

Ambedkar and Indian Nationalism Author(s): S. M. Gaikwad

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Ambedkar and

S M Gaikwad

The Indian national struggle
merely a struggle to wrest
a struggle to lay the foundations
outmoded social institutions.
Ambedkar's struggle consists
nation-in-the-making, one
currents all of which help
internal oppression and external
to mainstream nationalism.
the nation would not have
strengthen and broaden the

THE political dust storm raised by the blatantly malignant book on Ambedkar need not trouble us much.

rendered most people so myopic that even a political commentator or book reviewer tried to transcend the narrow constraints of one's own political affiliation or of conventional book review to bring in much needed objectively critical and historically correct perspective on sensitive political issues placed the lay public in a rather unguarded position. The media's concerted campaign to draw public attention on a work of scholarship, spiteful intent and reactionary socio-political orientation.

There can be little new information about Dr Ambedkar and his political activities, about Dr Shourie or any one else for that matter. Dr Shourie himself claims to have made available for

time. Most of the things he states for the conclusions drawn), have been in print in one place or other at times in the past. Even the much research into the writing of the book is more than a clever trick to provide of scientific objectivity to an otherwise distortional propaganda work. He author's claim to creative writing rests on his ingenuity to manufacture a political story from certain historical events torn away from their true historicity and presented skilfully in a dramatic form to produce a totally distorted picture of history. But a sensational political writer can hardly be expected to produce a noteworthy contribution to history or historiography. Nor does he do anything to contribute to the cause of historical knowledge.

history or historiography. Nor does it consist of documentary evidence by itself, which is unable to establish any historical truth. A historian can establish only a hypothesis, especially a historical truth needs to be established through a careful analysis of the whole complex of documents, the situation of which they (i.e., the group) form just a part.

Economic and Political Weekly
The changes in the political and administrative structure of the Indian subcontinent made sustainable by modern communication and transport changes effectively destroyed the balance of socio-economic life.

balanced or socio-economic setting into motion a process of finally paved the way for an urgent transformation of the change-resistant society in course of a few decades.

Under the changed conditions emerged a new elite class with its wealth and social prestige. This was fostered by the British, adopting western mannerism and lifestyle, western education, values and social ideas and ideals. It is among this élite of this class drawn mainly from the crust of the Hindu social order that the stirrings of the self-awareness and consciousness driving them on the collective identity rooted in the

past, were clearly found. In a relatively short period of time this craving for identity stemming from a share of common interests – economic and political – laid the foundations of nascent Indian nationalism in the decades of the 19th century, which in the next few decades grew into a political force encompassing the breadth of the British India, reflecting the general political evolution of India.

Indian nationalism in its initial stages had the very nature of its historical development. It was an upper class (upper caste) phenomenon, reflecting the interests and aspirations of its members. Naturally when it spoke in terms of national interest it

meant their own (class) interests. The use of ‘nation’ was a necessary ritual to secure the much needed popular support for an essentially partisan cause.

The sectarian character of Indian nationalism persisted even after the upper castes’ movement developed into a truly mass-supported anti-imperialist liberation movement enlisting the millions of people cutting across traditional caste/religion divisions. This failure to change its base from upper class/castes orientation delayed the shift in its underlying social basis. The national movement in due course gave way to the rise of new sectarian socio-political formations running parallel to the mainstream.

running parallel to the mainstream movement. The emergence of League was the first offshoot of the process of political splitting along communal fault lines. A emergence on the Indian political scene in 1930, commencing the advent of scheduled castes) politics, was manifestation of the same. Ambedkar's dalit politics posed significant threat to the overall

516

under any form of domination whether it is external, that

domination or an indigenous one. Ambedkar the scheduled castes last expressed their will to be free from the domination of caste Hindus. It is grossly unjust and unfair to blame Ambedkar's refusal to have an alliance with the nationalists as an act of treason. A close reading of his writings on India's problems reveal his deep concern about India's economic exploitation by British imperialism. His opposition to the partition of India stemmed from his unwavering support for the rights of the scheduled castes. He was never opposed to India gaining independence at any time. Nevertheless he was firmly opposed to any scheme of Indian independence which the scheduled castes were to be left out.

which the scheduled castes were due representation commensurate with their numerical strength. His demand for representation cannot be termed a

No progressive intellectual or political party supported the communal award was in the long term interests of the Indian union. It is also true that the nationalists did not oppose the award to destroy the communal basis of Indian politics. They were never opposed to the separate existence of Hindus and other strong minorities mainly because they wanted to give them a separate existence in the national life. If they were truly opposed to the communal award they should have supported the provision of a separate electorate for the Muslims too. They chose to oppose Ambedkar's demand for a separate electorate for the scheduled castes.

because the scheduled castes are
and vulnerable. That the Poona
to be a good thing in the long-te
of the Indian nation is a differ

The six crore untouchables
entities in national politics,
microscopic minorities enjoy
prestige and wealth. This could be
because the scheduled castes were
They were enslaved by the Hindu
system. The spiritualist Hindu
gets tired of preaching to the
gospel of ‘vishva bandhutwa’
(brotherhood) and the principle of
of all things never feels any qualm
his own inhuman and wicked treatment
the scheduled castes. There was

the scheduled castes. There was
of the Hindu ruling class ever so
concerned about this very big
problem. Gandhi's conscience
by the practice of racial discrimination
South Africa and, he fought against
his own characteristic way. His
conscience was not troubled by
of untouchability back home,
indeed the most condemnable crime
humanity. The degrading, deplorable
misery of the servile untouchables
touched his heart. He was moved to
cause of the un-touchables his own
Ambedkar's political stance posed

Economic and Political Weekly
of democratic socialism. But, still difficult to believe that their ha commitment to 'utopian socialis have really helped to transform the ridden, change-resistant Indian Ambedkar's intervention was ne bring about some measure of mer as material empowerment of the untouchables without which they w been unable to assume their rigl in national life. It is important to be that it was Ambedkar's political which forced the Congress to app national significance of the prob scheduled castes and to adopt

measures which in due course, c
towards broadening and strength
social base of Indian nationalism
the proper understanding of
significance of the scheduled caste
rendered possible through the
mentioned interaction, was an
important consideration in
Gandhiji's unhesitant decision to
the request of the scheduled caste
of the constituent assembly that
should be included in independent
first government. Shourie's ass
Ambedkar requested Jagjivan
recommend his name is false. In
Jagjivan Ram, then a protege of
Prasad, was the only scheduled cas

was the only member of the constituent assembly who I declined to support that proposal. I am giving this categorical statement on the information given by my uncle R M Pinto who was a member of the constituent assembly's important steering committee besides being a member of the Congress Committee. According to Nehru and Sardar Patel were totally opposed to considering of Ambedkar's name. Gandhiji, who without any hesitation welcomed the idea of including Ambedkar in the government saying that there was no harm in including Ambedkar, for it was going to be a national unity government. It is a pity that the man who

responsible for Ambedkar's rehabilitation at a time when his influence was at its nadir is the man among the many who Ambedkar. This is again a sad reflection on our political underdevelopment, an indication of the great task that

Preparing the Constitution of a divergent nation like India was a stupendous task, involving collective efforts of many varied talents. No single person can be considered as its sole creator. Shourie's characterisation of Ambedkar as the rapporteur of the constituent assembly is grossly unfair, unjust and mean-spirited. Ambedkar was one of the very few who were entrusted with the task of not merely codifying the

made by the constituent assembl

518