CHAPTER - IX

Protest As An Ideology : An Urge For Social Change

The revival of Buddhism has been the most significant contribution of Ambedkar. It is his legacy to India. He was emphatic about the need of Indians to develop character and integrity, since without this achievement in economic and social fields would make no qualitative change in their lives. Without undergoing such a total change, he believed, the Indians would be unable to defend the country's freedom and integrity. Dhamma (morality), according to him, is the foundation of a civilised social life. Unless the government accepts it as its corner stone, the society may either disintegrate or succumb to dictatorship of one kind or the other. In both the cases liberty of the individual would be the first casualty. Equality between man and man would be impossible under a dictatorship based on the negation of the principle of equality. In this context Owen M.Lynch writes:

"Buddhism has arisen at the point where traditional Hindu institutions and caste inequality are tangent to modern secular institutions and democratic equality. At present, the Indian socio-political system is a mixed system containing elements of tradition and modernity, caste and class. Buddhism functions to bridge the gap between these two systems and to soften the transition from one to other. It is religious and it is Indian ... It is also secular and egalitarian."1

It is necessary to remember here what the advocates of Marxism try to make out about Ambedkar's non-acceptance of communism (This is dealt with in the next sub-section). The ingredient of Marxian communism are not only German metaphysics, French Politics, and British industrial expansion but also Greek myths and Old Testament archetypal concepts. The Pagan myths and concepts added an irresistible moral flavour to the writings of Karl Marx. Ambedkar, an astute student of human nature and society, too had the insight to visualise the role of religion and myths in human history. "Because Ambedkar embedded his revolutionary message in religion and in religious myth, its appeal to his followers is far greater than that of his
purely political teaching. In a country where the religious attitude plays a predominant role it was but prudent to introduce revolutionary ideas in a language understood by the people. Buddhism is the language of ‘saintly’ politics; the language so persuasively spoken by Gandhi and others when appealing to Indian mind.” And this religion, in addition to being secular and rational, has its roots in the Indian soil. Inspite of its having suffered defeat at the hands of revengeful Hindu revivalist, the ideas it had set in motion and the ideas it had postulated had left their indelible mark on the Indian mind. M. Gobindan illustrates as thus.

“The deliberate attempt to wipe out Buddhists did not meet with complete success because ideas and images have their own logic. Whenever Indians thought of freedom they reminisced the great epoch and ideas that moulded it. Re-conversion or designed extermination of Buddhists did not lead to the total extinguishment of the light of Asia from the minds of Indian people. It took different forms and penetrated into their psyche influencing the later events and the periodical emergence of saintly social reformers especially of both the Vaishnavite and Saivite varieties to preach the doctrine of social equality. A large number of Hindu social reformers were Pracchanna Buddhhas.”

Dhamma and the Marxist Class Struggle

Advocates of Marxist class struggle accuse Ambedkar of not resorting to Marxist class struggle to achieve the welfare of the Untouchable. It is said, as already noted earlier that Ambedkar should have adopted the Marxist technique of class struggle to achieve his objectives. As observed by W. N. Kuber:

“Though Ambedkar had received Western education, still he was not westernised in the sense Nehru was. He pointed out that the Scheduled castes had two enemies: Brahminism and Capitalism; but what was his way to fight them? Not by adopting only parliamentary methods, but by waging class battles in corporation with other like-minded parties. That was the greatest drawback in his political thinking ... His (Ambedkar’s) rejection of Marxism and embracing Buddhism were reactionary steps ... It is inconceivable how he could achieve socialism by repudiating Marxism and making Buddhism an alternative to Marxism.”

It is evident from Kuber’s statement as quoted above that Ambedkar has made three mistakes. In the first place he contended that Nehru had been more westernised than Ambedkar. Secondly, he mistook the better method leading to the “greatest drawback in his political thinking.” Thirdly, his ignorance as to the efficacy of Buddhism in preference to Marxism in
bringing about socialism. But all these three objections have no legs to stand upon. As regards the comparison of Nehru with Ambedkar, Kuber betrays colossal ignorance. He does not know that Nehru was a casteist. And this is pointed out by Pattavi Sitaramaya in his introduction to the 'Life of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru' by Y.G. Krishnamurty. Sitaramaya observes that "Pandit Nehru is very conscious of the fact that he is a Brahmin" (p. 208, vol. 9). His casteism was also manifested in the passing of the Hindu Code Bill as sponsored by Ambedkar. It was Ambedkar who wanted to reform the Hindu law and thereby remove the social inequalities between man and woman but Pandit Nehru opposed. As a result the Hindu Code Bill could not be passed and Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet. Kuber should have been aware of this.

Kuber's second mistake is that he wanted Ambedkar to adopt the method of "class battles in co-operation with other like-minded parties," in addition to "parliamentary methods." Kuber should have known that other parties were mostly for Manuvite brotherhood. As such they were always opposed to social equality. In this context one could not expect that they would cooperate with Ambedkar to achieve social equality. Here Kuber advocates an impossible thing and he should remember the caveat of Bismarck: "Politics is a game of the possible." So Kuber's advice is unrealistic and untenable in the Indian context. The third mistake relates to Kuber's preference of Marxism to Buddhism. It does not stand to reason. How does he call Buddhism a reactionary step?

Ambedkar has analysed both the Marxist and Buddhist methods. According to him Buddhism has twenty five factors in its favour. With regard to the Marxist interpretations of history and the movement of history he points out that there is a great similarity between the Buddhist analysis and the Marxist analysis in identifying the private ownership of property as one of the factors accounting for class conflict and the consequence of sorrow and suffering in the social life. Then he evaluates the Buddhist and Marxian means of undoing this conflict and misery and ushering in an era of conflict-free social living based on equality. He concludes by saying that the means adopted by Buddha were to convert a man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily. On the Buddhist side he lists, as means: the Panhashila and the Noble
Eight Fold Paths. In regard to the Marxist method he points out that they are (i) violent revolution; (ii) the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thereafter he addresses himself to the question, "whose means are most efficacious"? And he gives the answer: "one has to choose between a government by force and a government by moral disposition."

It is clear that Ambedkar had a great appreciation for communist society; he expressed his antipathy toward dictatorship and the communist resorting to violence. He believed that Buddhism creates the society aimed at by the communist that is a society based on equality, but without dictatorship or force. However, it may be noted that the class-based state is an instrument for the exploitation of the oppressed class is inherently violent. It maintains itself through violence and any challenge to its existence would be met with violent suppression. In Marx's words: "Force is the mid-wife of every old society which is pregnant with the new." In this context it is inevitable for the ruling class to suppress the struggle to maintain itself as in the oppressor, making the social processes violent. What is inevitable is that violence goes on forever. The second objection raised by Ambedkar is that the communist revolution results in dictatorship and that too a permanent dictatorship. To avoid this, Ambedkar suggests that the communist might use "Buddhism as an ultimate aid to sustain communism when force is withdrawn." One may therefore conclude that given its rational structure, the Buddhist 'Dhamma' may play an important role as a moral and spiritual basis for some of the ideological developments required for sociologists living in the post revolutionary phases. It is unfortunate that Kuber has failed to understand this.

Ambedkar's way of thinking was characterised by Dr.Jatav as social humanism which is supposed to have contained the following principles — (1) Equality among human beings; (2) every human being as an end in himself; (3) right of every human being to social, economic, political and religious freedom; (4) to make every human being free from want and fear; (5) to maintain liberty, equality, fraternity, and strive to secure redemption from oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class, and of nation by nation; (6) to stand for a democratic society under a parliamentary system of government; (7) to believe in non-violence as an instru-
ment of social change and adopt peaceful and persuasive methods to avoid class conflicts and the possibility of civil war; (8) to avoid any ‘ism’ or any theory or dogma in its extreme aspect; (9) need for spiritual discipline; and (10) firm foundations of universal love, equality and human brotherhood that the Buddha taught. 9

The Neo-Buddhist Movement As a Protest

The progress of the Buddhist conversion movement is difficult to trace. It has now been almost forty years since Babasaheb Ambedkar took ‘diksha’ at Nagpur, and it is fair to say that many serious Buddhists are concerned that there still is not a Bhikshu in every locality or that some who converted still follow Hindu practices or that Buddhism has not developed the kind of festivals that make Hinduism such a participatory religion. But the outside observer does see change: there are more and more ‘Viharas, complete with images of the Buddha and Bahasaheb Ambedkar, many of them in slum areas. Now, there are perhaps a dozen Buddhist nuns as well as several dozen Marathi speaking Bhikshus. Hundreds of Maharastrian Buddhists go to the Vipassana meditation retreats offered by the growing movement of Goenka, who now has a permanent centre at Igpaturi. The Trailokya Baudha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana begun by the venerable Sangarakshita as the Indian branch of the Friends of the western Buddhist order is steadily adding new centres and new dharmacharis - dharmachari rather than bhikkhu since the order stresses by leadership rather than sangha of monks. At latest count, the TBSMG maintain a hostels and Dhamma work at ten towns in Maharashtra as well as in Goa, Ahmedabad, Agra and Hastinaipur. There is a beautiful centre of extensive work at Dapoli near Pune and a retreat center in Nagpur, and the ancient Buddhist cave at Karle is a retreat centre for today’s Buddhists. 10

The conversion spot at the diksha bhumi (conversion spot) in Nagpur is marked by an enormous stupa and it is still being built. There is a training centre of the late venerable Ananda Kausalyayan at that place still continues. Moreover, a branch at Kampti has been established. There have been recent mass conversion at Patna in Bihar under the care of Meiku Ram (Inspector General of Police) in December, 1994 and at Bhopal by the ‘Bauddha Mahasangha’ based in Bombay in May, 1994. A Japanese Bhikkhu, Surai Sasi, who lived four years in Nagpur, led a
continuous protests of the Hindu domination of Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha’s enlighten-
ment. A number of Maharastrian Buddhists joined him.

It may be noted here that the outsider sees more change and progress than the Buddhist
inside the Movement. But it is still true that change comes through individual action. There have
been overarching organisations and their noble efforts are praiseworthy. Such one has been the
All India Bauddha Dhamma Parishad which met in Nanded in January 1994 with ten thousand
people and eighty Bhikshus in attendance. The organiser of this 6th Conference was
Dr. S.P. Gaikwad, a long time worker for Buddhism in Maharashtra, who invited the venerable
Shasan Rashmi, general Secretary of the All India Bhikshu Sangh, to inaugurate the
conference.¹¹

Ambedkar’s Rationalization of Religious Concepts

Ambedkar considered the pros and cons of four religions before he resolved to embrace
Buddhism.¹² He compared mutually Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed and Krishna. The first point of
making Buddha separate from the rest was his self-abnegation. Jesus insisted that he was the
son of God and that those who wished to enter the Kingdom of God would fail if they did not
recognise him as the son of God. Like Jesus, Mohammed also claimed that he was the mes-
enger of God on earth and further he insisted that he was the last messenger. Krishna had gone
beyond Jesus and Mahommed. He claimed that he was the full incarnation of God on Earth and
his followers described him as the Supreme Being. But the Buddha was born a son of man and
was content to remain a common man and preached his gospel as a common man. He never
claimed any supernatural origin or supernatural power, nor did he perform miracles to prove his
supernatural power. The Buddha made a distinction between a margodata and a mokshadata.
Jesus, Mahommed and Krishna claimed for themselves the role of mokshadata. The Buddha
was satisfied with playing the role of a margodata or path-finder.

There is a third distinction between the four religious teachers. Both Jesus and Mohammed
claimed that whatever they taught was infallible and beyond question. Krishna assumed himself
as a God of Gods and therefore what he taught was a word of God, uttered by God, and they were original and final and the question of infallibility did arise. The Buddha claimed no such infallibility for what he taught. In the Mahaparinibban Sutta he told Ananda that his religion and experience was based on reason and experience and that his followers should not accept his teachings as binding merely because they emanated from him. He wished his religion not to be encumbered with dead wood of the past. It is because of this that he gave liberty to his followers to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required. No other religious teacher has shown such courage. They had been afraid of permitting repair.

However, Buddhism holds a unique position in this respect. Ambedkar compared Buddhism with Hinduism thus. Hinduism is a religion, which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has, it is not an integral part of it. In other words, morality is not embedded in religion. It is a separate force sustained by social necessities and not by injunction of Hindu religion. As contrasted with Hinduism, Buddhism is morality—it is embedded in religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if not morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religion, morality is to Buddhism. Secondly, here Buddha propounded a most revolutionary meaning of Dhamma. The Vedic meaning of Dhamma did not connote morality. The Dharma as enunciated by the Brahmins and as propounded by Purvaminansa of Jaimini nothing more than the performances of certain karmas. Dharma to the Brahmins means the keeping up of observances that is yajnas, yagas and sacrifices to God. It had nothing to do with morality.

It may be noted here that the Buddha repudiated the yajnas as being the essence of religion. He substituted ritualism by morality as the essence of Dhamma. Although Damma had been used by the Brahmin teachers and by the Buddha, the contents of both are radically different. Indeed, it may be stated that the Buddha was the first teacher in the world, who made morality the essence and foundation of religion.

Thirdly, there is a point of contrast between Hinduism and Buddhism. It lies in the fact that the official gospel of Hinduism is inequality as embodied in the Chaturvarna. Against this the
Buddha stood for equality. He stood for equality and was the greatest opponent of Chaturvarna. According to Hinduism neither a Shudra nor a woman could become a teacher of religion nor could they take Sannyasa to realise the God head. On the other hand Buddha admitted the Shudras to the Sangha. He also admitted women to become Bhikshunis. This he did to destroy the practice of inequality.

In this context Ambedkar gave his views which are as follows: - (1) That society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either society is sure to go to pieces. In all societies law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality, must therefore, remain as the governing principle in every society. (2) That religion as defined in the first proposition must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose its respect and therefore becomes the subject of ridicule and thereby not merely lose its force as a governing principle of life but might in course of time disintegrate and lapse if it is not in accord with science. In other words, religion if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science. (3) That religion as a code of social morality, must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Unless a religion recognise these three fundamental principles of social life religion will be doomed. (4) That religion must not sanctify or ennable poverty. Renunciation of riches by those who have it may be a blessed state. But poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion and to perpetuate vice and crime, to make the earth a living hell.

**Guiding Principles of Ambedkar**

In his battle to gain rights for his people, to lift the Untouchables to a status equal to the higher Castes of India, Ambedkar used many techniques, many tactics. In the religious field, he at first encouraged attempts to join in religious festivals, to enter temples, to perform marriages with Vedic rites. Later he called his people to a conference on conversion and asked them to leave the fold of Hinduism. For twenty years, following that decision in 1936, Ambedkar played
with the possibilities of entering Islam, Christianity or any one of India's numerous sects within Hinduism. The final decision was to convert to Buddhism, which meant liberty to revive a religion long dead in India.

Ambedkar at first supported special representation for the Depressed Classes in the political field, then joint electorates with Hindus, then separate electorates, and towards the end of his life the workability of the reserved seats for the Scheduled castes for which he had spent so much time and energy. Ambedkar's varying approaches in the religious and political fields, however, reflect the shifting opportunities and the changing political demands around him. There is a remarkable consistency in his total view. From his work the following guiding principles may be derived —

(i) The Untouchables should revolt because they are slave, and slavery is inherently inhuman. There is no racial difference that marks them off from caste Hindus. If Hindu religious scripture ordains the practice of untouchability, those scriptures should be rejected.

(ii) Only by acknowledging their slavery, by admitting their inferior position, could Untouchables unify and press for change. Only by Governmental acknowledgement of their deprivation as a class and the correction of that injustice by special treatment on a caste basis could equality eventually be reached.

(iii) Only Untouchables could understand their own condition and needs, hence only Untouchables themselves should lead Untouchable movements.

(iv) Education and politics are the chief means to equality; education so that the Untouchable will be able to participate in society on an equal plane; political agitation and participation, so that Untouchables can secure their rights and redress their economic and social grievances by law and political policy.

(v) Untouchables are totally Indians. No foreign ideology, no foreign religion could help them achieve equality as Indians. India must be free before they are totally free, but their battle
for freedom must never be subservient to other demands.

(vi) Only as some Untouchables become elite can the whole group be raised. Only if ability and ambition enable some Untouchables to be at the top of the pinnacle can the mass below realise its own potential. ¹³

The conversion announcement was made without reference to any religion. Ambedkar seemed to be inclined towards Sikhism explaining later that “conversion to Islam or Christianity would de-nationalise the Depressed Classes.”¹⁴ But after several interactions with the Sikhs as expression of goodwill towards the Scheduled Castes, Ambedkar led the issue of conversion lapse, probably because he felt that the reserved seats won for the Depressed Classes. There is another reason for this. The ideal religion according to him should be free from any taint of caste and untouchability. It would place man, rather than an authoritarian God, at its centre, and would work for man rather than requiring him to live in unquestioning obedience to God. He had no respect for religions, which shrouded themselves in superstitious mystery and insisted that there was no reason why religious teaching should not accord with the principles of reason. Finally, no true religion could sanction or ennable poverty; instead it should promote the principle of liberty, Equality and Fraternity.¹⁵

One by one the world’s religions failed the test. Islam and Christianity were not only God-based and essentially authoritarian, but they were also foreign. Still a patriot at heart, Ambedkar feared that mass conversion to an “alien” faith could have a de-establishing effect on the Country’s cultural integrity. Sikhism appealed for a while, many of his lieutenants favoured it, if only because it allowed, even encouraged its adherents to bear arms. But he finally rejected that on the grounds it was too closely allied to Hinduism, and even infected with canker of castes.¹⁶ In 1946 when Ambedkar was asked by a Christian minister why his first choice had been Islam rather than Christianity, he said it was not easy to uproot humanity. The Untouchables were willing to stay where they were provided they had political safeguard, and there was no agreement among them as to where to go.¹⁷
Gandhi and Ambedkar in Leadership And the Questions of the Untouchable

On November 29, 1948, nine months after Gandhi’s death, the Constituents Assembly of independent India passed a provision in the Constitution of India (article 17) abolishing untouchibility. The House resounded with cries of Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai (victory for Mahatma Gandhi) — a tribute to Gandhi’s 30 year effort to remove untouchibility from Indian Society. At the session was present the Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an Untouchable. Three years earlier he had ended his book, What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables? with bitter words, “the Untouchables have ground to say: ‘Good God! Is this man Gandhi our Saviour?’”

The irony of the movement was lost on those present — a legalistic measure was taken in the name of Gandhi who had no use for legal means, coupled with this was the lack of recognition for Ambedkar, the Untouchable who had drafted the measure and fought Gandhi to secure legalistic solutions to the problem of untouchability. The amalgamation of the two approaches, however, does symbolise India’s continuing attempts to synthesise the ways of Gandhi and Ambedkar in efforts to remove the stigma of untouchability from democratic national life. Both Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) are known to their followers respectively as the “Father of the Nation”, and “the Saviour of Untouchables”. Gandhi publicly put the abolition of untouchability, along with Hindu-Muslim unity, as the essential pre-requisite for India’s true independence. He also popularised the term “Harijan” (children God) for the Untouchables. Ambedkar objected to the use of the term. This new naming ‘Harijan’ was in fact a newer way of perpetuating the separation of the Untouchables from the rest of the Hindus. For the sake of equality, Ambedkar protested against any kind of exclusiveness. On the day after Ambedkar’s death, Nehru described him as a ‘symbol of the revolt against all the oppressive features of Hindu society.’

A comparison between Gandhi’s action and Ambedkar’s reaction has to be done against the background and ideology of each of them. Gandhi’s “vindication of castes,” as against its rejection by Ambedkar was interesting. Gandhi showed adherence to casteism and advanced
arguments in support of it. He described Ambedkar as "challenge to Hinduism." Ambedkar replied demolishing Gandhi's theory altogether. It may be noted that Ambedkar gave a logical defence of the annihilation of caste by his arguments. And he stated that Hindu society seemed to stand in need of a moral re-generation. Finally, he observed: "The intellectual classes to whom the masses look for guidance are too dishonest or too indifferent to educate them in the right direction."

Gandhi's statement on untouchability have been collected in several small volumes: *Caste Must Go; All Are Equal In the Eyes of God; None High : None Low; The Bleeding Wound; My Soul's Agony; My Varnasharma Dharma; The Removal of Untouchability*; and others, which draw chiefly from his two newspapers, *Young India* and *Harijan*. Descriptions of his work, which sometimes included private essays as well as public pronouncements, have been written by his close associates about the Vaikam Satyagraha, his experience at the Round Table Conference in London, his Communal Award fast and the 1930s anti-untouchability campaigns. Material on Gandhi has been taken from these works and the two other sympathetic but frank accounts of Tendulkar and Desai. Ambedkar's underlying beliefs and aims have been derived from his Writings on Caste, his testimony to various British Commissions, biographies in English and Marathi.

Gandhi identified his caste as Bania (Merchant) in his autobiography and stated that for three generations his forefathers had not practised the caste occupation but had served as prime ministers in some princely states of Kathiawad peninsula (Gujrat). This was an essentially conservative region in its adherence to traditional patterns of social relations. Hindu and Jaina merchant groups constituted an influential segment of the population. In Gujrat Bani as were without peer in wealth, influence and piety. They were orthodox.

Gandhi's autobiography contains only a few references to Untouchables or untouchability. The most striking reference is the story of his insistence on the admission of an Untouchable family to the *ashramas* he had established near Ahmedabad in 1915. On assuming the leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920 Gandhi made his first public statement on untouch-
ability. They reflect his dual role as *Mahatma* and politician in Indian life. As politician he said: "Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity." Here, in regard to the second point namely ‘Hindu-Muslim unity’ history has proved him wrong as may be seen in the emergence of two states — India and Pakistan. Ambedkar was right since he outlined this in his *Pakistan or the Partition of India* in 1940 (vol.8 of Dr. Ambedkar Writings and Speeches) in respect of the first point, namely the fate of untouchability of the Untouchables he stood against them in not allowing them special representation. On the other hand Ambedkar demanded this. Gandhi reiterated: “I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity.” On the other hand he was in favour of special representation for the Shiks and Muslims.

In this context Gandhi said: “I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be born, I should be born an Untouchable.” One may note here the contradiction between the two roles of Gandhi. This shows that Gandhi was more a politician than a *Mahatma* as seen by Ambedkar. Hence, much can not be made of Gandhi’s protestation as a *Mahatma*. He was primarily an orthodox in his views on caste and he could not extricate himself from Manuvite classes. In other words he believed in *Varnashrama Dharma* as opposed to Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste*. According to Gandhi the status of a caste should remain as before and could not be changed. He stated: ‘One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That, according to me, is Hinduism.”

It is evident from the above discussion that Gandhi posed as a saviour of the Untouchables but that he was, perhaps, inconsistent was exposed by Ambedkar in his memorable work, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables?* (1945). Ambedkar concluded (in Chapters X and XI Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, vol.9) —

“Gandhism is a paradox. It stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of the existing political structure of the country. At the same time it seeks to maintain intact a social structure which permits the domination of one class by another on a hereditary basis which means a perpetual domination of one class by another.
“The first special feature of Gandhism is that its philosophy helps those who have, to keep what they have and to prevent those who have not from getting what they have a right to get.

“The second special feature of Gandhism is to delude people into accepting their misfortunes by presenting them as best of good fortunes. Following Shakespear one can well say: Plausibility! Ingenuity! Thy name is Gandhism.”

It would thus appear that Gandhi and Ambedkar were opposed to each other so far as the removal of inequality was concerned. Ambedkar won his battle and got representation at the Round Table Conferences in preference to Gandhi and no wonder, Ambedkar became the leader of the Scheduled Castes. The difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar is noted by Nurullah and Naik:

“Gandhi’s main work lay among the caste Hindus. But however painful, it is a fact of history that he did not have a very large following among the Harijans themselves. On the other hand, Dr. Ambedkar was Harijan by birth and therefore was destined to be the leader of this people by virtue of his birth, complete identification with their cause and unequal capacity.... The great service of Dr. Ambedkar to the cause is awakening that he created among the Harijans. He gave them a leadership, which they sadly lacked and which was very badly needed. He puts the problem of the Harijans before the country in its true perspective political, social and economic.”

Savarkar and Ambedkar

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883 - 1966), popularly known as veer Savarkar, was born in 1883 in a middle class Chitpavan Brahmin family in a village named Bhagur near Nasik. Seven generations before him, his ancestors had come to this village from Guhanagar in Ratnagiri district, ‘Savargadh’ was a place near Guhanagar, from which came the surname. Vinayak was married (1901) to Mai, the daughter of Chiplankar, a minister in the small Jawahar State near Nasik. Vinayak passed the Marathi fourth standard at the age of ten. For two years he could not be sent to Nasik for higher studies, but during this period he completed at home the course of the first two English standards. He joined the Shivaji High School at Nasik in 1895 and passed matriculation examination in 1901. From an early age Vinayak was a voracious reader of books and newspapers. He learnt by heart passages of Marathi prose and poetry. He even began to compose poems at the age of ten. At Nasik one Barve encouraged him to write essays, one of which was published serially in the weekly, ‘Nasik Vaibhav.’ At fourteen he got the first prize in
an elocution competition on *Who was the best of the Peshawar?* At nineteen he got the first prize for his poem on *Woes of Child - Widows.*

In 1899 Vinayak formed his first secret society with a nucleus of three. Next year it expanded into *Mitra Mela.* In 1902 Vinayak joined the Fergusson college, Poona, and lived in its residency. He gathered round him a band of young patriots. During vacations he would visit places in Maharastra and deliver patriotic speeches. In 1905 the partition of Bengal roused a country wide political agitation. Savarkar’s group organised a big bonfire of foreign cloth at Poona. Tilak, Paranjpe and Savarkar addressed the gathering. Vinayak was fined Rs.10/- and expelled from the college residency. After graduating in 1905 Vinayak toured extensively to strengthen the *Mitra Mela* branches. Savarkar addressed a conference of their delegates, numbering two hundred. He gave the new name *Abinav Bharat* to the society. It may be noted in this connection that in front of the family Goddess at Bhagur he took an oath to fight like the Chaphekar brothers who murdered the oppressive plague officer Rand and went to the gallows singing verses from the Geeta, for India’s freedom. This oath was later introduced in the secret societies formed by him.

In 1906, on Tilak’s recommendation, Vinayak secured Shyamji Krishnavarma’s scholarship, and sailed for England. In London Savarkar gathered round him a number of Indian patriotic students. They procured a book on bomb-making and sent cyclostyled copies to India. Savarkar also wrote a Marathi translation of Mazzini’s Writings, with a long introduction. It was published in India and became popular.

In May 1907 came the 50th anniversary of Mutiny which Savarkar called the ‘War of Independence.’ He and his associates celebrated it in the India House of Shyamji. Savarkar wrote his famous English treatise on this war. The Government proscribed it in its manuscript form, but copies were printed in Holland and widely distributed. Vinayak’s leaflet, ‘Oh! Martyrs’, on the heroes of 1857 was also printed and distributed. His articles in the Indian Sociologist, the *Talwar* and other papers were also translated and reproduced in the *Yugantar* of Calcutta and the *Vihari* of Bombay.
The revolutionary movement soon spread to other countries. It was in London that Savarkar first met Hardayal before the latter went to America and founded his ‘Gadar’ (Revolt) party. Shyamji also left for Paris to carry on revolutionary activities, leaving the charge of the India House in London to Savarkar. In India also, the ‘Abhinav Bharat’ was continuing its activities.

In 1909 Vinayak’s brother, Ganesh, was sentenced to transportation for terrorist activities. This was followed by Madanlal Dhirga, of Savarkar’s group, killing Curzon Wyllie with a bomb in London.

At a meeting of Indians held in London after this incident, Veer Savarkar alone stood up and opposed the condemnation of Dhirga. He was assaulted on the platform and his eye-glasses broken; blood trickled down from one of his eyes. Next morning ‘The London Times’ published Savarkar’s letter that nobody should be condemned unless found guilty. Dhirga was tried and sentenced to death. The written statement with him was taken away by the police. But Savarkar had a copy, and he printed and distributed it to the surprise of the authorities.

At the time revolutionaries were very active in India. In 1910 Kanhere shot the collector of Nasik to avenge the transportation of Ganesh. Vinayak was in France, but came back to England after the Nasik murder conspiracy trial was over. He was arrested and put in Brixton jail, where he wrote his ‘Will’ and was extradited to India. From the steamer in which he was being taken, he escaped through a porthole and landed in French soil near Marseilles, but guards from the ship captured him. Brought back to India, he was tried by special tribunal on charges of treason and helping the Nasik murder. He refused to recognise the court’s authority on the ground that had been illegally captured from French soil. He was sentenced to two consecutive life-transports, which meant fifty years. His property was confiscated. The University cancelled his B.A. degree. The Hague International Court was invoked but it refused to interfere.

During his ten years in Andaman jail from 1911 to 1921, Vinayak composed poems, and wrote other discourses and dispelled the superstitions of many of the Hindu convicts. In the Andamans he composed his poem ‘Kamala’ in a special blank verse which he named ‘Vinayak Vrittva.’ The poem was learnt by heart by prisoners. It was printed under the pseudonym...
Vijanavasin’. Besides he composed other poems such as ‘Saptarsh’i and ‘Virahocchvasa’, dealing respectively with first night in jail and a yearning for the motherhood. After being released he published the story of his life in the Andamans in ‘Mazi Janmathep’ (My transportation).

He was brought back to India in 1921 and for three years kept in Yervada, Nasik and Ratnagiri jails. He was released in 1924 on condition that he should go out of Ratnagiri and take part in politics. In Ratnagiri jail he wrote his thesis of Hindutva, maintaining that everyone whose fatherland and holy land was India is a Hindu. It was smuggled out of jail and published under the pseudonym ‘Maratha’. During his stay at Ratnagiri from 1924 to 1937 he carried on a movement of social reform against Casteism and untouchibility. He published essays against the old Hindu taboos regarding food, inter-caste marriages, sea crossing and reconversion. He also started a Hindu Mahasabha branch at Ratnagiri.

In 1937 restrictions on Savarkar were removed and he was elected president of the Hindu Mahasabha Sessions - 1938 (Nagpur), 1939 (Calcutta), 1940 (Madura), 1941 (Bhagalpur) and 1942 (Kanpur). Although elected in 1943 also to preside over the Amritsar Session, he could not go owing to illness, and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherji presided. The Hindu Mahasabha founded in 1915, was mainly a social organisation. After 1943 Savarkar led a retired life in his home ‘Savarkar Sadan’ in Dadar, Bombay. In 1948 he was accused of complicity in the Gandhi murder case but was acquitted by the court. He died 1966 leaving behind his son Vishwas and daughter Prabha.

Savarkar is to be viewed in the context of various parties coming up according to the circumstances emerging at particular periods of the 19th and 20th centuries. The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 to rope in the recalcitrant youths of India. But its first President W. C. Bonerjee, did not like to tag social reforms to political independence. This idea of separation of one from the other was against a normal course of events. B. R. Ambedkar criticised this. W. C. Bonerjee in his presidential address at the 8th Session of the Congress in 1892 at Allahabad stated thus:

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"I for one have no patience with those who say we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I fail to see any connection between the two. Are we not fit (for political reform) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries, because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends, because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge?" (cheers) 

On the above statement of the Congress president Ambedkar wrote the following comments:

"History bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. The religious Reformation started by Luther was the precursor of the political emancipation of the European people. In England Puritanism led to the establishment of political liberty... The political revolution was led by social revolution of Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by religious and social reform brought about by the saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikhs was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nanak. It is unnecessary to add more illustrations. These will suffice to show that the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people."

That Ambedkar stated the whole truth and Bonerjee only partial truth is born out by the fact two organisations came into being subsequently. Thus the All India Muslim League was established in December 1906 with a view to:

"To support whenever possible, all measures emanating from the Government, and to protect the cause and advance the interest of our co-religionists throughout the country to controvert the growing influence of the so-called Indian National Congress, which has a tendency to misinterpret and subvert British rule in India, or which might lead to that deplorable situation, and to enable our young men of education, who for want of such an association have joined the Congress, to find scope, according to their fitness and ability, for public life." 

As a counter to the League the Hindu Mahasabha came into existence in 1914. Just as the League was meant to cater to the needs of the Muslims so also did Hindu Mahasabha to those of the Hindus. Thereafter, the Mahasabha was converted into Jan Sangh in 1951. When the president of the Jan Sangh met Savarkar, the latter warned not to merge the one with the other. He further developed the concept of Hindudom of the Hindus. There should be an organisation manned by Hindus only to represent Hindudom as a whole and to protect the interest, political, social cultural and economic, of the Hindus.
Savarkar himself coined the word *Hindutva*. He distinguished between Hinduism and *Hindutva* thus: “Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this *Bharat Bhoomi* - this land from the Indus to the seas, as his fatherland and Holyland - the land of origin of his religion and the cradle of his faith.” Therefore it follows that the followers of Vedism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and all Hill-tribe all were Hindus. Around this life-centre moved Hindutva which Savarkar defined as not only the spiritual or religious history of the Indian people, the history in full pervasion. Hinduism was only a derivative, a fraction, a part of *Hindutva*. He observed particularly that *Hindutva* was not theocratic, a religious dogma or a creed. It embraced all the departments of thought and activity of the whole being of the Hindu race. Forty centuries, if not more, he stated, had been at work to mould it as its prophets and poets, lawyers and lawgivers, heroes and historians have thought, lived, fought and died just to have it spelled thus. This movement was called *Hindu Sanghatan* or organisation for the solidarity and strength of the Hindu Nation.

A nation is a group of mankind which is bound together by some or all of these common ties such as common religion and culture, common history and traditions, common language and literature, and consciousness of common rights and wrongs, occupying a territory of geographical unity, and aspiring to form a political unit. When a nation realises this ambition, it becomes a state. A state is a governmental unit and may have more nationalities than one under its rule. By ‘nationality’ C.B. Fawcell, the author of *Frontiers - A study in Political Geography*, understands the group of qualities which characterise the people of any one nation. French nationality, he says, is that group of qualities which distinguish the French from other European people.

Subsequently, modern *Hindutva* as derived from Savarkar’s definition of the Hindu came into being with the help of a fellow Maharastrian K. B. Hedgewar. He provided the essential organisational backup by founding the R. S. S. (Rastriya Sayang Sevak Sangha). The R. S. S. ramified into B. J. P. (Bharatiya Janata Party), V. H. P. (Viswa Hindu Parisad) and V. D. (Vajarang Dal). The common ground on which both Savarkar and Amedkar met was the untouchability. It
appears that Savarkar tried to understand Ambedkar in a sympathetic way. Savarkar started the untouchability - removal movement and invited Ambedkar more than once to attend the meeting organised for the purpose. However Ambedkar refused to be drawn into it, because he wanted to steer clear of big parties such as Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim league, and the Congress.

Savarkar carried on intense propaganda in favour of mixed schools through press and platforms and appealed to the District and Provincial authorities for help against the forces of orthodoxy which denied the just, civic, human and legitimate rights to the children of the Untouchables to sit in a public school for all irrespective of castes. Savarkar entreated the orthodox Hindus not to treat their co-religionists worse than dogs and cats. In his words:

"You insult the Untouchables, because they are ignorant and helpless; but you yield to the unjust demands of the Muslims because they are aggressive. When a Mahar becomes a Muslim or a Christian convert, you treat him as your equal. But as a Mahar he will not receive the treatment. What a shame my countrymen! he thundered." 43

Savarkar appealed to the District Magistrate to bring the rowdy elements to book. It had its telling effects. The District Magistrate saw things for himself and wrote the following remark during one of his visits to school: "It is the good result of Mr. Savarkar's lectures that the Untouchable boys have been allowed to sit mixed and get their education without any division being made in their case." 44

The Hindu Mahasabha got two reconverted girls married to two Hindu gentlemen under the direction of Savarkar who performed the marriage rites himself. This shook orthodoxy to its roots. The question of temple entry for the Untouchables cropped up in 1925. The orthodox Hindus shouted that their religion, god and tradition were in danger. But their religion, tradition and customs welcomed an Untouchable when he became a Mahommed or Minto. The orthodox endures animals like bullocks and buffaloes, endures the presence of a dog or cat in their houses, but not the presence of their co-religionists Hindu Mahars or Bhangis though they were human beings. They fear that their sacred god would be polluted by the mere sight of a Hindu Bhangi. To this Savarkar thundered: "He is not god who can be degraded." He added that those who regarded such inhuman faith and abhorred the touch of a human being and yet gladly touched
dogs and cats were really fallen and not the Untouchable. Removal of untouchability, he added, thus implied purification and salvation of such misguided orthodox touchable also.Orthodoxy began to collapse under such ruthless arguments as given above. To pull down the steel walls of orthodoxy, Savarkar started *Pan Hindu Ganesh festivals* in 1925. He transformed the Ganesh festival started by Tilak into a Pan Hindu Festival. An Untouchable was not allowed for ages within the precincts of the Hindu sanctuaries. Gradually the question of temple entry was discussed with wisdom and vehemence during the days of Ganesh festivals. The Untouchables were brought into the hall of the Vithoba Temple in Ratnagiri, the most important temple in Ratnagiri District. At that time the independent movement started by Ambedkar in 1924 for the liberation of the Untouchable came to a head. It hated the sense of dependency and abhorred the feeling of patronage of Caste Hindu reformers. "Tell the slave that he is a slave and he will revolt" was its slogan. Self-elevation and self-help was the symbol on its standard. Ambedkar unfurled the banner of revolt at Mahad in December 1927. The one leader who fearlessly and whole-heartedly supported Ambedkar's struggle was Savarkar.

It is a matter of pride that a Brahmin like Savarkar upheld the struggle for human rights by the Untouchables. He stated that Untouchability must be condemned and abolished not only as the need of the hour but also as the command of the true religion. It was not only a policy or an expediency but as a matter of justice - not only as a matter of obligation, but also as a service to humanity. In this light Savarkar declared that the pious and bounded duty of the Hindu world at large was to restore full human rights to their co-religionists. The Untouchables responded well to the bold stand taken by Savarkar for the deliverance. He was invited by them to preside over the Conference held at Malvan, a leading town in the southern part of Ratnagiri district. The Conference sang *Vedic* hymns in a body. Savarkar distributed sacred thread among the so-called Untouchable Hindus and declared amid great applause:

"A battle royal has been raging for the last seven generations over the right of studying the *Vedas*. Here are the *Vedas*. Here is the sacred thread. Take these two. Is that all? Even non-Hindus read the *Vedas*. Why should not the Hindu Mahars read them? The fend over this problem was a useless task. Let us expiate the sins we committed. We are responsible for our political subjugation. That is the past. Now let us declare an oath that we shall
rectify our past blunders and wean back our wealth and glory. The people who regard untouchability which has been a disgrace to humanity as a part of their religion are really the fallen people."47

Savarkar told the Conference that he would have been very happy, had it been possible for Ambedkar to preside over the conference and distribute the sacred thread, since it has been his practice to do so on such occasion. As a result the sacred threads were distributed next day. P.N. Rajbhoj, a Depressed Class leader from Poona took the leading part in the Conference and observed: "I was really sceptical of the Savarkarian movement at the beginning. My contact and discussion with Barrister Savarkar and my personal observation have thoroughly convinced me of its far-reaching effect. I extremely rejoice to declare that this famous leader of the political revolutionaries is also an out and out social revolutionist."48

Dr. Ambedkar had been to Ratnagiri in the month of September, 1929 in connection with the murder trial at the District Session Court. Savarkar seized this opportunity and extended to Ambedkar an invitation signed by hundreds of citizens to address a meeting at the Vithoba temple, a very important centre where battles for social reforms had been going on for the past three years. The orthodox ran for an injunction. Just then Babasaheb Ambedkar received a telegram from Bombay demanding his presence, and Ratnagiri lost an opportunity to hear speeches of two great revolutionaries from the same platform. In November 1929, an event of far-reaching consequences took place. Following a special order the City Magistrate was present to see that the proceeding of the public meeting, held in the Vithoba temple of Ratnagiri to decide the question of the entry of the Untouchables into the Vithoba temple came off peacefully. The momentous meeting began, where Savarkar’s convincing speech swept away doubts, hesitation and misgivings which were lurking in the minds of the opponents.49

The Magistrate appointed to maintain law and order was carried off his faith by the force and faith of Savarkar’s speech so much so that he exclaimed: "Now who and what remain to be convinced?" None came forward. It was a unique triumph for Savarkar. The Untouchables entered the Vithoba temple step by step, singing gracefully and gratefully the glory of "one god, one goal, one language one country and one nation." Savarkar composed a song in Marathi for the occasion. It read:
“The Impurity of ages is gone
Scripture born stamp is torn
The age-long struggle is ended
The net enemies shredded
The slave of ages hoary!
Now is a brother of glory!”

Prohibition of one caste from dining with another was the keystone upon which the arch of the caste system mainly rested. Savarkar contemplated inter-caste Pan Hindu dinners. As usual orthodox Hindus opposed the idea vehemently. Savarkar silenced the opposition by throwing at their face extracts from their scriptures and holy works that sang that Lord Krishna dined with Vidur, a son born of a maid servant and their great Brahma Rishi, Durvasa, dined among with numerous disciples at Pandava’s who were Kshatriyas. The movement developed gradually from private quarters to public places. Thereafter, came the first Public Pan-Hindu dinner popularly known as Sahabhojan in a theatre in 1930.

Ambedkar’s ‘Janata’ dated 11 May, 1931 appreciated Savarkar’s advice to the Mahars and other Untouchables. Savarkar admonished them: ‘Your weakness is worse than the wickedness of the Caste Hindus. Always treat with equality and kindness all the sub-castes amongst your own Depressed Classes. That is also your duty. Forget it not!’ A few days earlier Savarkar supported the Nasik Satyagraha conducted by Ambedkar’s followers and appealed to the Nasik Caste Hindus to open the Kalaram temple to the Depressed Class Hindus. As regards inter-caste marriages, Savarkar did not approve of compulsory and forced marriages. He said: If a Hindu girl, selects as her husband any Hindu youth who does not belong to her caste or vice versa and if the couple is otherwise fit for the marriage should not be condemned, nor the couple be regarded as outcaste on that alone!”

It may be noted here that Ambedkar appreciated the work which Savarkar had been doing in the field of social reform. However, he added: If the Untouchables are to be part and parcel of the Hindu society, then it is not enough to remove untouchibility; for that matter you must de-
stroy Chaturvarna. I am glad that you are one of the very few who have realised this.\textsuperscript{53}

Protest Ideology and Emancipation from Exploitation

Ours is an ‘idea-struck age’, and liberal democracy is the typical product of it. Democracy, it may be noted, is the fruit of an ideocracy, which means that man has depended on ideas for his development. Here a distinction is to be drawn between ‘ideology’ and ‘ideocracy’. In other words ‘ideology’ is abstract whereas ‘ideocracy’ tends to be concrete. The one is the process and other is the product. ‘Ideology’ was coined by Destutt de Tracy in 1796\textsuperscript{54} to indicate the science of the study of ideas. In this context Ambedkar’s ideology is to be explored as shown below.

It has already been discussed that Ambedkar’s was an ideology of protest. This ideology had a paradigm - who protests against Whom for What Reasons with What means and to What purpose? The main propositions of the Ambedkar ideology at the time of his death in 1956 are noted below: \textsuperscript{55}

1. We the Untouchables of India, protest.

2. As Untouchables we may belong to the same religion as the caste Hindus, but we do not belong to the same society.

3. Untouchability emanates from and reaffirms a philosophy of inequality. Brahminism is the culprit responsible for this situation and Hinduism is but Brahminism. It is inflexible and it frustrates all attempts of reforms.

4. As Untouchables, we have historically been a clearly identifiable, exploited group, we are a minority in need of special protective measures — reserved seats, reservations in government jobs and in admission to educational institutions.

5. We demand equality and justice, not pity and favour.

6. Pious resolutions and half-hearted ameliorative measures will not be enough or acceptable to us. Political independence has not solved any of our problems or met our needs. We will now have to explore new linkages and new strategies to attain our social, economic and political goals.

7. We have now got adult franchise reserved seats in the legislatures, reservation in jobs and educational institutions. But the discrimination against us continues.

8. Our problems are not those of any other group, which is poor. They are problems of en-
forced social backwardness, continued discrimination and economic exploitation.

9. We continue to assert our separate identity and demand a more effective share in political power. For this we need to continue to educate, organise and agitate.

10. We have now reached the conclusion that a life of dignity is not being attained within Hinduism. We will seek it in a new religion—Buddhism.

The manifest goal of the Ambedkar ideology was to sensitise the Untouchables to their own deprivation, to make them socially and politically articulate, to organise them socially and to agitate on their behalf to ensure immediate modifications in social and civic arrangements to benefit the deprived. If fulfilled, these objectives would serve in direct social functions. Indirectly, as and to the extent the objectives specified were attained, the total social order would undergo change and, in the long run, would be consolidated on the basis of the new value of equality and opportunity for all in place of the earlier value of inequality of status even at the point of birth. As Ambedkar stressed, the prevalence of social equality was in part a function of social morality taught by a particular religion. But it was equally a function of the general widening of the economic opportunity. In this context a historical sense of the sphere of freedom and of equality may widen areas of life depending on material as well as moral factors. An ideology stressing the right of particular groups to social equality has a certain universal and perennial function in society. 56

In this connection the strength and weakness of the movement may be noted thus. Constitutional and legal provisions have certainly given the Untouchable a voice and a share in the political power structure. The economic and social subjugation of the Untouchables, particularly in the rural areas, is far from over and while political power provides an opportunity, it does not guarantee that the elected leaders of the Untouchables can or will exert themselves to change the ground realities. There is the problem of political co-operation, of the alienation of the urban, educated elite among the Untouchables from the crude, brute force used by the upper caste landed gentry in the semi-feudal rural economy for example Ranaveer Sena in Bihar. The burning down of Untouchables bustees, the killing and maiming of ‘recalcitrant’ untouchables, the atrocities against Untouchable women have not ceased. The annual toll of lives lost is in
terms of thousands and the inadequacy of formal legal provisions in the absence of a change in the existential reality of economic dependence and a change in social attitudes is all too evident.

Political means have to be utilised, but a change in the social and economic content is equally necessary. It is unfortunate that there has been no Untouchable leader of Ambedkar's stature, dedication or integrity to take his place and while the condition of some of the Untouchable groups, particularly in the urban industrial areas has improved, the condition of the others has probably worsened as a result of fear and the effort of the upper castes to screw the lid tight against the possibility of new workers on land. This situation is not to be interpreted as a failure of the Ambedkar ideology, although the partial success seems to be continuing in most movements for basic social change."

The Ambedkar ideology is otherwise called 'Ambedkarism' that is the theory of Dalit Liberation. 'Ambedkarism' is today a living force in India such as Marxism is: it defines the ideology of the Dalit movement and, to a large extent, and even broader anti-caste movement. Yet just as 'Marxism' as a trend in the working movement has to be distinguished from the actual theorising of Karl Marx, so the urge to abolish the social and economic exploitation involved in caste and capitalism (which is the main significance of 'Ambedkarism' as a general movement ideology) must be distinguished from the complex grappling of an individual theoretician with the interpretation of Indian reality. Some of Ambedkar's themes stand out: First, an uncompromising dedication to the needs of his people, the Dalits (as he said once in response to a legislative council claim that he should think as 'part of a whole' - 'I am not a part of a whole; I am a part apart') which required the total annihilation of the caste system and the Brahmanic superiority it embodied; Second, an almost equally strong dedication to the reality of India — but an Indian whose historical-cultural interpretation he sought to wrest from the imposition of a 'Hindu' identity to understand it in its massive, popular reality; Third, a conviction that the eradication of caste required a repudiation of 'Hinduism' as a religion, and adoption of an alternative religion, which he found in Buddhism, a choice he saw as not only necessary for the masses of Dalit who followed him but for the masses in India generally; Fourth, a
broad economic radicalism interpreted as 'socialism' (state socialism in some versions; democratic socialism' in others) mixed with and growing out of his democratic liberalism and liberal dedication to individual rights; Fifth, a fierce rationalism which burned through his attacks on Hindu superstitions to interpret even Buddhism he came to in rationalistic, 'liberation theology' forms; And finally, a political orientation which linked a firmly autonomous Dalit movement with a constantly attempted alliance of the socially and economically exploited (Dalits and Shudras, 'worker' and 'peasants' in class terms) projected as an alternative political front to the Congress party which, he saw as the unique platform of 'Brahminism' and 'Capitalism'.

The Flowering of Dalit Culture and Literature
Dr. Ambedkar as the Father of Dalit literature.

Some researchers have tried to trace the origin of the Dalit literary movement to the Buddhist period. Some hold that the originator was the saint poet Chokhamela (14th Century A.D.) Some mention the name of Mahatma Phooley (1828-90) and some give the credit to Prof. S.M. Mate (1886-1957). The researchers maintain that though the expression 'Dalit literature' did not exist in the ancient and medieval period, concern for Dalits and about the injustice meted out to them was first reflected in the writings of these authors and as such they can be called pioneers of the Dalit literary movement.

While both Goutam Buddha and Mahatma Phooley revolted against the unjust class structure and their teachings and ideas are inspiring even today, but historical and objective examination of the situation reveals that it was Ambedkar who infused his ideas and outlook towards a new life enabling the beginning of Dalit literature. His articles in some of his own Marathi periodicals, 'Mooknayk,' 'Bahishkrit Bharat,' 'Janata,' 'Samata' and 'Prabuddha Bharat' and though his major writings in English led to the beginning. It is significant that Dalit literature owes its origin to a revolutionary struggle for social and economic change. This explains the various aspects of serious thought in Dalit literature. And this literature is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people, who as Untouchables are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality.
Dalit literature is thus characterised by a feeling of rebellion against the establishment of negativism. To study Dalit literature from only a literary or academic point of view fails to present a complete perspective in its assessment. This overall perspective is lacking in the review of Dalit literature so far.59

It is to be admitted that Ambedkar through his struggle against untouchability and socio-economic inequality liberated the Dalits from mental slavery and abject wretchedness and thereby giving them new self-respect. The Dalit literary movement has now reached the various parts of India and the literature is now growing in almost all Indian languages. It is no coincidence that its beginning took place in Marathi language in Maharashtra. Ambedkar was from Maharashtra and the Dalit multitude there supported him fearlessly. It may be said that Ambedkar shaped the tradition of revolutionary thinking of almost a generation of Dalits who now have occupied high places. The literary manifestation of this social awareness is Dalit literature.60

The title of Zelliot’s61 book From Untouchable to Dalit explains the transformation effected by Ambedkar so as to bring in Dalit literature. The term “downtrodden” is a fairly accurate translation of dalit, but “downtrodden Panthers” and “downtrodden Literature” seem ridiculous because it carry’s none of the dignity and pride of the Marathi word. Dalit literature acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation as explained by Arjun Dangle62 that—Dalit is not a caste but a realisation and is related to the experiences, joy, sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society.

As a result of this realisation, experiences are not simply stated but their meanings are also explained. It is out of this realisation that the Dalits consider works such as the poetry of Narayan Surve, ‘Ek Gav Ek Panvatha’ by Baba Adhav or ‘Jevha Manu’s Jaga Hoto’ by Godavari Parulekar as their own. They also feel affinity to the Samantar literary movement in Hindi. On the other hand the works of some Dalit writers are seen as being suffocated by White-collar or traditional values.
Though caste is at the root of most Dalit literature, as its literary manifestation is based on its experiences, the horizons of Dalit literature are expanding. The non-Dalit writers do not like to call themselves Dalits. As a result the process of expansion of art is retarded. To use Marxist jargon, many authors avoid joining the ‘D’ class. This is not only true of non-Dalits but also of the educated and the secured among the Dalits themselves. The word ‘Dalit’ traditionally connotes wretchedness, poverty and humiliation. Hence the term has become derogatory. The non-Dalits therefore pose the question: why should we call ourselves Dalits? But with reference to Dalit literary movement the term ‘Dalit’ means masses exploited and oppressed economically, socially, culturally, in the name of religion and castes. Dalit writers hope that this exploited group of people will bring about a revolution in this country.

The Dalit movement entered a new phase on December 25, 1927. On this day Ambedkar began an agitation by the Dalits to draw water from the Chavadar Lake at Mahad. The water of this lake had been reserved for caste Hindus. The Manusmriti was burnt here as a mark of Dalit protest against untouchability. The historic speech delivered by Ambedkar contained his vision of the Dalit movement including Dalit literature. As explained by him, the speech was as follows:

"We are not going to Chavadar Lake to drink its water. We are going to the Lake to assert that we too are human beings like others. This meeting has been called to set up the norm of equality. No parallel to it can be found in the history of India. We shall have to go to the history of France on the continent of Europe. On 24 January 1789 King Louis XVI had convened, by royal command, an Assembly of Deputies to represent the people of the kingdom. The Assembly sent the King and the Queen of France to the guillotine; prosecuted and massacred the aristocrats; drove their survivors into exile. It confiscated the estates of the rich and plunged Europe into war for fifteen years. Such as accusations levelled against the Assembly by the Historian. In my view, the criticism is misplaced; further, the historians of this school have not understood the gist of the achievement of the French National Assembly. That achievement served the welfare not only of France but also of the entire European continent. If European nations enjoy peace and prosperity today, it is for one reason: the revolutionary French National Assembly convened in 1789 set new principles for the organisation of society before the disorganised and decadent French Nation of its time.

"Our Hindu society is based on the system of castes. A similar system of classes existed in the France of 1789: the difference was that it was a society of three castes. The important thing is that the caste or class system is similar. The inequality of our caste system was also
to be found in the French social system: it was economic in nature. The thing to bear in mind is that there is a great similarity between the French National Assembly that met on 5 May, 1789 at Versailles and our meeting today. The similarity is not only in the circumstances in which the two meetings took place but also in their ideas. The third proclamation is the most important of the three; it might be called the king of (all) these proclamations. This proclamation has 17 clauses, of which the following are important:

1. All human beings are equal by birth; and they shall remain equal till death. They may be distinguished in status only in the public interest. Otherwise, their equal status must be maintained.

2. The ultimate object of politics is to maintain these human birthrights.

3. The entire nation is the mother-source of sovereignty. The rights of any individual, group or special class unless they are given by the nation cannot be acknowledged as valid on any other ground, be it political or religious.

4. Any person is free to act according to his birthright. Any limit placed upon this freedom must be only to the extent necessary to permit other persons to enjoy their birth rights. Such limits must be laid down by law: they cannot be set on the grounds of religion or on any other basis than the law of the land.

5. The law will forbid only such actions as are injurious to society. All must be free to do what law has not been forbidden by law. Nor can anyone be compelled to do what the law has not laid down as a duty.

6. The law is not in the nature of bounds set by any particular class. The right to decide what the law shall be rests with the people or their representatives. Whether such a law is protective or punitive, it must be the same for all. Since justice requires that all social arrangements be based on the equality of all, all individuals are equally eligible for any kind of honour, power and profession. Any distinction in such matters must be owing to differences of individual merit, it must not be based on birth.

"I feel our meeting today should keep the image of the French National Assembly before the mind. We need to pull away the nails which hold the frame work of caste bound Hindu Society together, such as those of the prohibition of inter-marriage down to the prohibition of social inter course so that Hindu society becomes all of one caste. Otherwise untouchability cannot be removed nor can equality be established. None can doubt that the responsibility of letting the revolution take place peacefully rests more heavily on our opponents than on us. Whether this social revolution will work peacefully or violently will depend wholly on the conduct of the caste Hindus."

Ambedkar said, "The Hindus wanted the Vedas and they sent for Vyasa who was not a caste Hindu. The Hindus wanted an Epic and they sent for Valmiki who was an Untouchable. The Hindus wanted a constitution, and they sent for me —(Marathi, 1978, p. 225)."

The above quotation hints at the culture of the Dalits, since ex-Uncouchables and other
low-castes involved in a contemporary cultural movement identified themselves as Dalit or Downtrodden or Oppressed and not as Untouchables, Scheduled castes, or Harijans. Hence the term ‘Dalit’ connotes emancipation from untouchability. The Dalits feel that they do have and have had a culture of their own, no way inferior to any one else’s tradition. They have built up new folk beliefs around three ideas: (i) the idea that they are and were creators of culture from the very ancient times; (ii) the idea that they were “Lords of Earth”, the original inhabitants of their areas shunted aside by the Aryan invaders; corollary with this is a disbelief in hereditary pollution and purity, disbelief in Karmic rebirth; and (iii) the idea that they were and are a militant people, with heroes who used their strength in self-sacrificial way for their people.

Buddhism has a tremendous impact on the beliefs of the Dalits. Belief among the Mahars after their embracing Buddhism in 1956 changed because of the growing rational thinking among them. Earlier they used to rely on magic or oath in the name of deity or dead soul. After 1956 their earlier beliefs began to disappear. As a result they began to consult doctors and undergo operation wherever required. Practically the younger generations look from a rational angle. In this context the earlier rituals also began to discontinue, when they were not unconformity with Buddhism. In many places they constructed Vihars (Buddhist temple) and installed Buddha’s statue in them and threw their gods and goddesses from the temple. After embracing Buddhism they observed mainly the following five principles - (a) Buddha Jayanti or Vaishak Purnima, (b) Vijaya Dasami, the day of their embracing Buddhism, (c) 14th April, the birth day of Ambedkar and (d) 6th December, the day on which Ambedkar died.

Other Untouchable groups also have claims their cultural achievement. Many of the Bhangi caste of the North call themselves ‘Valmiki’, tracing their lineage to the author of the Ramayana, supposedly an outcaste and a criminal before his conversion by the inadvertent repetition of the name of Rama. There seems to have been no building of literary tradition based on this claim, but an effort of the much scorned Bhangi sweepers to elicit pride for self-improvement (Kolenda, 1960). (The recognition of Vyasa, son of a Brahmin sage and a fisherman girl, supposed author of the Vedas and of the Mahabharata, as a fellow Dalit is found, however, only
among contemporary Dalit intellectuals and does not seem to be traditional). A poem by Daya Pawar illustrates the way in which a modern poet thinks of Valmiki as a betrayer of his low-caste identity (Pawar, 1976, pp. 34-5). His reference to Shambuk relates to the story of Rama’s punishing the Shudra Shambuk for hearing the Vedas:

Oh Great Poet

Oh Valmiki

Should you sing the praises of Ramrajya

Because you’re the great poet of poets?

Seeing the heron’s wounded wing

Your compassionate heart broke out in lament.

You were born outside the village

In a shunned neighbourhood...

     where misery itself was born...

Never festooned with fruit or flower.....

The dejected faces ..... furrowed with care

Is it true you never heard

Their lament as they cried for liberation?

One Shambuk of your own blood

Caught fire, rose in anger.

Oh great poet,

Singing the praises of Ramrajya,

Even there the icy cliff of humanity towered up!

Oh great poet,

How then should we call you a great poet?

“Dalit culture” has now become something of a fashionable article of faith. ‘The Dalit Voice’, an English weekly from Bangalore, claims from time to time that Devadasi culture, which includes the classical dance from Bharata Natyam, is a Dalit forum of creativity. The June 1986 issue of ‘Religion and Society’, a scholarly journal published from Bangalore by Christian Insti-
tute for the study of society and religion, is entirely devoted to Dalit culture, Hindu as well as Christian. Even more striking, however, are the ways in which today's Dalits encourage cultural creativity. The poem by Daya Pawar on Valmiki indicates belief in the Dalit creative past and is itself an act of creation. Since the early 1970s short stories, novels, poetry and most recently autobiography have followed from Dalit pens in great quantity. Dalit theatre have followed close on heels of Dalit poetry and short stories. ‘Dalit Rangabhumi’ is the first Dalit theatre based in Pune. It has been followed by dozens of others in Maharastra and outside. The Delhi-based Ahwan theatre, a Cinema and mass media group has “definite plans to provide extensive exposure to rich cultural heritage and traditional Dalit and folk arts of the country. In this context there have been several drama conferences. It is said that there are now more forty Dalit theatre groups. There has been cultural activity amongst Dalit women in Bombay, who organised the Dalit Stri Samwadini (Dalit Women's Dialogue) in 1986. A Dalit art exhibition was held in Nagpur in 1979. It is believed that the sculptors of the classic period of Indian art were an Untouchable caste.

Dalit culture is related to Dalit literature, because both are products of imagination. Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people who, as Untouchables are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality. It is no coincidence that the Dalit literary movement began in Maharastra, the birth-place of Ambedkar’s movement. His revolutionary ideas stirred into action all the Dalits in Maharastra and gave them new self-respect. Dalit literature is the literary expression of this awareness.

The term ‘Dalit literature’ can be traced to the first Dalit literary conference in 1958, which passed a resolution defining the term. However, this conference went almost unnoticed, thus proving beyond doubt that the Dalit class was indeed neglected. The sixties saw many new things happening in Marathi literature. A poet-Narayan Surve - wrote about the problems of workers. The little magazine movement also took root and flourished in this decade. Marathi literature made its acquaintance with the angry young man. In Dalit literature, Anna Bhau Sathe
and Sankarrao Kharat were already established but the movement gained great momentum from the short stories of Bagurao Bagul. His collection of stories, *Jevha Mee Jaat Chorli Hoti* (when I had concealed my caste) made such waves in the Marathi literary world that some critics hailed it as the epic of the Dalits which others compared it to the jazz music of the Blacks. Bagul’s stories taught Dalit writers to give creative shape to their experiences and feelings.

In the seventies, thinking Dalit critics began to theorise on Dalit literature and its role. A number of young writers, full of a new awareness, had started writing for periodicals like ‘Asmitadarsha’. The poets Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Tryambak Sapkate, Arjun Dangle, Namdeo Dhasal, Umakant Randhir and J.V. Pawar and short story writers Tarachandra Khandekar, Yogiraj Waghmare, Avinash Dolas, Yogendra Meshram and Bhimrao Shirvale to name a few out of many who developed the foundation of Dalit literature.

But Dalit writers began to realise more and more that there was no point in merely writing provocative poetry against injustice. The Dalit writers had also become familiar with the Black movement and its literature in the U.S.A. The result was that the youths like Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle and J. V. Pawar took the initiative and established a political movement called the ‘Dalit Panthers’ in Bombay in 1972. The leaders of the Dalit Panthers were all writers. Thus a wave of writings describing experience in provocative language swept Marathi literature. This was probably the first time in India that creative writers became politically active, and formed an organisation. Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change.

Since the conversion to Buddhism in 1956 the Mahars of Maharashtra have entered upon an extraordinary literary movement that has made major contribution to Marathi literature. ‘Dalit Sahitya’ (the literature of the oppressed) includes short stories, novel and drama, but has been most effective in poetry and autobiography. The poems reflect something of ‘new past, new future,’ in that they refer either to the proud Buddhist of India, reinterpreting it for today’s need or to the conflict between the past tradition and the contemporary movement. In this context Daya Pawar sees *Angulimal* as the symbol of the fierce society around him. Thus Daya Pawar writes a poem named
"Siddharthanagar"

O Siddharth!
The town of your name
in the twentieth century
has been struck by the tyrannical plough of power.
Each hut
is uprooted like a worthless stone.

Over the sign board with your name on it
a police van was driven.
Clothing, mats in each hut—
the huge earnings of umpteen generations—
scattered by police clubs.
A bunch of naked little children,
screaming and moaning, came onto the road.

O Siddartha,
You made a tyrant like Angulimal
tremble.
We are your humble followers.

How should we confront
this ferocious Angulimal?
O Siddharth,
If we fight tooth and claw,
Try to understand us.

Tryambak Sapkate takes a diametrically opposite view of the figure of Angulimal, sees himself becoming the violent man who wore his victim's finger in a garland around his neck.

This is shown below—
When I came into this world
I was crying.
The world was laughing.
Two hands caressed me
On the back, on the stomach.

I tried to catch hold of this turning world.
My hands were brushed off.
I fell.
The world laughed.
pointing its fingers at me.

Tears dried
Feet froze
Gathering all strength
I laughed at this world
Ha........ha.........ha.......ha...
The world trembled
at my laugh.

Angulimal.
I am Angulimal...
I am Angulimal...

While much of the Dalit literature is bitter, a strain of humour and optimism through the work of almost every poet. Narayan Surve is not a Mahar, but a casteless orphan from the streets of Bombay. His poem, 'For I am Brahma' expresses beautifully one of the themes of Dalit literature—the betrayal of high Hindu concepts by the facts of India's social reality. This is
illustrated by the following lines:

I will protect all that belongs to Brahma,
all that is Brahma.
I'll undo the knot of time.

The mole's mountain, the mountain's mole —
they're both inside of me.

For I am Brahma. I hold the world together —
I, the helpless one,
without even a room to call my own.

Namdeo Dhasal in his poem 'Poverty as My Own Independent Piece of Land' explained the position of the Dalits as follows —

Destiny willing, the form may change or may not.
Even then poverty itself is my own independent piece of land
And as I cultivate it my days arise
And my days fall.....
Earlier men could have wretched slaves....
I refused to make compromise with the later feudal lords
My limbs of a forest were fostered by geometric contagion
Drenched me in gentle innocence
I am the headless body of a rat with a pyramid rising above me
Meat and fish
Rice and eggs
Bootleg liquor and the flowers of white champak
Kisses, embraces, coattail postures, jewels,
And beds, and a house with a leaking roof,
And the rhythm of lullaby.
I am squeezed: in my yearning
Feminine beauty flowers
The Mona Lisa pointed by Leonardo da Vinci
In the service of A-B
Rain driving down in sheets, a dying cigarette,
a dehydrated dancing girl,
Contrasting colour harmony
I too have poverty as my own independent piece of land...

A human being is not inherently Dalit, neglected or Untouchable. It is the system that degrades him in this fashion. When the system is changed, the human being regains his human essence. Therefore literature that portrays the human being is, in fact, not Dalit literature at all. Even after realising this, a major literary stream calls itself, in all seriousness, Dalit literature. The caste-ridden society and its literature have viewed the Dalit as someone who is mean, despicable, contemptible and sinful due to his deeds in his past life; he is seen as sorrowful in this life, poor humiliated and without history, one whose ancestors could never hope to acquire respectability in either temples or scriptures. This, in fact, is suffering, misery, servitude, humiliation, neglected and contempt of the Indian society as a whole, and Dalit literature carries the burden upon its head.

Dalit literature have accepted 'Dalit hood' (i.e., the status of the oppressed or the downtrodden), the way the Buddha accepted sufferings, or the way so many revolutionaries accepted the status of the oppressed. Day dreaming, and the establishment and portrayal of everything that belongs to it, may appear to be beautiful (due to the power attached to it, of course); but it cannot be forgotten that this establishment enslaved women and Shudras and condemned them to the status of Untouchables. Ambedkar was the essence of social revolution itself and embodied the mythical value-structure and ideal of the Dalits. It is not that he became the leader of the Dalits because he believed them to be Mahars, i.e. low caste. He became their leader in order to eradicate suffering, untouchability and caste distinctions. It was not that he became a 'Dalit' because
he did not respect the ideology based on the concepts of deeds or sins of past life which strengthened distinctions based on birth, caste, varna and class. He was a great revolutionary and a great scholar, and yet he called himself an Untouchable Dalit. It is for the same reason that writers — of today as well as tomorrow — whose works have the potential to be placed in the tradition of great literature of the world, call themselves Dalit writers. The established literature of India is Hindu literature. But it is Dalit literature which has the revolutionary power to accept new science and technology and bring about a total transformation. ‘Dalit’ is the name for total revolution; it is revolution incarnate.

Was the Neo-Buddhist movement inevitable?

It may be noted that “nothing in history is inevitable, except in formal sense that, for it has happened otherwise, the antecedent causes would have had to be different,” as observed by E. H. Carr. Carr further adds: “As a historian, I am perfectly prepared to do without ‘inevitable’, ‘unavoidable’, ‘inescapable’, and even ‘ineluctable’. But let us leave them to poets and metaphysicians.” The reason is, as pointed out by Sri Arabinda is “Life is not a rigid exercise in logic.” This may be illustrated by courts’ order restoring conjugal rights to the estranged husband and wife. Either partner may not agree to the judicial order, since its implementation on his or her free will. Determinism is to be reconciled with free will. To have this, law makes detour and show causes the recalcitrant partner why he or she should not be held up for contempt of court, bypassing the main issue relating to restoration of conjugal life.

In this context Carr deals with two “savoury red herrings which have been drawn across our path — one labelled ‘Determinism in History’, the other ‘Chance in History.” And he adds: “History is a process of selection in terms of historical significance ... Interpretation in history is always bound up with value judgement, casualty is bound up with interpretaton”. Carr’s interpretation leads to the interpretation of past, present and future. And our “present has no more than a notional existence as an imaginary dividing line between the past and the future.” This is so “since past and the future are the parts of the same time span, interest in the past and interest in future are inter-connected.” In this light history begins with the handing of tradition, and
tradition means the carrying of the habits and lessons of the past into the future. In the words of the Dutch historian Huizinga: "Historical thinking is always teleological." In other words the historian, in addition to the question 'why?' also the question 'whither?'

In this connection one may apply Newton's third law of motion to history: "An action is always opposed by an equal reaction, or, the mutual actions of two bodies are always equal and act in opposite directions." This may be illustrated by the following examples. When a body fall towards the earth the latter moves to meet the body, and a shell fired from a gun projects the gun backwards. The sun attracts the earth, consequently is itself attracted by the earth with a precisely equal force.

The application of Newton's may be done in the way in which Hegel stated his dictum in the introduction to the Philosophy of Rights: "What is rational is real, and what is real in rational." In this context Ambedkar's Neo-Buddhist movement has been 'inevitable' as discussed already.

Notes and References

2. Ibid, P.143.
3. Ibid.
8. Ibid., P.461.
11. Ibid, Pp. X-XII


16. Ibid.


30 *Young India*, 29 December,1920.


32. *Young India*, 27 April, 1921.


38 Ibid., Pp. 43 - 44.


41. Ibid., Pp. 161-162.


44. Ratnagiri Hindu Sabha, Five year Report,p.150.


46. Ibid., P. 183.

47. Ibid., quoted.

48. Ibid., P.183.

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., P.184.
51. Ibid., P.185.
52. Ibid., P.189.
53. Ibid., P.190.
57. Ibid. P.225.
60. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
70. Ibid. Introduction, P.XII
74. Ibid., P91
76. Ibid. P.108.
77. Ibid.