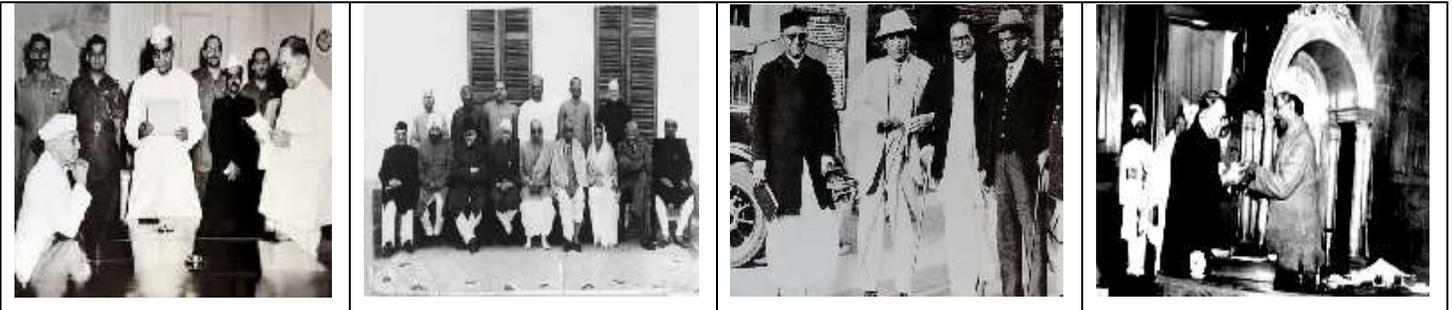


## *Dr. AMBEDKAR*



Dr. B R Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was one of the architects of the Indian Constitution. He was a well-known politician and an eminent jurist. Ambedkar's efforts to eradicate the social evils like untouchability and caste restrictions were remarkable. The leader, throughout his life, fought for the rights of the dalits and other socially backward classes. Ambedkar was appointed as the nation's first Law Minister in the Cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru. He was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor in 1990

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### **Where & when born**

Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 in the town and military cantonment of Mhow in the Central Provinces (now in Madhya Pradesh). He was the 14th and last child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal, a ranked army officer at the post of Subedar and Bhimabai Murbadkar Sakpal.

### **Brief history of the Dr. Ambedkar**

His family was of Marathi background from the town of Ambavade (Mandangad taluka) in Ratnagiri district of modern-day Maharashtra. Ambedkar was born into a poor low Mahar (dalit) caste, who were treated as untouchables and subjected to socio-economic discrimination. Ambedkar's ancestors had long been in the employment of the army of the British East India Company, and his father served in the British Indian Army at the Mhow cantonment. He used his position in the army to lobby for his children to study at the government school, as they faced resistance owing to their caste. Although able to attend school, Ambedkar and other untouchable children were segregated and given little attention or assistance by the teachers. They were not allowed to sit inside the class. Even if they needed to drink water, someone from a higher caste would have to pour that water from a height as they were not allowed to touch either the water or the vessel that contained it. This task was usually performed for the young Ambedkar by the school peon, and if the peon was not available then he had to go without water; the situation he later in his writings described as "No peon, No Water". He was required to sit on a gunny sack which he had to take home with him.

Ramji Sakpal retired in 1894 and the family moved to Satara two years later. Shortly after their move, Ambedkar's mother died. The children were cared for by their paternal aunt, and lived in difficult circumstances. Three sons – Balaram, Anandrao and Bhimrao – and two daughters – Manjula and Tulasa – of the Ambedkars would go on to survive them. Of his brothers and sisters, only Ambedkar succeeded in passing his examinations and graduating to a high school. His original surname Ambavadekar comes from his native village 'Ambavade' in Ratnagiri district. His Brahmin teacher, Mahadev Ambedkar, who was fond of him, changed his surname from 'Ambavadekar' to his own surname 'Ambedkar' in school records

In 1897, Ambedkar's family moved to Bombay where Ambedkar became the only untouchable enrolled at Elphinstone High School. In 1906, his marriage to a nine-year-old girl, Ramabai, was arranged.

In 1907, he passed his matriculation examination and in the following year he entered Elphinstone College,



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which was affiliated to the University of Bombay, becoming the first from his untouchable community to do so. This success provoked celebrations in his community and after a public ceremony he was presented with a biography of the Buddha by Dada Keluskar, the author and a family friend.

By 1912, he obtained his degree in economics and political science from Bombay University, and prepared to take up employment with the Baroda state government. His wife, by then 15 years old, had just moved his young family and started work, when he had to quickly return to Mumbai to see his ailing father, who died on 2 February 1913

In 1913, he moved to the United States. He had been awarded a Baroda State Scholarship of £11.50 (Sterling) per month for three years under a scheme established by the Gaekwad of Baroda that was designed to provide opportunities for postgraduate education at Columbia University in New York City. Soon after arriving there he settled in rooms at Livingston Hall with Naval Bhatena, a Parsi who was to be a lifelong friend. He passed his M.A. exam in June 1915, majoring in Economics, with Sociology, History, Philosophy and Anthropology as other subjects of study; he presented a thesis, *Ancient Indian Commerce*

In 1916 he completed his second thesis, *National Dividend of India-A Historic and Analytical Study* for another M.A., and finally he received his PhD in Economics in 1927 for his third thesis, after he left for London. On 9<sup>th</sup> May, he read his paper *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* before a seminar conducted by the anthropologist Alexander Goldenweiser

In October 1916 he enrolled for the Bar course at Gray's Inn, and at the same time enrolled at the London School of Economics where he started working on a doctoral thesis. In June 1917, however, he was obliged to go back to India as the term of his scholarship from Baroda ended. However, he was given permission to return to submit his thesis within four years. His thesis was on the "Indian Rupee." Ambedkar came back to London at the first opportunity and completed his studies. At the London School of Economics he took a master's degree in 1921 and in 1923 he took his D.Sc. in Economics, and the same year he was called to the Bar by Gray's Inn. His third and fourth Doctorates (Ll.D, Columbia, 1952 and Ll.D., Osmania, 1953) were conferred *honoris causa*.

As Ambedkar was educated by the Princely State of Baroda, he was bound to serve it. He was appointed as Military Secretary to the Gaikwad but had to quit within a short time. He described the incident in his autobiography, *Waiting for a Visa*. Thereafter he tried to find ways to make a living for his growing family. He worked as a private tutor, as an accountant, and established an investment consulting business, but it failed when his clients learned that he was an untouchable. In 1918 he became Professor of Political Economy in the Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics in Mumbai. Even though he was successful with the students, other professors objected to his sharing the same drinking-water jug that they all used.

After completing his studies in London, Ambedkar returned to India. In July 1924, he founded the Bahishkrit



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Hitkaraini Sabha (Outcastes Welfare Association). The aim of the Sabha was to uplift the downtrodden socially and politically and bring them to the level of the others in the Indian society. In 1927, he led the Mahad March at the Chowdar Tank at Colaba, near Bombay, to give the untouchables the right to draw water from the public tank where he burnt copies of the 'Manusmriti' publicly. Later he entered Indian politics and continued to serve in free India's Parliament as Law Minister under Jawaharlal Nehru Leadership.

In the 1950s, Ambedkar turned his attention to Buddhism and travelled to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) to attend a convention of Buddhist scholars and monks. Ambedkar organised a formal public ceremony for himself and his supporters in Nagpur on October 14, 1956. Accepting the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk in the traditional manner, Ambedkar completed his own conversion. He then proceeded to convert an estimated 500,000 of his supporters who were gathered around him. Taking the 22 Vows, Ambedkar and his supporters explicitly condemned and rejected Hinduism and Hindu philosophy. He then traveled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference. He completed his final manuscript, *The Buddha or Karl Marx* on December 2, 1956. He completed his final work on "The Buddha and His Dhamma", in 1956. It was published posthumously.

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Baba Saheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar died peacefully in his sleep.

### **Career in political**

Ambedkar had been invited to testify before the Southborough Committee, which was preparing the Government of India Act 1919. At this hearing, Ambedkar argued for creating separate electorates and reservations for untouchables and other religious communities. In 1920, he began the publication of the weekly *Mooknayak (Leader of the Silent)* in Mumbai with the help of Shahaji II (1874–1922), Maharaja of Kolhapur.

Ambedkar went on to work as a legal professional. In 1926 he successfully defended three non-Brahmin leaders who had accused the Brahmin community of ruining India and were then subsequently sued for libel. Dhananjay Keer notes that "The victory was resounding, both socially and individually, for the clients and the Doctor.

While practicing law in the Bombay High Court, he tried to uplift the untouchables in order to educate them. His first organised attempt to achieve this was the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, which was intended to promote education and socio-economic improvement, as well as the welfare of "outcastes", at the time referred to as depressed classes. For the defense of Dalit rights he started many periodicals like *Mook Nayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, and *Equality Janta*.

He was appointed to the Bombay Presidency Committee to work with the all-European Simon Commission in 1925. This commission had sparked great protests across India, and while its report was ignored by most Indians, Ambedkar himself wrote a separate set of recommendations for the future Constitution of India.

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By 1927 Ambedkar had decided to launch active movements against untouchability. He began with public movements and marches to open up and share public drinking water resources. He also began a struggle for the right to enter Hindu temples. He led a *satyagraha* in Mahad to fight for the right of the untouchable community to draw water from the main water tank of the town.

In a conference in late 1927, Ambedkar publicly condemned the classic Hindu text, the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu), for ideologically justifying the system of caste discrimination and “untouchability,” ceremonially burning copies of the ancient text. On 25 December 1927, thousands of people burnt copies of Manusmriti under leadership of Ambedkar.

In 1930, Ambedkar launched **Kalaram Temple movement**. This was a non-violent movement for which he was preparing for three months. About 15000 volunteers assembled at Kalaram Temple satyagraha making one of the greatest processions of Nashik. The procession was headed by a military band, a batch of scouts, women and men walked in discipline, order and determination to see the god for the first time. When they reached to gate, the gates were closed by Brahmin authorities. This movement was for human dignity and self-respect.

On 25 September 1932, the agreement known as **Poona Pact** was signed between Ambedkar (on behalf of the depressed classes among Hindus) and Madan Mohan Malaviya (on behalf of the other Hindus). The agreement gave reserved seats for the depressed classes in the Provisional legislatures, within the general electorate and not by creating a separate electorate. Due to the pact, the depressed class received 148 seats in the legislature, instead of the 71 as allocated in the Communal Award earlier proposed by the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. The text uses the term "Depressed Classes" to denote Untouchables among Hindus who were later called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under India Act 1935, and the later Indian Constitution of 1950.

In 1936, Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party, which contested the 1937 Bombay election to the Central Legislative Assembly for the 13 reserved and 4 general seats, and secured 11 and 3 seats respectively.

In 1937, Dr. Ambedkar introduced a Bill to abolish the "khoti" system of land tenure in the Konkan region, the serfdom of agricultural tenants and the Mahar "watan" system of working for the Government as slaves. A clause of an agrarian bill referred to the depressed classes as "Harijans," or people of God. Bhimrao was strongly opposed to this title for the untouchables. He argued that if the "untouchables" were people of God then all others would be people of monsters. He was against any such reference. But the Indian National Congress succeeded in introducing the term Harijan.

In 1947, when India became independent, the first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, invited Dr. Bhimrao



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Ambedkar, who had been elected as a Member of the Constituent Assembly from Bengal, to join his Cabinet as a Law Minister. The Constituent Assembly entrusted the job of drafting the Constitution to a committee and Dr. Ambedkar was elected as Chairman of this Drafting Committee. In February 1948, Dr. Ambedkar presented the Draft Constitution before the people of India; it was adopted on November 26, 1949.

In October 1948, Dr. Ambedkar submitted the Hindu Code Bill to the Constituent Assembly in an attempt to codify the Hindu law. The Bill caused great divisions even in the Congress party. Consideration for the bill was postponed to September 1951. When the Bill was taken up it was truncated. A dejected Ambedkar relinquished his position as Law Minister.

He was appointed to the upper house, of parliament, the Rajya Sabha in March 1952 and remained as member till his death.

### **Leadership qualities**

- Leading by example
  - Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar led an important role in the welfare of the downtrodden in India and he showed them a path which not only led to their development but also the development of India as a whole
- Never die
  - Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had to face lots of hardships to complete his education. However his strong will and dedication helped him to remove all the obstacles and complete his studies. He had to go through various social and financial obstacles. He faced lot of humiliation at his school as social discrimination was highly prevalent in India at that time. However, he did not give up his desire to learn and work hard to achieve his goals.
- Creativity
  - Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar prepared the constitution of India which is world's largest democratic country. He almost prepared it alone with the help of his extensive knowledge about Economics, Law, Politics, Indian society and detailed study of constitutions of other countries.
- Fearless Mind
  - When Hindus had called some people 'untouchables' and treated them very unjustly which



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went on for hundreds of years, Ambedkar struggled hard to strengthen his people. He knew that those who were weak were bound to suffer. Once he said, "Goats were sacrificed, not lions.' He attacked like lightening those who practiced injustice. He opposed the British, he opposed the Hindu, he opposed even Gandhiji, he opposed the Government of free India; Finally he brought justice to the 'untouchables' at times his own life was in danger; but he gave no thought to it.

### **Critical Moments in his life**

In 1929, Ambedkar made the controversial decision to co-operate with the all-British Simon Commission which was to look into setting up a responsible Indian Government in India. The Congress decided to boycott the Commission and drafted its own version of a constitution for free India. The Congress version had no provisions for the depressed classes. Ambedkar became more skeptical of the Congress's commitment to safeguard the rights of the depressed classes.

When a separate electorate was announced for the depressed classes under Ramsay McDonald 'Communal Award', Gandhiji went on a fast unto death against this decision. Leaders rushed to Dr. Ambedkar to drop his demand. On September 24, 1932, Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji reached an understanding, which became the famous Poona Pact. According to the pact the separate electorate demand was replaced with special concessions like reserved seats in the regional legislative assemblies and Central Council of States.

When Dr. Ambedkar failed against introducing the term Harijan, he felt bitter that they could not have any say in what they were called.

In 1948, when Dr. Ambedkar attempted to codify the Hindu law, the truncated Bill was taken up. A dejected Ambedkar relinquished his position as Law Minister.

On May 24, 1956, on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti, he declared in Bombay, that he would adopt Buddhism in October. On October 14, 1956 he embraced Buddhism along with many of his followers.

### **Principles & Practices**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is a pure symbol of hard work, dedication, commitment, love and humanity.

Religion and Rationality: Dr. Ambedkar's views on religion and its applicability to our lives put him in the



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category of the greatest rationalists and humanists that the world has ever produced.

Annihilation of caste: He wrote once "The untouchability will vanish only when the whole of the Hindu social order, particularly the caste system, will be dissolved. ... Nothing can be built on the foundations of caste. Neither a nation, nor a morality. Anything built on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole. Caste prevents mobilization. Indeed, the destiny of a defeat which has been the lot of India throughout history is due to caste."

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had proclaimed, 'Attempts to uplift my community rather than win Swaraj for the nation is my goal.'

Ambedkar was also critical of Islam and its practices in South Asia. While justifying the Partition of India, he condemned the practice of child marriage, as well as the mistreatment of women, in Muslim society.

### **Writings**

1. Annihilation of Caste
2. Indian Constitution (Bilingual)
3. Thought of linguistic States
4. Thoughts on Pakistan (Vol. I & II)
5. What Congress & Gandhi have done to the Untouchables?
6. Who were Shudras?
7. Buddha and his Dhamma
8. Why Go for Conversion

### **Awards and achievements**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar posthumously awarded Bharat Ratna by Government of India in the year 1990.

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