BHIMRAO RAMJI AMBEDKAR

(b) was given an excellent job in the Baroda Civil Service. Bhimrao now held a doctorate, and was being trained for a top job. Yet, he again ran into the worst features of the Hindu caste system. This was all the more painful, because for the past four years he had been abroad, living free from the label of 'untouchable.'

No one at the office where he worked would hand over files and papers to him - the servant threw them onto his desk. Nor would they give him water to drink. No respect was given to him, merely because of his caste.

He had to go from hotel to hotel looking for a room, but none of them would take him in. At last he had found a place to live in a Parsi guest house, but only because he had finally decided to keep his caste secret.

He lived there in very uncomfortable conditions, in a small bedroom with a tiny cold-water bathroom attached. He was totally alone there with no one to talk to. There were no electric lights or even oil lamps - so the place was completely dark at night.

Bhimrao was hoping to find somewhere else to live through his civil service job, but before he could, one morning as he was leaving for work a gang of angry men carrying sticks arrived outside his room. They accused him of polluting the hotel and told him to get out by evening - or else! What could he do? He could not stay with either of the two acquaintances he had in Baroda for the same reason - his low caste. Bhimrao felt totally miserable and rejected.

Bombay - Beginning Social Activity

He had no choice. After only eleven days in his new job, he had to return to Bombay. He tried to start a small business there, advising people about investments - but it too failed once customers learned of his caste.

In 1918, he became a lecturer at Sydenham College in Bombay. There, his students recognised him as a brilliant teacher and scholar. At this time he also helped to found a Marathi newspaper 'MookNayak' (Leader of the Dumb) to champion the cause of the 'untouchables'. He also began to organise and attend conferences, knowing that he had to begin to proclaim and publicise the humiliations suffered by the Dalits - 'the oppressed' - and fight for equal rights. His own life had taught him the necessity of the struggle for emancipation.

Completion of Education - Leader of India's Untouchables

In 1920, with the help of friends, he was able to return to London to complete his studies in Economics at LSE. He also enrolled to study as a Barrister at Gray's Inn. In 1923, Bhimrao returned to India with a Doctorate in Economics from the LSE - he was perhaps the first Indian to have a Doctorate from this world-famous institution. He had also qualified as a Barrister-at-Law.

Back in India, he knew that nothing had changed. His qualifications meant nothing as far as the practice of Untouchability was concerned - it was still an obstacle to his career. However, he had received the best education anyone in the world could get, and was well equipped to be a leader of the Dalit community. He could argue with and persuade the best minds of his time on equal terms. He was an expert on the law, and could give convincing evi-

dence before British commissions as an eloquent and gifted speaker. Bhimrao dedicated the rest of his life to his task. He became known by his increasing number of followers - those 'untouchables' he urged to awake - as Babasaheb. Knowing the great value and importance of education, in 1924 he founded an association called BahiskritHitakarini Sabha. This set up hostels, schools, and free libraries. To improve the lives of Dalits, education had to reach everyone. Opportunities had to be provided at grass roots level - because knowledge is power.

Leading Peaceful Agitation

In 1927 Babasaheb presided over a conference at Mahad in Kolaba District. There he said: -It is time we rooted out of our minds the ideas of high and low. We can attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help and regain our self-respect."

Because of his experience of the humiliation and injustice of untouchability, he knew that justice would not be granted by others. Those who suffer injustice must secure justice for themselves.

The Bombay Legislature had already passed a Bill allowing everyone to use public water tanks and wells. (We have seen how Bhim was denied water at school, in his office, and at other places. Public water facilities were always denied to 'untouchables' because of the superstitious fear of 'pollution.') Mahad Municipality had thrown open the local water tank four years earlier, but so far not one 'untouchable' had dared to drink or draw water from it. Babasaheb led a procession from the Conference on a peaceful demonstration to the Chowdar Tank. He knelt and drank water from it. After he set this example, thousands of others felt courageous enough to follow him. They drank water from the tank and made history. For many hundreds of years, 'untouchables' had been forbidden to drink public water.

When some caste Hindus saw them drinking water, they believed the tank had been polluted and violently attacked the Conference, but Babasaheb insisted violence would not help - he had given his word that they would agitate peacefully.

Babasaheb started a Marathi journal Bahiskrit Bharat ('The Excluded of India'). In it, he urged his people to hold a satyagraha (non-violent agitation) to secure the right of entry to the Kala Ram Temple at Nasik. 'Untouchables' had always been forbidden to enter Hindu temples. The demonstration lasted for a month. Then they were told they would be able to take part in the annual temple festival. However, at the festival they had stones thrown at them - and were not allowed to take part. Courageously, they resumed their peaceful agitation. The temple had to remain closed for about a year, as they blocked its entrance.

Round Table Conferences - Gandhi

Meanwhile, the Indian Freedom Movement had gained momentum under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1930, a Round Table Conference was held by the British Government in London to decide the future of India. Babasaheb represented the 'untouchables'. He said there: -The Depressed Classes of India also join in the demand for replacing the British Gov-

ernment by a Government of the people and by the people... Our wrongs have remained as open sores and have not been righted although 150 years of British rule have rolled away. Of what good is such a Government to anybody?" Soon a second conference was held, which Mahatma Gandhi attended representing the Congress Party. Babasaheb met Gandhi in Bombay before they went to London. Gandhi told him that he had read what Babasaheb said at the first conference. Gandhi told Babasaheb he knew him to be a real Indian patriot.

At the Second Conference, Babasaheb asked for a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. -Hinduism", he said, -has given us only insults, misery, and humiliation." A separate electorate would mean that the 'untouchables' would vote for their own candidates and be allotted their votes separate from the Hindu majority. Babasaheb was made a hero by thousands of his followers on his return from Bombay - even though he always said that people should not idolise him. News came that separate electorates had been granted. Gandhi felt that separate electorates would separate the Harijans from the Hindus. The thought that the Hindus would be divided pained him grievously. He started a fast, saying that he would fast unto death. Only Babasaheb could save Gandhi's life - by withdrawing the demand for separate electorates. At first he refused, saying it was his duty to do the best he could for his people - no matter what. Later he visited Gandhi, who was at that time in Yeravda jail. Gandhi persuaded Babasaheb that Hinduism would change and leave its bad practices behind. Finally Babasaheb agreed to sign the Poona Pact with Gandhi in 1932. Instead of separate electorates, more representation was to be given to the Depressed Classes. However, it later became obvious that this did not amount to anything concrete.

In the Prime of His Life

Babasaheb had by this time collected a library of over 50,000 books, and had a house named Rajgriha built at Dadar in north Bombay to hold it. In 1935 his beloved wife Ramabai died. The same year he was made Principal of the Government Law College, Bombay. Also in 1935 a conference of Dalits was held at Yeola. Babasaheb told the conference: -We have not been able to secure the barest of human rights... I am born a Hindu. I couldn't help it, but I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu." This was the first time that Babasaheb stressed the importance of conversion from Hinduism for his people - for they were only known as 'untouchables' within the fold of Hinduism.

During the Second World War, Babasaheb was appointed Labour Minister by the Viceroy. Yet he never lost contact with his roots - he never became corrupt or crooked. He said that he had been born of the poor and had lived the life of the poor, he would remain absolutely unchanged in his attitudes to his friends and to the rest of the world. The All-India Scheduled Castes Federation was formed in 1942 to gather all 'untouchables' into a united political party.

Architect of the Constitution

After the war Babasaheb was

elected to the Constituent Assembly to decide the way that India - a country of millions of people - should be ruled. How should elections take place? What are the rights of the people? How are laws to be made? Such important matters had to be decided and laws had to be made. The Constitution answers all such questions and lays down rules. When India became independent in August 1947, Babasaheb Ambedkar became First Law Minister of Independent India. The Constituent Assembly made him chairman of the committee appointed to draft the constitution for the world's largest democracy.

All his study of law, economics, and politics made him the best qualified person for this task. A study of the Constitutions of many countries, a deep knowledge of law, a knowledge of the history of India and of Indian Society - all these were essential. In fact, he carried the whole burden alone. He alone could complete this huge task. After completing the Draft Constitution, Babasaheb fell ill. At a nursing home in Bombay he met Dr. Sharda Kabir and married her in April 1948. On November 4, 1948 he presented the Draft Constitution to the Constituent Assembly, and on November 26, 1949 it was adopted in the name of the people of India. On that date he said: -I appeal to all Indians to be a nation by discarding castes, which have brought separation in social life and created jealousy and hatred."

Later Life - Buddhist Conversion

In 1950, he went to a Buddhist conference in Sri Lanka. On his return he spoke in Bombay at the Buddhist Temple. -In order to end their hardships, people should embrace Buddhism. I am going to devote the rest of my life to the revival and spread of Buddhism in India." Babasaheb resigned from the Government in 1951. He felt that as an honest man he had no choice but to do so, because the reforms so badly needed had not been allowed to come into being. For the next five years Babasaheb carried on a relentless fight against social evils and superstitions. On October 14, 1956 at Nagpur he embraced Buddhism. He led a huge gathering in a ceremony converting over half a million people to Buddhism. He knew that Buddhism was a true part of Indian history and that to revive it was to continue India's best tradition. 'Untouchability' is a product only of Hinduism.

Sudden Death

Only seven weeks later on December 6, 1956 Babasaheb died at his Delhi residence. His body was taken to Bombay. A two-mile long crowd formed the funeral procession. At Dadar cemetery that evening, eminent leaders paid their last respects to him. The pyre was lit according to Buddhist rites. Half a million people witnessed it.

Thus ended the life of one of India's greatest sons. His was the task of awakening India's millions of excluded and oppressed to their human rights. He experienced their suffering and the cruelty shown to them. He overcame the obstacles to stand on an equal footing with the greatest men of his time. He played a vital role in forming modern India through its Constitution. His work and mission continue today - we must not rest until we see a truly democratic India of equal citizens living in peace together.