CHAPTER - VII

Ambedkar and the Education of the Untouchables.

Ambedkar was born in an Untouchable Mahar family of Maharashtra. At that time the Untouchables were segregated and discriminated against on the basis of caste in every aspect of Indian society i.e. socio-economic and political. The advent of the British in India opened a new era in the history of the Dalits. During the British regime, various educational institutions (Government and aided) began to admit Untouchable students in schools and colleges. Moreover, some Indian reformers like Mahatma Jyotiba Phuley, Vithal Ramji Shinde, and princes like Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Sayajirao Gaikwad and others, had also worked in this direction. 1

Ambedkar, after completing his education, started to work for his people. First, in 1919, he gave evidence before the Southborough Committee to constitute separate electorates for the Untouchable. 2 He started a weekly paper Mooknayak (Leader of the dumb) on 31st January 1920, to mobilise the Untouchables for the struggle. 3 In 1924, he established the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha. The aim of this Sabha was to prepare the Untouchables for the future struggle. Through this Sabha Ambedkar gave a clarion call to his people to 'educate, agitate and organise'. 4

Apart from his other measures, Ambedkar began to take positive steps in the field of education in order to spread education among the Untouchables. At first, he started two hostels for Backward Class students at Solapur and Belgaum, in 1925. He established the Depressed Classes Education Society with a view to educate his people. He also appealed to the Bombay Government to help this Society to establish hostels, in which poor students could be accommodated. In response, the Governor of Bombay declared that he would sanction a scheme for five hostels for the benefit of secondary school students of the Depressed Classes. 5

It was difficult for the Depressed Classes Education Society to function, due to lack of funds and the negative attitude of upper caste people. In order to solve these problems B. R. Ambedkar met several persons and contacted several charitable institutions with a view to gather help from them. 6 In 1936, Babasaheb Ambedkar established the Independent Labour Party. The
party contested the Provincial elections of 1937, and explained its educational policy in its election manifesto. It was in favour of free and compulsory education. It would strive to remove illiteracy and stress the need of technical education, it also agreed to give scholarship to deserving candidates of the Backward Community for higher studies abroad. It declared its intention to establish regional Universities. Moreover, he was able to reserve certain seats for technical education of the Depressed Class students in London.

The Peoples’ Education Society

To propagate higher education among the Dalits, Ambedkar established the Peoples’ Education Society on 8th July 1945. Its objective was explained thus: “The people’s Education Society’s objective is not merely to give education in such a manner as to promote intellectual, moral and social democracy. This is what modern India needs and this is what all ‘well-wishers’ of India must promote.”

According to Ambedkar education was only effective means to uplift the down-trodden. He believed that it was only through education that the down-trodden would be awakened for their struggle to get their rights. He held, “My final word of advice is ‘Educate, Agitate and Organise, have faith in yourselves. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality.” The motto of the Peoples’ Education Society is ‘knowledge and compassion’ which is reminiscent of Buddhist principles of prajna and karuna. The Society had made good progress in this direction. At present the Society runs a number of colleges affiliated to various universities and institutions, high schools and hostels. They are as follows:

(i) The Name of the Colleges

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Siddharth College of Law, Bombay, Bombay</td>
<td>4. Dr. Ambedkar College of Commerce, Wadala, Bombay</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Milind College of Arts, Aurangabad.</td>
<td>10. Milind College of Science, Aurangabad</td>
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### ii) Other Colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>College Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Siddharth Institute of Industry and Administration, Bombay</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial Research Centre, Rajgriha, Bombay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>P.E. Society’s English Medium Central School, New Bombay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Marathi Medium Primary School, New Bombay</td>
<td>New Bombay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Milind Multipurpose High School, Aurangabad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>P.E. Society’s English Medium School, School, Aurangabad.</td>
<td>Aurangabad.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Matoshri Ramabai Ambedkar High School, Aurangabad.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Goutam Vidyalaya, Pandharpur.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Ngasen Vidyalaya, Nanded.</td>
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### (iii) Hostels and Ashrams

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Hostel Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Siddharth Vihar Hostel, Wadala, Bombay</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Subhedar Sawadkar, Vidyarthi Ashrama, Mahad Dist. Raigad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Matoshri Ramabai Ambedkar Vidyarthi Ashrama, Dapoli, Dist. Raigad</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Milind College of Arts and Science Girls’ Hostel, Aurangabad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Milind College of Arts Boy’s Hostel, Aurangabad</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Milind College of Science Boy’s Hostel, Aurangabad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar College of Commerce &amp; Arts Boy’s Hostel, Aurangabad.</td>
<td>Vastigraha, Pandharpur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sant Gadge Maharaj Chokhamela</td>
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### Commemorative Projects

The Peoples’ Education Society started the following projects.¹²

(i) **Projects at Bombay:**

1. A Multipurpose Auditorium
2. A Central Research Library.
3. A Stadium and a Pavilion.
4. A Buddhist Cultural Centre.

(ii) **Projects at Aurangabad:**

2. Stadium and Swimming Pool.
3. Working Women’s Hostel
(iii) Projects at Bangalore:

1. Buddhist Institute for study of Buddhism and comparative study of all religious.
2. A spacious Multipurpose Hall
3. A Residential School.

(iv) Projects at Mahad:

1. Buddhist Cultural Centre.
2. A polytechnic Institute.

(v) Projects at Dapoli:

1. Jr. College of Education
2. Girls' High School and a Hostel.

(vi) Projects at New Bombay:

1. A Multipurpose School.

The Society also planned to start I.A.S., I.P.S., I.F.S., coaching centres, vocational courses in different disciplines. In fact, the Society played an important part for spreading higher education among the Dalits. The Colleges run by the Society provided various facilities to the students, namely monthly scholarships, cheap accommodation and attention to their problems. Students also after completion of their education engaged themselves in villages and cities in various capacities. And the credit goes largely to the graduates of the Society for spreading Ambedkarism among the Dalits keeping the movement alive. In short, the survey of the educational conditions of the Dalits from 1920 to this day shows that there were a few matriculates and few are graduates among the Dalits in 1920 when Ambedkar started his public career. Today the position is different. The Dalits have made significant progress in this direction.

Ambedkar's Concern for Dalit Education.11

Ambedkar felt unhappy at the treatment of the Depressed Classes by the Higher Castes of the society, who monopolised and wielded all the power and positions. The situation made him
a life-long rebel to defend their human rights. The backwardness of the Indian people, particularly of the lower strata of the society had been due to two factors — (1) material negligence and (2) indifference to knowledge. Ambedkar analysed the progress of different classes of society and found that the Backward Classes were second in order of population, but fourth in the order of education, whether primary, secondary or College education. As a result, his efforts were directed towards the removal of the social disabilities. And this meant the opening up of avenues of educational advancement and provisions of better opportunities for economic progress. Earlier he felt that the lot of the downtrodden could not be bettered without a share in political power. To him education was not merely a means of livelihood, but as powerful weapon to liberate the Dalits from ignorance and to strengthen their fight against injustice and humiliation. That is why he raised the slogan ‘Educate, Agitate and Organise.’ He organised several educational institutions as noted above “to raise the level of consciousness of the serf-like people” and also started journals for Dalits so as to wage a better battle for their human rights.

Ambedkar was unhappy to see the slow progress of education of the Dalits in India during the British rule, and the position did not improve keeping pace with the increase of population. The level of literacy on which the quality of life depended much posed an alarming situation across the country and across the various social classes. For the poor Dalits it became a dream. The overall planned investment in educational and health sector had been far from the adequate. It may be noted in this connection that Ambedkar as the chief architect of the Constitution provided in article 45 of the constitution of India for free and compulsory education within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution for all children up to the age of 14 years. But the parties in the power did not and could not implement this Directive Principle of state policy during the twentieth century. It is a paradox that the primary education meant for the poorer and weaker sections of the society has been neglected because of the lack of funds, while higher education including technology has been highly subsidised. Dr. Amartya Sen the Nobel Laureate economist has brought to light the neglected aspect of primary education in India. He has pointed out that China has given more attention than India to education at primary stage compared with that at the higher stage. And this is unfortunate, for the poor have been deprived
of education whereas the rich have been pampered. Because of this policy of the ruling class, India has 54% of the illiterates of the world.

Ambedkar realised that 'education of the masses is a matter of great cost.' Hence, he wanted to ensure that the Depressed Classes did not find themselves in a helpless condition and the authorities charged with the responsibility of such an important subject like education should be up and doing in the matter. Further he stressed that education ought to be within the reach of every one. It ought to be cheapened in all possible ways and to the greatest extent possible. In this context Justice V.R.Krishna Iyer's words are worth quoting:

"Excellence in education is a non-negotiable value, true. Who can deny that, given opportunity, many a flower now wasting its sweetness in the desert air, will not blossom and brighten the garden? And they are the ignored Harijan/Girijan talent. On the other hand, demonstrably sub-standard candidates from among moneyed classes are pampered by allowing them to join private colleges, medical, engineering and others by payment of capitation fee although in the competitive market they have no chance, judging by the marks. Our meritorious lobby has not yet shouted against this monetary infection of educational health."

In regard to higher education Ambedkar was of opinion that "it is the duty of a modern university to provide facility for the highest education to Backward Communities." It follows from this as a necessary corollary that "the Backward Communities should have some control in the university affairs." He looked upon the university "primarily as a machinery, whereby educational facilities are provided to all those who are intellectually capable of using those facilities to the best advantage, but who cannot avail themselves of those facilities for want of funds or for other handicaps in life." He strongly recommended the nomination of members of Backward Communities on the university senates which functioned like Legislative Bodies and were supposed to put forth the needs of the Backward Communities and to suggest the facilities that were necessary for meeting them.

Ambedkar considered the acquisition of knowledge to be \textit{sine qua non} for the success of democratic experience. He said that when three-fourths of the population was drenched in ignorance and did not know its rights and responsibilities there could be no hope for self-government and added: "If we do not get self-government notwithstanding the fact that three-fourths of the population is drenched in ignorance, our representative system will be a slam, and
there would be a rule of wealth against poverty, of power against weakness." Purporting to give a solution to the problem, he said, "If we desire to have provincial autonomy we must ensure two things. One thing is that every access must be given to every grade of modern education to the communities which are educationally backward, in order that they may realise their rights and liabilities of citizenship, and secondly, in order that every access may be given to the communities, it is absolutely necessary, under the present circumstances, that special representation should be provided for them." No need to overemphasis that his words have great relevance even in the present day.

Therefore, if we are sincere to provide commensurate education to the weaker sections and thereby bringing them at par with the others, our society, particularly the academic world needs to look at the problem in a more humanistic way. A new approach seems necessary; keeping them out of the higher education on mere alibis like ‘quality’ or ‘merit’ would not do so.

Ambedkar’s Basic Educational Philosophy: Various Facets

Ambedkar considered as one of the "wretched of the earth" and "the lowliest and the lost" of the Indian soil shot into the political horizon by dint of his genius and prodigious diligence. He was not only a political emancipator, economic historian and constitutionalist, but a great savant and educationalist too. Secondly, the spectrum of his ideas and action has not only influenced the process of emancipation of Scheduled Castes but many others also. We are to make anendeavour to delineate his ideas in respect of education so as to come to his basic philosophy of education. Such an evaluation is to be effected in relation to the biographical and social context of his life.

Ambedkar was born in 1891 in a Mahar family of Central India and his social rank was very low. His father, a subedar Major, was burdened with fourteen children and ambedkar happened to be the last one. His father had not enough financial means to support his studies. Ambedkar reached his high school studies in Parel, Bombay. He used to take his afternoon meals in the school and had no home support to buy books of interest and choice. He had to help
himself with the reading in public among the Dalits. This led, in later years, to the formation of Peoples’ Education Society in Bombay. The impact of his mentor Jotiba Phooley is manifest in the inauguration of Siddarth College on 20th June 1946. And the naming of the College has an interesting history of its own. A lone Mahar boy like Ambedkar passed his Matriculation Examination in 1907 and the event became a matter of pride and celebration for the family and friends. On this occasion one of his teachers K. A. Keluskar presented him with a copy of Buddha’s life. His appreciation of the leadership of Buddha had a great impact on his religious and secular thinking and pushed him into charismatic fold of Buddhism. The naming of the college is thus a personal tribute of Ambedkar to Buddha, whose inspiration directed his thinking and activities.

2. Ambedkar happens to be one of the few Mahar people who could go abroad for higher studies. With the help of a scholarship from Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda, he went to the University of Columbia in America, where from he got his Master’s as well as Ph.D. degrees. Among the professors who influenced him notably was John Dewey. John Dewey was a philosopher of rationalism and instrumentalism. He had a great belief in the usage of education and its potentialities to alter the values of individuals and prepared for change. Greatly moved by his ideas Ambedkar developed the doctrinal belief in the efficacious and transformatory character of education. Ambedkar himself acknowledged his debt to his teacher John Dewey. He quoted from his teacher these words:

“Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse……..As a society becomes more enlightened it realises that it is responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society.

“An individual can live only in the present. The present is not just something which comes after the past; much less something produced by it. It is what life is in leaving the past behind it. The study of past products will not help us to understand the present. Acknowledge of the past and its heritage is of great significance when it enters into the present, but not otherwise. And the mistake of making the records and remains of the past the main material of education is that it tends to make the past a rival of the present and the present a more or less futile imitation of the past.”

3. Another major source of impact on his thinking was M.G. Ranade who was a great
advocate of rationalism, evolutionism and modernism, particularly, in politics. Ranade believed that education was the best and surest warranty of social change, for change, primarily had to germinate in the minds of men before they could come to its fruition of inexorable end. Ambedkar carried in him these ideas and spurned the idea of force as against education as a instrument of social change.

4. Another aspect of his life profile which glued him to education was his Mahar background. As a student he was not permitted to learn Sanskrit which he was fond of. In the school at Satara where he had his early education he experienced discrimination at the hands of fellow pupils. When his teacher asked him to solve a problem in mathematics which often pupils had failed to solve he attempted to go to the blackboard to solve the problem. But the fellow students shouted against Ambedkar for behind the blackboard lay their tiffin boxes and his writing on the blackboard would lend a defiling touch to the boxes. Instead of discouraging him this strengthened and fostered the iron will of Ambedkar for learning and education. In addition to that Ambedkar found a great compensation and rejuvenation for his murky life experience in the garden of books and public libraries which were strewn with lofty ideas and fruitful lives. Besides, his exciting studies in various libraries in Columbia and New York, his studies in the London Museum and India office Libraries, etc., paved the way for the emergence of Ambedkar as a formidable scholar and commendable educationalist.

5. Dr. Ambedka's involvement in education led to his career development and professional experiences. His post-matric employment in the Gaekwad's state and later employment after his return from foreign studies in 1917 as a military secretary to the Maharaja led him to realise that nobody treated him as a human being. He was treated by the staff and peons as despicable object. Similarly was the experience in respect of his accommodation and food at the hands of other citizens. None of his degrees could alter his status, since he carried the social stigma of a Mahar with him. In November 1918, he accepted the job of a professor of Political Economy in the Sydenham College, Bombay until he left for London. After four years Ambedkar became a full-fledged professor in Government Law College, Bombay. His interaction with the
students and teachers influenced his ideas on education. Thereafter, his assumption of the Principalship of the Government College of Bombay in June 1935 enabled him to get insight into academic and administrative problems. His three years experience as the Principal and also member of legislative Council in the Province of Bombay provided him the rich experience of the need and complexity to the problems of education. It was as a member of the Legislative Council that he gave the formula for the upliftment of the Backward Classes in education. He stated, “All these communities (backward) are unequal in their status and progress. If they are to be brought to the level of equality then the only remedy is to adopt the principle of inequality and to give favoured treatment to those who are below the level.”

The above statement may be explained by means of mathematics as follows. If the privileged class = P, non-privileged class=N, the ‘favoured treatment’=reservation=R, then Mathematically,

\[ P = N + R. \]

In this context, reservation is a must to remove the existing inequalities. And this has been incorporated in Article 15 (4) of the Constitution of India. The critiques of reservations have no occasion to decry this reservation. It is their ignorance of the basic problems of the society and their selfishness in this regard have led them to cry reservation down.

6. Dr. Ambedkar was committed to educational values as a means as well as an end in terms of Weltanschauung (world view). He shared this with many leaders from Dadabhai Naoroji to Tilak, Phoolay, Ranade and Gokhale etc. Since the time of Rammohan Roy, the innovative leaders of India had been championing the cause of English education for it was a source of new knowledge, national thinking and humanistic way of life. Ambedkar shared the concern for education in general and the education of the Mahars in particular. The Mahars of the time had been steeped in illiteracy and superstitions and had been living the life of dehumanised and brutalised beings. Ambedkar believed that education could bring not only a new consciousness among the Mahars, but also impel them toward the praxis of self-liberation. To this end he took lessons from Jyotiba Phoolay and Justice Ranade. He started journals, wrote petitions and drafted
manifestos for the welfare of Dalits. And he started many schools and educational institutions as noted already.

In this context, Ambedkar’s basic educational philosophy is seen to have been based on two objectives—(a) the search for truth, and (b) the practice of humanitarian principles in one’s own life. Here the Buddhist principles of prajna (understanding) and karuna (compassion) acted as the beacon light. He had been inspired by the rational approach of the Buddha in the East and John Dewey in the West. So as to inculcate rational thinking and scientific temper among the masses in general and the students in particular. In his address in the Elphinstone College, Bombay in December 1952 he exhorted the teachers and the taught to meet the challenges of the modern world by way of the application of knowledge. He warned that universities would continue to be sacred abodes of learning and not workshop centres training only an army of clerks.

7. Ambedkar had developed a programme of education for the uplift of the Depressed Classes as a part of the general manifesto of Indian Labour Party before the 1937 elections. To stamp out illiteracy, he stressed the necessity of full and compulsory education. He did not encourage liberal education, because it was neither useful for the upper classes nor for the Depressed Classes. Instead he advocated the adoption of diversified technical education. His programme of education included the divorce between teaching and non-teaching universities.

8. He championed universal primary education, but he was opposed to the introduction of charka in the primary school. The charka scheme drew its inspiration from Gandhi on the principle of “earning while learning.” Ambedkar contended that the Gandhian scheme would deprive the scheduled caste people of the curiosity and adventure of learning. The reason was that they being the poorest could be tempted to earn a little more than learn. As a remedy education should be made compulsory. Though Ambedkar was in favour of voluntary efforts to start educational institutions, he advocated the modernisation of the masses through education under the auspices of the states. In his concept of state socialism he allocated a major role for the state in discharging its duties in respect of educating the unlettered millions of citizen in the country.
9. Ambedkar was unhappy with the colonial system of education in British and post independent India. He was inspired by the freedom of choice of learning in American Universities and advocated a re-organisation of subjects and courses so as to provide a wider exposure of knowledge to the peoples. Moreover, he called for removal of inequalities in pay scale and status among academics involved in teaching and research. Moreover, he abhored the idea of differentiated status of undergraduates and post-graduate College under the university system.

10. Ambedkar was a great lover of students. As a principal of the Government Law College in Bombay he took keen interest in enriching and expanding its library and the academic facilities and environment for the students. He himself was conscious and worked hard to deliver his lectures full of insight and information. According to him, a professor “should not only be learned : he must speak in a clear tone. He must be well-versed.” He also held that professors should constantly seek knowledge and try for truth and practise it.

11. Ambedkar’s opinion on education of girls is interesting. He thought liberal education for girls was of no consequence. “What is the use of Burke and Shakespeare to girls,” he said. Ambedkar wanted women to be particularly trained in home science education and peripherally in other subjects. Men of course, are free to pursue a variety of courses and studies.

12. Ambedkar’s life was of study and struggle. His academic interest in crucial political and economic problems continued until the end. However, he stated that students in schools and colleges should not be involved in active politics. On the contrary they should be engaged in the development of self-culture and self-help. Ambedkar exhorted the students to put a premium on industry and creativity. They should persevere to attain goals and ideals dearer to them, devoid of which life becomes less thrilling and meaningful.

13. Ambedkar’s belief about commitment to education was so deep and wide that it had affected the entire gamut of his outlook and activity. In his struggle against the Congress, the Muslim League and the British for the freedom and emancipation of the Scheduled Castes, he used parliamentary methods to struggle. He believed in petitions, representation and debates as a means of information as well as redressal of social problems. He appeared before many com-
missions like the Royal Commission on Indian currency, the Simon Commission, the Round Table Conference and the like in which he pleaded for the uplift of the Depressed Classes.

14. Ambedkar’s method of struggle differed from Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* and non-co-operation method. Ambedkar used *Satyagraha* only thrice in his life when major issues like temple entry in Nasik and land distribution in Vidarbha were at stake. He neither believed in *Satyagraha* nor in the “change over theory.” Here Ambedkar’s bias seemed to be in favour of constitutional, Parliamentary and legalistic methods. After all, education is a critical process of societies. Ambedkar did neither embrace the philosophical anarchies in Gandhi nor the proletarian revolutionary in Marx. As a result he emerged as a champion of educative struggle for the creation of consciousness and liberation of the Dalit masses. All his life he had been in search of truth which would liberate the Dalits from the oppression of Hinduism. It started in 1938 at Nasik and went through a long ordeal of judgement and evaluation before he finally converted the lacs of Mahars into Buddhism. In October 1956 at Nagpur his process of learning and unlearning changed into an ideology of rationality, brotherhood and equality of Buddhism. Opinions may differ on this but there is no doubt about his quest for the truth as he understood it. The *summum bonum* of his life had been “to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.” And it was a source of education for those who participated in that adventure.

**Notes and References**

6. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., Pp.4, 13-14, 18.
12. Ibid.
15. Frantz Founou's Revolutionary Expression, which is also the title of his thesis.
16. Rabindranath Tagore's Poetic Phrase for the deprived and oppressed strata in 'Gitanjali -

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Here is thy foot stool, here reset thy feet.
Where live the lowliest and the lost.``
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18. Ibid. P. 279
23. Biswas, Dr. A. R., Ambedkar On Constitutional Reservation As the Cure-All For Casteism, (Calcutta, 1991), Mahamilan Sanga, Ambedkar Bhavan, Rajkumar Chakroborty Lane, Cal-9