

Chapter II

THE LIFE AND TIME OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR AND THE NATURE OF THEIR IMPACT ON THE FORMATION OF HIS IDEAS

2.1 Introduction

The continuing processes of transactions and interactions that one undergoes in the society are prime and dominating factors for shaping ideas and mental model of an individual. The process of interaction between a student and his teachers, which is called as the process of education, or, the process of interaction between parent and the child, called as upbringing, are the nature of social processes that go on in the society all the time. The social value system acts as a reference point for an individual and through this anchorage point, he derives 'security', provided through familial and special relationships. He also perceives 'opportunity' or 'threat' depending on his location in the social system. Depending upon the value system of the society, one may find himself discriminated or advantaged in the society in terms of 'opportunity' in future life. In a society, individual is not free and his relationships are mediated through the mode of his family affiliation, relationships between individual and groups and others. Most of the times, these relationships are not based on 'secular-rational' considerations but on 'notions of hereditary status'.¹

In the following sections, an attempt will be made to examine the influence of familial relationships, the process of education as well as contemporary social events that could influence the process of developing mental model and shaping ideas and vision of Dr. B R Ambedkar.

2.2 Early Influences

The life and time of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar and the nature of their impact on the formation of his ideas can be found to have its root years behind from the day when he was born. The social and cultural context in which his immediate blood-relations and people who dented impression in his mind and thought-making processes, were born and grew up has a significant influence. It is those people who influenced him culturally and helped him to develop his mind and personality. The cognitive process of thinking and shaping ideas in his mind can be considered a long drawn process that had its beginning much ahead of 14th April, 1891 when B R Ambedkar was born at Military Headquarters Of War (MHOW), near Indore in the present state of Madhya Pradesh. He was the fourteenth child of Ramji Sakpal, a Subedar in British Army posted at MHOW.

Ramji Sakpal (1848-1913), was born in the village named 'Ambadave'. It was situated near 'Dapoli' in the adjoining Mandangad Subdivision of the Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra. Ramji, like his father Maloji Sakpal, joined British Army in 1866 and in course of time was promoted as a Subedar and served as 'Head Master of an Army school'².

The disciplined and upright nature of his father's life in British Army and thereafter influenced the upbringing of his children in a distinguished manner than a normal villager and it can be stated that it had profound influence for admiration for 'Rationality' and 'Rule of Law and Justice' in the mind of young Ambedkar.

In 1892, the British government abandoned its century old policy of indiscrimination of castes in recruitment and banned the recruitment of "untouchables" in their armies. The policy, known as "*Kitchener's Policy*" upsurge a wave of protests in both inside and outside British Armies. As a friend and admirer of Mahatma Phooley, Subedar Ramji, father of B R Ambedkar, always took great interest the social problems of his time which concerned fate of his community³. He also took a leading role in protesting against the 'Kitchener's policy'⁴.

As Ambedkar himself said:

"Once I was examining some bundles of old paper belonging to my father, when I found in them a paper which purported to be a petition sent by the commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the Mahar Community to the Government of India, against the order issued in 1892, banning recruitment of the Mahars in the Army"⁵.

This discovery can be considered as one of the cornerstones that shaped the thinking-process of Ambedkar.

The influence of his father, Ramji Sakpal needs a special mention in discussing the events that shaped the thoughts of Ambedkar. He used to read and recite to his children the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two unfailing sources of motive forces and great inspiration that have nurtured and moulded the lives of great men in India in generations together. Subedar Ramji Sakpal was a follower of Kabir. He was a hard working man and enforced discipline to his children. He lived a very industrious and intensely religious life and it may be stated that the strong discipline and the religious atmosphere which Ambedkar imbibed early in his childhood made him to dedicate and fight for a just cause later in his life with sincerity and devoutness⁶.

Although, Ramji was earning a meager pension amount of Rupees fifty, which was inadequate to support his family, he managed to purchase new books for Ambedkar borrowing money from his married daughters and even pawning their ornaments. It was his ardent desire that his son would one day become a scholarly person, helped Ambedkar to inculcate the zeal of becoming a well educated person⁷.

The way Ramji influenced the daily life of Ambedkar when he was studying at Elphinstone High School; Bombay is worth noticing. While the family stayed in one room chawl at Parel and there were difficulties to provide necessary space and time for study, Ramji solved the problem of Ambedkar's studies by adjusting daily routines of himself and his son⁸.

Ramji Sakpal died on 2nd February 1913. Dhananjay Keer (1971), the biographer of Ambedkar described his personality as:

“Thus passed away an untouchable, Subedar Ramji Malogi who was to end of his life industrious, devotional and aspiring. He died in ripe age, but poor in wealth, for he had ran into debt but was exemplary in character and unconscious of his great legacy to his class, country and humanity. Having infused in his son strength of will to resist worldly temptations and a depth of spirituality very seldom found in his son’s contemporaries, he left him behind to fight the battle of life and break the world to his way.”⁹

The life of Ramji Sakpal and his son B R Ambedkar is a rare case of Depressed Class devoting father who sacrificed everything to a son and the devoted son then dedicating himself to a divine cause of uplifting the oppressed humanity¹⁰. Ambedkar derived from his father painstaking spirit, his forceful mental energy and the intense interest in the welfare of his society¹¹.

2.3 Childhood Events

The victory of British over last Peshwa Baji Rao II in the decisive battle of Khadki, in 1818 was seen by the people of Backward and Depressed Classes as death-nail to Brahmin orthodoxy and release of common people from the tyranny of Peshwas. Women rejoiced and people became happy that the rule of Bajirao II came to an end¹². With the beginning of British Rule in Western India and establishment of Bombay Province in 1818, the region came under growing influence of Western Education and thoughts. People, especially the educated segments, admired the British concepts of ‘Rule of Law’, liberty and fairness in justice. The demand for fairness in law-makings without favor to any caste, religion or creed became more and more as decades passed by. The protest lodged by Ramji Sakpal, father of Ambedkar and belonging to untouchable ‘Mahar’ community, on ‘Kitchener’s Policy’ is a prime example of how the undercurrents in the society demanding fairness in justice was becoming stronger. Many scholars such as Baba Walangkar, Shivram Janba Kamble and others followed the suit of Ramji Sakpal.

It is imperative to refer to the 'Kitchener's Policy' incidence for two specific reasons. Firstly, it is an example of the ongoing changes in the society where Ambedkar grew, secondly how Ambedkar himself was influenced by the discovery of documents that portrayed his father as a man seeking fairness of justice¹³.

Later on Ambedkar observed that:

"... to the codes of law promulgated by these authorities (Governors-in-Councils of Bengal, Madras and Bombay) must be added to the whole body of English Statute law introduced in India so far as it was applicable, by the Charter of George I in 1726 and such other English Acts subsequent to that date as were expressly extended to particular parts of the country."¹⁴

The growing concern for untouchables among a segment of people and especially people of British Army was also evident through the effort of Gopal Krishna (alias Gopal Baba) Walangkar was born in 1840. Gopal Krishna was born at Ravdal (near Mahad, Raigad District of Chhattisgarh) and was related to Ramabai (1896-1935), who subsequently became wife of Bhimrao Ambedkar. He was an army man and having retired from the army as Havaldar in 1886, he settled down at Dapoli. Gopal Baba was a pioneer of the movement for the emancipation of the 'Untouchables' and he founded the "Anarya Dosh-Parihar Samaj (Society for removal of evils among non-Aryans) in the same year. In 1888, he published his monthly Vittal-Vidahvansak (Destroyer of Ceremonial Pollution) which was the first ever journal of the 'Untouchables'. Subsequently, in 1889, he published his book in the same title. Gopal Baba died at Ravadal in 1909 and he was considered (Kadam, 1991) as the link between Jotiba Phooley and Ambedkar in the crusade against social inequality and injustice.¹⁵

Jotiba Phooley (1827-1890) was considered as the mentor of B R Ambedkar and in various writings. He was profoundly influenced by the ideas of Jyotiba Phooley' who inspired him to strive against Brahminism as Phooley's focus on social reform was the education of women and Shudras. He cited ignorance as the main reason behind their low condition. Ambedkar did not forget to bring the testimony to the profound

impact Jotiba Phooley had on his mind and activities. He inscribed his "Who were the Shudras" to the memory of Jotiba Phooley in order to show his respect to this great personality. Jotiba Phooley was a pillar of strength and a source of inspiration to thousands of people in Maharashtra¹⁶.

In 1893, when Ambedkar was only 2 years old, his father Subedar Ramji Sakpal retired from British Army and shifted his family from MHOW to Dapoli, Maharashtra. The early childhood years of Ambedkar was not immune from shocks that he received being an untouchable child. The incidence of his elder brother, nephew and himself driving a bullock cart by themselves on a summer day to visit their father who was posted at Goregaon(in Khatav Taluka in the Satara District), where they were forced to stay thirsty from evening to midnight during the journey was 'the first rude and shattering shock to the budding mind of Bhima(Ambedkar), that day he knew that he belonged to a family that was untouchable degraded to drink and eat on filthy things'¹⁷.

Ambedkar himself described this event to have a very important place in his life.

*"I was a boy of nine when it happened. But it has left an indelible impression in my mind. It gave me a shock such as I never received before, and it made me think about untouchability which, before this incident happened, was with me a matter of course as it is with many touchables as well as untouchables."*¹⁸

However, this was only one of the many events that he faced due to his location in the social strata. Ambedkar as a child had another great shock when he came to know that the barber would prefer to shave a bullock than cutting his hair because he was an untouchable. It was his sister who used to cut his hair and wash his clothes as no washerman would wash the clothes of an untouchable.¹⁹ Thus in his boyhood he experienced 'at the hand of his co-religionists the galling humiliations and the inhuman treatment under which his whole community had been labouring for untold ages'²⁰.

The formal education of Ambedkar began in 1896 at Dapoli when he was sent to a Marathi School at the age of five. In the year 1900, the 7th November, he was

admitted to a Government School at Satara in the first standard. He continued his primary and middle school studies at this school (now renamed as Pratap Singh High School, Satara). It was at this school, his surname was changed to 'Ambedkar' from 'Ambadavekar' by an affectionate Brahmin teacher bearing the same surname. In his early days in the entire school, Teacher Ambedkar and Pendse were the only ones who were kind and affectionate to him.

Ambedkar faced shameful experience in his school life also. He and his elder brother were usually made to squat in a corner of the class on a piece of gunny cloth which they had to carry themselves to the school. The teacher would not touch their note books nor did any one ask them to do anything related to class room study. When they felt thirsty they turned up their mouths upward and somebody would kindly pour drinking water in to their mouths²¹.

It can be argued that this might be the reasons why Ambedkar had very little interest in studies and he pursued his hobbies of gardening affectionately than reading books in his early childhood. It can also be stated that Ambedkar could never become the scholar he became had he continued his study at the school at Satara or such small places where the incidences of oppression to untouchables were at extremes. However, this did not happen and as such the nation is benefited immensely from the contribution of Dr B R Ambedkar in the process of Nation Building.

Ambedkar's mother died when he was just six years old. It was during his school days, his father married for the second time. Ambedkar did not like the idea of his father married for the second time and his mother's ornaments to be worn by the new woman.²²

He came to know, through his married sisters, that small boys could get paying jobs at Bombay Mills. He decided to become independent of his father and to earn his own livelihood by going to Bombay and taking up jobs there. He decided to steal money from his physically handicapped Aunt, Mirabai, who used to look after the family after his mother died. However, his four night long attempts of stealing money from his aunt yielded no result as he found only half of an anna (about 2 paise) in her purse. But, the experiences of stealing money in such wrongly manner gave a formidable

impact on his mind. He came to a decision that changed his mindset, he became studious and helped him to find his way charting a righteous path:

"...The four nights' experience was so nerve-racking that I gave up the idea of collecting money in this shameful manner and I came to another decision- a decision that gave an entirely different turn to my life. I decided that I must give up my truant habits that I must study hard and get through my examinations as fast as possible, so that I might earn my own livelihood and be independent of my father"²³.

The implication of this decision is unarguably significant as he later on became one of the few Indian with foreign degrees in higher education.

Thus, while making a note that Ambedkar's childhood memories were full of shameful experiences in school, rude shocks in social arena and self-realization that one should never do wrong etc, His father shifting to Bombay in 1904 was an another landmark event that inked a new chapter in the life history of Ambedkar.

In 1904, after he passed his Standard IV examination his father moved to Bombay. The family began to stay in one room chawl at Parel. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was first enrolled in Maratha High School, Parel (Bombay) but soon he was shifted to Elphinstone High School, Bombay. It was in the schools of Bombay he developed passion for reading and with the active support from his father, he studied beyond his class books.

The atmosphere in the school was better than the government school at Satara and Ambedkar could manage to study without enduring humiliations. But, there were several incidences that again reminded Ambedkar of the class to which he belonged. Although, Ambedkar could now participate in the class room activities, his activities were not immune from caste bias. One day the class teacher called upon Bhima (Ambedkar) to come to the black board to solve a geometrical theorem, instantly there was uproar in the class. The caste Hindu children used to keep their tiffin boxes behind the black board. Since they feared that their boxes would be polluted by Bhima's presence near the black-board they ran to the black-board and hurled their tiffin boxes aside before Bhima could reach and touch the black board.²⁴ This

cracking sound of the tiffin boxes was no less piercing than the croaking voices of the children's parents at home and in the streets at the untouchables.²⁵

Ambedkar was not even immune from the educated segments. One of the teachers in the school tried to discourage Ambedkar from pursuing his study by telling him that it would be useless for him. During those days the untouchables were prohibited from learning Sanskrit. So the Sanskrit teachers refused to teach Sanskrit to untouchables. Thus, he and his elder brother were not allowed to take up Sanskrit as second language. 'The school life of Ambedkar was to receive its unkindest cut. The cut was too deep which all his life afterwards he remembered with strongest aversion'²⁶.

There is no doubt that all these offending and infuriating incidences made him stronger and more determined in his pursue towards his own higher study so that he could play a major role in empowering untouchables in fighting for their dues. It also made the young 'Bhiva'¹ rebellious. His determination could be witnessed from the event when 'one day rising in anger he asked the teacher to mind his own businesses²⁷.' He also studied Sanskrit partly by himself to learn and acquire the vast knowledge available in Sanskrit literature. 'It was natural that his father's beliefs, struggles, and revolt had an effect on the young mind of Ambedkar. A feeling of questioning and protest grew strong in him after seeing the atmosphere of struggle around him at home and outside'.²⁸

2.4 Higher Education and Western Exposures

In 1907, he passed Matriculation Examination from Elphinstone High School. Although he could score only 282 out of 750 marks, for an untouchable student this was an extraordinary achievement. For a boy from Mahar family passing the matriculation examination was an admirable feat²⁹ and the achievement was celebrated by the Depressed Class community too. A meeting was held under the leadership of S.K. Bole, the well-known social reformer of Maharashtra. This meeting was important on two grounds. First, it was during this meeting, Ambedkar met the

¹ Ambedkar was also called as "Bhiva" by his neighbours

well known Marathi author and social reformer, Krishnaji Arjun Keluskar who was also an assistant teacher at Wilson High School. It was Sri Keluskar who played the key role in shaping the future of Ambedkar by facilitating scholarships for his higher education and secondly, he presented Ambedkar with his new book 'The Life of Gautam Buddha', the life and principles of Gautam Buddha became, later on, one of the prime drivers that transformed his thoughts.

The interest of Keluskar in the young Ambedkar shows that in the midst of all the contempt for untouchables, there were teachers who had tender affection for their students irrespective of the class or the caste they belonged to.³⁰ The significance of K.A Keluskar in the life of Ambedkar was explained by Keer (1971), the biographer of Ambedkar:

*"By the significant present, he made to his disciple, he indirectly spurred him to attack the tyranny of the caste system and by securing him a scholarship, he enlightened his path and added ballast to his brains"*³¹

In January 1908 he joined the Elphinstone College, Bombay. He lost one year of his study due to ill health. During his study in the college, his father faced financial crisis and through K. A Kelusker, Ambedkar secured an interview with the Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda who sanctioned a monthly scholarship of Rupees 25 for the completion of his graduation. He graduated from University of Bombay in January 1913 in Bachelor of Arts.

In his college days, he got support from Prof. Muller, Professor of Elphinstone College. Prof. Muller lent him books and have him clothes too. However, the adverse and insulting environment of Indian colleges and pitiable fate of Depressed Classes added to his restlessness and eagerness to explore new horizon³².

Ambedkar joined Baroda state forces as Lieutenant much against his father's wishes. However, his stay at Baroda was cut short by his father's death on 2nd February 1913. The agony of being an untouchable and the humiliation he received thereby continued during his stay at Baroda. The peons in his office used to throw office files to his table from a distance to avoid being polluted. He could not find an accommodation on his

own and had to stay with Pandit Atmaram, an Arya Samajist. After his father's death, he did not go back to his job at Baroda. The social conditions were unbearable for him to continue at Baroda, he resigned from the post.

It was during this period, the undercurrent of discontent against British oppression and volcanic political unrest was roaring forth with unprecedented vigour. Keer (1971) pointed out that contemporary events like Tilak's deportation to Mangalay, transportation of Savarkar's brothers to Andaman, imprisonment of several other leaders and editors, deaths of patriots in gallows etc. made an impact on Ambedkar's mind which can be seen in his thesis titled "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India"³³.

After his father's death, Ambedkar was left on his own. His insatiable thirst for knowledge and ambition made him restless. He was not willing to return to Baroda to pursue the job. It was at this time he found his dream of pursuing higher studies come into reality. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikawad of Baroda declared that he would be sending some students to America for higher studies. Ambedkar took this opportunity and met the Maharaja at his palace in Bombay. After listening to his story, Maharaja selected him for pursuing higher study in America on condition that he would serve Baroda state for ten years after completion of study, which Ambedkar agreed.

In the same year (12 June, 1913), he left for Columbia University for higher studies. The incidence of him being selected for higher study by Maharaja of Baroda was a landmark incident in the life and events of Ambedkar. As Keer (1971) mentioned:

"An untouchable, an abominable, Mahar going to a foreign land to cultivate the best, the enduring and the ennobling influence and imbibe the spirit of the age! Among the first-rate political leaders Ambedkar was the first to receive instructions on the land of Lincoln and Booker T Washington."³⁴

India would have never had a leader of the same caliber that of Ambedkar had he not been selected by Maharaja of Baroda for sending to America for higher study. The period of his stay in America had profound impact on him. In those early years in America 'his own natural proclivities and interests found a healthy soil for growth,

*and the experience served chiefly to strengthen him in his lifelong battle for dignity and equality for his people.*³⁵

He studied Economics, Sociology, Moral Philosophy, Anthropology and Political Science as a Gaikwad Scholar at Columbia University. Here in this new environment he experienced a life and a world that was free from any stigma of caste³⁶. Ambedkar was in New York for three years from 1913-1916 and to him the life at Columbia University was a revelation. It was a new World for him which changed his mental model and he started believing in a new existence, a new meaning of his life³⁷.

He found the atmosphere of New York more liberal than the Elphinstone College. He was impressed by the positive, comprehensive and progressive thinking of the learned professors like,³⁸ John Dewey, James Shotwel, Edwin Seligman, James Harvey Robinson, Franklin Giddings and Alexander Goldenweiser. He received a broad and deep exposure to an optimistic, expansive, pragmatic body of knowledge³⁹.

At Columbia, Ambedkar studied under John Dewey (the initiator of pragmatic philosophy), who inspired many of his ideas about equality and social justice. Ambedkar later recounted that at Columbia he experienced social equality for the first time. "The best friends I have had in my life," he told the New York Times in 1930, "were some of my classmates at Columbia and my great professors, John Dewey, James Shotwell, Edwin Seligman, and James Harvey Robinson."⁴⁰

John Dewey had great influences on Ambedkar and helped him to crystallize many of his ideas about equality and social justice. Dewey's ideas provided the basis for a systematic analysis of problems relating to politics economics, society, religion, and history.⁴¹ His pragmatic approach convinced Ambedkar that any philosophy which intended to offer a way to come out from human troubles must be dynamic and pragmatic. Dewey's method of inquiry influenced Ambedkar and he started objectively looking at the ancient philosophers of India. Ambedkar endorsed Dewey's emphasis on education as a means to change the world.⁴² This can be taken as one of the reasons what led him to establish the People's Education Society in Bombay in 1946 for the Depressed Classes. Zelliott (1969) points out it was in United States that the young Ambedkar acquired, 'a strong, unwavering belief in the power of

democratic institutions to bring about social equality⁴³ and these ideas were inculcated in his mind by Dewey.⁴⁴

It is here in America that he realized the difference between Indian and American way of life. In that atmosphere his 'sensibilities accentuated and his perception got enlarged'.⁴⁵ This may be one of the reasons that his writing style matured as seen from the letters⁴⁶ he wrote to the father of one of his friends. It can be stated from the contents of this letter that the seeds of 'Ambedkar's campaign for self respect, self reliance and self improvement were sown at that time.'⁴⁷ It also shows that Ambedkar at this juncture realized that one should not resign itself to their fate. He came out with a diagnosis of the ills of his community and his remedy hinted at his role as the saviour.

*".. we must now entirely give up the idea that parents give birth- 'janma'- to the child and not destiny- 'karma'. They can mould the destiny of the children...our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is pursued side by side with the female education.... Let your mission therefore be to educate and preach the idea of education to those at least who are near and in close contact with you."*⁴⁸

These are the seeds of future self-respect, self-help movement and the revolt against the philosophy of helplessness which later become cornerstones of his ideas and vision.

In June 1915, Ambedkar obtained his M.A. degree for his thesis on "Ancient Indian Commerce". In May 1916, he for the first time analyzed the caste system and he read a paper on "Castes in India, their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" at the Anthropology Seminar of Dr. A. A. Goldenweizer. It was published in the *Indian Antiquary*, in May 1917. It was also published in the form of a brochure, the first published work of Ambedkar. In the paper, Ambedkar described endogamy as the "essence of caste" and that the caste was a 'closed class'.⁴⁹ Ambedkar extrapolated from this phenomena that the social evils such as sati, bans on widow remarriage, were both mechanisms designed 'to mop up' surplus women who otherwise would have to marry outside their caste as was the marriage of pre-pubescent girls, since it allowed widowers to find a wife from among their own caste⁵⁰. It existed before

Manu whom he described as an 'audacious person' who simply codified the existing caste rule.⁵¹ In 1917, Columbia University accepted his thesis for PHD on "The National Dividend of India- A Historical and Analytical study". He wrote the thesis under the guidance of Edwin Seligman. The thesis was later published in 1925 by P S King and Company, London.

Both these papers indicate that although Ambedkar was gaining all he could from his educational opportunity in America, his attention was centered on using that knowledge to analyze Indian situation⁵². It can be said that Ambedkar for the first time applied the concepts derived from western Social Sciences to Indian situation.⁵³

Thus, it can be stated that even though the seed of silent rebellion was laid at a tender age of the 'Bhiva' when he grew up being treated unjustly, during his academic career he came across the views and thoughts of various philosophers and leaders which he imbibed or even questioned to mould his ideas and to give a final shape. The formative years of Ambedkar were full of influences. On one hand he was being influenced by the great scholars of America while on the other he was consolidating his original ideas of silent rebellion.⁵⁴

While in America, he was also greatly influenced by the Constitution of USA and its fourteenth Amendment which declared freedom to Negro. Moreover, he also observed how the various ethnic groups in America like the Irish, Italians and Jews were gaining political power through political pressure. The early twentieth century American dream of social and political equality in the great melting pot was apparent in both academic and social circles of New York. Thus, both Ambedkar's study at University and his interaction with local communities would have encouraged him to look for a political process through which social and political equality could be provided for all in Indian society⁵⁵.

He was also impressed by the life and political career of Booker T. Washington who was a great reformer and educator of Negro race. Booker T Washington died in 1915 while Ambedkar was still in New York⁵⁶.

In Ambedkar's politics American influence seems strongest. He became a strong believer in the power of democratic institutions to bring about social equality.

Ambedkar's basic faith in proper representation by depressed classes in political bodies may not be directly linked with American polity but it definitely had been influenced by the teachings of Prof. Dewey. John Dewey's philosophy offered favourable arguments for encouraging educated and politically aware people so that they could work out their social and political destiny on their own. Ambedkar's methodology for emancipation and empowerment was directly related to optimistic, pragmatic American democracy, which preached equality, no barriers to upward mobility and an attitude of respect for every citizen⁵⁷.

Ambedkar left United States on June 1916 and registered himself in London University on October, 1916. He enrolled himself in Grey's Inn to study Law. However, Ambedkar had to leave his studies abroad halfway and returned to India on July 1917, as the Diwan of Baroda wrote to him asking him to return home as the period of his scholarship was over. According to the contract he had to serve the state of Baroda for ten years. On his return he was appointed as a Military Secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda, with a view to being groomed for appointment as the State's finance minister⁵⁸.

However, the painful experience of being an untouchable continued even though he was then a great scholar and just returned from USA. As he reached Baroda he could not get accommodation in any hotel or hostel due to his caste. He took shelter in a Parsee inn and stayed there for eleven days. He was treated by his staff and peons as a 'leaper'.⁵⁹ Peons flung office files on his table. They rolled the mat when Ambedkar got up to go. Drinking water was not available to him in his office.

The humiliations reached a 'climax', when on the eleventh day of his stay at the Parsi inn when a group of Parsees armed with 'lathis' issued an 'ultimatum' to Ambedkar to vacate the Parsee inn by evening where he was living in pretence as a Parsi.

In the words of Ambedkar:

"I cursed all and wept bitterly, after all I was deprived of my precious possession-namely my shelter. It was no better than a prisoner's cell. But it was to me very precious".⁶⁰

No Hindu or Muslim was prepared to give him shelter in the city. All this was unbearable to him. He sent a note to the Maharaja; but the Diwan expressed his inability to do anything in the matter. Ambedkar reminisced this experience and described it thus:

*"The scene of a dozen Parsis armed with sticks lined before me in a menacing mood and myself standing before them with a terrifying look imploring for mercy is a scene so long a period as 18 years has not succeeded in fading away. I can even now vividly recall it and never recall it without tears in my eyes."*⁶¹

Depressed and Indignant Ambedkar left Baroda and went to Bombay in November 1917. It was at this juncture of his life he felt sad and remorse by the treatment meted out to him at Baroda.

He probably thought that if a person like him who possesses rare foreign degrees, is treated in this manner then what would be the conditions of the pitiable poor and ignorant people of India.⁶²

This incident played a major role in shaping his thoughts and action and he decided to dedicate himself to the sacred cause of the suppressed humanity of India. He had no specific aim except his personal well being before him when he started his journey to America for education. However, within short period of time after return, he dedicated himself to lead underprivileged people towards achieving social and political equality. The events, education and other social processes and circumstances prevailing during the period of his stay in America and shortly after that had great influence in shaping his ideas and vision and helped him to decide about his future role in Indian polity.⁶³

2.5 Charting His Path as a Leader

Being educated abroad and having seen the power and understood the necessity of print media to rouse the social conscience of mass, he undertook attempts in various phases to promote print media specially addressed for Depressed Class of people.

'Mook-Nayak' (The Leader of the Dumb) was the first such effort. The weekly paper was started by Ambedkar on 31st January 1920. The comment of Ambedkar in its inaugural issue expresses the objective of this venture vividly:

*"It is important to suggest ways and means to redress the wrongs done to the Depressed Classes, and to discuss the measures of their upliftment. A journal reaching the mass is the best means to achieve this end"*⁶⁴.

This venture, however, did have its premature death after Ambedkar left for London on July 1920 to pursue further studies. For this he borrowed Rs. 5000 from his friend, Naval Bhatena and secured some financial help from Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur. He completed his DSC from London University & Bar-at-law.

However, Ambedkar, on return from London, ventured again to pursue his objective of empowering Depressed Classes through print media. On 3rd April 1927, he launched 'Bahiskriti Bharat' (Outcast India), a new fortnightly paper. It was an attempt to wrest the initiative for the Depressed Classes in their struggle for establishing Human Rights. The launching of this paper had a direct bearing on the historic Bahiskriti Conference, at 'Mahad' (Kolaba District) on 19th and 20th March 1927.

Ambedkar addressed the 'half-clad, embarrassed gathering of men & women, in an inspiring tone':

*"No lasting progress can be achieved unless we put ourselves through a three-fold process of purification. We must improve the general tone of our demeanour, re-tone our pronunciations and revitalize our thoughts I, therefore, ask you now to take a vow from the moment to renounce eating clarion. It is high time that we rooted out from our mind the ideas of highness and lowness among ourselves."*⁶⁵

It is during this conference, Ambedkar with a group of people exercised their right to take water from the Chowdar tank, at Mahad. This incident, subsequently, took form of a larger socio-legal battle between upper caste Hindus and Untouchables. The Mahad Conference was not an ordinary event. It was a propitious launching of the

'Dalit' revolution. It was for the first time that the Dalits started a direct action.⁶⁶ In the words of 'Bombay Chronicle', it was an event which changed not only Ambedkar's life but also the current of social and national reorganization.⁶⁷

The Mahad episode made Ambedkar the acknowledged leader of the untouchables. As Chandra Bharill (1977) commented:

*".....the chowder tank Satyagraha was a very important landmark in Ambedkar's career as a social reformer as it reaffirmed his belief in the democratic, constitutional and peaceful methods of agitation as well as his tacit acceptance of Gandhi's weapon of Satyagraha which was frequently adopted by the Depressed Classes later on."*⁶⁸

Among other resolutions mentioned above an important resolution was also passed which was to burn the 'Manusmriti' publicly on December 25, 1927 which according to him perpetuated the social, economic, religious and political slavery of the untouchables. Ambedkar while speaking on the 'bonfire of Manusmriti', in an interview with T. V. Parvate said (1938):

*"The bonfire of Manusmriti was quite intentional. We made a bonfire of it because we view it as a symbol of injustice under which we have been crushed across centuries. Because of its teaching, we have been ground down under despicable poverty and so we made the clash, staked our lives, took our lives in our hands and performed the deed."*⁶⁹

A new bi-weekly called 'The Ostracised India' was published by Ambedkar on 3rd April 1927 which aimed to solidify the movement and to ensure justice of which Ambedkar was not very sure in the event of Independence of India.⁷⁰ Ambedkar announced the launching of his another journalistic venture 'Janata' at a reception given in his honour prior to his departure to London to attend the Round Table Conference. The first issue of 'Janata' was published on 30th November 1930 with Deorao Naik as its editor. This journal survived and it was later renamed as 'Prabuddha Bharat' (India of the self enlightened Buddha) in 1955 with Yeswant Rao Ambedkar, son of Dr. B. R Ambedkar as its editor.

Ambedkar attempted to utilize the print media as a means to educate the people on various social, political, economic and other issues. The writings of Ambedkar that appeared in these journals were based on thorough knowledge and well-supported facts. It can be argued that by way of educating common people through these journals, the ideas and thoughts of Ambedkar got crystallized and thus it helped to address the social issues in a more systematic manner. His writings breathed rationalism and humanism, and they revolutionized the outlook of the untouchables, completely, as never before⁷¹. Ambedkar's methodology in approaching a problem was very methodological. In all his serious writings he has adopted the deductive method. He approached the issue from historical context, explaining its theoretical aspects and lastly providing necessary information and data in support of his arguments.⁷²

In March 1930, The Nasik Satyagraha stood for the entry of untouchables to the Kalaram Temple. Ambedkar put forward a thought-provoking speech on the entry of Kalaram Temple:

*"The issue of Kalaram Temple is an appeal to the Hindu mind. The high caste Hindus deprived us from the far ages. Whether the same Hindus are willing to grant our humanitarian rights will be the question raised from this Temple entry Satyagraha.....This Satyagraha is one of the efforts for bringing about a change of heart among the High Caste Hindus. Hence the success of this effort depends on the Hindu mind set.....who is willing to accept that man must be treated as man; he must be given humanitarian rights; human dignity should be established."*⁷³

This satyagraha lasted for six years until April 1936. Ultimately it ended without gaining its specific objective. Though, Ambedkar had from the beginning looked at the temple entry as relatively unimportant part of his programme which would not bring about any radical changes in the lives of Depressed Classes. It was started because he felt it was the best way of energizing the Depressed Classes and making them 'conscious' of their positions,⁷⁴ He is reported to have told the Nasik leaders that he was more interested in securing political rights for the untouchables than in gaining them entry to temples.

When the Nasik Satyagraha petered out, Ambedkar spoke in the 'Yeola Conference', on 13 October 1935, that in Hinduism they have always suffered so it is best to leave it for their own pride and progress. Here at this juncture he made a public vow, that he was born a Hindu not of his choice, but he will not die as a Hindu."⁷⁵

Ambedkar was in favour of reforms from within. It can be mentioned that Ambedkar was learning himself from the outcomes of the above mentioned incidents and these incidents were helping him to devise a long term constructive programme towards sustaining high level of morals among the oppressed which would bring about changes in the existing social, economic, political arenas relating to education, respect for Dalits, backward classes, women's rights as well as in the development of their livelihoods.

On behalf of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, Ambedkar submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission demanding Joint Electorate with reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes.⁷⁶ He struggled for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. He became a nominated member of Bombay Legislative Council in 1927. In 1929, Ambedkar made the controversial decision to co-operate with the all-British Simon Commission which was to look into the setting up a responsible Indian Government in India. The Congress decided to boycott the Commission and drafted its own version of a Constitution for free India. Unfortunately the Congress version made no provisions for the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar became more skeptical of the Congress's commitment to safeguard the rights of the Depressed Classes.

Ambedkar was invited to the Round Table Conference in London held from November 1930 to January 1931 to represent the Depressed Classes. He emphatically declared that before the British came the evil of 'untouchability' was rampant and now after 150 years of British rule, this evil had not abated. The British had done nothing to alleviate the status of the Depressed Classes. He declared that India must have a minimum of Dominion Status. He pressed for a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes.

At the Second Round Table Conference, he repeatedly clashed with Gandhi. When a separate electorate was announced for the Depressed Classes, Gandhi went on a fast unto death against this decision. Leaders rushed to Ambedkar to drop the demand for a separate electorate. Finally on September 24, 1932, Ambedkar (as a representative of

the Depressed Classes) on the humanitarian ground to save the life of and Gandhi signed the historic Poona Pact with him. According to the pact the separate electorate demand was replaced with special concessions like reserved seats in the regional Legislative Assemblies and Central Council of States.

On October 13, 1935, at a conference at Nasik, Ambedkar reviewed the progress made on the condition of the 'untouchables' in the decade since Ambedkar started his agitation. Ambedkar declared that their efforts had not borne the kind of results he had expected.

The British Government agreed to hold elections at the provincial level in 1937. The Congress, Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha started gearing up for the elections. Ambedkar set up the Independent Labor Party in August 1936 to contest the elections in the Bombay province. On February 17, 1937, Ambedkar and many of his candidates won it with a thumping majority. Around the same time, the Chowdar Valley water dispute which was referred to the Bombay High Court in 1927 finally handed down its verdict in favour of the Depressed Classes.

Ambedkar introduced Bills in 1937 to abolish the "khoti" system of land tenure in the Konkan region, the serfdom of agricultural tenants and the Mahar "watan" system of working for the Government as slaves. In July 1942, he joined the Viceroy's Executive Council as a Labour Member. On July 15, 1947, the British Parliament passed the act of Indian Independence and on August 15, 1947, India became free. Ambedkar was an elected member of the Constituent Assembly of India. He was elected to the Drafting Committee and ultimately, elected its Chairman. Ambedkar was also invited to join the Cabinet as the Minister of Law. In February 1948, Ambedkar presented the Draft Constitution before the people of India. As the chairperson of the Constitution drafting committee Ambedkar was instrumental in the incorporation of the principle of Fundamental Rights in the Constitution.

He resigned in September 1951 from Nehru's cabinet on the issue of Hindu Code Bill. After resigning from Nehru's Cabinet Ambedkar contested Lok Sabha election as an opposition leader in 1952 and 1954. He was defeated in both these elections. However, in March 1952, he was elected to the Rajya Sabha.⁷⁷

Ambedkar's first wife Ramabai had died in 1935. She was a 'reticent, determined and self respecting' lady. She had spent the first part of her married life in distress even then she was quiet and undemanding. She was always prepared to sacrifice and supported the mission undertaken by Ambedkar.⁷⁸ Thirteen years after the death of his first wife on 14 April 1948, he married Dr. Sharda Kabir, a Brahmin by birth and a medical doctor by profession.

Ambedkar had started moving away from Hinduism in 1935 itself when he had publicly declared that he was not going to die as a Hindu. In 1936, Ambedkar also wrote and published 'Annihilation of Caste', his undelivered presidential address to the 'Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal' Conference at Lahore where he resolved to give up Hinduism.

In May 1950, Ambedkar contributed an article 'Buddha and the Future of his Religion' to the 'Mahabodhi Society Journal' in which he expressed his preference for Buddhism. Ambedkar started writing his book 'The Buddha and His Dhamma' on 14 October 1951. It was finally published in 1957 after his death. In the third week of December 1954, he started writing 'The Riddle in Hinduism', which, too, was published after his death.

In a public speech at Agra on 24 March, 1956, Ambedkar revealed that he had three missions in life, to bring learning in each house of the untouchable, to secure adequate representation to them in the services and to emancipate the untouchables living in the villages. He expressed his satisfaction over the first two missions but regretted that he could not fulfill the third mission and pledged to endeavour to achieve the last mission till his end of life.⁷⁹

Meanwhile on 24 May 1956, Ambedkar formally announced on the day of Buddha Jayanti that he would embrace Buddhism in October 1956. The actual conversion took place in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism along with his wife and lakhs of his supporters. On 15 November 1956, Ambedkar went to Kathmandu to attend the World Buddhist Conference where he delivered a lecture on 'Buddha and Marx'. He died at his Delhi residence on 6 December 1956.

2.6 Summary and Conclusion

Ambedkar became the first 'Pan Indian Untouchable leader' not by chance his intelligence and played a key role as did the familial, social, and the regional contexts which shaped his destiny, notably as their heir of the pioneering anti Brahmin movement of Maharashtra and as the recipient of the support extended to him by Maratha Maharajahs. His socio-political awareness and militancy were directly attributed to the predicament of his caste and his family. But the decisive factor in shaping his revolt against the caste system was his education overseas, which exposed him to egalitarian values and allowed him to defy the mechanisms of caste. On his return to India he further refined his tools of 'sociological analysis' to fight for the betterment of the Untouchables.⁸⁰

A.C. Pranjpe,⁸¹ while analyzing the historical and personality factors of Ambedkar quotes the Social psychologist, Milton Rokeach who points out that in any social reformatory movement, values of freedom and equality get supreme importance. Ambedkar's philosophy of life represents this idea as a social reformer; his ultimate goal was to have freedom and equality for the downtrodden people. His belief in equality can be understood referring to the kind of treatment meted out to him throughout the formative part of his life. Social movements are not idiosyncratic events which occur randomly; rather, they are collective attempts to bring about--or prevent-- either individual or institutional social change by means characterized in identifiable patterns of behavior. The preceding sections attempt to examine the nature of an ideology of protest and locates it within the broader framework of a concurrent social value systems, upbringing, education and social movements to redefine them.

The doctrine of Ambedkar deals with presentation of arguments promoting the rights of individuals trapped within the lower levels of the caste system. This integration of Ambedkar's philosophy with a historical overview of social protest provides an excellent balance of ideological positing with established fact. He was able to analyze the social issues from present perspective, observations were drawn from the functioning of the system and then he proceeded to find out the possible causal factors for the prevalence of such system. Thus, we can find watermark of his academic stint

overseas in his 'deductive' approach of problem solving. The rationale of Ambedkar's movement can be stated as a 'protest movement'. It is this protest framework that enables one to understand and even appreciate Ambedkar's critique of the efforts of early and contemporary social reformers directed towards eradicating of untouchability and providing social justice to the underprivileged⁸².

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