

CHAPTER - IV

B. R. Ambedkar and the Socio-Cultural Reforms in Hindu Society

Early Life and Education : The shaping of Revolutionary Mind

Ambedkar was born an Untouchable at Mhow in Central India on April 14, 1891. He was a Mahar by caste—a robust, intelligent, brave and leading community. It is believed that the Mahars were the original inhabitants of Maharashtra and the name Maharashtra is derived from the term *Mahar-rastra*. The Mahars were very early to come in contact with the Europeans in India. They were a part of the the army and their recruitment in the army was discontinued after 1892. Ramji Shakpal, the father of Ambedkar, protested against this unjust order of banning and approached M.G.Ranade and interviewed the Governor of Bombay. The order banning the Untouchables in the army was withdrawn on February 6, 1917 and a Mahar Battalion III was raised in the First World War (1914-1918). Ramji was a Kabirpanthi. In the army Ramji rose to the rank of Subedar Major and was a head instructor in a military school for about 14 years. After retirement in 1891 on a pension of Rs.50 per month he settled at Dapoli in Ratnagiri district. In 1894 he was re-employed as a store - keeper in the Public Works Department in Ratnagiri and was later transferred to Satara.¹

There is a confusion as to the question of the exact date of birth of Ambedkar and this is clear from his own statement. Babasaheb Ambedkar delivered a speech on 28th October, 1954 at Purendare Stadium, Bombay when he was presented a purse of Rs. One lakh and eighteen thousand on the eve of his 60th birthday . This gives date of birth sometime in October 1894 and contradicts the usual date of birth on 14th April 1891. On this he said : “My father was in the 6th Pioneer Battalion, then he moved to 7th . At that time he never felt any importance of me as his son. He did not record my date of birth therefore, today, nobody can say that it is my real date of birth.” He wanted to write a book on his childhood. But this did not materialise. He told his

audience some home truths. He said :”The way my life was going, had I allowed to go like that, I would have at the most become some virtuous man, but I had my own self-instinct.” This gives a clue to his life.²

Bhimrao entered the Government High School , Satara , in 1900, in the first Standard . His name in the School was Bhima Ramji Ambedkar. The original sub-name of the family was Sakpal, however his ancestors preferred to call themselves after their ancestral village Ambavade which is in Khed taluka in Ratnagiri district. One teacher named Ambedkar in the Satara High School loved Bhimrao very much and often fed him. He was very obliging and kind to Ambedkar. As a token of love and respect Bhimrao began to call himself Ambedkar. And this name remained attached to him throughout his life.

During his school days Ambedkar realised what the stigma of untouchability meant. Some instances are cited below. One cart-man refused to associate with him and his brother in a bullock-cart. This happened when Ambedkar and his brother were travelling from Masur railway station to Goregaon. They had hired a bullock-cart. After sometime the cart-man could know that the two boys were Untouchables. The boys paid the cartman double the fare. Bhim’s elder brother drove the cart since the cart- man was unwilling to drive it. As a result the cart-man followed the cart on foot for fear of pollution, while the elder brother had been driving the cart . They could not get drinking water during the whole journey.

No barber would cut his hair for fear of pollution. Hence Bhim’s sisters would cut their brothers hair. All such insulting treatments were just common to the Untouchable. This humiliating and inhuman treatment at the hands of co-religionist in Ambedkar’s school days gave birth to his sense of hatred for the caste Hindus. Being an Untouchable by birth Ambedkar was forced to sit apart in the school. He could not associate with other boys or take part in games and sports. Even the teachers would not touch his note-books. Some of the teachers would not ask the Untouchables to recite poems or put questions to them for fear of being polluted. When the Untouchables felt thirsty in the School they turned their mouths upward and then somebody would kindly pour drinking water into the mouths as if through a funnel. Ambedkar was prohib-

ited from learning Sanskrit. The Sanskrit teacher was adamant and reluctant to teach Sanskrit to the Untouchables. As a result Ambedkar was compelled to take Persian as a second language in the High School.³

Since Ramji's job was terminated in 1904, he shifted to Bombay. And Ambedkar joined the Elphinstone High School, a Government institute. There was no such restriction in Bombay and he could play games. The caste Hindu students used to keep their tiffin boxes behind the black board. Once Ambedkar was asked to write on the black board. The boys feared that their food would be polluted by Ambedkar's presence near the board. The boys at once ran to the black board and hurled their tiffin boxes aside before Ambedkar could reach and touch the black board. The teacher discouraged him. Ambedkar passed the matriculation in 1907 and this was an event to be celebrated in his family. A congratulation meeting was arranged under the presidentship of S.K. Bholey, one of the leaders of the Satyasodhak movement. K.A. Keluskar who later wrote a biography of Shivaji took a fancy to Ambedkar and presented him a book on the life of Goutam Buddha. He was in the fifth Standard and on the 14th, when he was married to Rama Bai who was then only 9.

At that time the Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda was a progressive ruler and announced help to be given to any promising Untouchable students for higher studies. Ambedkar got this help and joined the Elphinstone College. He was granted a scholarship of Rs.25 per month. Professor Muller lent him books and gave him clothings. However the old insulting environment had not changed. The Brahmin hostel-keeper of the College would not give him tea or water. Ambedkar did not mind such inconveniences and humiliating treatment. He concentrated his energies on studies and passed the B.A. examination in 1912 with English and Persian. He became a scholar later but in the College examination he could not secure any class. After graduation he joined the Baroda State service. But his father did not approve of this decision. The reason was that the higher officers of the Baroda State were orthodox upper class Hindus. Because of Hindu injunction against pollution, the peons in his office used to throw files at him lest they should be polluted. He could not get residential accommodation in a decent locality. He had to stay with

Pandit Atma Ram , an Arya samajist. The social conditions became so unbearable that it was not possible for him to continue in service. As a result he decided to resign his post at the earliest opportunity.

Meanwhile his father died on February 2,1913 and it was a shock to him. His father, Ramji, had to sacrifice much to provide education to his son and had to incur debts. He was unfortunate that he did not live to see his son going abroad for higher education. The Maharaja of Baroda, at the time, thought of sending some student to the U.S.A for higher studies at the Columbia University. And Ambedkar became his choice. On June 4th,1913 he signed an agreement with the Baroda State authority . In the third week of July, 1913 Ambedkar joined the Columbia University as Gaekwad scholar. Ambedkar was the first Mahar to study in a foreign University. He joined a cosmopolitan Club where some of the Indian students lived. He could move freely with a status of equality. He found it a new world. It helped enlarge his mental vision.

His teacher was the well known economist Professor Seligman. In June 1915, Ambedkar obtained the M.A. degree for his thesis *Ancient Indian Commerce*. In May 1916, he read a paper on *The Caste in India , their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, at the Anthropology Seminar sponsored by Dr. Goldenweiser. It was published in the *Indian Antiquary* in May,1917. It was published in the form of a brochure, the first published works of Ambedkar. In it he observed that endogamy was essence of the caste system. A caste is an enclosed class and it existed before Manu. Manu codified the existing rules with *Brahmanical* bias. As a result the *Shudras* and women have been degraded in the *Manu Samhita*.⁴

In June 1916, Ambedkar submitted his thesis for the degree of Ph.D. , entitled *National Divident of India : A Historical and Analytical Study*. Eight years after this was published under the title : *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*. However, the original doctoral dissertation was reviewed in the light of the Montagu-Chemsford Reforms of 1919 with reference to finance. The Book was dedicated to Maharaja Sayajirao with an introduction by Professor S.A. Seligman. The Professor stated therein : ‘Nowhere to my knowledge, has such a detail

study of the underlined principle made .” In the thesis Ambedkar stated that the whole policy had been dictated by the interests of British industries and manufacturers. He concluded that in every country there is social oppression and social injustice. This does not mean that the country should be without political power. Ambedkar’s book was so indispensable that during the budget session of the Indian legislature used this as a reference book . To the students it was a guide. He was called to give evidence before the Hilton-Young Commission on Indian currency. He was filled with pride when he saw that every member of the Commission had his book for reference.

Ambedkar left the Columbia University and joined the London School of Economics and Political Science as a graduate student in June 1916. Professor Seligman gave him introductory letters to professor Cannan and Sydney Webb. In October 1916 he was admitted to Gray’s Inn for law. But he had to face a crisis. He had to return to India before the completion of his thesis for the M.Sc.(Econ.) degree, because of the termination of Maharaja’s scholarship. Ambedkar tried to persuade to reconsider his decision but without any success. However, he obtained permission of the London Univeristy through recommendation of Professor Cannan to resume his study within a period not exceeding four years from October 1917.⁵

In July 1917 Ambedkar was made Military Secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda with a view to being groomed for the post of the States’ Finance Minister. It was unfortunate that none received him in the State. He could not get accomodation in a hotel or hostel. He had to take shelter in a Parsi Hotel and stayed there incognito. In the office also the same treatment awaited him. Peons flung office files on his table. Drinking water was not available to him. This was unbearable to Ambedkar . He sent a note to the Maharaja, but the Dewan expressed his inability to do anything in the matter. This humiliation at the hands of the Caste Hindus compelled him to leave Baroda. He then came to Bombay in 1917 . At this time he published a brochure : *Small Holdings in India and their Remedies*.⁶

The Depressed Classes held two conferences in November in Bombay. A resolution at one of the conferences was passed, requesting the government to protect the interest of the

Untouchables by granting them the right to elect their own representatives to the Legislature in proportion to their population. Another resolution supported the Congress - league Scheme with a view to impressing upon the Caste Hindus the necessity of removing of all disabilities in the name of custom and religion. The second conference opposed the transfer of power to the Caste Hindus and appealed to the government to grant them the right to choose their own representatives. But Ambedkar thought that the Congress - League Scheme was unsound since the Executive and the Legislature in it derived their mandates from and were responsible to different powers.⁷

The First All India Depressed Classes Conference was held on March 23 and 24, 1918 in Bombay and attended by prominent leaders. Maharja Sayajirao of Baroda presided . The conference appealed to the country for removing untouchability. The national leader Tilak threatened that he would not recongnise God if he were to tolerate untouchability. Ambedkar was very sceptical about the movement started by the Caste Hindus for uplift of the Untouchables. In Bombay he tried to mould his life anew. Through the good offices of a Parsi gentleman, he became a tutor to two students . Moreover he started a business firm to offer advise to dealers in stocks and shares. However, he had to close it permanently as the customers were not ready to go to an Untouchable for advice. In November 1918, he joined the Sydenham College as professor of Political Economy. His lectures were so attractive that students from other colleges attended them. But social treatment accorded to him remained unchanged . "The High Caste Professors objected to him drinking water from the pot reserved for the professorial staff."⁸ He served in the college from November 11, 1918 to March , 1920. Thereafter he resigned his post to resume his studies in law and Economics in London. The Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shahu Chhatrapati also helped in this regard.⁹

When the South Borough Commission examined the representatives of different interests and communities for the preparation of the Montagu-Chemsford Reforms of 1919, Ambedkar and V.R. Shinde were called upon to give evidence before the commission for franchise. Ambedkar demanded separate electorate and reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in proportion to their

population. He stressed social equality before the demand of Home Rule. He remarked that Home Rule was as much the birth right of Mahar as that of a Brahmin. He emphasised the need for marked change in the attitude of the Caste Hindus.

On January 31, 1920, Ambedkar started a weekly paper, *Mooknayak* (leader of the dumb) to champion the cause of the Depressed Classes in India. In the editorial of the first number he remarked that the existing news paper had been looking to the interests of certain castes. In his words: “ Devoid of power and knowledge , the non- Brahmins and the Depressed Classes can not make any progress.”¹⁰

Conferences of the Depressed Classes were held at Nagpur(1918) and at Kolhapur (March 21,1920) under the presidentship of Shahu Maharaj and Ambedkar attended them. At Kolhapur conference Shahu Maharaj stated that Ambedkar had the potential for becoming an All-India leader. The conference ended with an intercaste dinner. At the Nagpur Conference held in May, 1920, Ambedkar criticised V.R.Shinde and his Depressed Classess Mission supported by Sir Narayan Chandravarkar. The servants of India Society had sympathies with this cause. The Nagpur Conference passed resolutions of no-confidence against V.R. Shinde and others. Ambedkar declared:”Institutions and individuals have no right to defend the interest of Depressed Classes, if they are not run by Untouchables.” The Nagpur Conference laid the foundation of Ambedkar’s future work. In his weekly paper Ambedkar wrote that the Depressed Classes were justified in their opposition to the rule of the Brahmins in the case of transfer of power to Indian hands. In case the protection of the British was withdrawn the caste Hindus would trample upon the Depressed Classes and the Swaraj constitution must include fundamental rights for the Depressed Classes.¹¹

Marathi lexicographer Dr. S.V. Ketkar requested Ambedkar to join him as a contributor to the Marathi *Jnanakosha* (encyclopaedia). But Ambedkar refused. He also refused the invitation from the principal of Sydenham College, Bombay, to read paper at the Economic Conference to be held in December, 1918. These events reveal the attitude of Ambedkar towards the movement started by the caste Hindus. In September, 1920, Ambedkar had been in England and

re-joined the London School of Economics and Political Science. He also entered Gray's Inn to qualify as a barrister. He got some helps from Shahu Maharaj. As regards his studies in London, he joined several Libraries, for example , the London University General Library, Godsmith's Library of Economic Literature, the British Museum Library and the India Office Library. In these libraries he used to sit throughout the day even without a break for lunch, since he could not afford a lunch. He avoided all kinds of diversions, such as excursions, theatres and restaurants. He asked his wife, Ramabai, to sell even ornaments in case of difficulties . Many admirers voluntarily offered help but Ramabai refused to accept it.¹²

In June, 1921, the University of London accepted his thesis - *Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance in British India*- for M.Sc. (Econ.) degree. In 1922-23, Ambedkar had been to the University of Bonn to read Economics for sometime. In March 1923, he submitted his thesis: *The Problem of the Rupee - Its origin and its Solution* — for the degree of D.Sc(Econ.) . It was published in December, 1923, by P.S. King and Company, London. It had an introduction by Professor Canan. He paid glowing tributes to Ambedkar for the freshness of his views. This book was re-issued by Thacker and Company, Bombay, in May, 1947 with the title *History of Indian Currency and Banking*, (Vol I). Ambedkar was called to the Bar in April, 1923. While in London he met E.S. Montagu, Secretary of State for India and Vithalbai Patel and discussed with them the grievances of the Untouchables.¹³

Influence of Protestant Religions and Reformers on Ambedkar

Ambedkar spoke of three Gurus or preceptors and three deities as shaping his personality. The first preceptor was the Buddha (623-544 B.C.). Ambedkar passed the Matriculation Examination in 1907 from the Elphinstone High School. His father made him read the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharat* etc. earlier. Now to celebrate the event of Ambedkar's passing the examination the residents of his Chawl decided to felicitate him with the help of Dada Keluskar (Krishnaji Arjun Keluskar), Maratha author and social reformer. The function took place much against the wishes of Ambedkar's father and Dada Keluskar presented a book on the life of the Buddha to Ambedkar. On reading this book Ambedkar got a new enlightenment. As he himself put it: "Maruti , Sita,

Rama had gone to jungles ; on a washerman's complaint Rama abandoned Sita. Krishna had 1600 wives, all these things could not create any impact on me. But after a study of Buddhism thorough that book, I felt like studying it more and more. The impact of Buddhism is very much firm on my mind and I firmly believe that it is only Buddhism which can emancipate the world. If Hindus want their country to survive, they must accept the path of Buddha.”

His second Guru was Kabir (1440-1518). His father was a follower of Kabir . As a result the life and philosophy of Kabir influenced Ambedkar's life to a great extent. In his opinion Kabir could understand the real significance of the philosophy of the Buddha. Ambedkar never regarded anybody great and he did not recognise Gandhiji as 'Mahatma'. Ambedkar's third Guru was Jotirao Phooley (1827-1890) . He was a pioneer of reforms among the Untouchables. Phooley's mission was to educate the Depressed Classes such as the Darji, Kumbhar, Nais, Kolis, Mahars, Mangs and Chambhars, which Ambedkar acknowledged with gratitude.¹⁴

Phooley was a social reformer in the 19th Century in Maharashtra .He was the first man in Poona who openly made arrangements to give drinking water to the Untouchables. He established schools for women in 1848 and for Untouchables in 1851. For this Sri Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur called Phooley the 'Martin Luther' of Maharashtra. Phooley opposed Brahminism, but he was not a *Brahman*-hater. Men like Justice M.G. Ranade helped him in the cause of social reform. In 1873 , Phooley founded the *Satyashodhak Samaj* (Society of the truth Seekers). It preached three principles: (a) God Almighty is one, All beings are his children, (b) There is no need for any middlemen between man and God, and (c) Greatness should not depend on the conditions of birth i.e., in what caste a man is born. Sri Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda assisted him in his cause and called him the "Booker T. Washington " of India. When Tilak and Agarkar were released from Dongari Jail in 1881, Phooley received them courageously and led them into Poona City in procession.¹⁵

Besides the above Gurus (preceptors) Ambedkar had three deities. His first deity was *Vidya* (knowledge). Mankind, he said , can not get peace and human dignity without knowledge. In the Hindu society knowledge had been withheld from the *Shudras*, *Ati-shudras* and women

for thousand of years. As a result they had remained illiterate. The Brahmins had been reluctant to impart knowledge to non - Brahmins . It was the so-called religious dogmas that stood in the way. Ambedkar stated that he had a library of 2 lakh books and worshipped knowledge all the 24 hours. In the words of Aldous Huxley: "Knowledge is a function of being. When there is change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowing, what we know depends also on what, as moral beings, we choose to make ourselves."¹⁶

Ambedkar's second deity was " Self -respect." Habits are the flying wheels of society . They are formed in the service of sentiments and instincts. In fact, the genesis of a sentiment consists in the habitual functioning of an instict through a particular channel of expression . Sentiments thus make for greater consistency of conduct. It is the great principle of cohesion that works here as one of the main powers of the mind. However, the sentiments gradually organise themselves into a hierarchy under one dominant sentiment. Only one sentiment is capable , from its very nature, of including all the others. It is the sentiment of 'self-regard' in which all the instincts and sentiments are organised round the idea of self. In the normal man the two main tendencies of self -regard, that is, the impulses of self-assertion, are duly balanced and the sentiment is properly called " self-respect." When self-assertion tendency is unduly preponderant, it is called "pride". When the superiorities in which satisfaction is chiefly found are trivial, it is known as "vanity". When this impulse assumes a more active role and seeks to compell the admiration of a larger number of men, the sentiment is called "ambition" or in extreme cases *megalomania*.¹⁷

In regard to his own case Ambedkar said : "I never begged of anybody, saying that I should be given this post or that." Further he added : "I want to tell you that one should not be so much submissive. He must consider himself that he is only somebody. My "self-respect" is so burning that I consider even 'God ' inferior to me."

Ambedkar's third diety was "*Shila*" (Character). In his own words:- "In my life I have not comitted any forgery, cheating or some sin for self - interest. I visited England many times, but never drank wine, never smoked a cigarette. Books and cloths — these are the only two things

I like. To preserve a *shila* (Character) is a very big virtue." A question arises : "What is character?" According to Mc. Dougall : "Character is the system of directed conative tendency. The better organised and the richer intellect, the more efficiently will character work toward the realisation of its goals."¹⁸ The unit of character are sentiments or complexes . The word 'sentiment' denotes all acquired conative trends, while "complex" sentiments are out of harmony with the rest of the character. Ambedkar showed both the sentiment and the complex in his character. Sometimes he wept at the thought of losing his eye-sight, for then life would be meaningless for a person to whom "books were the breath of life." He said, and sighed : "It is a sin to take birth in a country whose people are so prejudiced. I have done a lot in spite of abuse hurled at me from all sides. I will continue to do so till my death."¹⁹ So saying he burst into tears.²⁰

Impact of his Teachers on Ambedkar's Ideas

In regard to education Ambedkar had some teachers in foreign lands for example in the U.S.A. and the U.K. Ambedkar cherished high respects for some of them. Three names come up and he mentioned them. One was Professor Seligman and the other was Professor John Dewey. The third was Professor E. Cannan. Professor Seligman and Professor Cannan belonged to economics and Professor Dewey to philosophy and logic.

Malthus wrote the first edition of his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). Any articulate statement of the Malthusian population theory must be interpreted as implying the law of diminishing returns. According to Malthus the production of food stuff goes on in arithmetical progression, whereas increase of population goes by geometrical progression. As a result the food supply can not keep pace with the increasing population. To strike a balance between the two positive checks on the population must be restored to. Otherwise there would be wars, famines, pestilence and the like. The Malthusian theory was attacked by technical experts suggesting that technical innovations could check it by improved standard of cultivation and other technical gadgets in food production. But this is not the whole solution. Here professor Seligman gave a solution thus : The problem of population is not one of size only, but of efficient production and equitable distribution.

In regard to the law of the diminishing returns Professor Cannan had something to say. He maintained that Malthous' original reasoning (1798) about the geometric and arithmetic progression moved on a plane different from that of law of diminishing returns. However, this was not convincing. What mattered was that any trully articulate version of the Malthousian theory did imply diminishing returns.²¹ Professor Cannan wrote a forward to Ambedkar's Book— *History of Indian Currency and Banking*(1947). He wrote as follows :

“ I was one of the few economists, who believed that the rupee could be kept at fixed ratio with gold by the method then(1893) proposed , and I did not fall away from the faith when some years elapsed without the diesired fruit appearing. I do not share Mr. Ambedkar's hostility to the system , nor accept most of his arguments against it and his advocacy. But he hits some nails squarely on the head, and even when I have thought him quite wrong, I have found a stimulating freshness in his views and reasons. An old teacher like myself learns to tolerate the vagaries of originality , even when they resist ‘ severe examination’ such as that of which Mr. Ambedkar speaks. In his practical conclusion, I am inclined to think, he is right.”²²

His professor was also John Dewey (1859-1952) the philosopher, born in Burlington , Vermont. He taught at the University of Michigan and thereafter at the University of Chicago, where he established a famous experimental school to try out his ideas on education . From 1905 till his retirement in 1929 he was a professor of philosophy at Columbia University. Ambedkar entered the Graduate school in Columbia University in 1913. So he had contacts with Professor Dewey and he stated : “John Dewey was my teacher and to whom I owe much.” Ambedkar applied Dewey's maxim to Indian conditions. India is a country tied to the past traditionally (*Esho Dharma Sanatana*). Ambedkar wanted to break that tradition. In this he got help from professor Dewey. Thus he quoted his professor while discussing the *Annihilation of Caste* (third edition, 1944): “ 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.”²³

Ambedkar has summed up the baneful effect of the worship of the past. In professor Dewey's words thus : “ 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. A knowledge 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.”²⁴

In this context one has to remember what Ambedkar has said about the Hindus: “ The Hindus must consider whether the time has not come for them to recongnize that there is nothing fixed , nothing eternal, nothing *sanatan*; that everything is changing , that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society. In a changing society, there must be a constant revolution of old values and the Hindus must realise that if there must be standards to measure the acts of men there must also be a readiness to revise those standards.”²⁵

Professor John Dewey’s influence on Ambedkar led him to burn *Manusmriti* on December, 25, 1927. John Dewey began as a Hegelian in philosophy. But his studies of Darwin’s biology led him to a new conception of the nature of thought which he called “instrumentalism”. Thinking, he said, is an activity of the organism, which, like swimming, walking and climbing, was generated as a means to adjustment and survival; it is an instrument brought into play when instinct and habit break down, in order to surmount obstacles in the way of behaviour. Hence its true test is practical — whether it succeeds in reaching the specific end for which it was adopted (*Studies in Logical Theory, 1903*). This insight required, he held , a reconstruction of philosophy. The speculative thought of the West since Plato had been dominated by a “spectator’s view” of knowledge; the business of thought was to contemplate an eternal and changeless order. Repudiating this , Dewey substituted for contemplation ‘Creative intelligence’, whose business was to transform the condition of life so as to achieve the greatest practicable fulfilment for all. Since evolution implies continual change, our ideals themselves must be tentative; the ideal that is fixed and final tends to arrest advance (*Reconstruction in philosophy, 1920*). His instrumentalism followed his views on education, politics and religion.²⁶ *Data*, in the sense in which they are understood by the empiricists are rejected by professor Dewey as the starting point of knowledge. There is a process of inquiry in the course of which subject and

object change. The process is in some degree, continuous throughout life, and even throughout the history of a cultural community. Nevertheless, a problem has a beginning and this is called a 'situation'. A situation is a "qualified essential the whole of which is unique". According to him: "Every situation, when it is analysed, is extensive, containing within itself diverse distinctions and relations which, inspite of their diversity form a unified qualitative whole". Moreover, "Singular object exists and singular even occurs within a field or situation."²⁷ We point out rather than point at. There is no such thing as passive receptivity; what is called the given is selected, and is taken rather than given.

We are told that sense-data are not objects of knowledge, and have no existential reference. Three common errors are to be avoided : (1) that the commonsense world is perceptual; (2) that the perception is a mood of cognition ; (3) that what is perceived is cognitive in status . Professor Dewey denies *immediate* knowledge and its supposed indescribability for mediated knowledge. But he admits *apprehension*, which functions as immediate knowledge. What is most distinctive in professor Dewey's logic , namely the emphasis upon *inquiry* as opposed to *truth* or knowledge. Inquiry is not for him a search for truth. It is an independent activity defined as follows: "Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole."²⁸ It is admitted that inquiry alters the objects as well as the subjects : "Inquiries concerned with objective transformation of objective subject matter."²⁹

The influence of Prof. Dewey left a profound impression on Ambedkar's world of thought. The ideation of a changing world, society and history as against the concept of traditionalism moulded the life and activity of Ambedkar. Idea as a form of response, and response for change remained as a guiding force throughout Ambedkar's life. It seems, therefore, Ambedkar had a practical implication of both pragmatism and instrumentalism on his life. Moreover, Dewey's ideas of education capable of transforming human mind and society and of democracy capable of uprooting overcentralization of political power in the hands of the exploiting few inspired Ambedkar to struggle for democracy as a remedy to the exploitative society in India.

Ambedkar was a voracious reader. He had a powerful thrust for books. He purchased books even sacrificing his daily needs. In New York he bought about 2000 old books. During the Second Round Table Conference he bought books in London and sent them to India in 32 boxes. It is significant that he built a Bungalow in Mumbai and named it 'Rajgriha' after the name of the place where the Buddha had spent a long period of his life. He remained and slept in the library and often took meals there. His great library had a store of up-to-date books on various topics, namely law, philosophy, religion, socialism, economics, politics, constitutional law and parliamentary affairs. There was a special division containing political biographies.³⁰

It may be noted that many distinguished persons had private libraries. Mention may be made of Shripad Balaji Thakur (first Maharashtra Member of the Indian Civil Service), V. N. Mandlik of Bombay, Dr. Bhandarkar's eldest son, Justice K.T. Telang, M.R. Jayakar and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Ambedkar's name may be added to the list.³¹ Ambedkar used to say: "For a man like me who is socially boycotted these books took me to their hearts".³² His love of books resembled that of a lover for his beloved. Ambedkar himself said that he took special care in respect of two things, books and dress. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya expressed his desire to purchase Ambedkar's collections for the Banaras Hindu University for two lakh rupees but he refused. Ambedkar stated that books had constituted his life: They were the life-blood. There is no hesitation in describing Ambedkar as an erudite person. He distinguished himself in many subjects for example, history, economics, politics, law and constitution. In these subjects he acquired the highest degrees of three universities in England and America.³³

During his stay in America, Ambedkar was impressed by two important things. One was the fourteenth amendment to the U.S.A Constitution, giving freedom to the Negroes. In India the Untouchables resembled the Negroes but had no freedom of their own. The second thing was the impact of Booker T. Washington, a great social reformer who educated the Negroes in America. Washington was the founder and president of the Tuskegee Institute. And this Institute spread education amongst the Negroes. The Institute also broke shackles of the bondage which had been crushing the Negroes for centuries.

England is a model for Parliamentary Democracy . Ambedkar also fought for the liberation of the Untouchables and dreamt of Parliamentary democracy . He came to the conclusion that the Western system had the capacity to break the shackles of the Untouchables in India. He began preaching, by his own example, that 'Worth', and not the 'birth' shaped the life of an individual in a country . His own example proves that 'worth ' shapes the life of an individual more than his 'birth' . It is 'worth' that made Ambedkar a D.Sc. Prior to his entry into Indian Politics Ambedkar was fully equipped with the Western ideas of democracy , liberty, equality and fraternity. His living in England and America revealed to him that the existing Hindu Social System could never free the Untouchables from social and political oppression. It is not the laws of Manu that would be of help to the Untouchables but the constitutional safeguards that would lead them to a free life.³⁴

Ambedkar's Building of the horizons of Ideas of Socio-cultural Reforms

It is interesting to delve into the evolution of man from the primitive stage to civilisation. There is no evidence that any of the early primates or the Ape-man and the sub-man of Pleistocene or even the dawn men of Palaeolithic and Neolithic cultural epochs lived in organised 'States' under governments. It is evident that *Homosapiens* knew nothing of such matters during the first few tens of thousands of years of his existence as a recognisable denizen of the turning of the earth. There was apparently no 'Civilization' whatever among human beings prior to a time which began not much more than 7000 years ago.³⁵

Generally three terms are used in day to day conversation of mankind. These are — civilisation, culture and mentation. Roughly these three are different . Civilization aims at physical comforts. What produces these comforts are known as civilization and these relate to outward things. What yeilds mental happiness is known as culture and what reveals intellect and knowledge is called mentation. Examples will make the distinction clear. Mahenjo-daro seals and other articles discovered by way of archeological excavations are examples of ancient civilization of the inhabitants of the Indus valley. *Varatanatyam* illustrates the culture of the ancient Hindus. And lastly mentation relates to the expression of numbers by the *Vedic Aryans* with the

help of nine digits.³⁶ Incidentally White Head has defined culture thus : “Culture is activity of thought and receptiveness to beauty and human feeling.”³⁷

A major unsolved problem of social science is the question of how and why men, living for ages as ‘animals’ among other animals , finally developed cultures and “how and why men, living for many millennia in primitive culture, at length arrived at the peculiar cultures called ‘civilization’. Three conditions distinguish this civilization. The first is that the earliest primates lived as beasts. That is to say their equipments for solving problems consisted primarily of ‘instincts’ or biologically inherited patterns of response to stimuli, built slowly and solidly into nerves, glands and muscle via the genes, through the mysterious process of organic adaptation over many generations.”³⁸

The early ancestors possessed also some talents for individual learning through trial and error monkeying or fumbling with a strange and dangerous situation. Only those who learnt survived . To learn is to change the pattern of response fixed by instinct or previous habits. Ape-man probably hit upon the use of fire and of simple weapons and tools before they arrived at words. The Apes of today can not learn to talk, but they readily learn to use tools and occasionally seem able to invent them . ‘Culture’ is the totality of learned devices for problem solving , as distinct from hereditary or instinctual equipments. It may be noted that culture is impossible without effective communication between individuals and between generations. Communication in turn creates community, which means no more or less than the sharing of the expenses. To this end comes the invention of words.³⁹ In this context there is the origin of the state and of civilized government based on the war and conquest theory . Reduced to its elements it holds that the crucial events in shift from barbarism to civilization was the subjugation of primitive farmers by hunters and herdsmen . A decision was taken that the victors should carry the victims and utilise them as tillers of the soil . All these are typical features of the earliest literate culture. Writing and religion, no less than the arts of politics and war, enabled the masters to consolidate their mastery by winning the religion of their victims. Through the adroit use of forces, fraud and favours, sanctified by the usage of magic, the new arrangement was perpetuated and developed into the first stratified societies of the first territorial state.⁴⁰

There exists a distinction between the state and society. The state is a definite space or territory inhabited by a distinctive human stock engaged in a nexus of co-operative activity under the protection and auspices of a government of its own. It seems that the state or nation is an amalgam of space and its people, with a nexus of co-operative activities. The people of the state generally follow two orders concurrently and simultaneously, the one is the social order of society and the other is the legal or compulsory order of the state.

By 'society' is meant the wholesome of voluntary bodies or associations contained in the nation with all their various purposes and institutions. Taken together and regarded as a whole, these associations form the social substance which goes by the general and comprehensive name of society. Taken separately and regarded in themselves, they generally show and share two features: first, they are essentially voluntary in origin: secondly, they are essentially specific in purpose, or for some one purpose, namely, religious, economic, educational, charitable or 'social' in a broader sense.

By the state is meant a particular and special association, existing for the special purpose of maintaining a compulsory scheme of legal order, and acting therefore through laws in force by prescribed and definite sanctions. The state capital, as a rule, is national in a scope, just society also is national. In other words, most states are what we call 'National State'. On this point the state agrees with society or more exactly, is co-extensive with society. However it also differs from the associations other than itself which we call, in their sum, by the name of society. It differs in two respects. First, the state includes all the members of the stock living in its territory, and it includes them all as a matter of necessity. Other associations include only on voluntary basis. Secondly, the state has the power of using legal coercion, the power of enforcing obedience under the sanction of punishment, to ordain rules of behaviour. Other associations by virtue of their voluntary basis, can apply only social discipline, and can expect only voluntary obedience to agreed ways of behaviour.⁴¹

In the evolution of man there developed the state, and morality entered the scene. Oppenheimer suggests that the state was at last founded when the ruling group put to death one of its

own members for committing an act of prohibited violence against one of the conquered.⁴² In other words the state was based on common morality. Subsequently the state deteriorated and politics developed. It consisted in “Who gets what , when and how”.⁴³ This developed further so as to yield “force, fraud and favours” as noted already. This is illustrated by the *Manusmriti* (200 B.C. - 200 A.D.). It is one of the misdeeds of Pusyamitra ,the Brahmin General ,who assassinated the Maurya emperor Brihadratha and ascended the throne of Magadha and set up the Sunga dynasty (187-75 B.C.). Pusyamitra wanted the Brahmins to rule over others and got the *Manusmriti* written by one Bhargava. Actually there was none of the name of Manu. It was a fictitious name of a person by whom the attitude of the Brahmins was expressed.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has criticised the institutions of Manu (*Manusmriti*) and he has condemned it. Some of the *slokas* are quoted below to show how undignified and vulgar they are: II.31- Let (the first part of) a *Brahman's* name (denote) something auspicious ... but a *Shudra's* (express something) contemptible. II.32-(The second part of) a *Brahman's* (name) shall be a word implying happiness ... and of a *Shudra's* (an expression) denoting service.⁴⁴

Regarding the wealth that a Brahmin may possess, the following *slokas* testify as follows: I .99- A *Brahmana*, coming into existence, is born as the highest on earth, the lord of all created beings, for the protection of the treasury of the law. I .100- Whatever exists in the world is the property of the *Brahmana*; on account of the excellence of his origin the *Brahmana* is, indeed, entitled to it all.⁴⁵

As regards the wages to the *Shudras*, Manu says, X.124. They must allot to him (*Shudra*) out of their own family property as suitable maintenance, after considering his ability his industry, and the number of those whom he is bound to support. X.125. The remnants of their food must be given to him, as well as their old cloths, the refuse of their grain, and their old household furniture.⁴⁶

Besides a Brahmin must never read the *Veda* in the presence of the *Shudras*: IV.99. Women also are directed not to have any business with the *Veda* :IX.18. Moreover a twice born (*Dwija*) who has ... (improperly) developed the *Veda* (that is to *Shudras* and women) commits sin. Gautam

has in his *Dharma sutra*, XII.4. has stated thus: If the *Shudra* intentionally listens for committing to memory the *Veda*, then his ears should be filled with (molten) lead and lac; if he utters the *Veda*, his tongue should be cut off; if he has mastered the *Veda* his body should be cut to pieces.

In this context Ambedkar comments thus : “The ancient world may be said to have been guilty for failing to take the responsibility for the education of the masses . But never has any society been guilty of closing to the generality of its people the study of the books of its religion. Never has society been guilty of prohibiting the mass of its people from acquiring knowledge .Never has society made any attempt to declare that any attempt made by the common man to acquire knowledge shall be punishable as a crime. Manu is the only law giver who has denied the common man the right to knowledge.”⁴⁷

Subsequently under Ambedkar’s leadership the *Manusmriti* was burnt on 25th December, 1927 after a Satyagraha conference pledged to vindicate the right of the Untouchables to the Mahad Tank. The conference was convened and more than 10,000 Untouchables assembled to consider an injunctions issued by the civil court at the instance of the high castes and restraining the Untouchables from using the Tank on the plea that the Tank was a public property. The conference took following resolutions:

(1) Taking into consideration, the remarks in the *Manusmriti* and such other books which are most vulgar and which most flagrantly violate the human rights, this meeting condemns them emphatically and as an expression of that condemnation resolves to burn them and make the following declaration of rights to form the basis of reconstruction of Hindu Society. The declaration stated that all the Hindus should be considered as one *Varna* and should be recognised and called as such and law should be enacted prohibiting the use of class words as Brahmin, *Kshatriya* etc.

(2) Another resolution urged that a competitive examination be held for the admission of person to the Hindu priesthood and that licenses be issued only to the successful candidates.⁴⁸ The ruling castes in ancient India confused society and state and introduced *varna-ashrama* or the caste system on iniquitous principles. In other words it exulted the *Brahman* and conferred

almost divine honour upon him or made him a 'Bhudev' and reduced the *Shudras* and *Chandalas* almost to the position of slaves, denying them the most elementary rights of ordinary citizenship. The *Shudras* prevented from holding property and were subjected to more heavier punishments than those meted out to the Brahmins for identical offences. The *Chandalas* were treated worse than dogs. When the state became a champion of *varnas* and *ashramas*, it became a party to all these iniquities. It enforced the *varnashramadharma* at the point of the sword to the detriment of the lower classes. It was thus based upon social injustice. It confounded 'dharma' with the existing iniquitous social order. It idealised the actual instead of trying to actualise the ideal.⁴⁹

Ambedkar's Study of the Riddles in Hinduism

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar⁵⁰ has examined the Hindu social system and called it undemocratic. It is designed to be undemocratic. The division of society into castes, sub-castes and outcastes is not only a decree but also a dogma. They are all barricades raised against democracy. It would appear that the doctrine of fraternity was unknown to the Hindu religious and philosophic thought. Such a conclusion would not be warranted by the facts of history. The Hindu religious and philosophic thought gave rise to an idea which had greater potentiality for producing social democracy than the idea of fraternity. To denote this Ambedkar has borrowed a work from Professor Hopkin's *The Epics of India*.

There are three trends in the philosophical thought of the Hindus. They may be designated as (1) *Brahmoism* (2) *Vedanta* and (3) *Brahmanism*. Although they are co-related they stand for three different and distinct ideologies. These are explained thus: (i) *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahmo* — All this is *Brahmo*. (ii) *Aham Brahmasmi* — *Atma* (self) is the same as *Brahmo*. Therefore I am *Brahmo*. (iii) *Tattvamasī* — *Atmana* (self) is the same as *Brahmo*. Therefore thou art also *Brahmo*.

They are called *Mahavakyas* which means Great Sayings and they sum up the essence of *Brahmoism*. The following are the precised teachings of *Vedanta*.

(I) *Brahmo* is the only reality. (II) The world is *maya* or unreal. (III) *Jiva* and *Brahmo*

are — (i) according to one school identical ; (ii) according to another not identical but the elements of *Jiva* are not separate from *Brahmo*; (iii) according to the third school they are distinct and separate. The dogma of *Brahmanism* may be summed up in the following dogmas, (i) Belief in the *Chaturvarna*; (ii) Sanctity and infallibility of the *Vedas*; (iii) Sacrifices to Gods the only way to salvation.

It is said that *Brahmo* is unknowable . But all the same the theory of *Brahmo* has certain social implications, having a tremendous value as a foundation for democracy. If all persons are parts of *Brahmo*, then all are equal and all must enjoy the same liberty which is what democracy means. There cannot be the slightest doubt that no other doctrine could furnish a stronger foundation for democracy than the doctrine of *Brahmo*. However, to support democracy on the basis of all beings having been the children of God is, of course, only a religious foundation of democracy.

A question arises as to why *Brahmoism* failed to produce a new society. This is a great riddle. It is not that the Brahmins did not recognise the doctrine of *Brahmoism*. They did , but did not ask themselves how they could support inequality between *Brahman* and the *Shudra*, between man and woman, between casteman and outcaste. In this context Ambedkar concludes:

“The result is that we have on the one hand the most democratic principles of *Brahmoism* and on the other hand a society infested with castes, sub-castes, out castes, primitive tribes and criminal tribes. Can there be a greater dilemma than this? What is more ridiculous is the teaching of Great Shankaracharya. For it was this Shankaracharya who thought that there is *Brahmo* and this *Brahmo* is real and that it pervades all and at the same time upheld all the iniquities of the *Brahmanic* society. Only a lunatic could be happy with being the propounder of such contradictions. Truly as the Brahmin is like a cow, he can eat anything and everything as the cow does and remain Brahmin.”

While paying a tribute to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru moved a condolence resolution in Parliament thus : “Dr. Ambedkar was a symbol of revolt against all oppressive features of Hindu society.” But the ‘revolt’ turned into a ‘revolution’. And there is a difference between the two. On this Dr. Oneil Biswas³¹ has observed that –

“A revolt is a vigorous outbreak that arises from general turbulence or from opposition to tyranny or oppression. It passes into rebellion, that is on a larger scale and better organised.

It has for its object the securing of independence or the overthrow of government . If successful; it turns into a 'revolution' which overthrows one government or political system and establishes another. This is illustrated by the Glorious Revolution (1688), the American Revolution (1776-89), the French Revolution (1789), the Chinese Revolution (1911) and the Russian Revolution (1917). The distinction between the two is ably brought out by a dialogue between the King and his Duke on hearing of the Fall of Bastille, 1789 as follows:

‘Louis XI : Is it a revolt?

The Duke : No, Sir, it's a revolution.”

In this context one is to distinguish between reform and revolution. The true reformer is the seminal, nor the radical one. And this is the way the sower sows his seed— he does not make any open assault to uproot what is existing , but it is otherwise with the revolution. In the words of Victor Hugo , “revolution is the larva of civilization.” Revolutions begin in the best heads and run steadily down to the populace. An idea of the operations of the two is given below :

“A reformer only reforms the society, he does not destroy and remake it . He is not interested in refurbishing the society— he outwardly addresses to its super structure while retaining the base. Thus God, religion and *varnashrama dharma* and Scriptures form the foundation of Hindu society, and its superstructure comprises the family setup and cultural heritage; primary group association, religious tolerance and spiritualism. Adi Sankara and Ramanuja, in the past and M.K. Gandhi in the 20th Century were social reformers, since they tried to reform the social superstructure without dynamiting the social base.”

In the words of G.B. Shaw : “A revolutionist is one who desires to discard the existing social order and try another.” Examples are Periyar E. V. Ramasami Naicker and B.R. Ambedkar. However, there is a difference between them. As has been well said by Mazzini : “Great revolutions are the works of principles rather than of bayonets, and are achieved first in the moral , and afterwards in the material sphere.” Ambedkar started from the moral plane and descended to the material, whereas Periyar began from the material plane and ascended to the moral. These are cases of descent and ascent.⁵² In the words of Napoleon : “Revolutions are like the most noxious dung-heaps, which bring into life the noblest vegetable.” It is thus seen that revolution is both destructive and creative whereas revolt is only destructive.⁵³ In this perspective social philosophy is to be understood, since social reforms cannot be carried out without a social philosophy. Social philosophy has two parts — critical and constructive. The first one separates the basic categories and principles used in the social sciences and tests their validity. The second one

corrects the onesidedness of specialised social studies and endeavours to see social life as a whole. Social philosophy is helped by the science of sociology, that is, the study of human interaction, their condition and consequences. However, society cannot exclude from the field of study the psychology and history of ideals, since they influence human behaviour. On the other hand, social philosophy deals with the validity of the application of ethical categories to the phenomena of social life and development from the view point of their contribution to ends or purposes to which intrinsic value is ascribed.⁵⁴

Ambedkar in an All India Radio Broadcast of speech on Oct 4, 1954 outlined his personal philosophy of life. According to him : “ Every man should have a philosophy of life, for everyone must have a standard by which to measure his conduct. And philosophy is nothing but a standard by which to measure.” This has two aspects — negative and positive. Negatively he rejected the Hindu social philosophy propounded in the *Bhagavat Geeta* based as it is, on the *Tri-Guna* of Shankhya philosophy, which is a cruel perversion of the philosophy of Kapil. This has made the caste system and the system of ‘graded inequality’ as the law of Hindu social life. Positively Ambedkar’s social philosophy is enshrined in three words liberty, equality and fraternity which according to him are derivatives of Buddhist ideals. This philosophy, therefore, has roots in religion and not in political science, since he claims to have derived it from the Buddha. However, unlimited liberty destroys equality and absolute equality leaves no room for liberty. Law is a safeguard against the breaches of liberty or equality. He gives the highest place to fraternity as the only real safeguard against the denial of liberty or equality. Fraternity is another name for brotherhood or humanity which is again another name of religion.

Law is secular which anybody may break, while fraternity is religious and sacred which everybody must respect. According to Dr. Ambedkar his philosophy had a mission, for he had to do the work of conversion. In other words he had to make the followers of *Tri-Guna* theory give it up and accept Ambedkar’s. In the words of Ambedkar : “ Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideas as set up in the preamble to the constitution affirm a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal as embodied in their religion denies them”.⁵⁵

The Genesis of Socio-cultural Ethos

First Mahar Parishad, 1920 :

The first Mahar Parishad or Council also known as Mangaon Parishad was convened at Mangaon near Kolhapur district in the then Maharashtra on 21st and 22nd March, 1920. The Parishad was presided over by Babasaheb Ambedkar and the , chief guest was Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj. 20-25 thousand people gathered there from Kolhapur, Chikodi, Kudchi, Belgaon and Nippani. The special feature of the Parishad was to set up 5 Mahalla committees.

Chhatrapati Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj delivered his speech on 21st March, 1920. He mentioned Ambedkar as the publisher of '*Mooknayak*'. He reviewed the status of the backward castes and congratulated Ambedkar . Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj stated that he had freed the Untouchables from the daily attendance so as to free them from the exploitation in the hands of village officers. By such a system a kind of slavery was in operation in the 20th century. This was, according to him, the heinous form of slavery. By discontinuing the inhuman practice a good beginning was made towards social reformation. Lack of leadership was one of the reasons for the backwardness of the Untouchable communities. Most of the leaders by their sweet talks cheated the masses. One who treated the Untouchable with the lowest attitude and contempt was not supposed to be a leader. As regards the co-relation between politics and untouchability Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj stated that unless the Untouchables were treated as equal human beings, there could not be any politics of the Untouchables. He emphasised that politicians must treat the Untouchables in the light of equality. In the context of a leader breaking the age old caste-system, the Rajarshi admired Dr. Ambedkar . Since the Rajarshi had started the movement for liberating the Untouchables , the Mahars and Mangs began to call him the king of the Untouchables (*Maharancha raja*). Shahu ,maharaj further wished that in future Ambedkar would shoulder this responsibility and the time would come when he would be the leader of the country.⁵⁶

Ambedkar delivered his speech as president on 21st March, 1920 . He stated that it was the responsibility of the first conference to make it a success. This was a reflection of the ideological

revolution which was taking shape in the minds of the Mahars. They had been believing that it was impossible for them to change their destiny . However, this was the work of some ugly people and therefore, should be brought to the notice of all. The Hindus usually observed two basic principles — (1) eligibility by birth ; and (2) purity and impurity by birth. According to these two principles, Hindu people are divided into three categories: 1. Those who are supreme by birth and pure, i.e., the Brahmins. 2. Those who are subordinate to Brahmins by birth and purity, i.e., the Non-Brahmin class. 3. And lastly the class that is inferior by birth and purity which is referred as the outcastes.

Ambedkar further said that the Brahmins, because of unjust classification on birth supremacy and purity had prospered. On the other hand the Non-Brahmins owing to the birth in low castes had been deprived of facilities in gradation including education and remained backward. However , for the Non-Brahmins there were ways and means to get wealth and education. But the condition of the outcastes was the worst owing to birth-ineligibility and the so called theory of ineligibility. The Untouchables had lost moral strength and self respect, which were necessary for development. The outcastes and the Untouchable had no right , they were not allowed to go to school, to draw water from a public well and to make the use of public streets, vehicles and the like. They had also suffered economically. Owing to birth in low castes they could not engage in trade and commerce . They could get a job. Because of these stern realities they had been outlawed from the military jobs. The same condition did exist in regard to agriculture too. These outcastes had either no piece of land or a very small unproductive piece of land. Thus outcastes had been exploited socially, educationally and economically. Having so analysed, Ambedkar put the question how these exploited people would prosper?⁵⁷

The Mangaon Parishad passed 15 resolutions on 22nd March, 1920 and these were published in *Mooknayak* dated 10th April, 1920. Some of the resolutions are reproduced below :

1. This conference expresses its gratitude towards all the Rajas, Maharajas and princely states who have started working for the betterment of the outcastes.
2. (The outcastes) are entitled to the following human rights, like all other Hindu people : (a) They have a right to make the use of public streets, wells, schools, *dharmashala*, lakes and government-licensed places of

entertainment, restaurants and vehicles. (b) They have a right to get an employment and engage in commerce according to their ability. 3. At the earliest there should be free and compulsory primary education to all children without any discrimination between boys and girls. 4. This conference is of the opinion that there should be one and the same school for the touchables and Untouchables. 5. Due to “*Mahar Watan*” the condition of Mahars is worst. This conference attributes this worst condition to two reasons : (a) *Mahar Watandars* are also engaged in the most condemned work of carrying away the dead animals. Hence these *Watandars* have no esteem in society. (b) *Mahar Watan* land is fragmented land because from generation to generation the same land is distributed and redistributed. As a result *Mahar Watandars* have no sufficient land. 6. This gathering resolves that, eating the flesh of dead animals by any men should be considered as a crime by law. 7. This conference demands the appointments of outcastes people in the posts of Talathis. (Who maintains a land record of a village). 8. This conference as a matter of right demands that in the future Legislative council the representatives of the outcaste people must get elected in proportion to their population from the separate Electorate.⁵⁸

The Dharmantar Parishad:

The *Dharmantar Parishad* (Mumbai Ilakha Mahar Parishad) held a conference at Naigaon, Mumbai on 30th and 31st May, 1936. The president of the *Parishad* was B.S. Vyankatrao otherwise known as Hydrabadi Ambedkar and the chief speaker was Babasaheb Ambedkar. Nearly 25 thousand people attended the conference and the *Samata Sainik Dal* was in-charge of management. The conference *Mandap* was named as Mata Ramabai Nagar. The *Mandap* was decorated with the rebellious slogans such as :

“ If you Want Humanity — Convert”

“ If you Want An Organisation — Convert”

“ If you Want to Aquire Strength - Convert”

“ For Equality — Convert”

“ For Freedom — Convert”

“ For Happy Life — Convert’

**“ Why Do you Remain In that Religion
Which Derecognises Your Humanity”**

**“ Why Do You Remain in that Religion
Which Do Not Give You Water.”**

**“Why Do You Remain In that Religion
Which Does Not Allow You To Get Education”**

**“ Why Do You Remain In That Religion
Which Deprives You From Jobs”**

**“ Why Do You Remain In that Religion
Which Condemns You At The Every Step
OF Your Life.”**

On religion the thinking of Ambedkar is on the following line :1.The Hindu religion which prohibits the human treatment is not the religion but the decoration of supremacy of a few .2.The religion which prescribes for the inhuman treatment is not a religion but a disease.3.In the religion where touch of animals is allowed but touch of certain people is not allowed that religion is not a religion but sheer madness. 4.The religion which prescribes that one class should not get education , shoul not collect money, should not bear arms such religion is not the religion but mockery of human life.5.The religion which tells the illiterates to remain illiterate , and tells the poor to remain poor that religion is not a religion but it is a punishment.⁵⁹

In the conference Dadasaheb Gaikwad moved the resolution favouring ‘The conversion Policy’: ‘Mumbai Ilakha Mahar Parishad after a deep thought makes declaraton that in order to attain the freedom and equality for the Mahar Community conversion is the only way out. This conference firmly resolves that under the leadership of Dr. Amebedkar Mahar samaj is collec-

tively and fully prepared for the conversion.” This Mahar Parishad further resolved: “This Parishad is also of the opinion that as preparations to the conversion, hereafter the people of Mahar *jati* should not worship the Hindu gods-goddesses, observe festivals and fasts, pilgrimages and they should not take part in any Hindu festivals.”

In the historic Yeola declaration Ambedkar told his followers that, “although I have been born as a Hindu , I shall not die as a Hindu.” The Mumbai Ilakha Mahar Parishad remained very active in the subsequent years and a big conference in regard to his conversion policy was held in Naigaon area to the east of Dadar Railway Station of Bombay on the 30th and 31st May, 1936. The idea of the parishad was to gauge the public opinion after the Yeola declaration of renouncing Hinduisim. In this conference different sessions were held. There was one separate session of the *Sadhus* and the one for women.

The main focus of the conference was on conversion policy and the path to be followed to attain salvation. Prior to this in the Solapur district of Maharashtra at Barshi in the Mumbai Prantik Bahishkrita Parishad held in May, 1924, Ambedkar suggested three different ways to the Untouchables— (1) *Dehantar*, (2) *Namantar* or (3) *Dharmantar*. While discussing these issues he opined that one must find out the ways of exterminating untouchability. In a speech on conversion or *Dharmantar* he said, : “Why should we not get converted into any other religion (allowing) us to lead the noble life”. Since the Untouchables were easily un-identifiable by their particular name he suggested the remedy of *Namantar*, that is the change of name. Ambedkar explained that Hindu religion was not the religion of the Untouchable’s forefathers, it was a forced slavery on them. They had no means to liberate themselves from such slavery. But the present generation had the means to do so. For man’s progress change was absolutely necessary. Conversion was a change and it was necessary.

Ambedkar criticised Mahatma Gandhi on the ground that he fought against the Britishers with non-violence, however, he was not prepared to change the minds of the Hindus towards the Untouchables and thus he could not undertake *Satyagraha* against the Hindus. In this context Gandhi’s reforms were of no utility but futile. The Hindus questioned the conversion and asked

what would happen by conversion. Their advice was to improve the economic and educational conditions of the Untouchables instead of conversion. According to Dr. Ambedkar the intention was to divert the attention of the Untouchables. According to him, the Hindus should have first effected social and economic reforms and then demand a *Swaraj* just as Hindus were in need of *Swaraj* so also the Untouchables were in need of conversion . This was so , because the ultimate object of both was to attain freedom.

Dr. Ambedkar stated clearly : “My conversion is not for material gain . There is only spiritual foundation behind my conversion . Hindu religion does not appeal to my conscience. It does not suit to my self respect . But for you conversion is a must for the both , spiritual as well as material reasons. Those who laugh at our decision of conversion, I have no hesitation in calling them fools. Finally, I must tell you that man is not for religion, religion is for man. For humanity, liberty, equality you must convert. If you decide to convert then you must assure me that it will be a collective decision. I feel that you must convert with me. If you have no desire to convert I have nothing to say. But if you decide, then your future generation will not be dependent on others, hence you have more responsibility.”

Finally, Ambedkar reminded the gathering of the last message of Buddha given to his disciple Anand : “ You will be self-enlightened , believe in yourself, do not rely on others, follow the truth, take a decision in accordance with your conscience.”⁶⁰

Reforms in Action

Ambedkar was conversant with the teachings of Phoolley. He had the ideal of a society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar’s education in England and the U.S.A gave him a broad social outlook to free his community from the social thralldom of the caste Hindus. To him *Brahmanism* was a poison and he took up a cudgel to fight it all along. As a result he had to wage social battle against caste Hindus.

Ambedkar made efforts to maintain a balance between thoughts and action. He recognised dynamism in life and this was derived from his teacher, Professor John Dewey. About this wrote

Ambedkar: “ Every society gets encumbered with what is trival , with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively preserved. ...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 made for a better future society.”

His principles of dynamism recognised that “There is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing *sanatan* : that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society.”⁶¹ Ambedkar held that social environment was as much responsible for human sorrow as man himself. He wanted to establish a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. According to him : “ In an ideal society, there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be social endosmosis”⁶² To this end he traced a social conscience as the only safeguard of all rights fundamental and non-fundamental.⁶³ He considered social progress and social stability as depending on ‘fluidity’ and ‘equity’ among classes . According to Ambedkar , stability is wanted but not at the cost of change when change is imperative. Adjustment is wanted but not at the sacrifice of social justice.⁶⁴ Social stability meant to him negation of the caste system in Indian Society.

The social struggles launched by Ambedkar aimed at counteracting the unequal treatment meted out to the Untouchables by the caste Hindus. His motive was to establish status in religious, social, economic and political matters to all classes. This meant an offer to give them an opportunity to rise in the scale of life and to create conditions for their advancement. These fundamental ideas underlay the social struggles launched under the leadership of Ambedkar against communal tyranny.⁶⁵

Mahad Tank Satyagraha

S.K. Bole, the leader of a Non-Brahmin Party had moved a resolution in the Bombay Legislative Council and it read as follows: “ The Council recommends that the Untouchable classes be allowed to use all public water-places, wells, and *dharmashalas* which are built and maintained out of public funds or are administered by bodies appointed by government or

created by statute, as well as public schools, courts offices, and dispensaries.”

The Bombay Government issued a directive on September 11, 1923, to give effect to the said resolution. In spite of the resolution a number of local boards and municipalities did not grant the civil rights to the Depressed Classes.

Bole then moved another resolution on August 5, 1926. It directed that the municipalities and local boards would not get grants for having to implement the resolution passed three years ago. To implement the resolution the Mahad Municipal Borough threw open the Tank to all the communities. The Tank was known as *Chowdar* because of its tasty water. The caste Hindus in Mahad were opposed to this resolution.

At Mahad, a conference of Untouchables was held on March 19 and 20, 1927 and was attended by about 10,000 delegates. In his presidential address Ambedkar traced the need of eradicating caste barriers by self - elevation through self-help , self-responsibility and self - knowledge. After the conference all the 10,000 delegates marched in a procession to the *Chowdar Tank* to assert their right to drink and take water.

A rumour was spread to the effect that all the Untouchables had entered the Vireswar temple. The caste Hindus entered the pandal and attacked the delegates. Stray individuals were beaten . They had to run into Muslim houses for shelter and Dr. Ambedkar was forced to take shelter in a police station.

There after the Untouchables had to face social boycott. They were dislodged from the land and assaulted in many villages. Ambedkar urged his followers to take aggressive steps to assert their rights. To this Javalkar and Jethe, the prominent leaders of the *Satyasodhak* movement in Maharashtra promised their whole-hearted support. It was decided that all the Brahmins should be weeded out from it and the struggles should be non-violent on a mass scale.⁶⁶

At Mahad a Satyagraha Conference was called on December 25, 1927. The site for the conference was taken from a Muslim citizen. The local merchants were non-cooperative. The reception committee had to purchase corn and other materials from outside. Ambedkar left

Bombay with 200 delegates. About 3000 *Satyagrahis* were ready, but the District Magistrate requested Ambedkar to postpone the proposed struggle. In his speech he attacked the *Varna* system, since it was at the root of inequality. He stated that equality meant equal opportunity and making power dependent on inherent qualities.⁶⁷ He emphasised two things (1) equality and (2) absence of casteism. On December 25, 1927 the *Manusmriti* was burnt as noted already. The resolution on the proposed *Satyagraha* was moved by Ambedkar himself but in the then circumstances it was thought inadvisable to antagonise the government.⁶⁸

Temple Entry Movement.

In May, 1930, *Satyagraha* was started to enter into the Kalaram Mandir Temple at Nasik. Ambedkar thought that such a *Satyagraha* might facilitate the entry into other temples and create change in the Hindu-mind-set. This *Satyagraha* was directly under Ambedkar's leadership. Bhairao Gaekwad was the Secretary of the *Satyagraha* Committee. About 15000 male volunteers and 500 female volunteers were ready. A mile long procession went towards the Kalaram Mandir in batches of four. The door of the temple had been closed. Hence the processionists proceeded to the *ghats* of the Godavari river. The caste Hindus reacted by throwing stones and shoes. After a month a compromise took place between the caste Hindus and the Untouchables. It was decided that strong men from the Untouchables and the Caste Hindus should draw Ram's chariot on the *Ramnabami* ceremony. However, the Caste Hindus broke the promise and drew the chariot without the Untouchables, and Ram's temple remained closed for a whole year. But the agitation continued upto the end of October, 1935. The news of the arrest of volunteers appeared in the London times. It helped Ambedkar at the Round Table Conference.

It may be noted in this connection that Ambedkar launched the movements namely, (1) The Mahad Tank *Satyagraha*, (2) the Burning of the *Manusmriti* and (3) the Kalaram Mandir *Satyagraha*. Ambedkar made it clear that the motives behind this struggle were to rouse the consciousness of the people. He stated: "It is not that you can solve all your problems by *Satyagraha* this is only a request to the upper caste Hindu minds."⁶⁹

Ambedkar was of opinion that the problems of the Untouchables would never be solved

by worship alone. He stressed a change in the attitude of the caste Hindus.⁷⁰ Dr. Subbarayan a South Indian leader introduced a Bill in the Central Assembly. The contention of the Bill was that if a referendum favoured temple entry, temples should be thrown open to the Untouchables. But the Bill remained silent as to their right to worship the deity in the temple. Ambedkar rejected the bill since it did not condemn untouchability as a sin. Despite Gandhi's request Ambedkar refused to support this Bill and the Temple Entry Bill of Ranga Iyer. He regarded the removal of untouchability as more important than the erection of temple.⁷¹

Mahar Watan

There was a Bombay hereditary offices Act. 1874 in which the Mahars held certain posts and were required to work all day and night and in the absence of a Mahar servant his father or any other member of his family was required to work in the service of the government. For this hard work they got a piece of land as *Watan*. As *watan* some corn from the villagers and some negligible remuneration varying from two *annas* to a rupee and a half per munsum. As a result of the *watan* system the Mahars lost their self-respect and they were attached to trifling jobs. This practice kept the Mahar community down. Ambedkar said that the problem could not be solved by amending Act. But the system must be abolished. He suggested that his community should bring the waste land under cultivation and maintain themselves.

On March 19, 1928 Ambedkar introduced a Bill in the Legislative Council to amend the 1874 Act. He made clear the objects of the Bill in a series of meetings and conferences. Firstly, the purpose of the Bill was to permit commutation of the *watan* at the option of the holder. Secondly, it was to provide better security for the payment of remuneration to certain classes of *Watander*. Thirdly, it was to provide for specification, by rules, of the duties to be performed by the *Watandars*. While moving the Bill in the Bombay Legislative Council on August 3, 1928, Ambedkar reminded the House that the lands had been given to the Mahars by the ancient emperors of the country. The present government had neither increased the extent of the land nor paid any attentions to the remuneration of these payable and their income was negligible. He therefore proposed that the *watan* lands should be given to the holders of these posts at the full

rate of assesment and they should be relieved from the obligation to serve. He further added that they should be paid from the revenue derived from the assesment imposed on the lands of the Mahars and from the *Baluta* (collection of grain made by *watandar* Mahars from the villagers). If this was not done, then there would be a war between revenue department and the Mahars. In case the proposed Bill was not passed, the Mahars would organise a general strike.⁷² He concluded that the *watans* were the greatest hindrance in the advancement of the Mahar community.

The Bill was refered to a select committee of 23 members which was to report by the beginning of June 1929. The select Committee changed the Bill beyond recognition. Ambedkar proposed to convert *Baluta* into a money cess. The committee, however, opined that *watan* lands should not be given over to the *watandars* on payment of full assesment of their lands, but should be given the half the produce of the land. The vested interest opposed the very essence of the Bill and Ambedkar withdrew it on July 4, 1929.

The Mahars were excluded from land revenue because the land had been given to them as *watan* land. But owing to the stringency of money, assesment on a small scale was recovered from the Mahars since the Peshwa rule. This revenue was known as *Judi* , which was not recovered in cash but in the form of corn. The Mahar leaders wanted to change *Judi* into full assesment and derived monthly pay for services rendered to the government and to the village. The first Congress ministry (1937 - 1939) in Bombay was of opinion that such a scheme must be opposed.

The Mahar Leaders organised a Conference at Horegaon (Ahmednagar District) on December 16, 1939 and a statement was submitted to the governor of Bombay who had talks with Ambedkar . The demands of the Mahars were as follows : To transform the *watan* lands of Mahars into Ryotwari (peasant proprietorship) lands, to pay monthly wages to the Mahars as inferior servants and to make them do only the government job. Again Ambedkar introduced a Bill at the Poona Session of the Bombay Legislative Council on September 17 , 1937 so as to abolish the Mahar *watan*. During war years Dr. Ambedkar wanted a peaceful and constitutional solution of the problem . He did not want the agitation to turn into Satyagraha . Ambedkar

became a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council in 1942 and thought it better to withdraw the movement, and the government promised that no increase in *Judi* would be made. To agitate against the *watan* system Ambedkar subsequently set up the Bombay State Inferior *Village Watan* Association on June 16, 1956 and he became its Chairman. He warned the government that if it did not solve the problem amicably he might prosecute the government. But the villagers opposed such a measure by all means. However, Ambedkar stated that government had accepted the principle, "land to the Tiller", but was not ready to include government land under the jurisdiction of the Act.⁷³

Ambedkar, however, believed that the *watan* Act. and the *watan* system were contrary to the constitution of India. He held that writ petition should be filed in the High Court and if it was unsuccessful then it must be taken to the Supreme Court.⁷⁴ The Mahar *watan* was at last abolished under the *Bombay Inferior Village Watan Abolition Act.* of 1959. It took 20 years for the abolition of the *watan* system and Ambedkar could not see the Abolition Act on the Statute Book.⁷⁵

The Mahars and their Movements

The Mahars were found in almost every village of Maharashtra and were always in a minority. Their quarters, called Maharwada were set apart, usually east of the village proper. A Marathi proverb, *jethe gao Tethe maharwada* (wherever there is a village, there is a maharwada), underlines their prevalence and also their low status. The reason is that it was used ideomatically to mean the same as the English proverb, — "There is a blacksheep in every flock."⁷⁶ Irawati Karve, an anthropologist has found the Mahars, and not the dominant agricultural caste among the the Marathas, the most thoroughly wide spread castes of Maharashtra and ended an essay on "Mahars and Maharashtra" with the statement on a Mahar village official on the boarder between the Marathi and the Hindi - speaking belts. It was stated, "*jethaparayant mahar pochle tiithaparyant maharashtra*" (as far as the Mahars have gone, there is Maharashtra).⁷⁷

It has been held by some scholars and writers that the Mahars were the original inhabitants of Maharashtra. One of the old names used for them '*dharnicheput*' (sons of the soil) — as well as

some of their traditional village duties— the arbitration of boundari disputes and the care of the village goddess *Mariai* — suggests that they might at one time had owned the land . At least one early Mahar leader, Kisan Fagoji Bansode of Nagpur , spoke of pre-Arian landownership to try to build a historical spirit of the Mahars. But , B. R. Ambedkar did not exploit this belief. When asked if he were a pre-Arian, he said to the Simon Commission : “Well , I do not know.”⁷⁸

The traditional place of the Mahar in the village community was as a *balutedar* or *watandar*, or as a village servant whose duty was to the village and whose recompense came from the village in the form of — *balute* or gifts in kind, and *watan* or land. The Mahars’ hereditary duty in former times might have involved membership of the village governing body when the village servant, including the *Patil* (headman) and the *Kulkarni* (accountant, usually a Brahmin), sat as a panchayet.⁷⁹ The Mahar *balutedars’* duties included arbitration in boundary disputes, acting as the village watchman, mending the village wall, serving as guide and messenger to government servants, calling landowners to pay land revenue at the village roads *chaudi* (village hall), sweeping the village roads, escorting the government treasury, tracking thieves, carrying death notice and messages to other villages, bringing fuel to the cremation ground, and removing the carcasses of death cattle from the village.⁸⁰

Besides, the Mahar had fixed duties in religious matters, including kindling of the first *Holi* Festival Fire from which other fires were lit and guarding the shrine of goddess *Marai* which was in the *Maharwada*. Recompense given by the village for these duties included not only grain and the skins of the dead cattle, but a small amount of land known as *watan* and a host of other perquisites legendarily numbering fifty two. The Mahars not required for *Balutedar* works did agricultural labour, since their own *watan* lands were insufficient to support them. These set of duties was prevalent in the Konkan (costal) and desh(plains) areas of Maharashtra; in the Vidarbha region to the east where a looser social structure prevailed. It may be noted that some Mahars were also weavers, statesmen and Malguzars(revenue collectors).⁸¹

Ambedkar analysed the conditions that an Untouchable had to face as contrasted with the

touchable. The Touchables had prescribed certain offences only for the Untouchables which were not to be found in the Indian Penal Code. Ambedkar has cited some of these offences as follows:⁸² (i) The Untouchables must live in separate quarters away from the habitation of the Hindus. It is an offence for the Untouchables to break or evade the rule of segregation. (ii) The quarters of the Untouchables must be located towards the South, since the South is the most inauspicious of the four directions. A breach of this rule shall be deemed to be an offence. (iii) The Untouchables must observe the rule of distance pollution or shadow pollution as the case may be. It is an offence to break the rule. (iv) It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to acquire wealth, such as land or cattle. (v) It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to build a house with tiled roof. (vi) It is an offence for a member of an Untouchable community to put on a clean dress, wear shoes, put on a watch or gold ornaments. (vii) It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to sit on a chair in the presence of a Hindu. (viii) It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community not to salute a Hindu. (ix) An Untouchable must conform to the status of an inferior and he must wear the marks of his inferiority for the public to know and identify him such as — (a) having a contemptible name; (b) not wearing clean cloths; (c) not having tiled roof; (d) not wearing silver and gold ornaments. A contravention of any of these rules was an offence.

Ambedkar also noted the wages paid to the Untouchables — these were paid either in cash or in corn. In part of U.P. the corn given to the Untouchables as wages is called *Gobarah* meaning privy corn or corn contained in the dung of an animal. In the month of March or April when the crop was fully grown, reaped and dried, it is spread on the threshing floor. Bullocks were made to tread over the corn in order to take the corn out of husk by the pressure of their hooves. While treading over the corn, the bullocks would swallow up the corn as well as the straw. As their intake is excessive they find it difficult to digest the corn. Next day, the same corn came out of their stomach along with their dung. The dung was strained and the corn was separated and given to the Untouchable workmen as their wages.⁸³

There is considerable evidence that Mahars freed from traditional village services saw a need to try to adopt a Hinduism more sophisticated than that offered by village gods. A poem,

probably by a Mahar, attached to the handwritten copy of the 1894 petition depicts the hardships and the bad habits of Untouchables in rough and direct language, and includes the complaint: Our religious names are *Satvi, Jaravi, Mesai, Vetai, Mhasra, Bahari, Bhadvi, Mariai*. We do not know *Brahmo, Vishnu, Mahesh, Krishnarai, Rukhamai, Sita, Lakshman*.

Many of the Mahars joined the *panths* of Kabir and Ramanand who stressed equality. A sizable section of the Mahars of the Bewani sub-sect in Vidarbha joined the *Mahamubhah panth* and thereby they came to hold high status in the Mahar community itself and gradually they took up the professions of weavers, traders and shopkeepers.⁸⁴

In this context it may be noted that the Mahars had a natural faith in the person of their own saint Chokkhamela, a 14th Century poet and spiritualist. Chokkhamela's *Abhangas* (songs) are still sung by pilgrims of the *warkari* cult on pilgrimage to Vithoba's temple at Pandharpur.⁸⁵ This seems to have been a beginning towards using the name Chokkhamela as a caste name, building temples in his honour, naming groups and institutions after him, much in the same way that the Chamar of U.P. did in the name of their saint Rabidas, in an attempt to gain status.⁸⁶ The resolution of the *Chokkhamela Reform Society* meeting at Ramtek, a pilgrimage centre near Nagpur, in 1823, illustrate the methods of this approach: (1) a temple should be built where Untouchables as orthodox Hindus can have equal rights in weddings and thread ceremonies along with *Brahmans, Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas*; (2) there should be religious education to bring about the unity of the Hindu people; (3) upper class people should help educate so-called untouchables, and government should give concessions to the upper classes to encourage them; however, the importance of education and the necessity of governmental helps are necessary if any change is actually to come.

There have been sporadic efforts to create specific Mahar Institution within Hinduism, to join a reforming caste Hindu organisation or to adopt higher caste ritual practices — called Sanskritisation by the socialist M. N. Srinivas — throughout the first three decades of 20th Century. Examples are: Gopal Baba Walangkar, author of the 1894 army petition, encouraged the replacement of *Brahman* joshis who cast wedding horoscopes, one of the few duties performed

by *Brahman* priests for Mahars, with Mahar joshis. Kisan Fagoji Bansode of the Nagpur and G.A. Gawai of Amravati, both important Mahar social reformers spokesmen for increased participation in a higher form of Hinduism, joined the *Prarthana Samaj* in 1910. Vithoba Raoji Sant Pande built a separate bathing place for Mahars at Ramtek near Nagpur around 1914 and “placed the whole community under a deep obligation”. In the late 1920’s, Mahars in Bombay attempted to participate in the public worship of Ganpati at Dadar, started performing weddings in accordance with “*Vedic rites*”, and at least on one occasion donned the symbol of the high caste Hindu, the sacred thread.⁸⁷

The claim to religious rights gradually yielded its importance to the growing consciousness for education and political power articulated by Ambedkar. Besides, the experience of the failure of the attempts for religious reforms prepared Mahars to reject Hinduism altogether. The figure of Chokkamela remained a source of caste pride rather than a stimulant to claiming a place of worth in the Hindu hierarchy. They were after new avenues for rising in status in a stratified system. In this connection a letter of Ambedkar to the leader of the *Nasik Satyagraha* in 1934 is an eye opener. He suggested: “I would advise the Depressed Classes to insist upon a complete overhauling of Hindu society and Hindu theology before they consent to become an integral part of Hindu society. I started temple entry *satyagraha* only because I felt that was the best way of energising the Depressed Classes and making them conscious of their position. As I believe I have achieved that, therefore I have no more use for temple entry. I want the Depressed Classes to concentrate their energy and resources on politics and education.”⁸⁸

In this connection the name of Kisan Fagoji Bansode (1879 - 1894) comes up. He was a labour leader, newspaper editor, social worker and a poet of Nagpur. He agreed with Ambedkar in social and political matters, however, he retained the belief that progress could be made within Hinduism. The following of his statement illustrates this:

“Why do you endure curses?

Chokha went into the temple resolutely,

Why do you, ashamed, stay far off?

You are the descendant of Chokha,
 Why do you fear to enter the temple ?
 Brace yourself like a wrestler, come,
 Together let us conquer pollution.”⁸⁹

The Mahar awakening came in the wake of military service and other contacts with the British. The employment opportunities outside the village pattern and the beginning of education provided first by caste Hindu reformers and Christian missions inspired the Depressed Classes to begin their own efforts. Ambedkar incubated all these progress and awakening into a political force and equipped them for the use of political means towards a modern goal of socio-political equality.⁹⁰

Amongst the Scheduled Castes in India, the Mahars of Maharashtra have used political means most consistently and unitedly in their attempt to better their condition. The expression ‘political means’ covers both early efforts of scattered groups to secure governmental benefits and representation on legislative and political bodies, and later more direct efforts in the form of political parties that secured representation of their special interest, agitated for constitutional guarantees created for themselves a firm electoral base.

In this connection Ambedkar based his belief on the army experience of his ancestors and attributed the beginning of the Untouchables’ movement almost solely to their contact with the British army. In his words :

“ Until the advent of the British , the Untouchables were content to remain Untouchables. It was destiny preordained by the Hindu God and enforced by the Hindu State...Fortunately or unfortunately , the East India Company needed soldiers for their army in India and it could find none but the Untouchables... In the army of the East India Company there prevailed the system of compulsory education for Indian Soldiers and their children, both male and female. The education received by the Untouchables in the armygave them a new vision and a new value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the priest. They felt the shame of it as they never did before and were determined to get rid of it.”⁹¹

‘The gradual unfolding of ideology and strategy of the Untouchables’ protest movement

under Ambedkar between 1920 and 1929 may be stated in the following six propositions :

(i) The Untouchables might belong to the same religion, but they were not a part of the same society as the caste Hindus. They constituted as a separate interest group. (ii) Untouchables had historically been an exploited group; untouchability was the culmination of religious philosophy based on inequality. (iii) The philosophy of *Brahminism* was a philosophy of 'graded inequality' and Hinduism was the same as *Brahmanism*. It was inflexible and had frustrated till then all previous efforts for reform in this basic feature. (iv) The Untouchables sought equality and justice, not favours. Social graces were unimportant. (v) Justice demanded not just for proportional representation, but also against protective discrimination for the Untouchables. (vi) The Untouchables would seek to attain legitimate equalitarian goals and special protection, in political and economic spheres, within the fold of Hinduism as far as possible, but would reject Hinduism if necessary.⁹²

On the above six ideological propositions the strategy of Ambedkar's movement was based. The assertion of the separate identity of Untouchables as a group on the basis of the strategy of remaining outside the mainstream nationalist movements. This marginal position was important for the Untouchables' movement so as to bargain with the main stream on the one hand and the powerful outsiders, against whom the main stream had been battling on the other. Social reform was given primacy over the political goal of self-government. To hold out the threat of religious conversion in full awareness of the Hindu fear of losing plurality and to seek a separate electorate and reserved seats to retain political leverage were parts of the same strategy. In this context Ambedkar justified making peace with the government in Mahad when the Hindu majority denied the Untouchables their legitimate right.⁹³ Ambedkar also spelt out his position clearly while writing the note, '*Sir John Simon and the Untouchable Castes.*' "We think that when the question of granting the right of self-government to Indian people comes up before the British Parliament to the task of ensuring the progress of Untouchables would be easier if the Simon Commission takes cognisance of our memorandum in preparing its constitutional proposals."⁹⁴ Ambedkar also propounded a strategy of tit-for-tat in dealing with Caste Hindus. "One should not expect the eclipse of untouchability to be over unless we show readiness to say tit-for-tat ,

rub wrist against wrist , and adopt a strategy of obstruction and allround checkmating [of Hindu social mores].⁹⁵

The ideology of Ambedkar's movement as well as that of some other minority groups in Indian polity prior to independence had some common and recurrent themes. They were four in number as follows : (i) The assertion of separate identities and special interests of their groups; (ii) A claim that the British must provide for special protection of these interests in any programme of political liberation that they adopt for India; (iii) The maintenance of a visible but variable distance between their own movement of social and political advancement and the mainstream nationalist movement; and (iv) A similar variable distance between their movement and the foreign ruling power.

The decade from 1930 to 1940 was to bring out the various aspects of the ideology and strategy of the Ambedkarite movement of the Untouchables so as to ensure their own social and economic uplift. During this decade Ambedkar showed the awareness that the road to social betterment by Untouchables could play no part unless they asserted their separate identity.⁹⁶ From the year 1930 Ambedkar moved increasingly from his earlier pre-occupations with social reform and social protest to political action. He never lost the sight of the social aspects of inequality , but he began to focus on political issues and political means of achieving social equality and of safeguarding the interest of the Untouchables. It began with the memorandum to the Simon Commission and the commentary on the Nehru Committee Report. And this continued almost upto 1950, when he resigned from the Union Cabinet. He continued a movement thereafter for religious conversion of his followers. But a conclusive development took place only in the year 1956.

In 1930 two important events took place and these marked the transition from the "social" to the "political" and also from the 'regional' to 'national' sphere. The first was the *Nasik Temple Entry Satyagraha* in – March , 1930. The second was his participation in the First Round Table Conference in London in 1930. A full report on the long - drawn *Nasik Satyagraha* is available in Y.D. Padke's *Ambedkar Chalval* (Y.D. Phadke, 1990). The second is to be found in Dhanonjay

Keer's biography of Ambedkar (Keer , 1962) as also in Volume 2 of Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches (Moon, 1982). The *Nasik Satyagraha* for the entry of the Untouchables in to the Kalaram Temple began on March 2, 1930 and continued for six long years until April 1936 and ended inconclusively without gaining its specific objective. But its success lay in hightening the Untouchables' consciousness of their rights in mobilising them to militant action and in bringing out the leadership potential of persons like Bhaurao Gaikwad, Amritrao Ranakhambe and Savalaram Dani.⁹⁷

By the time the *Nasik Satyagraha* was to begin, Ambedkar looked upon temple entry as relatively unimportant part of the programme. He told the leaders who were to start the Satyagraha that he was more interested in securing political rights for the Untouchables than in gaining them entry into temples. In an editorial in the *Bahishkrit Bharat* on the earlier *Parvati Satyagraha*, Ambedkar had said that if orthodox Hindus were bent on preventing the entry of the Untouchables from entering Hindu temple, the Untouchables were necessarily to launch a Satyagraha against such a move.

During the period of the *Nasik Satyagraha* many important events took place. The Gandhi - Ambedkar confrontation at the Second Round Table Conference, Gandhi's Fast against the Communal attack followed by the Poona Pact, Gandhi's reluctance to give up the ideas of *ChaturVarna* — all these embittered Dr. Ambedkar and alienated him from his Hindu identity . When the *Nasik Satyagraha* petered out Ambedkar said at the Yeola Conference on October 13, 1935 : "Enter a religion where you will obtain peace and dignity . But remember to select only that religion in which you will get equal status, equal opportunity and equal treatment... It was not my fault that I was born an Untouchable. But I am determined that I will not die a Hindu."⁹⁸

It may be noted in this connection that Ambedkar was wholly rational in his approach to life's problems, but not a materialist. In this context his readiness to give up Hinduism was an important condition in his choice of work- associates. Towards the end of his life, his search for a rational morality, for a humane, non-preist - ridden equalitarian faith led him to Buddhism.

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