Demolition of "Ambedkar Bhavan": Historical Facts and Current Controversy!

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- Round Table India

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On 25-06-2016, some parts of Ambedkar Bhavan situated in Dadar area of Mumbai were demolished by the current Trustees of the "The People's Improvement Trust". The said structure is under the control of "The People's Improvement Trust". In Maharashtra, the political movement among the Ambedkarites is fractured and has many factions. And the recent demolition of the "Ambedkar Bhavan" has added some more fuel to it. This controversy has divided the Ambedkarites in Maharashtra into three groups. One group has been supporting the heirs of Dr Ambedkar and the other is in support of the Trust, the third group belongs to those set of Ambedkarites who are skeptical and have their own analysis about the issue.

*Old Pamphlet by Dr.B.R Ambedkar making an appeal to princely states for the envisioned social centre for Untouchables*

**Chronology of the whole set of events associated with the demolition of Ambedkar Bhavan**

*3 December 2015*: The new development plan for the land of People's Improvement Trust notified by Govt of Maharashtra signed by Chief Minister, Devendra Fadhavnis.

*6 December 2015 (Death Anniversary of Dr B R Ambedkar)*: The Trustees of the "The People's Improvement Trust" publicly announces at Chaityabhumi regarding
the new development plan for the construction of "Ambedkar Bhavan". The Trust publicly distributes pamphlets and advertises the plan on various flex banners in the stall near the Chaityabhumi area. (Chaityabhumi: The Final Resting place of the mortal remains of Dr B R Ambedkar)

14 March 2016: Notices are issued to Mr. Prakash Ambedkar and other tenants for occupying the building premises of Ambedkar Bhavan. Notices were also pasted on the notice board of the "The People's Improvement Trust".

14 April 2016: Inauguration of new, approved building plan of "The People's Improvement Trust" by Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri.Devendra Fadnavis and other dignitaries.

25-06-2016: Some parts of the "Ambedkar Bhavan" were demolished by the Trustees, between 2.30 am to 4.30 am.

History of "People's Improvement Trust" and "Buddha Bhushan Printing Press"

Dr B R Ambedkar envisioned a new headquarters for his movement. Since 1938 onwards, Dr B R Ambedkar had started collecting funds for the new building. He appealed to the masses to donate money, Rs. 2 (Males) and Rs. 1 (females), for the collection of funds required to establish the new building. On 19 March 1938, Somvanshi Hitakarini Samaj of Tatwadi (Maazgaon) donated Rs. 101 in memory of Ramji Borikar to Dr B R Ambedkar; it was the first public program of its kind in which such a lump sum donation was made towards the "Building Fund". Various public programs were organized in Mumbai for the same, and Dr B R Ambedkar had addressed people on many occasions on the said program. From 1938 to 1944, a sum Rs. 45095 was collected from the people who worked shoulder to shoulder with Dr B R Ambedkar in his movement.

On 29th July 1944, Dr B R Ambedkar registered "The Bombay Scheduled Caste Improvement Trust". On 30th October 1944, Rs.36535 was paid to Mr. Ambalal Punamchand to purchase a land measuring 2332 square yards. The details of the purchased land are as follows: *Plot No.18D, Survey no 17 A/76 on Gokuldas Pasta Road (Ref: The Bombay Scheduled Caste Improvement Trust, sale deed dated 30/10/1944).* Later on, a room of 40×50 square feet was constructed on the purchased land. The amount spent on the construction of the room was Rs. 35000. Dr B R Ambedkar dreamt of constructing a three floor building in Mumbai to establish a Central Headquarter for the Depressed Classes Movement. He proposed a building consisting of a Central Office,
a multipurpose Hall and rooms, which would be utilized for the movement. The land was not purchased for the office of the Printing Press.

During 1946-47, Dr B R Ambedkar relocated "Bharat Bhushan Printing Press" from Naigaon to the building of the "Bombay Scheduled Caste Improvement Trust", to avoid further damage due to the riots which took place in that area. Dr B R Ambedkar paid a rent of Rs. 50 per month to the "Bombay Scheduled Caste Improvement Trust" for the printing press. On 13th January 1955, in the sessions court (Case No.RAE Suit No.1095/4920), Dr B R Ambedkar gave his evidence that the land is purchased from the money collected as donations from the people. The case was filed against the illegal encroachment by Mr. Avtar Singh and Others. Until 1975, the court cases were going on in the sessions court, Bombay. The press was defunct for nearly 50 years after the last publication of the "Prabuddha Bharat". Later on a new press was procured to carry out commercial activities, such as printing of wedding cards, pamphlets and other items.

View from the remaining part of the structure

On 14th January 1956, in the weekly edition of "Janta", Dr B R Ambedkar published a public advertisement about the "Bharat Bhushan Printing Press". The "Bharat Bhushan Printing Press" was renamed as "Buddha Bhushan Printing Press". Also, it was mentioned that the "Buddha Bhushan Printing Press" was the collective property of the "Bhartiya Baudhajan Panchayat". The ownership of Buddha Bhushan Printing Press was transferred to Bhartiya Baudhjan Panchayat. And this was amended in the By-laws of the Bhartiya Baudhjan Panchayat and was submitted to the Charity Commissioner .....( Whenever there is amendment in the bylaws , it has to be submitted to Charity Commissioner) (Reg No.982 (Bom), Appendix No.1).

According to the development plan of BMC, the said land was reserved for a Higher Secondary School. As per the developmental plan (1975) of BMC, instead of a parking lot, a community multipurpose hall was at that place. There were offices of political parties in the said premises. Under section 354, BMC issued a notice to demolish the said structure due to its structural instability. A time period of one month was issued to the Trustees of the "The People's Improvement Trust". In accordance with the law, Trustees of the "The People's Improvement Trust" published various advertisements regarding the demolition of the said structure. The advertisements were published in Lok-Satta, Samrat and Mahanayak. Also notices were sent to the tenants of the said structure. On 14th March 2016, notices were served to Mr. Prakash Ambedkar. He didn't
approach BMC officials or Court to get a stay on the notice issued to him by the Trust. The notices were in public domain from 14th March 2016 onwards.

After nearly 46 years of legal disputes, the new Trustees wanted to carry out developmental work in the said land. On 3rd December 2015, Maharashtra Chief Minister, Shri. Devendra Fadnavis changed the developmental plan of the said land from "Secondary School" to "Museum, Auditorium, Library, Community Multipurpose Hall, Training Center" (notification no.CMC/TPB 4315/384/CR-57/2015/UD-11). In the month of April 2016, BMC approved the new 17 storey development plan as proposed by the Trustees. On 14th April 2016, on the eve of 125th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Dr B R Ambedkar, the newly approved building plan was unveiled and there was an inauguration program attended by Shri Devendra Fadnavis, Chief Minister of Maharashtra. The Chief Minister of Maharashtra also declared in his public address that the "Govt of Maharashtra" will provide special funds for the development of the said building.

Some personalities involved in the whole controversy:

  Mr. Bhimrao Yashwant Ambedkar: Grandson of Dr B R Ambedkar. He is associated with Buddhist Society of India (Meera Tai Yashwant Ambedkar Faction)
  Mr. Anandraj Yashwant Ambedkar: Grandson of Dr B R Ambedkar. He is the head of another political outfit "Republican Sena". He registered the FIR against the Trustees.
  Mr. Ratnakar Gaikwad (IAS Retd): Current Chief Information Commissioner, Maharashtra State Government. Former Chief Secretary to Maharashtra State Government. Current Advisor to "The People's Improvement Trust".
  Mr. Yogesh Varhade: Leading NRI Ambedkarite. Head of ACJP (Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace).Current Trustee of "The People's Improvement Trust".
  Mr. Shrikant Gaware: Current Trustee of "The People's Improvement Trust".
  Mr. Nagsen Sonare: Current Trustee of "The People's Improvement Trust".
  Mr. Ajay Bambole: Current Trustee of "The People's Improvement Trust".
  Mr. Uttam Bodwade: Former DCP and Current Trustee of "The People's Improvement Trust".
Dr. Shinde: Working in KEM and Current Trustee of "The People's Improvement Trust".

Politics over the control of Land and Trust

An FIR was filed against the current Trustees of "The People's Improvement Trust" by Mr. Anandraj Ambedkar at Bhoiwada police station, Mumbai. Till today no action has been taken by the police. Both parties are involved in the politics over the control of Land and Trust. Both parties held press conferences presenting their points of view. On legal grounds, the defense of the "Trustees" is strong enough whereas the other party has very less chances due to lack of proper documents related to the property of the trust. Ratnakar Gaikwad, the advisor to "The People's Improvement Trust", has made serious allegations against the Ambedkar brothers calling them as thugs and illegal tenants occupying the property of the trust. Mr. Prakash Ambedkar too made serious allegations against the party workers of BSP and cadres of BAMCEF. He mentions in a video circulated on social media that the party workers and cadres of both BSP and BAMCEF respectively were present during the demolition of the structure and they have some vested interests with the current Trustees of "The People's Improvement Trust".

When one sees/inspects the Ambedkar Bhavan from inside, one can see that the whole structure is not demolished. Only a certain section which was occupied by the Ambedkar brothers with their respective political offices was demolished. From this, it can be inferred that the very purpose of the demolition of the structure was to vacate the illegal
tenants. Ambedkar brothers are fueling the people's sentiments by stressing that the whole building was important part of the Ambedkarite history. On the contrary, Mr.Ratnakar Gaikwad refuted this fabricated piece of history by the Ambedkar brothers. Only some part of the building, where some offices were functioning, was demolished. The entire Ambedkar Bhavan (a multipurpose hall) was built later on in the 70’s but not during the lifetime of Dr B R Ambedkar. The issue of "Heritage" was put forth by the Ambedkar brothers but that too doesn't hold on legal grounds. Suppose the structure had to be placed in the Heritage listing, there is a whole procedure established by the "Central Government Heritage Law". The Heritage Conservation Committee was never involved in granting a "Heritage status" to this particular piece of property.

Legal Perspective
The First Information Report filed by Mr. Anandraj Ambedkar is regarding the robbery of certain office items and cash from the office of Republican Sena. There is no FIR challenging the "Legal Positions" of the Trustees in the "The People's Improvement Trust". The FIR also states that damage was done to the "Printing Press belonging to the complainer". But legally the "Printing Press" is not owned by Mr. Anandraj Ambedkar.

Some articles in the debris
Recently, the defense counsel representing "The People's Improvement Trust" presented his case in the court. Some of the questions that were raised by the defense counsel along with certain observations are as follows:

1. For the same crime how can there be two FIRs?
2. One of the Trustees, Mr. Yogesh Varhade was out of India on the day when the demolition was carried out. Then how come he was present at the time of demolition in Dadar?

3. As the Trustees of "The People's Improvement Trust" were themselves shooting the video of the demolition of "Ambedkar Bhavan". It is not evident from the video, shot during the demolition, that the Trustees are involved in any type of robbery or theft. The recorded videotapes have been handed over by the Trustees to the police.

4. Before carrying out the demolition of the "Ambedkar Bhavan". The Trustees of the "The People's Improvement Trust" have already given a written statement to Police, BMC, Electricity Department regarding the demolition to be carried out. BMC had pasted the notice on 1/06/2016 on the walls of "Ambedkar Bhavan".

5. Before proceeding towards the demolition of "Ambedkar Bhavan", "The People's Improvement Trust" carried out "Panchnama" (Record of observation) of all the things that are there in the Bhavan. And hence no trustee is involved in any theft or robbery.

The counsel representing Ambedkar brothers was not in any position to contradict the above observations and hence the matter is sub judice.

**Political Ramifications**

Already the Ambedkarite politics in Maharashtra is fractured. Many political outfits exist in Maharashtra with their own version of "Republican Party of India". As soon as the allegations were made against BAMCEF for their alleged hand in the "Ambedkar Bhavan's" issue, Mr. Waman Meshram (BAMCEF) filed a defamation complaint against Mr. Prakash Ambedkar. Mr. Ramdas Athavale appealed to the masses to calm down and let the Trust construct the new 17 storey building on the said land. He proposed that the Trustees allot a piece of land to the Ambedkar family. Shiv Sena, the political antagonist of the Ambedkarite Movement/Politics, also jumped into the whole controversy to secure some base in the Ambedkarite population. The current Mayor of BMC (Shiv-Sena) issued a press statement to stop any kind of construction activity on the disputed land.
In the entire controversy created due to the power tussle between the Ambedkar brothers and Trustees, the common Ambedkarite is in a much confused state. There are already reported stray incidences of violence between two factions in the Vidarbha region. Ambedkar brothers, along with some communist party cadres, held a protest rally on 19 July 2016. The sentiments and emotions of the common Ambedkarite masses is being politically exploited for their personal feud over the control of Trust and the land associated with it.

Documents that are pertaining to the Trust, other legal Documents and advertisements:

Copy of FIR (Page No.1)
Press Note by Mayor of BMC (Shiv-Sena), Snehal Ambekar dated 14-07-2016
Advertisement of renaming of "Bharat Bhushan Printing Press" to "Buddha Bhushan Printing Press" and ownership of Press by "Bharitya Baudhajan Panchayat" published in Prabuddha Bharat
Advertisement for renaming of "Bharat Bhushan Printing Press" to "Buddha Bhushan Printing Press" and ownership of Press by "Bharitya Baudhajan Panchayat"

Old Advertisement of Bharat Bhushan Printing Press published in Janta (5th November 1932 edition)

Old Pamphlet by Dr.B.R Ambedkar making an appeal to princely states for the envisioned social centre for Untouchables
Letter of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to his son Yashwant Ambedkar regarding management of the "Buddha Bhushan Printing Press".
Earlier documents of printing press when the ownership was with Dr. B.R Ambedkar

Notice from the Executive Engineer, BMC to the "The People's Improvement Trust" (Page No.1)
Notice from Executive Engineer, BMC to "The People's Improvement Trust" (Page No.2)

Copy of the page of sale deed of land to "Bombay Scheduled Caste Improvement Trust"

More Pictures of the demolished building
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