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Dr. AMBEDKAR AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

"Fifty years ago in a special interview with the editor of a monthly Jewish publication in Bombay (The Jewish Advocate, November 1941), one of the India's most respected leaders expressed openly his admiration for the pioneering efforts of the Jews in Palestine "in respect of the Social order that was being created there" (in Palestine) as he said.

It was none other than the "Father of Indian Constitution" and the Leader of the Depressed Classes in India, Dr. Ambedkar.

Dr. Ambedkar whose centenary is being celebrated all over the world, was among the few. In the Indian National Movement who was aware of and consequently sympathised with, the Jewish National Movement in Israel (then Palestine under British rule).

To understand the specialities Dr. Ambedkar had with the Jewish people one should read his article "Moses and His Significance " published in the Bombay Sentinel probably the same year, 1941. In this masterpiece of a short essay about the Biblical Leader Moses, Dr. Ambedkar exposes to the roots of his special attitude towards the Jewish people. Due to its importance, I feel it is only appropriate to reprint it once again.

"The story of the Jews told in the Old Testament is a moving tale. It has few parallels. It is told in a simple but thrilling language. The pathos inherent in the subjugation and ultimate emancipation of the Jews cannot, but affect the emotions of those who are as depressed as the Jews were in Egypt in the days of Pharaoh. But the heart of every one who is working for emancipation of a depressed people is bound to go to Moses, the man who brought about the emancipation of the Jews."

"What did Moses not do for the Jews ? He led them out of Egypt, out of bondage, he laid the foundation for their religion

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Dr. Ambedkar was interviewed by Glora Becher, Consul of Israel in Bombay—Editors.

by bringing the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai. He gave them laws for social, civil and religious purpose and instructions for building the tabernacle."

"What did Moses not suffer at the hands of the followers "? When the children of Israel left Egypt and were pursued and attacked by the army of Pharaohs they were sore and said unto Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, has thou taken us away to die ?' It has been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in wilderness."

"The marching Israel came to Elim and camped there. There was not sufficient water for them all. They all shouted, give us water wherefore is this that thou hast brought us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst ? They were ready to stone him because there was no water."

"Moses went up to Mount Sinai and delayed to come down. Immediately the Jews went to Aaron and said unto him. 'Make for us Gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt,' we woe not what has become of him."

Even his leadership was challenged. The Old Testament records that Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman he had married and they said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses ? Hath he not spoken also by us ? Yet Moses bore their calumny, their abuse, tolerated their impatience and served them with the fullness of his heart.

"As the Old Testament truly says : 'There arose not a Prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face'. Moses was not merely a great leader of the Jews. He is a leader whose birth, any downtrodden community may pray for."

"Whatever interest others may have felt in the story of the exodus and the leadership of Moses they have been to me a source of perennial inspiration and hope."

"I believe that just as there was a land of promise for the Jews, so the Depressed Classes must be destined to have their land of promise. I trust that just as the Jews reached their land of promise, so will be the Depressed Classes in the end reach their land of promise."

"I see in the present day condition of the Depressed Classes of India a parallel to the Jews in their captivity in Egypt. In Moses I see a leader whose infinite love for his people has given undaunted courage to face hardships and bear calumny."

"I confess that if any thing sustains me in my efforts to emancipate the Depressed Classes, it is the story of Moses undertaking the thankless but noble task of leading Jews out of their captivity."

It is only natural that the Jewish people have always looked at Dr. Ambedkar and his life's work with absolute admiration. His struggle for the weakest sector of society has found an echo in the hearts of those who for many hundreds of years since their expulsion from their "Promised land"—Israel—were suffering from discrimination and persecution just becasue of being different from the majority around.

We in Israel are till today proud of Dr. Ambedkar's support in our struggle for rebuilding our national home in Israel.

(*Courtesy : News from Israel*)." [1]

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[1]: Praja bandhu, dated 30th December 1991.