

Sixth Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture

AMBEDKAR ABROAD

Delivered by
ELEANOR ZELLIOT
Northfield, Minnesota, USA



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PREFACE

There runs a general impression especially among the upper caste and class intelligentsia about Dr. Ambedkar that he was highly westernized and had little knowledge about the social realities prevailed in the contemporary period. Such impression is anchored in three, rather, four misgivings related to Ambedkar and his articulation of the Indian social reality *vis-à-vis* social realities of the west prevailed during his lifetime. One, since he was educated in the western educational institutions wherein he not only got opportunities of breathing in a relatively free atmosphere and interacting with the scholars of high repute but also became well-aware of the ethos of social structure as well as relationships between man (including woman) and his society, he was insistent of instilling of western norms and values, and even institutions in the Indian society. Such misgiving is completely baseless as he looked at both the positive and negative aspects of norms and values of the western societies and advocated for adoption of the former one provided these comensurated with the basic values of the Indian society—not of the Hindu social system.

Two, before and after Ambedkar, quite a few scholars visited and studied in the western educational institutions. They were either completely opposed to or had fully endorsed the introduction of the western norms and values in the contemporary Indian society which was, in any case, to become modernized, scientifically and technologically developed, and industrially advance society similar to the western societies. In other words, the western path of modernization and development was to be followed, in their opinion, by India if it wanted to become a modern and developed society in the

4 *Ambedkar Abroad*

world. Those who were completely opposed to such path of modernization and development of Indian society adhered to continuation of the dynamic aspect of Indian tradition, including its civilisational and philosophical moorings, to cope up with the required magnitude and pace of change in it. Ambedkar, on his part, was in favour of evolving a new society or social order in India which was to be based on equality, liberty and fraternity or democracy. For him, the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity were not exclusively rooted in the western philosophical orientation but more so in the Indian civilisational tradition particularly in the Buddhism.

The third misgiving is about Ambedkar's allegiance to the western ideology and its adoption in constitution-making as well as visioning of a new social order to be evolved in future India. It is true that during the period of his achieving higher education in the western educational institutions and also through his independent readings about the European, American and other societies of the world, Ambedkar was greatly fascinated by their ideological orientation as well as their adoption of changes therein over a period of time. But he was much aware and conscious of the ideational moorings of the ancient Indian society. This is, however, not to be taken as if he wanted the contemporary Indian society to follow the traditional ideals; instead, he had identified the universal values of equality, liberty and fraternity, and in a word, social justice—having their roots in the ancient Indian social and cultural practices as well as philosophical traditions—to be adopted as bases for a new society to emerge in India.

Lastly, Ambedkar is said to be highly westernised in his dress appearance. It is true that Ambedkar always put on suit, tie and shoes like a westerner and not of a common man. This may be due to his exposure to the western dress code or pattern. Those who criticize him on this ground simply forget three points here: one, Ambedkar fought, throughout his life, for the liberation of the common man who also happened to be a Dalit—a marginalized one; two, through his own dress-pattern he inspired the millions of Dalits to come forward and strive for better living standard against their being timid and subjugated; and three, his own dress-pattern was a symbol of revolt against the hegemony of the upper castes and classes for better, or rather, westernized dress pattern. In fact, such

dress pattern is no more treated a westernized one but is well accepted by people of the middle class across the various castes and communities especially in urban areas.

The Sixth Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture was delivered, on 28 November 2002, by Dr. Eleanor Zelliott, Professor Emeritus, Northfield Minnesota, U.S.A. The lecture titled *Ambedkar Abroad* covers a wide-ranging issues such as his ideas about birth control, his interpretation of Buddhism, his role in making of Indian Constitution, the Hindu Code Bill, etc. The author has justifiably explained the themes of her lecture by referring to three types of linkages of Ambedkar with the western societies, including the societies of the European continent. One, his achieving education in the western universities and educational institutions; two, his referring to western sources – source-materials, including examples, to analyse the issues at home; and three, his thoughts and philosophy being disseminated among the western scholars as well as being translated into action by the policy-makers and implementers and also by the activists in the west. Accepting the frame of reference of the lecture as it exists, two points may be mentioned briefly here. One, while quoting the western references to explain the issues at home, Ambedkar was not only well aware of the indigenous sources or source-materials on these issues but also their spatial and temporal existence as well as the solutions suggested or sought therein. Two, his link with the western world, especially through the third channel – his thoughts and philosophy being disseminated, advocated and adopted in the west, is relatively weak, as has also been accepted by the author, in spite of the multiple efforts made by the Indian Dalits. This may broadly be attributed to the weak bargaining power of the Indian Dalits both at home and abroad and not to the theoretical and empirical strength of the thoughts and philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar. Anyway, the text of the lecture, though published lately, is an interesting reading and, I am sure, it would broaden the understanding of the readers of Ambedkar and the Dalit issues in modern India.

November 26, 2004
New Delhi

Nandu Ram
Dr. Ambedkar Chair
Professor of Sociology

AMBEDKAR ABROAD

Eleanor Zelliot

My title is meant to reflect four things. First, I have used simply the last name of Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. This is not meant to denigrate him in any way, or to be impolite; it is to honour that name as an institution, much in the same way that we say Lincoln, or Kennedy, or Churchill—or indeed Nehru or Gandhi. The very name calls up ideas and images and signifies a unique importance. Ambedkar himself despised “manus bhakti” or “vyakti puja”. Looking at his ideas as significant and important is a tribute to him as human being, not a divine figure.

Then I want to talk about the way in which Dr. Ambedkar used the example of the West to cast light on Indian problems. He was not a “Westernizer”. He did not want India to imitate the West in any way, except in the broad and universal usage of the concept of “democracy”. But his knowledge of the ways of the world was vast, and he brought that knowledge to bear on Indian problems to illumine them, to present ways in which the world had handled difficulties.

The next area of my talk is very new. Dr. Ambedkar and his movement have become a subject of greater interest in the West now than ever before. Some of the scholarship arising in the west, especially in the U.S., offers different interpretations and different approaches than does earlier work. Dr. Ambedkar’s image has not yet penetrated the popular

American mind (in spite of my thirty years of teaching!) but it has become a challenge to the scholarly mind, and there will be even more fruit from that challenge than I have documented here.

And last, a note on Ambedkar and America, especially his experiences in my country.

Ambedkar and the Example of the West

More than any other national leader, Ambedkar used events and situations in the Western world as points of reference to illumine Indian problems. His reference to the West was very different from that of Gandhi or Nehru. Gandhi said, when asked what he thought of Western civilization, "It would be a good idea", but he clearly was heavily influenced by Tolstoy and Thoreau although certainly not by his English law training. Nehru was cut in the pattern of a Fabian Socialist after his British education. Ambedkar, in contrast, seemed not to be influenced by the West in his work to bring about equality in India, except to honor the pragmatism of John Dewey, and to believe unrepentantly in democracy. His understanding of Western thought, however, was many faceted and he used it to illumine Indian problems.

Birth Control

An interesting example is in a debate on birth-control in the Bombay Legislative Assembly on 10th November 1938. I owe my knowledge in this field to Professor Mangudkar of Pune. An unofficial resolution recommending to the Government that an intensive propaganda in favor (favour) of birth-control "among the masses of this province (Bombay)" and adequate facilities "for the practice of birth-control" was presented to the Legislative Assembly by P.J. Roham, a member of Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party.¹ In the following speech by Roham, which he stated was written by Ambedkar, the evil consequences of over-population and poverty are demonstrated by reference to Germany where "On the average every family gets one room....Seventy-five thousand families had no tenements of their own in Berlin in

1925. The result is that children sleep with the adults not only in the same room but also in the same bed. Many children lose their lives by the overcrowding in unsanitary conditions". The quotation goes on to detail the sexual and social problems that arise from overcrowding.²

The rest of the speech refers to Indian problems, notes the difficulty of celibacy as a way of limiting births, ranks European countries by birth-rate, finds that over-population is at the root of most modern wars and, in a very sophisticated way, presents the need for each country to maintain its population at the rate it can feed and support each child. The argument is made that neither emigration nor agricultural development is a satisfactory and permanent solution. It is a passionate speech, and the references range far and wide, from Hitler's push for more children "for cannon fodder" to the dead bodies of little infants in Shanghai to the happy conditions of Holland. In spite of the eloquence of several members of the Independent Labour Party and an amendment by Jamnadas Mehta to the effect that birth control centers should be opened at major Bombay province's cities, the resolution did not pass.

This little known effort by Dr. Ambedkar to secure a commitment to birth control illustrates his wide knowledge of the conditions of the rest of the world. The Germany references are especially interesting because Ambedkar studied at Bonn sometime during his pursuit of a DDS at the London School of Economics and the passing of the bar at Grey's Inn. But as far as I know, there is no other indication that he knew and was troubled by German conditions in the mid-1920's.

The purpose of all this erudition is, it seems to me, to illustrate that over-population was a world-wide problem which some European countries had conquered, and that it was so very serious that India should begin to take some steps to slow its growth. The way in which some Western countries had lowered their birth rate is not discussed, but the horrifying consequences in both the West and the East are graphically displayed and the suggestion that clinics be attached to

hospitals in India is made forcefully. The main purpose is to pressure the Legislature to pressure the Government to take the problem seriously. But as in the case of most of Ambedkar's efforts in the Bombay Legislative Assembly in the 1930's, no one listened.

Buddhism—A Religion Honored by the West but Wholly Indian

A second example of the way in which Ambedkar used Western thinking occurs in the book which he wrote toward the end of his life, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, published in 1957, the year after his death by Siddharth College and the People's Education Society, institutions he founded. There is, I feel, no western influence in the actual text. True, it is exceptionally rational, with all mythical elements expunged, but rationality is not a preserve of the West, nor is the humanism and compassion which are stressed. There seemed to be three influences on Ambedkar's chief religious work, and they are all Indian: the Pali texts; the book, *The Essence of Buddhism* by Lakshmi Narasu; and the Marathi study by Dharmanand Kosambi, *Bhagwan Buddha*.³

The Western references come in the very last section, "Tributes to the Buddha's Greatness". Two Indians are quoted, S.S. Raghavachar and Ranjan Roy, but the real praise for the Buddha comes from R.J. Jackson, Winwood Reade, E.G. Taylor, Leslie Bolton, Dwight Goddard, E.J. Mills and W.T. Stace. And following those tributes and "A Vow to Spread His Dhamma" and "A Prayer for His Return to His Native Land" credited to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. X: 168 and 169. Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism was uniquely his own, but his hope that all India would respond to the humanity and equality taught by the Buddha was undergirded by Western praise.

It must be added that Ambedkar read widely in Buddhist studies. The names listed above indicate that he probably bought and read the books of those authors. In the 1950's, he was working on a Pali dictionary and reading for his major opus on the Buddha. He ordered books from London through

V.B. Kadam, a student there from Maharashtra, and among his orders are 12 books on Pali Grammar, "Miss Horner's book on Arhant", T.R.V. Murti's *Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. A.C. Bouquet's *Comparative Religion*, Christmas Humphery's *Studies on the Middle Way and Concentration and Meditation*, and Paul Dhalke's *Essays on Buddhism*.⁴

We might ask, why all this reading in Western sources? Ambedkar had a passion for learning, that is basic. And it seems that understanding from all quarters was essential to his sense of grasping the essence of something so that even though he wanted to make his own interpretation from original sources, he also wanted to read what others had thought.

Ambedkar and The Constitution

A much more likely area in which Ambedkar's western education at Columbia, the London School of Economics and Grey's Inn would come to the surface is in his work on the Indian Constitution and the Hindu Law Code. As Minister for Law in Nehru's cabinet, he was the Chair of the Drafting Committee for the Constitution and, hence, guided it through the Constituent Assembly. Later, he served to attempt to get the Hindu Law Code passed by Parliament. In the first area, there are many references to the rest of the world; in the second, there are a few, but the main reference to equality, fraternity and justice are to the Constitution so recently created in India.

Ambedkar did not serve on the Committee which scoured the world to find wisdom in various nations' constitutions, and under the guidance of B.N. Rau, prepared a draft containing provisions chiefly modified from America and British constitutions and the Indian Constitution of 1935.⁵

Ambedkar's comments on the Constituent Assembly on May 6, 1945, before that body was formed, were in a speech given to the All India Scheduled Castes Federation. It is clear that he spoke for a broader audience as well as to the Scheduled Castes. And it is interesting that at that time the future "Architect of the Constitution"⁶ was "wholly opposed

to the proposals of a Constituent Assembly... which may involve this country in a Civil War." His reason was that "much of the Constitution has already been written out in the Government of India Act, 1935... The only function which could be left to a Constituent Assembly is to find a solution of the Communal Problem" (p. 361). And here he refers to two western events: "Indians are not in the same position as the Fathers of the American Constitution were when they framed the Constitution of the United States. They had to evolve ideas suitable for the constitution for a free people...[now] constitutional ideas and constitutional forms are ready at hand" (p. 360). The second reference is to the history of the Union between Scotland and England. "I was shocked at the corruption and bribery that was practiced to win the consent of the Scottish Parliament...The chances of corruption and bribery being used in the Indian Constituent Assembly to buy over members to support decisions desired by interested groups are very real" (p. 365). A third reference is to the description of Germany in 1867 as a confederation of "Divinely Ordained Confusion", a description which Ambedkar applied to India (p. 378). (Note the sophistication with which he addressed the Scheduled Caste audience!).

On the 17th of December, 1945, Ambedkar spoke in the Constituent Assembly as an elected member from Bengal, a seat he sought, he said, in order to protect the rights of the Scheduled Castes. He spoke to the Resolution embodying the Objectives of the Constitution, revealing his debt to the study of the French Revolution: "When one reads that part of the Resolution [guarantee of rights, safeguard of integrity of Republic], it reminds one of the Declaration of the Rights of Man which was pronounced by the French Constituent Assembly. I think I am right in suggesting that, after the lapse of practically 450 years, the Declaration of the Rights of man and the principles which are embodied in it has become part and parcel of our mental make-up. I say they have become not only the part and parcel of the mental make-up of modern man in every civilised part of the world, but also in our own country which is so orthodox, archaic in its thought and its

12. Ambedkar Abroad

social structure, hardly anyone can be found to deny its validity... These principles have become the silent immaculate premise in our outlook."⁸

At the end of his speech, in the context of the Hindu-Muslim problem and the idea of forcing the Muslims into the new nation, Ambedkar read a passage from Burke's great speech on Conciliation with America. Which might have some effect on the temper of this House. The British People, as you know, were trying to conquer the rebellious colonies of the United States and bring them under their subjugation contrary to their wishes. In repelling this idea of conquering the colonies this is what Bruke said:

The use of force alone is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment, but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again, and a nation is not governed which is perpetually to be conquered... A further objection to force is, that you impair the object by your very endeavors to preserve it. The thing you fought for is not the thing which you recover, but depreciated, sunk, wasted and consumed in the contest...⁹

Ambedkar was elected Chairman by the Drafting Committee on August 30, 1947. The draft Constitution then came up before the Constituent Assembly for discussion on 4th November 1948. In his first address, Ambedkar explained the difference between the Presidential system of Government prevalent in America and the Parliamentary system in the Draft Constitution in which the President is the head of the state but not of the executive. In making the contrast Ambedkar explains why the Ministers are members of the Parliament when the American secretaries, because of the separation of the Executive and the Legislature, are not members of Congress (50-51). The British system in which the executive is dependent upon a majority in Parliament provides for a "daily assessment of responsibility which is not available under the American system [and is] far more effective than the periodic assessment and far more necessary in a country like India."¹⁰ He points out that the differences between the Indian and the American constitutions are more fundamental and glaring than the similarities. The dual citizenship in the USA, the nation and

the state, is assuaged by the fourteenth amendment which prohibits the States from taking away the rights of a citizen. Ambedkar quotes William Anderson on the ways in which States may and do discriminate in favour of their own citizens (53). All this reference to the U.S. was, I think, in the interests that India needed a stronger center than did that country.

"It is said that there is nothing new in the Draft Constitution, that about half of it has been copied from the Government of India Act of 1935 and that the rest of it has been borrowed from the Constitutions of other countries... One likes to ask whether there can be anything new in a Constitution framed at this hour in the history of the world... The only new things... in a Constitution framed so late in the day are the variations made to remove the faults and to accommodate it to the needs of the country...I have shown what is new in the Draft Constitution and I am sure that those who have studied other Constitutions...will agree that the Drafting Committee...has not been guilty of such blind and slavish imitation as it is represented to be."¹¹

The way in which Ambedkar referred to history is shown clearly in his argument that minorities must be safeguarded. "Minorities are an explosive force which, if it erupts, can blow up the whole fabric of the State. The history of Europe bears ample and appalling testimony to this fact...minorities in India have agreed to place their existence in the hands of the majority. In the history of negotiations for preventing the partition of Ireland, Redmond said to Carson 'ask for any safeguard you like for the Protestant minority but let us have a United Ireland'. Carson's reply was "Damn your safeguards, we don't want to be ruled by you". No minority in India has taken this stand."¹²

Ambedkar also referred to the American Supreme Court, the fundamental rights in the American Constitution, and the provisions for amendment in the Australian Constitution—all of these constitutional elements adopted by India. He argued for nationalisation of the land in his first speech at the Constituent Assembly, before he was made Law Minister, but this is more a response to the land hunger of Dalits and to

their rural exploitation than an imitation of Soviet policy, I think. And on this issue, he did not win. When he saw that nationalisation of land was not the will of the majority as he chaired the Constitution debates, he bent to the dictates of democracy and said that the solution to the land problem would have to be evolved.

Ambedkar and the Hindu Code Bill

The ways in which Ambedkar referred to the West, noted the history of the West, and extracted from western (and sometimes other parts of the world) example justifying something to be done in India are best illustrated by his participation in two great debates in the Constituent Assembly over the Hindu Code Bill. However, even here, it is clear that Ambedkar is not a Westerniser but an Indian concerned for the best for his country as it was.

Ambedkar believed passionately in the importance of the Hindu Code Bill, which was basically about the rights of women, and here he did not bend on his basic principles in the debate. The foreward of the volume on the Code Bill discussion quotes him:

No law passed by the Indian Legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it (Hindu Code) in point of its significance. To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of Hindu society, untouched and to go on passing legislation relating the economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap. This is the significance I attached to the Hindu Code.

It was partly the failure of the Code Bill to be passed by Parliament that caused Ambedkar's resignation as Law Minister in 1951.

Most of Ambedkar's arguments and explanations in the Hindu Code discussion refer to matters totally India: Mitakshara Law, Dayabhaga Law, Krithrim adoption, Godha adoption, Dwaimushayan adoption, shastras and smritis, Marumakkathayam and the Aliyasanthanam law, Kautilya's Arthashastra, Yagnavalkya, Manu, Narad, the Muslim system

of inheritance, the Parsi system of inheritance, etc. His command of these sources, as well as similar command among a few of the other participants in the Assembly, seems extraordinary. References to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, however, are more prevalent. And it must be said that the debates are extraordinarily contentious, with Ambedkar often on the receiving end of harsh criticism and answering in short sharp rebuttals. Some comments (not Ambedkar's) are snide, some almost libelous.

The first intrusion of the west in Ambedkar's comments comes during the discussion of inheritance. Ambedkar notes that the Committee also examined the British system of inheritance, and he adds: "Nowhere could we find any case where a daughter was excluded from a share. There is no system anywhere in the world where a daughter has been excluded" (p. 282).

Shortly after this is another example of Ambedkar's reference to his broad reading in Western matters. In trying to show that the giving of a share to the daughter upon the death of the father is not a revolutionary or even a radical measure. He noted that the Rau Committee which formulated the proposal included conservatives. And then his rationale for change was this:

The great political philosopher Edmund Burke who wrote a big book against the French revolution because of its radicalism and revolutionism did not forget to tell his own countrymen who were very conservative, one very important truth. He said that those who want to conserve must be ready to repair and all I am asking of this house is this: that if you want to maintain the Hindu system, the Hindu culture, the Hindu society, do not hesitate to repair where repair is necessary. This Bill asks for nothing more than repairing those parts of the Hindu system which are almost become dilapidated.

Ambedkar was immediately challenged by H.V. Kamath, a frequent challenger, to bring some citations from the Smritis on the matter, and the smriti's pros and cons were batted back and forth during most of the discussion. Ambedkar did not answer directly.

Dr. Ambedkar was certainly not the only learned student of the World. Various members referred to many other cultures in the course of the debate: to Britain, Germany, the Soviet system, China (p. 916), the Shintoism of Japan (p. 974), Americans watching the progressive nature of the Indian people and 26 American states not allowing marriage between Americans and Negroes, Roman Catholic religious laws against divorce (p. 990-1), Hitler forcing social reform (Deshmukh, p. 1020), the battle of Ohad as responsible for Muslims' being allowed to have four wives (p. 1054), Max Muller's praise of the shastras (p. 1058); an increase in the number of illegitimate children when adult males going to war created an excessive number of women left behind (1272); and many other non-Indian things. These references were probably more prevalent to other cultures used by Ambedkar.

Ambedkar was accused of being western. Shri Biswanath Das complained: "But the Law Minister is bringing contractual relations, thereby doing away with the sanctity of marriages enjoined by *samskara*. He [Ambedkar] is introducing contractual relationship of the Western type into our society and enforcing it in all its rigidity by means of registration" (p. 924).

Many members extolled the longevity of Indian custom, but Ambedkar acknowledged the survival of Hindu society (as against Greek, Roman, Egyptian) and asked if it was all good:

"It has been contended that today all that we know about the Roman Society or the Greek Society or the Egyptian Society is their history; they no longer exist; they have disappeared. The only ancient society which has survived is the Hindu Society and if the Hindu Society which has survived while all other ancient societies have disappeared, then its laws, its social structure, its principles must be good...[but] I think we ought to consider this question on what plane has the Hindu Society survived...[we] have been from time to time subjugated, vanquished and enslaved...[and] has the Hindu society changed its structure as a result of the absorption of the doctrine of their opponents [answering the argument of Dr. S.P. Mookherjee]?... Whatever else Hindu society may adopt, it will never give up its

social structure for the enslavement of the *Sudra* and the enslavement of women. It is for this reason that law must now come to their rescue in order that society may move on" (pp. 1158-60). And later, Hindu society has deteriorated in terms of caste and class and the status of women.

He answered the argument that the assembly "is proceeding in a kind of imitation of the western nations. It is said that because the western nations have monogamy, because the western nations have divorce or because the Chinese are trying to do something along that direction, we, in order to put ourselves in the good books of the world at large, are trying to do something along the lines which they have been doing with these words. My ideals are derived from the Constitution that we have laid down. The preamble of the Constitution speaks of liberty, equality and fraternity. We are therefore bound to examine every social institution that exists in the country and see whether it satisfies the principles laid down in the Constitution". And then he goes on to say that the Sacramental ideal of marriage so praised by critics of the Hindu Code Bill can be described as "polygamy for the men and perpetual slavery for the women" (p. 1161).

Ambedkar added: "If you mean to give liberty...then you cannot allow this institution [of sacramental marriage] to stand as it is. That is the reason why we are proceeding with this Bill and not because we want to imitate any other people or we want to go in for our ancient ideals which are, to my judgment, most archaic and impossible for anyone to practice" (p. 1162).

Regarding the request for similar laws for Hindus and Muslims, Ambedkar said:

"All through the history of Europe there has been a great contest between the Church and the State. The State has said that it will not interfere in religion and that the State is supreme over the Church. The Church, on the other hand, has said that the State is subordinate to the Church, it is only when the Church permits that the State can enact... We adopted a middle course; ...while we will permit people to practise and to profess their religion and, incidentally, to have their personal law because the personal

law is so imbedded in their religion, yet the State has retained all along the article 25. the right to interfere in the personal law of any community in this country... (p 1160). I think it would be not only unwise but a most tyrannical piece of political action to subject the Muslim community to any such provision (monogamy) without their being consulted beforehand.... the reason why [we did not consult beforehand] was because some communities like the Hindu community needed the reform so badly—it was a slum clearance" (p. 1168).

It will be noted that Ambedkar was not above combining calm reason with strong criticism of Hindu custom. He credits the longevity of custom with a lack of governmental reform: "The principle reason why custom has been allowed to govern the life of the people in this country and in a manner much more rigorous than is to be found in any other part of the world... (interrupted here) but clearly means because India had no Parliament" (p. 1306).

The critics won. The Hindu Code Bill would not pass. Ambedkar resigned on 27th of September 1951. Parliament was still in session on the Hindu Code Bill. In Ambedkar's resignation statement, he regretted that India did not side more firmly with the democracies in its foreign policy.

New Interest in Dr. Ambedkar and the Ambedkar Movement in the West

The first part of my talk may be somewhat controversial, but I hope I have made my main point that Dr. Ambedkar was not a Westernizer but a man of immense learning who was totally involved in the creation of equality and humanity in his beloved India. In this second part, I want to bring to your attention some of the developments in the United States and in Europe which indicate greater knowledge and new interest in the thinking of Dr. Ambedkar and in the Ambedkar movement. First, let me say that much of this new attention and new scholarship rests on the monumental work of the late Vasant Moon. The republication of Dr. Ambedkar's writings and speeches in twenty volumes, seventeen of them published, collected and edited by Moon under the orders of the Government of Maharashtra has proved invaluable.¹³

And it is fitting that the first Dalit autobiography to be published in English in the west is Vasant Moon's autobiography, titled *Vasti* in Marathi. It has been published in the U.S. as *Growing Up Untouchable*, translated by Gail Omvedt.¹⁴ (I will always be grateful that we were able to honour Moon with the Indian edition of this translation in a ceremony in Mumbai just before his death in the spring of this year). Another sign of an American interest in Dalit literature, which we hope will spread, is the inclusion of Datta Bhagat's play, *Routes and Escape-Routes* in a volume of modern plays from India.¹⁵

There are several Westerners who have edited valuable studies that include material on the Ambedkar movement such as Peter Robb of England and Simon Charsley of Scotland, and perhaps I can make an honorary Westerner for the moment of Hiroyuki Kotani of Japan. Johannes Beltz of Zurich's own work on the Buddhist movement of Dr. Ambedkar has not yet appeared in English, nor the volume on Ambedkarian Buddhism he is editing with Surender Jondhale. The work of all these editors and scholars is published or will be published in India. Now, I want to bring to your attention scholarship by Western scholars or Indian scholars living permanently in the West which breaks new ground. Before I do, I must tell you the story of Homi Bhabha, now at Harvard, one of the chief proponents of the new literary criticism which is highly complex and theoretical. He got in touch with me when he was working on a study of Dr. Ambedkar and the early American Black scholar, W.E.B. DuBois, which he has not yet published. So when I found I was to lecture to a group which contained fans of Bhabha, I phoned him and asked him to tell me in a simple sentence, avoiding complex theory, what was important to him about Dr. Ambedkar, and he said something like, "Ambedkar's knowledge of the world". And that was the beginning of my current train of thought.

Another complex theoretician, Gauri Viswanathan of Dr. Ambedkar's own University, the University of Columbia, has won awards with her *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*.¹⁶ She discusses Annie Besant, Pandita Ramabai, John

Henry Newman (an Englishman who converted to Catholicism), and in a chapter called "Conversion to Equality", the conversion of B.R. Ambedkar to Buddhism. She summarizes her book this way: "The book as a whole establishes the need to historicize conversion not only as a spiritual but also a political activity, the narrativization of which crucially elucidated the momentous transitions to secular societies" (p. xvii of the Preface). In a simpler phrase, she notes that "In much the same way that John Henry Newman turned to pre-Reformation Catholicism to recover the foundational structure of Englishness, Ambedkar turned to an originating moment in Indian history—the spread of Buddhism—to reclaim a redemptive cultural identity not only for dalits but for all Indians" (p. 232).

An American scholar at Harvard, Christopher Queen, has done more than anyone else to bring a sympathetic account of Ambedkar's Buddhism to a wide American audience. He has published in a popular Buddhist journal, he will bring out a book devoted entirely to the Buddhist movement; and in an edited volume on *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, he has included a chapter on "Dr. Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation".¹⁷ (As a historian and not a scholar of religion, I always have to look up "hermeneutics". Simply put, it means the science of interpretation). Queen discusses Ambedkar's decision to convert, his consideration of various religions, and the fact that Ambedkar then "set-off perhaps the largest mass religious conversion in the twentieth century" (p. 55). Queen notes all the ways in which Dr. Ambedkar departs from what might be called the Maha Bodhi Society's textbook interpretation. He notes that Dr. Ambedkar applied three criteria to the traditional interpretation of the Buddha's teachings: rationality, social benefit, and certainty. Queen is very clear on Ambedkar's rationale: "Ambedkar knew that the traditional presentation of the Four Truths—which blame the victims for their own suffering—would be offensive and unacceptable to people whose sufferings were caused by others' cruelty and a heartless social system" (p. 59). And

Queen introduces a new word for Ambedkarian Buddhism in this paragraph:

It may be said that to turn the wheel—the ancient Buddhist metaphor for preaching the Dharma—is to change the wheel; each rotation suggests a new “angle” on the truth. Over many centuries, Buddhist teachings have been worn, mended, and changed like ancient cartwheels; today some have been traded in for the rubber tires of the automobile. Yet, the function remains: to convey passengers to their destination. By assembling Ambedkar’s best-known teachings under the rubric of the traditional Four Noble Truths, one may discern the spokes and axles of a distinctive new vehicle. (The term *Navayana* or “new vehicle” has been proposed for Ambedkar’s new Buddhism...).

Queen goes on to note the truths more applicable to Untouchables: widespread suffering of injustice and poverty; the cultural institutions of oppression, greed, hatred, delusion; the third expressed by the European ideals of “liberty, equality and fraternity”; followed by Ambedkar’s slogan, “Educate! Agitate! Organize!” He ends his analysis with “Ambedkar’s construction of a socially engaged Buddhism was not, in the end, the discovery or the creation of a religious faith, but an act of religious faith...” (page 67). Dr. Ambedkar was not the only one to renew Buddhism. Included in the book are other, often equally radical, interpretations of Buddhism: the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order of Sangarakshita in its Indian incarnation, the TBMSG; the A.T. Ariyaratne movement in Sri Lanka, Buddhadasa Bhikku and Sulak Sivaraksha of Thailand, Buddhist Principles in the Tibetan Liberation Movement; the restoration of a nuns’ order; Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam, and the Soka Gakkai in Japan.

Another scholar who uses the term *Navayana Buddhism* is, Gary Tartakov, the art historian from Iowa State University. Tartakov has moved from a close study of Hindu temples to a position as being the only scholar who writes on Dalit Art and the art of the New Buddhists. Several studies are in process, but two have been published. His “Navayana Buddhists on the Public Stage”¹⁸ analyzes the images of Dr. Ambedkar in Tarodi Colony, Nagpur, at Mahimapur in Maharashtra, on the maidan

in Mumbai, and in the B.R. Ambedkar Foundation in New Delhi. He also discusses Viharas in Nagpur and Delhi, various Ambedkar portraits and Buddhist imagery in private homes in Mumbai and Agra. All his notes are illustrated with photographs. The text is in the context of the "Navayana community's struggle against internal colonization [as] a demonstration of how the decolonization process can be brought up short of full independence".

Tartakov has also looked at "New Paths to Sanchi"¹⁹, noting that, "When we consider Sanchi now, what we see is a palimpsest of one era overlapping another, a graphic record of the continual change brought about by the different varieties of Buddhists...all three of Buddhism's great historic courses are recorded in the surviving stone here: the Sharavakayana (Way of the Elders), the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana, now with a fourth—the new Buddhism or Navayana—only now beginning to emerge" (p. 113). In the article, Tartakov tells the story of Dr. Ambedkar's conversion and also the history of Sanchi, including photographs of Sanchi, of New Buddhist pilgrims at Sanchi, of the Chetiyagiri vihara built by the Maha Bodhi Society at Sanchi, the Triratna Vihara in Mumbai (with a photograph of Dr. Ambedkar as well as a portrait and an image of the Buddha, the October 14, 1956 *diksha* ceremony in Nagpur with a model of Sanchi on the platform, Brahmeshvar Wagh's statue of Dr. Ambedkar on the Maidan in Mumbai, and the Ambedkar Samadhi Memorial at Dadar Beach in Mumbai, the Chaitya Bhumi). He enters the mind of a Navayana Buddhist to imagine what he or she would see and do differently from other tourists in the contemplation of the great Sanchi monument.

A third interpreter of Ambedkar's Buddhism, with a new and fresh approach, is Meera Nanda whose book is published in India²⁰ but whose residence is in the US. After a discussion of current theoretical disdain for rationalism and the Enlightenment, she brings the thought of John Dewey into importance as the guiding principle behind the rational thought so important to India's Dalits. She very convincingly relates the thinking of Dr. Ambedkar to the philosophy of the great

democrat and educator of Columbia University, John Dewey, who was Ambedkar's teacher: Dewey's influence in China and Japan has been well documented; Meera Nanda makes clear that he also influenced India, and continues to influence India through the establishment of the "Deweyan Buddhism" of Dr. Ambedkar.

Two recent studies of the entire situation of India's Untouchables include Dr. Ambedkar but are also meant to be much more inclusive. From Australia comes *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*.²¹ Oliver Mendelsohn teaches in the School of Law and Legal Studies at La Trobe; Marika Vicziany is an Economist at Monash and Director of the National Centre for South Asian Studies, Melbourne. Their comprehensive study rests on these two essential disciplines, with religion the only area not thoroughly explored. From Belgium comes Robert Deliege's *The Untouchables of India*.²² Building on his anthropological experience in South India, Deliege through vast amounts of reading deals with the situation all over India and includes a chapter on "Dr. Ambedkar, Leader of the Untouchables". Both books are valuable studies of the situation and problems of Untouchables, much broader in scope than earlier works, but without the innovative theorizing of Viswanathan, Queen, Tartakov and Nanda.

Deliege is a member of an influential group of scholars who write in French on India's social and political situation, chief among them, Christopher Jaffrelot, who is a student of the political parties of the North. His biography of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar exists in French, but not yet published in English. Another writer in French is Oscar Herrenschmitt, who tackles the idea of a sociology that is non-Brahmanical in its foundation and approach and who has become fascinated with the thought of Dr. Ambedkar.²³

One more note. There is a publication on Dalits in the U.S., the *Dalit International Newsletter*, now in its 7th year. Published three times a year and circulating widely in the U.S. and Europe, it contains a wide variety of articles, mostly by Indians and most of those on the contemporary matters. It

represents a new and long lasting awareness of Ambedkar and of Dalit's social and political problems and progress.²⁴

Ambedkar and America

The Coda to my lecture is a note on Dr. Ambedkar in America. I wish I knew more about his years 1913 to 1916 in my country. We do know that he revered three of his teachers: John Dewey, whom he credited with much of his intellectual development. Three words can perhaps qualify Dewey's basic teaching: pragmatism, the value of education, the need for equality. Alexander Goldenweiser, an anthropologist, held a seminar which produced Ambedkar's first publication. His class paper, "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development", appeared in 1917 in the *Indian Antiquary Journal*. Ambedkar found sociology important also and he made it a subject at Siddharth College, an unusual inclusion in the 1940's. The third teacher was Edgar Seligman, an economist, with whom Ambedkar studied the railway system. Seligman wrote recommendations for Ambedkar and also introduced him to the well known Fabian socialists in England, Sydney and Beatrice Webb.

What should be realized is that Columbia in Ambedkar's day was one of the premier universities in the United States. Jabbar Patel made a video on all the places in Ambedkar's life and I went with him to photograph Columbia—what an elegant place! But although elegant, Columbia was on the edge of Harlem. In Jabbar Patel's later film, a feature film called *Dr. Ambedkar*, a scene shows Dr. Ambedkar in a Black church in Harlem. We do not know if he attended a Negro service or not, but I am very sure that his knowledge of the Negro world led to his denial of a race theory for India. Even though there was a strong belief among Dalits that they are *bhumiputra*, sons of the soil, lords of the land conquered by the Aryans, Ambedkar denied any race theory. Caste is man-made, he held, not the result of race and conquest.

Ambedkar renewed his American connections in 1946 with a letter to W.E.B. DuBois, the leading Black intellectual of his day, and one of the historic great Black thinkers. Actually,

DuBois resembles Ambedkar in his early role as a highly educated minority, as one of the first scholarly writers from within the Black community, as a founder of a social organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and as a great thinker on the nature of society. His theory of the need to develop the "talented tenth" to raise the whole group resembles somewhat Dr. Ambedkar's belief in educating to the upper limits a cadre of Dalits. Ambedkar wrote to DuBois in 1946:

Although I have not met you personally, I know you by name as everyone does who is working in the cause of securing liberty to the oppressed people. I belong to the Untouchables of India and perhaps you have heard my name. I have been a student of the Negro problem and have read your writings throughout. There is so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and of the position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary.

I was very much interested to read that the Negroes of America have filed a petition to the U.N.O. The Untouchables of India are also thinking of following suit. Will you be so good as to secure for me two or three copies of this representation by the Negroes and send them to my address. I need hardly say how very grateful I shall be for your troubles in this behalf.

Professor DuBois replied that he had often heard of Ambedkar's name and work and had every sympathy with the Untouchables of India. He promised to send the document of the NAACP if it materialized.

So what can we say was the effect of America? I would very much like to believe that Dr. Ambedkar's profound and unshakable belief in democracy owed something to his observations of my country, flawed though it was and is.

As a footnote, let me say that Columbia University is beginning to acknowledge significantly its links to Ambedkar. I have mentioned Gauri Vishwanathan. At a recent conference on South Asia, Professor Nicholas Dirks of Columbia spoke on Ambedkar and Periyar and Partha Chatterjee gave the main conference lecture on Ambedkar, a lecture that will be published by the Columbia University Press. And Columbia

hopes to establishing an Ambedkar web page which will include *Annihilation of Caste*, and *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, as well as other basic writings, facts and current news.

Conclusion

I have studied the Ambedkar movement and the situation of Untouchables (now Dalits) in India for almost forty years. I have a vast collection of books and periodicals, many in Marathi, most in English, mostly by scholars and activists in India. In the middle part of this lecture, I have tried to share in a fairly interesting way what is really a bibliographic exercise—the astonishing amount of new scholarship originating in the West specifically on Dr. Ambedkar. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is more important now in India as symbol and challenge than he was, perhaps, in his lifetime. It is my delight that his importance has now become a serious subject of study in the West. We have much to learn from him.

NOTES

1. Quoted in *Dr. Ambedkar and Family Planning* by M.P. Mangudkar. Poona: Savarna Mangudkar, 1976, p. 21.
2. Quoted from an essay by Prof. Dr. Tondler read before the Congress at Vienna in 1933 in Mangudkar, *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.
3. P. Lakshmi Narasu, *The Essence of Buddhism*, 3rd ed., Preface by B.R. Ambedkar. Bombay: Thacker and Company, 1948 (first published in 1907); Dharmarand Kosambi, *Bhagwan Buddha* Pune: Suvicar Prakashan Mandal, 1957 (first published in 1940).
4. The many letters to V.B. Kadam are in the microfilm collection of the Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi.
5. Austin, Granville, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, pp. 34.
6. The 13th volume of *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* is titled, *Dr. Ambedkar: The Principal Architect of the Constitution of India*. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1994. This 1240 page volume contains all Dr. Ambedkar's comments in the Constituent Assembly together with enough other material to give them a context. Further references will be to *Writings and Speeches*, op.cit.

7. "Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve It", address to the May 6, 1945 session of the "All India Scheduled Caste Federation, in *Writings and Speeches*, Volume I, 1979, p. 360.
8. *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 13, p. 8.
9. *Op.cit.*, pp. 13-14.
10. *Op.cit.*, p. 52.
11. *Op.cit.*, p. 59.
12. *Op.cit.*, p. 62.
13. The first scholarly study based solely on the collection of Dr. Ambedkar's writings by someone not in the Ambedkar movement and concerned only with theory was M.S. Gore's *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993.
14. *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* by Vasant Moon. Translated from the Marathi by Gail Omvedt with an Introduction by Eleanor Zelliott. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001. Also published by Sage: New Delhi, 2002.
15. *India-Six Modern Plays* edited by Erin B. Mee. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001. *Wata pal wata*, translated by Maya Pandit, was first published in *Yatra: Writings from the Indian Subcontinent*, Vol. III, edited by Satish Alekar, New Delhi: Indus, 1994.
16. Gauri Vishwanathan, *Outside the Fold*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
17. *Engaged Buddhism* edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
18. See *Proceedings* Volume 1 of a conference on *Theatres of Decolonization (Architecture)* edited by Vikramaditya Prakash. The conference was sponsored by the University of Washington and Arizona State University and organized by the Architecture Research Education Information group at Chandigarh.
19. In *Unseen Presence* edited by Vidya Dehejia. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1996.
20. Meera Nanda, *Breaking the Spell of Dharma*. New Delhi: Three Essays Press, 2002.
21. Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
22. Translated from the French by Nora Scott. New York: Berg, 1999.
23. "I" inegalite gradee" in *Archives Europeewns de Sociologe*. XXXVII: 1 (1996), pp. 3-22.
24. *The Dalit International Newsletter*, edited by John C.B. Webster. P.O. Box 932. Waterford, CT 06385.

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