



# FACTS

against MYTHS

VIKAS ADHYAYAN KENDRA

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INFORMATION BULLETIN

## Campaign of Falsification & Defamation : The Myths on Dr. Ambedkar - Part I

*"The Indian Constitution provides inspiration in preparation of a new South African Constitution. We hope that our efforts...will reflect the work and ideas of this son of India. Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to social justice and to the upliftment of the oppressed is worthy of emulation"*

— Dr. Nelson Mandela  
President, Republic of South Africa

### COMMENT

In recent times all-round attacks on Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) have increased in frequency and intensity. His teachings, his ideology and philosophy, and his whole cultural legacy are being maliciously and tendentiously attacked particularly by the upper caste brahminical order. Desecration of his statues in various parts of the country is one manifestation of this onslaught. In August 1997, for instance, Ambedkar's statue at Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar at Ghatkopar in Mumbai was desecrated with a 'garland' of chapals. This was followed shortly thereafter with ruthless police firing on Dalits who had gathered together to protest against the outrage. The firing led to the deaths of 10 Dalits with 14 injured. The gruesome incident also led to a well-known Dalit cultural activist Vilas Ghogre committing suicide in protest against the repression.

These ominous developments have brought to the forefront highly disturbing trends, viz., the prevalence of the deep-seated anti-Dalit prejudices of the whole state apparatus; the hypocritical stances and double-standards of various political

formations who one hand venerate Dr. Ambedkar's cultural symbols whilst pay only lip-service to his ideology and cultural legacy; the pathetic state of affairs of the whole Dalit movement which has shown enormous weaknesses, more so with the ascendance of communal right wing political parties.

It is not coincidental that the killings of these Dalit protestors was preceded by the publication of the scurrilous book, 'Worshipping False Gods' by Arun Shourie, an ideologue of the Hindu Right, slandering Ambedkar as a stooge of British imperialism. Yet, on the one hand, the Hindu Right venerate his idols, calling him a 'great Hindu son' (Hinduputra), and on the other its sympathetic ideologues are working overtime to tarnish his image and undermine his teachings. This comes at a crucial time when the Dalit movement has been reduced to concentrating on reservations alone.



Dr. Ambedkar began his career as a lawyer in 1923 at the Bombay High Court. His public service was within the backdrop of the *Satyashodhak Samaj* launched by Mahatma Phule, whose pioneering efforts served the first challenge to Brahminical hegemony which propagated the segregationist Chaturvarnya system

considered as divinely ordained. Ambedkar was also engaged in Phule's educational efforts to rouse the Dalits against the vice-like hold of the religious superstitions and orthodoxies of the Brahmanical order. On completing his studies abroad and returning to India, he launched the journal '*Muknayak*' (The Silent Hero) to fight for the cause of the Dalits. In it he illustrated that Hinduism is like a multi-storied building with each floor being occupied by one particular caste but without the required staircase to link the floors to each enabling healthy interaction between various castes. His other major endeavour was in establishing the '*Bahishkist Hitkarni Sabha*' (Society for Welfare of the Outcastes) aimed at starting schools and hostels for the Untouchables.

His first major movement was the attempt to break down the restrictions discriminating Dalits from free access to public services like drinking water. The biggest and well planned campaigns took place in Maharashtra (the Mahad's Chavadar Water Satyagraha of 1927 which culminated in burning the *Manusmriti*). This led to attacks on the 'Untouchables' by the upper castes. Despite this, the movement gained in momentum inspiring large sections of the Dalits – to organise themselves – to stand up and fight for their rights.

Throughout his lifetime Ambedkar tirelessly endeavoured to transform the mindset of Dalits and caste Hindus. He attacked the authority of the scriptures and advocated the destruction of the religious sanctions that legitimise the atrocious caste system: "The real enemy is the Shastras which teach...this religion of caste. Destroy this belief in the sanctity of the Shastras - Scriptures - destroy the authority, the sacredness and divinity of the Shastras and the Vedas. Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras". (quoted by the late M.M.Thomas) He further pointed out that "...it is mischievously propagated by the Hindu scriptures that by serving the upper three classes, the Shudras attain salvation..." and then added that "...religion is for man and not man for religion...".

To the caste Hindus he stated, "The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system...Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system...The salvation of the depressed classes will come only when the caste Hindus are made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus". The agitation to enter the Hindu temples was next on his agenda, i.e. the *Kalaram Temple Satyagraha* in Nasik of 1930-35.

To blunt the political domination of upper castes Dr. Ambedkar demanded a 'separate electorate' which was conceded to in the 'communal award' of McDonald. But Gandhi opposed the move and began a fast unto death. Ambedkar conceded to Gandhi's pressure and by entering in to 'Poona Pact, which gave 'reserved constituency' to Dalits, he in a way saved Gandhi's life.

Under his leadership Dalit agitations rose from strength to strength. As a large majority of the Untouchables were workers Dr. Ambedkar launched the 'Independent Labor Party' to express their political aspirations. Its agenda was to struggle for democracy, civil rights, minimum wages and land reforms. He disapproved the Congress policies of subordinating the interests of Dalits and opposed the use of the word '*Harijan*'. These efforts led to their formation of the 'Mahar Regiment' in the army, scholarships for Dalits, government jobs and promotion, etc. He also established the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942 to widen his reach on an all-India basis.

On gaining freedom from colonial rule Ambedkar was appointed the Law Minister in Nehru's cabinet and nominated as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of free India's Constitution. The Constitution was implemented on 26th January 1950, and the first General elections were held in 1952. Congress won with a massive majority. Ambedkar's Scheduled Caste Federation failed to win any seats, mainly due to the joint electorate, reserved constituency system. As a measure to further strengthen the political impact of Dalits Ambedkar founded the Republican Party.

Dr. Ambedkar had also been entrusted with the responsibility to reform the Hindu Code Bill for which the Hindu Law Committee was formed on June 25, 1941 under the chairmanship of B.N. Rau. Ambedkar took this as an opportunity to ensure that the repressive nature of Hindu laws, its discriminatory character towards women and Dalits be removed. The Bill which he formulated was radical and purged the discriminatory aspects to a great extent. It was, however, met with stiff resistance by orthodox elements within the Hindu Law Committee both from within and without. Some in the Congress too had opposed it. For instance, President Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the R.S.S. chief, M.S. Golwalkar including the Shankaracharya of Sankeshwar Peeth who considered it outrageous that an untouchable was given the task to reform Hindu society. Even the introduction of a clause outlawing the mysogynic crime of bigamy was strongly opposed in some



high courts (EPW) e.g. in the Bombay High Court when Chagla was Chief Justice. Finally, on winning the Elections the Congress diluted the Bill considerably from its progressive elements, to placate the conservatives. This was strongly objected to by Dr. Ambedkar; resigning in protest from Nehru's cabinet.

Ambedkar's efforts to reform Hinduism and get social justice had a mixed response. On one hand the self respect of Dalits started getting roused and on the other Ambedkar realised the futility of trying to get 'concessions' from Hindu elite. It is in this context that he in 1935, had declared that "though I was born a Hindu, but I will not die as a Hindu". He was highly knowledgeable in the study of comparative religions and was particularly and greatly influenced by the teachings of Buddha, especially those on Truth, Nonviolence, Social Equality and disbelief in the 'other world' and cycle of rebirth. Avoiding the controversy over the *Hinayan* and *Mahayan* sects of Buddhism he decided to revive the original teachings of Buddha that led him to establish 'Neo Buddhism'. On October 14, 1956, along with thousands of his followers he adopted Buddhism as his religion.

Today, mainly due to Dr. Ambedkar a large majority of Dalits are conscious of their rights — the right to self respect and dignity. Ambedkar's efforts to provide for reservations in the Constitution itself was aimed to break the barriers impeding the realisation of 'Dalit Self Respect'. Even prior to drafting the Constitution he was constantly busy to get them jobs in the government. This he ensured in a definitive way by introducing these measures as constitutional provisions. Today, however, Dr. Ambedkar's enormous contribution to Indian society is not only being eroded but there is simultaneously a surreptitious attempt to vilify his name and undermine his legacy. There are also attempts to undermine the rights and aspirations of Dalits. It is therefore imperative to re-claim Dr. Ambedkar's legacy and reassert his relevance on issues of human rights and simultaneously expose the anti-Ambedkarite expressions.

**MYTH :** *Ambedkar did not support the freedom struggle against British colonial rule. He was a traitor to the nationalist cause.*

**FACT :** As Ambedkar's politics was primarily to guarantee the principles of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' in the course of social movements, his contribution to freedom struggle is often underrated and at times shown in a negative light. However, he had clearly seen the role of the

Congress, and its overlooking the interests of Dalits, including the principles of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', that he had contributed to the freedom struggle. At any rate, this false allegation was shattered by Ambedkar himself in his book, "What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables". He countered that "the Untouchables are not opposed to freedom from British imperialism. But they refuse to be content with mere freedom from British imperialism. What they insist upon is the Free India is not enough (but) should be made safe for democracy...The Untouchables cannot forget the fate of the Negroes. It is to prevent such treachery that the Untouchables have taken the attitude they have with regard to this, "Fight For Freedom". The historical events that subsequently unfolded on the national political scene only vindicated Dr. Ambedkar's stand. Further,

➤ *In 1930 at the First Session of the All-India Depressed Classes Conference, Dr. Ambedkar vehemently criticised the British colonial government. He pointed out that the British Government was responsible for the large scale starvation deaths — ranging from 15 to 26 million between 1875 and 1900! "The aim of the British Government along has been to discourage the growth of trade and industry...", he had maintained.*

As a strong anti-colonialist he reminded the Dalits that there had been "...no fundamental alteration in your position..." under the colonial rule and concluded: "I am afraid that the British chose to advocate (your) unfortunate conditions not with the object of removing them, but only because such a concern serves well as an excuse for retarding the political progress of India...Nobody can remove your grievances as well as you can and you cannot remove them unless you get political power...No share of this political power can come to you so long as the British government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj Constitution that you stand any chance of getting political power into your own hands without which you cannot bring salvation to your people". Cf. G.S. Lokhand ("Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar" Sterling Publishers, Delhi, 1977 pp.159 & 161-2) and Ranadive and Patankar-Omvedt (in EPW 1979, pp.341 & 413).

At the First Round Table Conference (1930-31), Ambedkar again strongly condemned the British colonial government. "Our wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted, although 150 years of British rule have rolled away. Of what good is such a government to anybody? It was a government which did realise that the capitalists were denying the workers a

wage and decent conditions of work and which did realise that the landlords were squeezing the masses dry, and yet it did not remove social evils that blighted the lives of the down-trodden classes for several years". After narrating the plight of the Dalits Ambedkar demanded in unambiguous terms freedom for India. (Quoted by Patankar-Omved)

Further, in his demand for Independence, he took the opportunity to ridicule the patriotism of those who did not struggle against the caste system: "A patriot and a nationalist in India is one who sees with open eyes his fellowmen treated as being less than men. But his humanity does not rise in protest. He knows that men and women for no cause are denied their human rights. But it does not prick his civic sense to helpful action. He finds whole classes of people shut out from employment. Hundreds of evil practices that injure man and society are perceived by him. But they do not sicken him with disgust. The patriot's one cry is power and more power for him and for his class. I am glad I do not belong to that class of patriots. I belong to that class which takes its stand on democracy and which seeks to destroy monopoly in every shape and form. Our aim is to realise in practise our ideal of one man, one value in all walks of life — political, economic and social". (Quoted by Lokhande)

To understand the freedom struggle merely as a political endeavour overlooking its social aspects is highly myopic. One has to see the totality of the process and in that Dr. Ambedkar had a major contribution to make by leading the social struggles, and those which opposed the powers by entrenched sections of society. At political level also Ambedkar had his own approach to the struggles. One Dalit MP summarised Ambedkar's life-time contribution as follows, "After the meeting Mahatma Gandhi sent him a message, 'Ambedkar, you are a sterling patriot!' (Arun 1977). Ambedkar also highlighted the grievances of Dalits and oppressed and demanded for minimum wage at the Round Table Conference. As an extension of these demands he went on to say, "no body can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our hands...It is only in a *Swaraj* Constitution that we stand a chance of getting the political power in our own hands, without which we cannot bring salvation to our people...." (Murlidharan, 1997 : 22). At the same Conference Ambedkar indicted the British on its social policies. He maintained that, 'when we compare our present position is the one which it

was our lot to bear in Indian society of pre-British days, we find that, instead of marching on, we are marking time. Before the British we were in loathsome position because of untouchability. Has the British Govt. done anything to remove it? Before the British, we could not draw water from the village well. Before the British we could not enter temple. Can we enter now?...To none of these questions we can give an affirmative answer. Our wrongs have remained as open sores and they were not righted although 150 years of British rule have rolled away...of what good is such a government to anybody? (Gadgil, 1997, 32)

Unlike other nationalist leaders, Ambedkar's political struggles were multi-pronged. On one hand he struggled for social rights of Dalits, on the other he called for *Swaraj*, and on yet another he supported the freedom fighters. For instance, during the Quit India Movement he had provided shelter at his residence to the underground Congress leader, Achyut Patwardhan. According to Nandu Ram (1997:67) "Ambedkar was accepted as the undisputed leader of depressed classes...he was recognised both in India and abroad as a true nationalist and patriot but with his bent of mind and orientation he was different from leaders of the Indian National Congress. Yet, he continued his movement of the depressed classes for their social, political and religious rights".

On Ambedkar's bona-fides as a great nationalist Gandhi himself had complimented the manner he went about fulfilling his role at the Round Table Conference where he had raised the demand for *Swaraj* most eloquently.

In recording the history of the freedom movement the so-called mainstream historians fail to narrate the achievements and contributions of minorities like Dalits, Muslims, Adivasis among others. Hindu nationalists, for instance, have wilfully suppressed the sacrifices of especially the Muslim masses in India's freedom. Right since 1857 struggle historians have generally ignored the freedom fighters among also the Dalits e.g. Zalakari Bai, Matadin Bhangi the first accused in the chargesheet of 1857 revolt.

Furthermore, either out of design or otherwise most such "historians" whilst denigrating the role of the Untouchables in the freedom struggles gloss over the fact that communal forces like the RSS, etc., not only failed to support the various anti-colonial struggles like the Quit India movement but even provided assurances to the colonial powers that they would remain neutral from these struggles.



Finally, on the so-called lack of a 'Nationalist' consciousness on the part of the Dalits Dr. Gopal Guru states that given the historical evolution of their consciousness Dalits are bound to "...awaken first to the socio-cultural consciousness which is the first glimpse of the political consciousness. Hence, it cannot be pre-empted and imposed on the Dalits who are not yet structurally ready to develop this consciousness. And, therefore, while understanding the development of nationalist consciousness the cultural-social consciousness needs to be treated with all seriousness rather than being dismissed contemptuously as some "fake nationalists" seem to be doing by putting a slur of Ambedkar"(EPW).

**MYTH :** *Ambedkar was an opponent of Gandhi and conspired with British to destroy his movement.*

**FACT :** There were no doubt several differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi. These were however, mainly due to their respective approaches and priorities to the problems the country and the people were confronted with. Ambedkar was primarily concerned with procuring the rights of the depressed classes in the framework of 'freedom movement' to ensure the rightful place of Dalits in free India. In no sense Ambedkar was opposed to the freedom struggle as it is evident from the above. As shown above Gandhi himself complimented Ambedkar for his role in the Independence movement. Gandhi says to Ambedkar, "from the reports that have reached me of your work at Round Table Conference, I know you are a patriot sterling worth" (Gadgil).

Ambedkar's top priorities were to launch struggles against high caste oppression and domination. Realising that unless Dalits aspirations got represented in the Parliament their conditions will not be improved. Accordingly, he called for separate constituencies for Untouchables on the line similar for Muslims. The McDonald 'Communal Award' was the outcome of this effort. Gandhi, on the other hand, on the premise that Untouchables are 'integral part' of Hindu society went on fast to oppose Ambedkar's demand. Realising the gravity of situation Ambedkar yielded and settled for 'reserved constituency' which was no answer to the needs perceived by him. But in order to save Gandhi's life he gave up his demand and signed the Poona Pact.

At no stage in the Freedom struggle did Ambedkar oppose Gandhi as far as the struggles launched by him were concerned. On the contrary as a measure

of cooperation he agreed to join Nehru's interim cabinet, and later his cabinet after independence. In the same vein he cooperated with Indian National Congress, Nehru's ministry, and undertook the responsibility as Chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution and in formulating the Hindu Code Bill.

In fact, to strengthen Gandhi's movement Dr. Ambedkar conceded many of his deeply held convictions. This is clear from the compromises he made on these and other contentious issues.

**MYTH :** *Ambedkar was sympathiser of British and collaborated with them for material gains.*

**FACT :** It is true that Ambedkar joined Viceroy's Council but he was very clear about his aim and purpose. All through he wanted to ensure that the depressed classes be pulled out from their social condition and in this direction he operated from the Viceroy's Council. After all Ambedkar was academically highly qualified person, with Ph.D and D.Sc. He was Professor in Siddharth College, Government Law College and also had a successful legal practice. He entered the arena of social and political struggles to enhance the agenda of Dalits. Monetarily he could have been much better off had he pursued his cosy pursuits as a professor or successful legal practitioner. Attempts of people like Shourie are desperate acts to tarnish his image and his teachings which are very much against the interests of the elite, upper class and upper castes. Shourie has concocted this charge based on some report of British officials who noted contradictory things about Indian leaders, at different times. As such they cannot form the sole basis of assessing such leaders. For instance whenever Gandhi withdrew his *satyagraha* colonial administration issued statements praising him!

Ambedkar was aware of the 'pro-Hindutva' slant of many an important Congress leaders. Realising that it was the main political force, he wanted to ensure the incorporation of checks and balances to promote the interests of Dalits. It was also in this light that he joined the Viceroy's Council. He was ensuring a democratic content to the freedom struggle by making it incorporate the interests of Dalits (Untouchables at that time). His concern of *Hindu Raj* being spearheaded by RSS, *Hindu Mahasabha* and a certain Congress leadership was farsighted. Thus, Ambedkar's contribution in the liberation from clutches of colonial powers operated at social level. At a political level he made sure to use the existing channels of power-relationships, including the Viceroy's Council and simultaneously fighting against the pro-upper-



caste bias of Congress. His disagreement with broad Congress pronouncement 'first political freedom then social justice', is so much rich in meaning for the oppressed classes. But, these policies were misrepresented by many as 'collusion with British'.

**MYTH:** *Ambedkar and ideologues of Hindu Rasbtra (RSS and Hindu Mahasabha) had similar goals vis-a-vis problems of Dalits.*

**FACT :** Currently, a big attempt is on by different wings of Sangh Parivar to woo dalits to their side for electoral purposes. They have adopted Ambedkar as one of the major leaders of Hindus, they initiated campangins like 'Ram Khichdi' (interdining) also lie that Ambedkar and their views on the question of untouchability were similar. Though some of Hindu ideologues recognised the atrocities of untouchability their approach was half hearted, inadequate and nowhere close to Ambedkar's. Ambedkar had initiated radical movements for social reform by leading the *Chavdar Talab, Kalaram Temple and Manusmriti dahan* agitations. None of the upper caste outfits supported these movements though they mildly tried to support temple entry. That though some of the ideologues of Hindu Right were paying lip sympathy to abolition of caste system, most of the social supporters of RSS and Hindu Mahasabha (Brahmin, Bania, Landlords) opposed these movements in villages and towns. And it is precisely at this time that the major Hindu ideologue, *Guruji M.S. Golwalkar*, in this book 'Bunch of Thoughts' eulogised Brahminism and *Manu*. As per him the world should learn wisdom at the feet of Brahmins, who are the chosen ones for the world mission and that *Manu* the greatest 'Law giver of mankind', his laws were true not only for his times but for all times. But note the contradiction. Ambedkar is burning *manusmriti*, Golwalkar is praising *Manu*, and his social and ideological descendents in a massive attempt at falsification assert that their's and Ambedkar's goals were similar ones! Further, on notes that the Hindu Right has a duplicitous stand on the Dalit issue. On the face of it, for electoral purposes, they support Dalit demands but at a another level they



either deflect the issue or undermine the same by other manoevers. Reservation for jobs and educational facilities is one such issue. Again, they do not appose it but through 'word-of-mouth campaign' they denigrate reservations and its beneficiaries. Similarly in a Catch 22 situation, on Mandal Commission implementation, which they could not oppose for electoral purposes, they 'cleverly' deflected the whole issue by intensifying the pitch of *Ramjanmbhumi* campaign leading to demolition of *Babri Masjid*. Again while they have iconised Ambedkar, the states where their governments rule they initiate anti-Dalit and anti-poor policies.

On coming to power, the *Hindutva*-alliance Government of Maharashtra, the *BJP - Shiv Sena* withdraw cases lodged under 1989 SC/ST Anti-Atrocity Act during the agitation over the renaming of Marathwada University after Ambedkar, was their first step to undermine the morale of Dalits". (Guru: 1997 : 1879). Guru further points out, 'After coming to power of the Sena BJP Govertment its supporters.at all levels of power structure have become culturally arrogant and intolerant. For example, in March



1997, at Shrirampur in Ahmednagar district supporters of the ruling coalition threw color on even those who refused to participate in *Holi* festival, two Dalits lost their lives in police firing over the issue of desecration of Ambedkar's statue there a few months ago".

Ambedkar stood for winning of self respect and social rights of Dalits while the Hindu right stands for subjugating the Dalits. Ambedkar struggled against the caste system, upper caste practices and *Manusmriti*, the Hindu Right pays lip support to caste eradication and reverses the *Gurus* and leaders upholding the patriarchal, caste supporting ideologies.

**MYTH :** *Contrary to the current fashion Ambedkar did not perform any significant role in drafting the Constitution but merely piloted it.*

**FACT:** This hollow claim is a display of total ignorance apart from being a tendentious manoeuvre to downplay his contribution to the nationalist cause. It fails to note that the draft Constitution was a text for the drafting committee to work upon. The Constitutional Assembly Debates (C.A.Debates, Vol.V.pg.309) clearly notes that this drafting committee's task was to "...scrutinise the draft of the text of the Constitution...prepared by Constitutional Advisor giving effect to the decisions taken already in the Assembly...and to submit to the Assembly consideration the text of the Draft Constitution as revised by the Committee".

The C.A. Debates also clearly reveal how Dr. Ambedkar as Chairperson of the Drafting Committee was sought after for his opinions on various issues in the Assembly and the motion was not adopted until he consented; how every time the President of the Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, looked to Ambedkar for expertise and guidance on the different issues being discussed and voted on in the Assembly and did not proceed any further until he had had the matter cleared by Ambedkar; and how Ambedkar efficiently responded to the trust reposed in him by the Assembly. These debates also show speaker after speaker made glowing tributes to Ambedkar during the period November 19 to 25 for the extraordinary effort he made in framing the Constitution.

While working on the drafting of Constitution, Ambedkar ensured the incorporation of "dearest principles of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity as binding principles to be observed by all citizens. Besides making untouchability as an unlawful Act punishable by law, he also provided

number of provisions in the Constitution for protection, welfare and development of Scheduled Castes, Tribes, Other Backward Classes or Communities, Women etc" (Ram, 1995 : 70).

It is on record that speaker after speaker made glowing tributes to Ambedkar in the Assembly during the crucial period November 19 to 25 for the outstanding effort he had put in to the framing of the Constitution. According to Dr. K.M. Munshi, Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to the evolution and drafting of the Constitution was the most constructive aspect of his life, no less than his advocacy of the poor. According to Nehru, Ambedkar was an 'illustrious architect of our constitution' (Gadgil, 1997 : 33). In a similar vein Mr. H. Hanumanthappa, Chairman of National Commission for SCs and STs points out, "There were seven members in the drafting committee, including Ambedkar. Two members were badly ill, one was out of India for a prolonged period and other was indifferent. It was Ambedkar alone who prepared the draft. Eminent persons like Pandit Nehru and Rajendra Prasad paid glowing tributes to Ambedkar for his exemplary work" (Arun, 1997).

On December 6, 1956, the day Dr. Ambedkar died Prime Minister Nehru stated in Parliament, "...We in Parliament do remember him...particularly for the very prominent part he played in the making of our Constitution, and perhaps that fact will be remembered even longer than his other activities. He is often spoken of as one of the architects of our Constitution. There is no doubt about that. No one took greater care and trouble over Constitution making than Dr. Ambedkar".

**MYTH :** *Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a mere act of opportunism, a "political stunt" guided by material considerations.*

**FACT :** On the contrary! Dr. Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism (October 14, 1956) was not only a conscious effort to lay down a way his people could follow after his death. It had nothing to do with the teaching and life of Buddha as such. There is not the slightest trace of any inner-directed search in Ambedkar (Gadgil : *ibid*).

Dr. Ambedkar's interest in Buddhism began when a Bombay teacher, K.A. Keluskar, presented him a copy of the life of Buddha in 1908. In the 1920s he corresponded with *Maharshi* Shinde for his interest in Buddhism. In 1934 the house in the largely Brahman Hindu colony in Dadar, Mumbai, was named Rajgriha, after the ancient city of the Buddhist kings. The first of the colleges established by his People's Education Society, was called

Siddharta, Buddha's personal name. In 1948 he re-published *The Essence of Buddhism*. The same year he published his own book, "The Untouchables", stating that the Untouchables had been Buddhists, degraded and banished from the villages because they had held fast to their Buddhism when others had re-converted to Brahmanism. As early as 1951 he prodded his followers to convert to Buddhism, and that he began writing the "The Buddha and His Dhamma", a secular, rational, social interpretation of Buddhism, which he felt was needed to bring Buddhism to the masses.

His conversion was not a "political stunt" as it makes very little political sense! It was not entirely correlated with his political life. It was instead a unifying force for the *Mahars*; a corollary to the RPI then being established, an effort to weld the SCs, STs and BCs into a power political group.

In short, the 'raison d'être' of his conversion were two-fold: the rejection of Hinduism and in consequence the status of untouchability; and the establishment of a religion which would serve as a bulwark against communism and to which all Indians could eventually turn, according to Zelliot.

-- P. R. Ram  
(Part -- II forthcoming)

### ARISE!

*You 'Untouchables', Brothers and Patriots true,  
Arise and awake to your history. Organize!  
You Proletarians true  
You have nothing but chains to loose  
Rise in revolt!  
Nothing will come from reforms slow,  
Revolutionise social order,  
Rebel and unleash upheavals,  
liberation is your goal!  
Arise!  
Nation's real force and foundation  
You sleeping lions,  
Arise and revolt.*

- Bhagat Singh

*Facts Against Myths is a monthly bulletin of factual information on a number of development myths and fallacies, etc, including information against disinformation campaigns, propaganda and canards spread by communal and fundamentalist forces.*

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