







# PROFESSIONALS' SPECIAL



## Discovering Baba Saheb

A critical analysis of Dr. Ambedkar's life sketch authored by Ashok Malladevan and Sushan Shetty, and appeared in Reader's Digest (December 2006) is recapitulated hereunder for the Think Tank of Social Scientists and Engineers.

For four years Dr. Ambedkar was in New York and London on a Baroda Govt. Scholarship and it didn't matter at that time that he was an untouchable. But, on return to India in 1917, his academic accomplishments did not undo the incontrovertible fact that he was an untouchable. Nobody turned up to receive him when he landed in Baroda Railway Station on his appointment as Military Secretary to the Maharajah of Baroda. He could have pretended to be a Brahmin and checked into a Hindu Hotel, but he did not choose to do. Somehow, he managed to get into a Parsi Inn as the Zoroastrians did not have a caste system; but when he was identified as a Hindu, he was denied entry and somehow, managed to register himself as Parsi and stayed for some time. On one fine morning, a dozen Parsis, wielding sticks, walked up to his room and asked him to leave the premises. Years later, he lamented that he "could never recall it without tears in my eyes". It is reminiscent of another incident in history when Mahatma Gandhi was ejected from his first class train compartment in Maritzberg in South Africa 24 years earlier.

Another shocking incident in his life was when Brahmin priests chanting Mantras, dipped 108 copper pots into a tank and pulled them out with water. The water was then mixed with cow-dung, curds, milk and cow's urine, and the pots were lowered into the tank again. Then the Priests declared that the water was fit for drinking. That was on March, 21, 1923. That was at a time when Dr. Ambedkar launched Mahad Satyagraha and gathered all the Dalits and asked them to draw water from that tank. The Mahad Satyagraha was seen by many Dalits as the beginning of their political awakening. Of course, nobody then could possibly have dreamt that 20 years later, Ambedkar would oversee the writing of the Constitution of a free India and be hailed as the Modern Manu.

Ambedkar's rise to the leadership of the Untouchable Community (then officially called Depressed Classes) was rapid. He was the only Post-Graduate in the entire Bombay Presidency and within a few years of the Baroda humiliation, he started newspapers and established Dalit self-help and self-respect organisations and began lobbying the British Government to improve the lot of his community.

### CLASH OF TITANS

It was September, 20, 1932 Mahatma Gandhi, who was just a couple of weeks shy of 63, began the only fast that he had ever directed against an Indian politician. His target was Ambedkar and the fast was, in the words of Mahatma, "unto death". At stake was the issue of separate electorates. Under a separate electorate system, each of India's various communities - such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, Untouchables - would vote independently of each other. To Gandhi separate electorates were anathema because they promoted

communalism and division. He had accepted separate electorates for Muslims and Sikhs with reluctance, but to him Untouchables were not a separate community - they were Hindus. Ambedkar, on the other hand, reasoned that Untouchables had little in common with caste Hindus. Gandhi felt it was a corruption of Hinduism and that it would be removed by appealing to the conscience of caste Hindus. Ambedkar was convinced that Untouchability was an integral part of the Hindu caste system and would persist unless the caste system itself was destroyed. The two men clashed again that December at a British-sponsored conference in London to discuss the political future of India. Ambedkar described his position thus: "As between the country and myself, the country will have precedence, as between the country and the Depressed Classes, the Depressed Classes will have precedence." The British who had arrested Gandhi soon after he returned from London, granted the Depressed Classes a separate electorate in August, 1932. Soon after, the Mahatma announced his fast and Ambedkar became the most hated man in India. Initially, Ambedkar described the fast as a political stunt. But he negotiated with other Hindu leaders for a compromise and also met Gandhi on a couple of occasions as he lay on his iron cot under a mango tree in the prison yard. Once, Ambedkar began by saying, "Mahatmaji, you have been very unfair to us." Gandhi told Ambedkar that "You are an Untouchable by birth", and "I am an Untouchable by adoption. We must be one and indivisible". On the fifth day of the fast, with Gandhi near death, M.C. Rajah, an Untouchable leader from Madras, told Ambedkar: "For thousands of years we have been downtrodden, insulted, despised. The Mahatma is staking his life for our sake, and if he dies, there will be such a strong feeling against us that the Hindu community will kick us downstairs further still." Soon after, Ambedkar agreed to a settlement and Gandhi broke his fast.

(part 2 next month)

**Do you know :** Does anyone know the name of the man who stole Gandhi from the train? (In South Africa). Of course not. But today the name of that train is Mahatma Gandhi Train and the name of the station is Mahatma Gandhi Station.

### Art Buchwald

A widely read news paper Humorist, Satirist, and Columnist, Art Buchwald died on 17-1-2007 in Washington. He was 81. At the height of his popularity in 1972 his column was appearing three times a week in about 400 news papers in Washington and in a hundred news papers in other countries. He was awarded Pulitzer Prize in 1982 for his Journalism forwar.

### Sir Thomas More

Sir Thomas More (1478-1535 A.D.) was a martyr to Freedom of Mind and Spirit. Born in London on 17-2-1478 he studied in Oxford and rose to become Lord Chancellor of England in 1529 (Synonymous to the post of Chief Justice of Supreme Court of U.S., India, etc.). In 1532, following his opposition to King Henry's desire to divorce Catherine of Aragon, he resigned the post. In 1534 as his refusal to acknowledge Henry VIII as Head of English Church he was imprisoned and beheaded in 1535.

Like Socrates 2000 years earlier Thomas More became a martyr to Freedom of Mind and Spirit.

## Remembering HM Seervai :

On the eve of his Birth Centenary, Sri Harish Khare (Hindu dated 5th December, 2006) depicted his Seervai's Saga of life in the following terms.

A legendary figure in legal circles and a jurist of par excellence and one of the greatest legal minds of Modern India.

He will be remembered as the man who wrote the majestic and magisterial treatise "Constitutional Law of India" by the generations of legal practitioners and students of law. In the words of one of the junior colleagues who later became Solicitor General of India, TR Andhyarajna, Mr Seervai was "the moral force in the profession for over fifty years". A collection of grateful admirers compiled a book titled "Evoking HEM Seervai" which "sears that Seervai could tell the Judges that they were wrong or that under the constitution they did not have this or that power."

A former Chief Justice of India, RS Pathak noted "The line of high fees and public adulation mattered not to him nor indeed the unpopularity of the cause, excellence in the discharge of professional obligation was his only standard. The Courts came to respect him with a respect given to a few". He further described him as "A courageous knight in shining armor who had dedicated his life to protecting the purity of the administration of justice, to the upholding of its traditional values and to promoting a consistency in the policies and direction of judicial law making"

For Seervai honor and autonomy was key to professional integrity. He resigned as Advocate General of Maharashtra when small minds in the Congress Party found him too autonomous and too independent for their taste. That was in 1974, the first time that Indira Gandhi's India was becoming impatient in respecting the restraints of Constitutional Institutions. He regarded the duty of a Law Officer to respect the public interest and acting independently as his "Dharma".

Decades ago while addressing Social reformers and Social engineers  
**Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** said  
 "To survive, we need a revolution in our 'Thoughts' and 'Outlook'. From the altar of our past, we should take the burning fire and not the dead ashes. Let us remember the past, be alive to the present, and create the future with courage in our hearts and faith in ourselves."

## 60th Anniversary of Indian Independence:

Writing under the caption "The Tenable Patriot", Rudolf C. Heredia (Hindu dt. 3-12-2006) commented that :

"It appears that some Indians can claim to be born citizens by virtue of belonging to the Hindu majority while others must remain citizens-on-probation all their lives.

"We need patriotism dedicated to Swadesh and Prama Swaraj in Gandhian sense....

We must distinguish Devotees from Fanatics; Religions from Ideologies; Statesmen from Politicians.

"A civil religion demands a religious humanism, not as the least common denominator of various religious beliefs, but as premised on the core ethic found in all faith traditions something that is certainly more compatible with

**GANDHIAN SARVA DHARMA SAMABHAVA** than with a **NEHRUVIAN 'DHARMA NIRAPEKSHANA'**.





