

INSTEAD OF A STATUE, A PUBLIC LIBRARY WILL BE THE BEST MEMORIAL OF SIR MEHTA

“This is the earliest letter of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar sent for publication while he was a student of Columbia University, New York, U.S.A. in 1916. A proposal to erect a statue of Sir Pherozshah Mehta was mooted in the city of Bombay to be erected in front of the Municipal Office. Dr. Ambedkar having learnt this through the newspapers, considered it a most trivial form of memorial of a great man. According to him the memorial should have utility to the society especially for spreading the knowledge. He, therefore, proposed a memorial in the form of a public library in memorium of Sir Pherozshah Mehta. This letter may be found instructive and guiding even to-day to the Indian people who have craze for erecting statues of illustrious personalities.” ¹—

“The Late Sir Pherozshah Mehta

To,

The Editor of ‘The Chronicle’

Sir,

You will agree with me when I say that in a country like India so badly situated socially, economically and politically, the paramount need of the hour is for honest leaders to take upon themselves the enormous task of regeneration. Such leaders were found in the persons of the late Messrs Gokhale and P. M. Mehta, both of whom were entitled to everlasting gratitude for the zeal and sacrifice with which they represented our cause. Their identification with the people and the latter’s repose in them were so complete that their sudden death seemed for a while as though it was all nature’s trick.

It is to their lasting credit that they grappled with many of our problems, solved a few of them and left the rest for us to face. But our feelings for the work done by them have completely set aside our feelings of the future work to be done by us- so much is our devotion to them. And it is quite natural that we should be more concerned about raising fitting memorials for those who have

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unremittingly exerted themselves in our behalf than about meeting the problems that confront us to-day.

The Indian papers so far to hand indicate that the memorial of Mr. Gokhale is to take the form of establishing branches of the Servants of India Society at various places, while that of Sir P. M. Mehta is to stand in the form of a *statue* before the Bombay Municipal Office.

Permit me to say that individually I regard this particular form of Sir P. M. Mehta memorial to be very trivial and unbecoming to say the least.

I have been at pains to understand why his memorial cannot be in a form which will not only be a true memorial of him, but will be of permanent use to posterity.

As combining these two purposes, I would suggest that in my humble opinion the memorial of Sir P. M. Mehta should be in the form of a public library in Bombay to be called "Sir Pherozshah Mehta Library."

It is unfortunate that we have not as yet realized the value of the library as an institution in the growth and advancement of a society. But this is not the place to dilate upon its virtues. That an enlightened public as that of Bombay should have suffered so long to be without an up-to-date public library is nothing short of disgrace and the earlier we make amends for it the better.

There are some private libraries in Bombay operating independently by themselves. If these ill-managed concerns be mobilized into one building, built out of the Sir P. M. Mehta memorial fund and called after him, the city of Bombay shall have achieved both these purposes. As to the funds for the purchase of books and management of the library on modern lines, I trust there will be many generous souls to endow it.

As a student in one of the biggest universities of the U.S.A. I am thoroughly convinced of the place a library has in the intellectual and social development of a people and being painfully conscious of its lack in the city of Bombay, I take this opportunity of urging on the Bombay public of what I think can be the fittest and, most lasting memorial of the greatest hero of modern Indian history.

Being 10,000 miles away from India it takes time to get home-news. Consequently, I am a little late in submitting my proposal, but better late than never.

Yours etc.

Bhimrao R. Ambedkar

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New York City, U.S.A.”¹

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