Ambedkar and Ambedkarism: Foundation, Building Blocks and Relevance

Pramod Ranjan

AMBEDKAR AND AMBEDKARISM

EDITOR

PRAMOD RANJAN

AMBEDKAR AND AMBEDKARISM

Foundation, Building Blocks and Relevance

Editor

PRAMOD RANJAN

BFC PUBLICATIONS

BFC PUBLICATIONS

Published in India by BFC Publications Private Limited

CP-61, Viraj Khand, Gomti Nagar,

Lucknow-226010, Uttar Pradesh, India

www.bfcpublications.com

ISBN – 978-93-5632-022-2

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this book are solely those of the author, and presented by the publisher in good faith.

About this book

The past few years have witnessed growing interest in the life and works of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. Several Indian Universities have set up Ambedkar Study Centres and content on and about Ambedkar has been included in the curricula of several disciplines including literature, political science and sociology. I have edited different newspapers and magazines for more than one and a half decades and am teaching in a University for the last couple of years. My experience tells me that quality academic material about Ambedkar is still scarce. The published material on Ambedkar is mostly emotional and does not do justice to his multi-dimensional personality, his complex thought process and his formidable analytical skills.

It was to fill this void that this book was planned. Over the past some years, I have been requesting writers and scholars who are authorities on Ambedkar and his thoughts to write articles on related topics. Most of these articles were published in Forward Press, Delhi from 2016-18 during my editorship of the monthly magazine.

The idea behind compiling these articles in a book is to make quality material on Ambedkar available to students and scholars researching topics related to social justice and to introduce them to the comparatively lesser-known aspects of Ambedkar's ideas and beliefs.

The articles compiled in the first section of the book throw light on the factors that shaped Ambedkar's ideology. The first article in this section underlines Ambedkar's significance for the present-day India. The other two articles are about the influence of Kabir's Nirgunvaad and the thoughts of John Dewey on Ambedkar's ideology. It also includes a comparative study on how Ambedkar and Gandhi saw religious conversions.

The four articles compiled in the third section throw light on the significance of Ambedkar's work as a historian, educationist, jurist and anthropologist. The articles include succinct write-ups by two women scholars on Ambedkar's concept of nation and feminism.

The focus of the fourth section is on the future of Ambedkarism and what Ambedkarism is and what it isn't. The seventh and the last section are about the chronology of Ambedkar's life and his writings.

If this book aids a comprehensive understanding of the different aspects of Ambedkar's personality and the diverse dimensions of Ambedkarism, I will consider this endeavour a success.

I am grateful to the writers, translators and others who have contributed in the making of this book

-Pramod Ranjan

April 14, 2022

Contents

Section 1:

The Making of Babasaheb

Ambedkar's India

Premkumar Mani

Who has built today's India? Who has contributed the most to her transformation? In other words, whose is the biggest influence on contemporary India? If you pose this question to a 'Savarna' Hindu, the answer will invariably be either Gandhi or Nehru. Some middle class people might well say that many personalities have influenced India. Their list may carry other names but Gandhi and Nehru will definitely figure in it. Very few will put Ambedkar in that list.

But, if you ask the same question of Dalits and members of educationally and socially backward classes, now generally described as OBCs, most of them will name Ambedkar. The educated section of the Dalits and Backwards owes its thought process and mental make-up to the Ambedkarite ideology, either directly or (mostly) indirectly.

Baba Saheb died in Delhi on 6 December 1956. He was working till late in the night. In the morning, he was found lying lifeless on the heap of documents he was working on. His death sent a wave of sorrow in a small circle in Delhi. I say a small circle because at that time, there was no big group of Dalits and Backwards in Delhi. There is none even today but things have changed considerably.

But yes, Mumbai and Maharashtra were immersed in grief and the huge turnout for his funeral procession is remembered even today. Newspapers wrote editorials on him and a clutch of dignitaries, including President Rajendra Prasad and Prime Minister

Nehru, mourned his demise. But still, that was nothing as compared to the respect Ambedkar commands today.

Till 1960, the biography of even Vinoba Bhave was taught in schools and colleges but Ambedkar was not even mentioned. Ambedkar gradually came on the centre stage – not courtesy the media or the government publicity machinery but on his own strength. As education spread among the Dalits and OBCs, the influence of Gandhi and Nehru, who were thrust upon them, began waning and Ambedkar took their place. If there is any single personality whose statues dot the villages and hamlets, cities and towns across the country, it is Ambedkar's. His statues outnumber those of every other leader. And very few of these statues have been installed by the government. Most have been put up by that class which regards him as its liberator. The fact that the highest number of statues in the country are of modern India's biggest iconoclast, is in itself, a moot point. But then, one cannot wash away the reality. In this race, Nehru stands nowhere and even Gandhi has been left far behind and the gap is widening by the day. No leader can match Ambedkar's popularity in the country today. Besides mythological-historical personalities like Ram, Krishna and Buddha, there are only two individuals on whose birthdays the country observes a national holiday – Gandhi's and Ambedkar's.

In the initial days, Ambedkar's popularity and influence was not a patch on Gandhi's. The Indian bourgeoisie class tried its best to give Gandhi the status of an international personality. Dozens of 'Gandhi Prathisthans', hundreds of Universities and thousands even lakhs of writers-intellectuals tried hard to build his image as that of a messiah of the oppressed. But they did not succeed. Today, Gandhi may be seen as an anti-imperialist and a leading light of the national movement but as far as the striving for the modern values of liberty, equality and fraternity goes, Gandhi seems to be a pygmy before Ambedkar – and sometimes even an anti-hero. For instance, a contemporary intellectual may find it difficult to believe that an

Indian national hero of the 20th century was a supporter of the Varna and Caste system. After 1940, Gandhi did emerge as a liberal nationalist leader but science, modernism and logic still did not have the needed space in his ideology. After Gandhi's death, Vinoba Bhave inherited his mantle and ultimately he began being described as 'Sarkari Sant' (Government saint). Nobel Laureate VS Naipaul, in his famous book "India: A wounded civilisation", has portrayed Vinoba as an anti-hero. We will have to decide whether Nehru or Lohia were the real inheritors of Gandhi or whether it was Vinoba. Nehru had made his differences with Gandhi on many issues very public and Lohia described himself as an 'outcaste' Gandhian. It is my firm belief that had Lohia broken away from Gandhi completely, he would have been a greater thinker. The inheritors of Gandhi's legacy today are either busy giving a modern veneer to their conservative notions of Hindu society or, like Anna Hazare, are militating against corruption in government or for establishment of 'Gram Swaraj' or other similar campaigns raising slogans like 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' or 'Vande Mataram'. There is no doubt that they enjoy the support of a big section of civil society or the middle class but social transformation, building a better society which is just and egalitarian, is not the objective of this section. It has no vision regarding it either.

Ambedkar's legacy has no fixed shape or structure. But it is expanding with each passing day. Dalits, OBCs and even a section of the general category 'Savarna' classes have become the carriers of Ambedkar's legacy. They have their own opinion on every issue, whether big or small. They have their own firm beliefs, their own vision. This vision encompasses scientific and logical thinking. They have completely rejected the entire system of Varna, caste and rural hierarchy. They see Gandhi more as a mythological figure than as a historical one. Mythological personalities are worshipped; we do not learn things from them. Also, they are never the subject matter of any debate. It is Ambedkar who is the subject matter of

debates and discussions. He interests them and they can learn a lot from him. Today, lakhs and crores of Indian youth are coming under the influence of Ambedkar's thoughts and his vision. Ambedkar is inspiring them to build a new, modern India based on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity.

The new generation, upholding the legacy of Ambedkar, is strengthening Indian nationalism – a nationalism which is scientific and just in the true sense. Their nationalism is not the nationalism that takes pride in rivers and mountains. It is not 'Shujalam, Shufalam' (richly-watered, richly-fruited) nation of 'Vande Mataram'. This is the nation of crores of workers, farmers, dalits and artisans. Those bent upon distorting the concept of nation may think that corruption is the biggest problem besetting the nation but that is not true. The biggest problem is the exploitation of men, the exploitation of the entire nation by a particular section. Where is this section?

Ambedkar had worked in very difficult circumstances. He had no interest in becoming Gandhi-Vinoba. He was interested in becoming Voltaire, Rousseau and Marx. He worked silently. He brought the Dalit problem to the centre stage of the nation. After 1932, even leaders like Gandhi turned towards him. It was Ambedkar who drew Gandhi's attention. The so-called modern anti-imperialist leaders like Nehru and Subhash did not like this. But Ambedkar continued his work. He had studied Marxism extensively but he had no interest in becoming a rigid Marxist His work was more challenging than that of Italian thinker-warrior Antonio Gramsci. Like Marxists, he believed that politics is only a super-structure. Nothing would change by bringing about changes in politics. It is the society which needs to be changed. Once the society changes, the super-structure of politics will also change. Hence, his emphasis was on social change. For him, social change meant a change in the way the society thought. He did not mince words in slamming the thought and philosophy based on

superstitions and rites and rituals. As far as thoughts were concerned, the country of their origin, the era to which they belonged and the direction from which they came never mattered to him. Many conservatives – and Gandhi joined their ranks sometimes – branded some thoughts as Western and rejected them. "Hind Swaraj" is based on this negation. Ambedkar flayed all this in his book 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables'. It was the first systematic repudiation of Gandhism. Another key contribution of his was pitting Buddhist common sense against Vedic classicism that had become the nucleus of the Indian Renaissance.

He was a Minister in the Government of India for a very short time but he did important things in that brief period. His key role in the drafting of the Constitution of India is well known. And so is the historic tabling of the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament by him in his capacity as Law Minister. But few people know that he played an important role in the launching of irrigation and power generation projects and in reforming the financial system of the states. The Damodar valley project and Hirakud dam were the result of his vision. He was one of the persons who ensured that the Gandhian model of development did not come in the way of the Five Year plans.

That is why, today's India appears to be more of Ambedkar's than Gandhi's. The deepening roots of India's democratic polity are a legacy of Ambedkar. The growing interest of the younger generation in modernity and science is the legacy of Ambedkar. It was Ambedkar who laid the foundation of social justice. And today, the concept of social justice dominates every single political stream of the country. There is, of course, a section which wants to brand Ambedkar as a leader of the Dalits. There are also some who want him to be confined as a leader of the 'Mahars'. I can only speculate on their understanding of Ambedkar. Those who want to confine a leader who was an advocate of constant change to a limited arena

are definitely not carrying his legacy forward. Ambedkar had said once, “The Indian tendency to accord the status of ‘Guru’ to demi-gods is more injurious to democracy than anything else. In politics, the tendency to worship is bound to lead to degradation and ultimately to dictatorship”. (This article is translated from Hindi by Amrish Herdenia)

Kabir's 'Nirgunvad' influenced Ambedkar

Kanwal Bharti

There are many similarities between Ambedkar and Kabir. Both were staunch opponents of Brahmanism and both opened the doors to growth and progress for the deprived. Both faced almost the same kind of challenges in their lives.

Ambedkar considered three people his gurus and Kabir was the first and the foremost among them. Clearly, Kabir had influenced him greatly. But what in Kabir had impressed him? What role had Kabir played in shaping the personality of Ambedkar? It is said that Ambedkar's family was Kabirpanthi. He must have come to know about Kabir in his childhood. But it is difficult to say whether Ambedkar was introduced to Kabir, the saint or Kabir, the philosopher. It is also not clear whether Marathi translations of Kabir's works were available then. Kabir's complete works were first published in Hindi in 1930 under the editorship of Babu Shyamsundar Das. But it is more likely that Ambedkar was introduced to the questioning, philosopher Kabir through *Hundred Poems of Kabir*, a book published by Macmillan, London in 1915, which contained 100 poems of Kabir translated into English by Rabindranath Tagore. When this book was published, Ambedkar was a student of political science in London. He was a voracious reader, always on the lookout for new books. Needless to say, this book must have had a profound influence on him.

But it wasn't just Kabir's philosophy that drew Ambedkar towards him. The most important reason for Kabir's appeal to Ambedkar was the identical social and religious ambiences of the times in which they lived. That was why Kabir's personality gave a

new edge to Ambedkar's leadership abilities. We need to dwell a little more on this factor. Though 500 years separated Ambedkar and Kabir, if a student of history carefully compares the situations prevailing in India in the 15th and 20th centuries, he will realize that things came full circle in these five centuries. It was as if history was repeating itself.

Let us first try to understand Kabir's times. Kabir was a poet and thinker of the 15th century, born into a poor Julaha family. At the time, Julaha was an untouchable caste. The Mughal rule had been well established during Kabir's lifetime. Islam had opened many new doors for the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras. The madrasas were not out of bounds for them, and influenced by the message of love and equality of the Sufi saints, the backward castes were embracing Islam. At the same time, the brahmanical counter-revolution had emerged. It was aimed at saving Hinduism from the onslaught of Islam. Advaitvad, which Adi Shankaracharya had propounded in the 11th century to counter Islam, had taken the form of a powerful Vaishnav Bhakti Movement by the 15th century. Ramanuj was the founder of this movement. One of his disciples, Ramanand, had shifted base from South India to Kashi (Varanasi) to convert Dalit castes to Vaishnavism[1]. To stop Dalits, especially Chandals, from converting to Islam, he turned them into adherents of Vaishnavism by giving them the mantra of "Ram Ram". He did this in the most bizarre way. Ensuring that his body did not touch that Dalits' bodies, he whispered the word Ram twice into their ears, which, according to him, made them Vaishnavites.

---

[1] Vaishnavism is focused on worship of Vishnu. Vaishnavites lead a way of life promoting differentiated monotheism, which gives importance to Lord Vishnu and his incarnations. Its beliefs and practices, especially the concepts of Bhakti and Bhakti Yoga, are based largely on the Upanishads, and associated with the Vedas and Puranas.

Though Swami Ramanand used to say, "*Jaatpaat puche nahi koyee, Hari ko bhaje, so Hari ka hoyee*" (Caste is of no consequence, the one who worships God, belongs to him), the fact was that the Vaishnav sect believed in the Varna system. It did not practice what it preached. That was why conversion to Vaishnavism did not translate into any change in the social status of the Dalits. They were not allowed entry into the sanctum sanctorum of the temples. They could have a glimpse of their Thakur (Krishna) from a distance. One should read *Sau Chaurasi Vaishnavan Ki Varta*[2] to know what status the Vaishnav sect accorded to the Dalits. The book talks of freeing Dalits from the practice of eating the leftovers of Brahmins! The same was the condition of the Dalits who had joined the Shakt[3] sect. Sympathizing with Shakts and Vaishnavs, Kabir wrote:

Shakat Brahman na milo, Baisno milo chandal

Ank maal de bhetiye, mano mile Gopal (*Kabir Granthanvali)*, p 28.

Kabir was saying, "Don't meet the Shakts and the Vaishnavs. But if you come across a Chandal Vaishnav, embrace him as if you have met Gopal (Krishna)." These lines are satirical but they also contain a message: "Love your Dalit brother; even he has lost his way."

For Kabir, there were two power centres in society – the Mullah and the Pandit. Coincidentally, Ambedkar held the same belief. Mullahs and Pandits were the undisputed leaders of their respective

---

[2] Written by Gokulnath. He is known for his 'Varta' Literature.

[3] Shakt Sect Shaktas focus most or all worship on Shakti, as the dynamic feminine aspect of the Supreme Divine. Shaktism or Shakta focuses focuses worship upon Shakti or Devi – the Hindu Divine Mother – as the absolute, ultimate Godhead. Shaktism regards Devī as the Supreme Brahman.

communities and no one dared to question them. Kabir could see how the Pandits and the Mullahs were feeding bunkum to the masses in the name of Varna system – haj, puja, namaz, pilgrimage and the other world – and how the feudal lords, moneylenders and traders had turned the life of the common man – fed on this nonsense -– into hell by exploiting them. Kabir could see through the sham of the Pandits and the Mullahs. He could realize that there was a wide chasm between what they preached and what they practised.

Karl Marx had said: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, ie the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force." Similarly, Kabir could see that the Mullahs and the Pandits were not only the ruling material force but also the ruling intellectual force of society. He understood that the people needed a new intellectual stream based on the principle "seeing is believing". Kabir held dialogues with both the Mullahs and the Pandits, but to no avail. So, he turned to the principle of "neither Hindu, nor Muslim" and, negating both the religions, provided a revolutionary leadership to the people. He developed his own aesthetics, his own way of seeing religion and society, which was in sharp contrast to the worldview of the *Quran* and the Vedas and Puranas. He wrote: "*Allah Ram ka gham nahin, taham ghar kiya Kabir*" (ibid p 411). He says that Vaishnav's deity is Raja Ram, who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and so unacceptable to him. In his view, both Ram and Allah are "sagun" (having attributes). Kabir then came up with the revolutionary concept of "Nirgun" (attributeless) that militated against the belief in the Varna system and in the other world. He said, "*Hamra jhagra raha na kou, Pandit, Mullah chhode dohu.*" (ibid p 206). He realized that no revolution is possible without abandoning both the Pandit and the Mullah. This aspect of Kabir's thought influenced Dr. Ambedkar. In the 20th century, Dr. Ambedkar was facing the same challenges that Kabir had faced in his time. That was why Kabir's

concept of "seeing is believing" gave him the vision he was looking for. This third stream of criticism became the foundation of Bahujan thought and Kabir was undoubtedly its proponent. It formed the departure point of Ambedkar's thoughts.

Kabir never accepted the Brahmin as his leader though the Brahmin considered himself the teacher of the entire world. "*Brahman guru jagat ka, Sadhu ka guru nahin, urjhi-purjhi kar mari rahya, charion veda mahin*" (ibid p 28). At the time, this was the biggest revolution in the realm of ideas, and it touched Ambedkar deeply. Though Ramananda was no longer alive when Kabir lived, Ramananda's ideology was, and it had given rise to big mutts. But Kabir attacked these mutts mercilessly and ensured that no "sagun"[4] mutt of Dalits come into existence. This revolutionary step influenced Ambedkar. In the 20th century, treading the path of Kabir, Ambedkar too followed the principle of "na Hindu, na Musalman" and did not accept the leadership of anyone, including Gandhi. He attacked both the Hindu and Muslim establishments with equal ferocity. That was why he could caution the Dalits against accepting the leadership of either the Hindus or the Muslims.

Dr. Ambedkar's quest for a religion that conformed to this belief ended in Buddhism. It was Kabir's logic and reason that led him to Buddhism. He could never develop respect for any Hindu saint. It was Kabir's Nirgunvad that took Ambedkar to atheism. Some may find this assertion unbelievable but it is true. Kabir's Nirgunvad may, on the surface, appear theological but in reality it is atheistic. It is the only theology that rejects the concepts of Heaven and Hell, of rebirth, of salvation, incarnation, puja, pilgrimage and fasting and has no faith in any scripture. Which other theology does so? Kabir's

[4] Sagun Bhakti considers God with attributes.

Nirgunvad urges the people not to believe in fate and scriptures. It says:

Kaun mare, kaun janme bhai,

Sarag, narak kaune gati payee,

Panchtat avigat thein utpana, ekai kiya nivasa,

Bichure tat phiti sahaji samana, rekh rahi nahin aasa,

Jal mein kumbh, kumbh mein jal hai, bahari bhiter pani,

Phute kumbh jal jalhein samana, yah tat katho giyani,

Aade gagna, ante gagna, madhe gagna bhai,

Kahe Kabir karma kis laage, jhoothi sank upayee. (ibid p 80)

Nirgunvad[5] influenced Ambedkar deeply. He discovered the same kind of logic in Buddha's philosophy, too. Babasaheb saw in the following verse of Kabir the preaching of Buddha to Kalams, in which Buddha had emphasized realized knowledge rather than scripturalism and individualism.

Mera tera manua kais eek hoyee re,

Mein kahta hon aakhan dekhi,

Tu kahta kagad ki lekhi (*Kabir* p 247)

Here, "kagad lekhi" negates scripturalism and individualism both while "aakhin dekhi" approves of realized knowledge. This verse of Kabir was the foundation of Ambedkar's political leadership and using which Ambedkar held the mirror up to Gandhi

[5] Nirgunvad considers God without attributes.

and the Congress by putting before them the socio-economic status of the Dalits.

Kabir is present in Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* speech from the beginning to the end. The irrefutable logic used in the speech by Ambedkar to attack the caste and the Varna system may make one feel that five hundred years on, Kabir was speaking in his new avatar.

'When the God does not have any Varna, how can men have one?' Kabir would argue. He put forth a very scientific argument: "*Nati saroop Varna nahi jake, ghati-ghati rahyo samayee*". Kabir said, what Buddha had said centuries earlier: "*Ek boond ek malmutra, ek cham ek guda; ek jot se sab utpanna, ko Brahman ko Suda*". When Ambedkar said that no caste is pure, when he said that there was an admixture of alien blood not only among the warrior classes – the Rajputs and the Marathas – but also among the Brahmins and so no one can be Brahmin or Shudra; when he said that Brahmins and the Untouchables belong to the same stock, was he not taking Kabir's argument's forward? When Ambedkar asked the Vedas and the Shastras to be destroyed with dynamites, was he not repeating what Kabir said to Brahmins "*Ved-kiteb chadi deu pande, ee sab man ke bharma*" (ibid p 242). When Ambedkar criticized Hindu saints for saying that God and humans were equal but not raising their voice against the inequality between man and man perpetuated by the caste system, was he not echoing Kabir who said that one who had not given up his caste and Varna couldn't perform 'bhakti':

Jab lang naata jati ka, tab lang bhakti na hoye,

Bhakti kare koyee surma, jati baran kul khoye,

Jahan bhakti wahan bhesh nahin, varnashram hoon nahin,

Naam bhakti jo prem son, sau durlabh jag mahin

(*Kabir Samagra* p 404-05).

Kabir never supported the spiritualism that considered this world an illusion and the other world as truth. There are two streams of philosophical thought in brahmanical spiritualism – Dvaitvad (Dualism) and Advaitvad (Monism). Dvaitvad argues that the soul and the Brahma are different while Advaitvad says that they are one. But both talk about the other world. It would be interesting to find out what Kabir's spiritualism was and to what extent it influenced Ambedkar.

For Ambedkar, social justice was the touchstone for any philosophy or spiritualism. This touchstone had three parameters – liberty, equality and fraternity. He had tested all religions – especially Hinduism – on this touchstone and discovered that not only Hinduism but also Islam and Christianity did not pass muster. His book *Philosophy of Hinduism* underlines this fact. Kabir's emphasis is on love. Without love, there can be no equality, no liberty and no fraternity. It was Kabir who declared that it is useless being tall like a date palm, which does not provide shade to the passerby and the fruits of which hang too high to pick. It was Kabir who said, "*Preme ko premi mile, tab sab vish amrit hoyee*." Only love can convert the poison inside a person into the nectar of life. Then, people will not only grieve for their dead but also for slaves – "*Muon ko kya roiye, jo apne ghar jaye; roieye bandivan ko, jo hate hat bikay*" (*Kabir Granthavali*, p 63). Kabir had no patience for people who were proud about Brahma and subjectivism but thought of humans not as humans but as Shudras and mlecchas.

"*Bahut garab garbe sanyasi, brahmacharit nahin paasi; sudra maleccha base man mahin, aatamraam su cheenha nahin*" (ibid p 112). These lines are very popular among Dalits. Kabir had transformed the majority population of the country. Today, if Ram forms the part of names of most Dalits, it is because of the influence of Kabir and Raidas. This influence was so deep that "Ram" figured

in the name of Babasaheb's father too. This "Nirgun" Ram of Kabir created repulsion for the "Sagun" deities adorning Hindu temples. But who could predict that in the 16th century, Goswami Tulsidas, by hailing Thakur ji, would convert Kabir's Nirgun Ram into Sagun Ram and the moneybag patrons of Brahmanism would loosen their pulse strings to promote it.

Ambedkar's critics might say that nowhere in his works he has quoted Kabir. But then, he has not quoted Phule either. But did he not consider Phule his guru? (This article is translated from Hindi by Amrish Herdenia)

The Like-Mindedness of John Dewey and Bhimrao Ambedkar

Scott R. Stroud

By the 1950s, Bhimrao Ambedkar had experienced all the ranges of life's vicissitudes. He had felt the exclusion and pain of being an "Untouchable" in the Hindu caste system. He had seen electoral successes and setbacks as a representative of his people, now called by the labels of *Dalits* or *Dalit-Bahujans*. He had come close to the sources of power, being the architect of independent India's Constitution and an advisor, albeit an eventually estranged one, to Prime Minister Nehru. Few formally celebrated his legislative accomplishments in India, but the story was different elsewhere. In June 1952, Ambedkar was recognized by his alma mater, Columbia University in New York, with an honorary degree in recognition of his role in framing the Indian Constitution. New York was worlds away from his normal haunts in Bombay or New Delhi, but Ambedkar surely recognized its charms and vivacity – he studied there from 1913 to 1916 under some of the best professors America had to offer. But on his visit in June 1952, there was one person whose absence he felt deeply: John Dewey[6], the American pragmatist [7] philosopher and former teacher of Ambedkar from his

[6] John Dewey (20 October 1859 – 2 June 1952) was a proponent of the American school of thought known as pragmatism. Due to his philosophical reputation, he was invited to join the department of philosophy at Columbia University, where he taught Dr. Ambedkar. Dewey authored the book named *Ethics* (1908) with another important philosophical collaborator, James Hayden Tufts. This book had a profound influence on Dr. Ambedkar.

[7] Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition. Though it has many figures who theorize different senses of "pragmatist philosophy, all tend to agree that ideas are

days at Columbia University. As fate would have it, Dewey died after a short illness 2nd June 1952, as Ambedkar was on his way to New York. Writing to his wife, Savita, he lamented that "there are many old friends who have gathered around me and [are] helping me in all sorts of ways. I was looking forward to meet [ing] Prof Dewey. But he died on the 2nd when our plane was in Rome." Ambedkar had many teachers in New York, but none compared to Dewey, as his next words to his wife reveal: "I am so sorry. I owe all my intellectual life to him. He was a wonderful man."[8] At this stage in his accomplished life, Ambedkar rarely showed absolute humility or inaccuracy, at least not in his private letters. We must take his words seriously and explore Ambedkar's debt to Dewey.

Other scholars have noticed this debt, but more must be said about its specifics. In the 1930s, Ambedkar would write that "The best friends I have had in my life were some of my classmates at Columbia and my great professors, John Dewey, James Shotwell, Edwin Seligman, and James Harvey Robinson." [9] Eleanor Zelliot concludes her study of Ambedkar's education with the judgment that "John Dewey seems to have had the greatest influence on

---

true if they "work" satisfactorily, or that the meaning of the proposition is to be found in practical consequences of accepting it and that unpractical ideas are to be rejected. It is thinking about solving problems in a practical and sensible way rather than by having fixed ideas and theories. Pragmatists contend that most philosophical topics - such as the nature of knowledge, language, concepts, meaning, belief, and science - are all best viewed in terms of their practical uses and implications. It rejects the idea that the function of thoughts is to represent, describe or mirror reality. This school of thought originated in the United States of America and is most often linked to the philosophers John Dewey, William James, and Charles Sanders Peirce.

[8] Nanak Chand Rattu, *Last Few Years of Dr. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Amrit Publishing House, 1997), 35.

[9] *Columbia Alumni News*, 19 December 1930, 12

Ambedkar".[10] K.N. Kadam tells us that "Dr. Ambedkar took down every word uttered by his great teacher [Dewey] in the course of his lectures; and it seems that Ambedkar used to tell his friends that, if unfortunately, Dewey died all of a sudden, 'I could reproduce every lecture verbatim.' "[11] Dewey clearly influenced Ambedkar, but how? If we look at the relationship between these two original thinkers, we will see that Ambedkar is best understood as a pragmatist following in the line of John Dewey's philosophy, but with emphases and creative additions that could only come from his status as a Dalit-Bahujan located in the Indian context. Ambedkar's urges to be an activist and an advocate also bring a communicative flavor to his form of pragmatism, something that is not emphasized in just this fashion in the thought of John Dewey. Ambedkar's pragmatism is a novel philosophical orientation that encourages vigorous engagement with others through persuasive communication.

A GIANT AMONG PHILOSOPHERS

Who was John Dewey? This may be a useful question to ask now, given the proliferation of philosophers and philosophies in the stories we tell about humankind's intellectual explorations, but in the 1910s, this query would be asking for the obvious. Dewey was a giant in philosophical circles. Having honed his philosophical theories at the University of Michigan, explored education by running the "Laboratory School" at the University of Chicago, Dewey was hired by Columbia University with a halo of philosophical fame surrounding him. Like his fellow pragmatists

---

[10] Eleanor Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2013), 69.

[11] K.N. Kadam, *The Meaning of the Ambedkarite Conversion to Buddhism and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 1997), 1.

William James (1842-1910) and Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), John Dewey (1859-1952) emphasized community and experience in his philosophical writings. Rebelling against age-old European tendencies to fixate on the permanent, the changeless, and the certain, Dewey's philosophy emphasized the changing and uncertain nature of the world. He emphasized the transactional character of our activities, including that of "knowing", by frequently employing the notion of "experience". The experience was an interaction between organism and environment and not simply a series of images inside an agent's head as an idealist would put things. Human being living organisms, shared much in common with the rest of the natural world: we are animated by purposes and desires and impulses, and these translate into paths of activities that make use of some aspect of our environment. These are called "habits" by the pragmatists. Habits are not merely physical, as there can be habits of how we talk to others or how we solve problems that perplex us. They are not negative traits since habits serve as a means to get to the ends we want. Life, for Dewey, was best seen as a quest to intelligently shape our habits such that we get the individual and group goals that we see as worthy of our pursuit. Philosophy on such a scheme does not capture or recite timeless truths about the ever-changing world; instead, it serves as one tool among many to get what we want out of an uncertain environment.

FIRST LESSON IN LIBERTY, EQUALITY & FRATERNITY

Dewey lived a very long life, so this brief account of his philosophy is necessarily a simplification. But it captures its general orientation, and it also is an apt description of what Dewey was thinking when young Ambedkar first stumbled into his classes at Columbia University. Even though Ambedkar started his education at Columbia University in 1913, I have found no concrete evidence that he was exposed to Dewey until 1914. Using a course list from Ambedkar's transcripts in connection with the original Columbia University Bulletins, I determined that the first Dewey class

Ambedkar took was in fall 1914 titled "Philosophy 231: Psychological Ethics and Moral and Political Philosophy". This was part of a yearlong sequence of two courses, Philosophy 231 and 232, but the second course is not listed on the copies of Ambedkar's transcripts that we possess. Ambedkar is noted as taking two other courses in 1915-1916 that we can verify as Dewey's courses: Philosophy 131 and 132, "Moral and Political Philosophy".[12] I have found the student lecture notes for the Philosophy 131-132 courses that Ambedkar enrolled in, a fact verified by him being listed in the notes as a substitute note-taker for three days.[13] It was in the spring of 1916 that Ambedkar heard – perhaps for the first time – the motto of the French revolution [14] from Dewey: "the moral standard, aim, as a common good … the notion consequently of the control of the individual in the name of the common good. Liberty, equality, fraternity, and the name fraternity means common good."[15] These

---

[12] For the courses that Ambedkar enrolled in while at Columbia, see Frances W. Pritchett, "Courses Taken at Columbia". Available online at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/graphics/courses.html. I have gathered the course instructors from materials contained in *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: Division of Philosophy, Psychology, and Anthropology Announcement*, 1914-1915 (New York: Columbia University, May 30, 1914); *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: Division of Philosophy, Psychology, and Anthropology Announcement*, 1915-1916 (New York: Columbia University, 27 February 1915).

[13] For more details on these notes and the courses involved, see Scott R. Stroud, "Pragmatism, Persuasion, and Force in Bhimrao Ambedkar's Reconstruction of Buddhism", *Journal of Religion*, 97 (2), 204-243.

[14] The French Revolution (1789-1799) was an unprecedented effort to break with the past and to forge a new state and new national community based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Even though it leads to errors by those who gained power, the revolution provided to the French and to the world a new and enduring political hope: at the heart of progress lay liberation from the past, equality and a representative government.

[15] The original typed notes from Homer H. Dubs can be found at the Center for Dewey Studies in Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. The original

concepts would assume prominence later in Ambedkar's life, guiding his quest for social reform. Pragmatists such as Dewey were not concerned with only one of these values, such as the individual notion of liberty or freedom of action. Such freedom must also be pursued with the idea of creating certain sorts of community. Thus, the values of equality and the creation of feelings of the fraternity are also important. Ambedkar listened to this American philosopher expound on the motto from Europe, but surely he was mentally connecting it to his past and future battles for social justice in the Indian context. Can one achieve equal rights for *Dalit-Bahujans* without sacrificing fraternity? This would be one of the most prominent balancing points in Ambedkar's later struggles against communism, a philosophical orientation that he believed could achieve equality (at least in terms of material wealth) only at the cost of fraternity among community members. One cannot achieve one goal while destroying the hope of achieving the other goals, the pragmatist line of thought goes. Ambedkar thereby always sought to achieve freedom and equality for *Dalit-Bahujans* while preserving the conditions for fraternity or fellow-feeling among individuals. I submit that he gained this idea from such sources as Dewey's lectures, even though Ambedkar would change and alter this way of thinking to fit the Indian context of caste oppression later in his life. Ambedkar's creativity and genius was evident in how he appropriated and used vital values from American pragmatism in an Indian context that thinkers like Dewey knew little about back in America.

DEMOCRACY AS A WAY OF LIFE

Another way in which Ambedkar was influenced by Dewey's form of pragmatism was through his books. Ambedkar was a

---

handwritten notes taken by Robert Lee Hale are located in the Butler Library Rare Book and Manuscript Collection at Columbia University.

voracious reader, consuming knowledge from a huge range of areas in the form of books. One of his letters on the way to London later in his life complains of being unable to get into his trunk full of books, thereby forcing him to "enjoy" the voyage without reading. What is left of Ambedkar's personal library is now largely preserved at Siddharth College in Mumbai, an institution his People's Educational Society[16] founded in 1946. Some other books owned by Ambedkar can be found at the Symbiosis Institute in Pune and at Milind College in Aurangabad. In browsing all of these caches of books, I have come to the conclusion that no modern author is more represented than John Dewey. At Siddharth College, I discovered the following books written by Dewey: *Ethics* (1908), *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (1910), *German Philosophy and Politics* (1915), three copies of *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Experience and Nature* (1929), *The Quest for Certainty* (1930), *Freedom and Culture* (1939), and *Problems of Men* (1946). Books about Dewey and his pragmatism are also included in this collection: Sidney Hook's *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom* (1950), Jerome Nathanson's *John Dewey: The Reconstruction of the Democratic Life* (1951), Paul Arthur Schilp's *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (1951), and A. H. Johnson's *The Wit and Wisdom of John Dewey* (1949). At the Symbiosis Institute, I came across two additional books related to pragmatism: Dewey's *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1953)[17] and Joseph Ratner's collection of Dewey's essays, *Intelligence in the Modern World:*

[16] Ambedkar established the People's Education Society at Bombay in 1945. Under this organization, he established a number of colleges such as Siddharth College, Milind College at Aurangabad (1950), and Siddharth College of Law at Bombay (1956). Ambedkar's *The Buddha and Dhamma* were published by the People's Education Society and Siddharth College, Bombay in 1957.

[17] Experimental logic means enquiry which, pursuing genetic and functional methods, investigates thinking with a view to tracing the deviation, development and embodiment of beliefs.

John Dewey's Philosophy (1939). The collection housed at Ambedkar's Milind College in Aurangabad contains Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* (1948) and William James's *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (1913).

Of all of Ambedkar's surviving books, two of the most extensively annotated and underlined are works by Dewey: *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Ethics* (1908, co-authored with James Hayden Tufts). As noted by his own hand inside the cover, Ambedkar acquired Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) in January 1917, while he was in London.[18] This book is an important work, as it presents much of Dewey's thought in one place. It relates moral philosophy, science, history, and career training to the general category of education. Education, according to Dewey's revision of his concept, involves how societies transmit and preserve themselves. New members of a society are created in and through their experience in schools. Dewey argues in this work that not only environments can educate individuals, but that agents can also take a role in purposively shaping environments – such as that of the classroom – to make them more effective in creating the sorts of habits that we need in a democracy. Education relates to democracy insofar as democracy denotes a *habit* of interacting with others and in solving problems in concert with one's peers. Democracy was a habit, or a way of life, and it was for Dewey an intensely personal affair that conditioned and created publics.

This notion of democracy as a way of life among others resonated with Ambedkar. The caste system violated such a communal situation and orientation by separating and ranking individuals based upon birth castes. This ideal of democratic habits

---

[18] For more on Ambedkar's engagement with this book, see Scott R. Stroud, "What Did Bhimrao Ambedkar Learn from John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*?" *The Pluralist*, 12 (2), 2017, 78-103.

leading to democratic communities sank into his mindset to the extent that he began to make these arguments naturally. For instance, in his 1919 testimony to the Southborough Committee[19] on the issue of extending the franchise to Indians, Ambedkar included a criticism of the caste system as destroying democratic like-mindedness:

Men live in a community by virtue of the things they have in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge, a common understanding; or to use the language of the Sociologists, they must be like-minded. But how do they come to have these things in common or how do they become like-minded? Certainly, not by sharing with another, as one would do in the case of a piece of cake. To cultivate an attitude similar to others or to be like-minded with others is to be in communication with them or to participate in their activity. Persons do not become like-minded by merely living in physical proximity, any more than they cease to be like-minded by being distant from each other.[20]

---

[19] The Southborough Committee (referred to at the time as the Franchise Committee) was one of three British committees convened in India from 1918 to 1919, alongside of the Committee on Home Administration and the Feetham Function Committee. The Franchise committee was headed by Lord Southborough, hence its title as the Southborough Committee. The Functions Committee was chaired by Richard Feetam and the Home Administration Committee was headed by Lord Crew. These committees were created to give the Montague-Chelmsford report a constitutional form. This report formed the basis of Government of India Act of 1919. The act indicated that the objective of British Government was the gradual introduction of responsible government in India. The act included a provision that a commission would be set up after 10 years which shall evaluate governmental functioning. The Simon commission of 1927 was the outcome of this provision. The Simon Commission promised to consider the demands of right of depressed class sympathetically. However, Gandhi and Congress opposed the efforts of this commission.

[20] Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, "Evidence before the Southborough Committee," *Writings and Speeches*, vol 1 (Government of Maharashtra, 2014), 248–49. For

These are largely Dewey's words from *Democracy and Education*, adapted to fit an instance of religious discrimination that Dewey was not aware of that operated through the mechanism of caste. Dewey's conception of democracy clearly affected Ambedkar when he was asked to explain the evils of the caste system to a committee charged with extending the mechanisms of democracy to the various publics in India.

A central part of Dewey's philosophy of democracy, however, was that democracy did not begin and end at the voting booth. It was more than this as a habit of interaction that we could have or fail to possess. Indeed, Ambedkar saw this from his reading of *Democracy and Education*, noting in his own hand a vital line in his copy of this book: "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." [21] Caste destroys this habit that could create the shared interests and cooperation denoted by like-mindedness, and in the Indian context, Ambedkar saw that this schism between groups was furthered by a certain use of religion. Thus, in his controversial undelivered speech from 1936, "Annihilation of Caste", he shows the enduring importance of this democratic ideal as a way of life by echoing this very line from his teacher's great book. Ambedkar spoke Dewey's words, but in a different context – that of the battle against caste-based injustice. He did note his debt to Dewey in that speech, however, in one specific passage. This passage is also

---

the passage of Dewey's work that he is drawing up, see John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol 9, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Southern Illinois UP, 1985), 7.

[21] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 93

notable because it introduces the concept of *reconstruction*[22] as a method of social change.

Prof John Dewey, who was my teacher and to whom I owe so much, has said: "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 realizes 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]

The ellipses are Ambedkar's own insertion, and they excise a phrase dealing with education and the school in Dewey's original passage in *Democracy and Education*. This shows that Ambedkar was enamoured with Dewey's pragmatism, but also that he wanted to extend it and change it into a vehicle of reform that would be up to the challenges of the Indian context. What remains common, however, is the pragmatist's urge to not throw out everything from one's past tradition; one must save what is useful, fix what is damaged, and abandon that which is harmful. In other words, one does not *revolt* against the past in the present, one *reconstructs* the past for the needs of the present. This is why Ambedkar asks his high-caste audience of reformers in this speech text to abandon pernicious shastras in an attempt to change the religiously infused mental habits that result in caste separation. Without such reconstruction, the hopes for instilling habits that create like-minded community members are minimal. This emphasis on reconstruction of the past as a way to a democratic future is a Deweyan trace in the social outlook of Ambedkar.

---

[22] Social reconstruction means creatively using past resources to improve future social experience and to create a better society.

[23] Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste", *Writings and Speeches*, vol 1 (Government of Maharashtra, 1989), 57

RELIGION, PRINCIPLES AND RULES

Religion is not only a cause of social injustice for Ambedkar. It also assumes an increasing prominence as a means for the alleviation of social injustice. This faith in the reconstructive power--and perhaps necessity--of religion is a major difference between Ambedkar's pragmatism and Dewey's philosophical thought. Later in Ambedkar's life, one sees him talk more and more about Buddhism and how it can be thought of as an egalitarian religion that guarantees equality, liberty and fraternity among all members of society. It does this through doctrinal commitments, such as to the fundamental equality of all humans, but it receives a boost in these endeavours through a methodological tool that Ambedkar took from Dewey. The other pragmatic book that Ambedkar heavily annotated was *Ethics*, a book authored by John Dewey and James H. Tufts. The edition of the book that Ambedkar possessed was the 1908 version (it was also published in a heavily-changed second edition in 1932). The origins of this book in his collection are mysterious, but there is evidence that the activist, K.A. Keluskar, had gifted it to Ambedkar at an unknown time.[24] This book is important because it shows Dewey's commitment to an individual transition from customary morality [25] to reflective or reason-based morality[26]. Moral progress happens, on this account, when individuals break free from custom and past ways of doing things and start to evaluate the comparative usefulness and worth of doing things in those ways. One may return to one's customary habits of thought and action, but

---

[24] For my speculations on the dating of this gift from Keluskar, see Scott R. Stroud, "The Influence of John Dewey and James Tufts' *Ethics* on Ambedkar's Quest for Social Justice", *Relevance of Dr. Ambedkar: Today and Tomorrow*, Pradeep Aglave (Ed) (Nagpur: Nagpur University, 2017).

[25] Customary morality is based on customs, tradition, religion, etc.

[26] Reflective morality is based on logical examination and testing.

only after reflectively analyzing them. This surely grounds Ambedkar's critique in "Annihilation of Caste", since his goal there was to get orthodox Hindus to think about the roots of oppression within their customs and traditional texts.

Later in his life, Ambedkar reaches back to Dewey's 1908 *Ethics* for a vital concept – the distinction between principles and rules in moral activity. Ambedkar extends this conceptual tool to fit his notion of religion and religious change. In his magisterial work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957), Ambedkar engages the challenging topic of *ahimsa* or nonviolence using Dewey's distinction between principles and rules in his *Ethics*. In his posthumous work on the Buddha's doctrines, Ambedkar asks "whether His Ahimsa was absolute in its obligation or only relative. Was it only a principle? Or was it a rule?"[27] What Ambedkar is appealing to is a passage – underlined by Ambedkar in his personal copy of *Ethics* – authored by Dewey and Tufts: "*Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things. But principles are intellectual; they are useful methods of judging things*."[28] Rules are straightforward, but what they gain in explicitness they lose in flexibility and range of application. A rule may state "Do not kill", but one wonders what that means in situations of less-than-lethal harm. Rules simply tell one to do or not do some specific action. On the other hand, principles serve as methods to judge actions, situations and events. These are more useful as they cover a variety of situations. Both the Buddha's and Dewey's views of experience

---

[27] Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, "The Buddha and his Dhamma", *Writings and Speeches*, vol 11 (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1992), 345.

[28] John Dewey and James H. Tufts, "Ethics", in Jo Ann Boydston (Ed), *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol 5 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1908/1985), 301.

entailed its ever-changing nature, a fact that rendered much of present and future life uncertain. Principles become our best intellectual tool to coalesce what we have learnt from our past experiences and to utilize those resources for future success in unpredicted situations. Principles are more pragmatic and reflective than merely following the customary lines of acting and judging.

Ambedkar appropriates this distinction in reconstructing the concept of ahimsa, indicating that it should be seen in the Buddha's hands as a principle, not as a rule. According to Ambedkar, the Buddha's teaching is to "'Love all so that you may not wish to kill any'. This is a positive way of stating the principle of Ahimsa … the doctrine of Ahimsa does not say 'Kill not. It says love all.' "[29] Love is a much more malleable and adaptive term, especially when compared to a mere prohibition on killing. One could refrain from killing another, yet still not instantiate a true Deweyan community of shared interests with that other person. This is the way that Ambedkar adapts Dewey's thought into his view of Buddhism. Buddha was proffering love, Ambedkar maintains, and this principle should be useful in a range of situations. A mere rule to not harm would not enable the rich and deep sense of community that Ambedkar sought among all the publics in India.

One of the most important situations, of course, comes in the case of solving disagreements in situations of community. Ambedkar's reconstruction of Buddhism speaks to this challenge. At one point in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar explains all the aspects to right speech in a way that is animated by the principle of loving others.

One should speak only that which is true; that one should not speak what is false; that one should not speak evil of others; that one

[29] Ibid, 346.

should refrain from slander; that one should not use angry and abusive language towards any fellow man; that one should speak kindly and courteously to all that one should not indulge in pointless, foolish talk, but let his speech be sensible and to the purpose. [30]

Lying behind this argument is the idea that we should constantly be seeking ways to still our self-focused anger and instead love others, even our enemies or those who disagree vehemently with us. This is nonviolence, but a reconstructed form of it that de-emphasizes harm. Instead of killing, it centres on the maintenance and creation of *fraternity* among community members, now and in the future. Ambedkar's vision takes the Deweyan ideas of democracy, reconstruction, and reflective method and merges them with the distinctively Indian tradition of Buddhism. What emerges is a reconstructed sense of Buddhism that can serve as a vehicle to empower *Dalit-Bahujans* and as a doctrine that hopefully creates more common ground among communal members. Ambedkar, like Dewey, did not want to solve a specific problem and create future ones by destroying needed relationships within one's community.

Instead, Ambedkar combines these lines of Deweyan thought and sees the Buddhist religious orientation as a way to communicatively solve one's problems now while maintaining needed relationships for future success. This was a point he noted even during the height of his political activity. When he addressed the student parliament of his newly formed Siddharth College on 25 September 1947, he encouraged the attentive student leaders to respect their opponents:

[A tyrant] need not pay any attention to eloquence because his will is law. But in a parliament where laws are made, no doubt by

---

[30] Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, "The Buddha and his Dhamma", 71.

the wishes of the people, the man who succeeds in winning our opposition is the man who possesses the art to persuade his opponent. You cannot win over a majority in this House by giving a black eye to your opponent … You will have to carry a proposition only by the art of speaking, by persuading [your] opponent, by winning him over his side by argument, either gentle or strong, but always logically and instructively.[31]

Persuasion, communication, and advocacy can be vigorous, but they must not destroy the hope of creating common ground with one's opponents. Ambedkar's own heated rhetoric did not always live up to this charge, but one can see the Deweyan ideal that he shaped in the Indian context. If democracy is a matter of habits of interaction that preserve and promote community, and matters of community involve some amount of shared interest and like-mindedness, then one cannot totally disrespect or write-off one's opponents in their quest for social justice. Justice is more than a matter of *equality* or *liberty*, it depends upon and requires *fraternity* among community members. Thus, communication becomes vitally important in Ambedkar's scheme of Buddhism because it is a means of social change that is susceptible to guidance by Buddhist views of loving one's interlocutors and opponents.

Much has been written on Ambedkar's innovative programme of social reform.[32] This short essay points out valuable aspects to what

---

[31] Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, "The Minority must always be won over, it must never be dictated to"Writings *and Speeches*, vol 17 part 3 (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 2003), 378.

[32] See Christopher S. Queen, "Ambedkar's Dhamma: Source and Method in the Construction of Engaged Buddhism", and Adele Fiske & Christoph Emmrich, "The Use of Buddhist Scriptures in B.R. Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*", in Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (eds), *Reconstructing the World: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 2004); Dhananjay Keer, *Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan,

Ambedkar was pursuing, and why he did things in those ways. The point that I have tried to make in various places, and to which I gesture here, is that we are best served to also consider Ambedkar's efforts in light of his continuous dialogue with pragmatism.[33] As I have shown, there is reason to believe that Ambedkar admired and internalized Dewey's ideas of deep democracy, reconstruction, and reflective morality and wove these into the tapestry of reform that his life represented. He was a pragmatist, albeit one with a distinctively Indian concern with the problems and boons of religions in a pluralistic community. Much more can be said about the relationship between Ambedkar the caste reformer and the American pragmatist Dewey, but it is now clear that Dewey's influence can be charted in specific and traceable ways in Ambedkar's writings, speeches, and activities. Like Dewey, Ambedkar was firmly committed to achieving equality, liberty *and* fraternity; unlike Dewey, Ambedkar had the traditional materials and imaginative resources to see Buddhism as the religious means that could be reconstructed and used for these meliorative ends. It is in acknowledging this debt and foundation that we can start to appreciate what Ambedkar does with pragmatist philosophy when he adapts it to the Indian context and allows it to blossom in his work.

1990); Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[33] For other explorations of this aspect to Ambedkar's development, see Scott R. Stroud, "Pragmatism and the Pursuit of Social Justice in India: Bhimrao Ambedkar and the Rhetoric of Religious Reorientation", *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 46 (1), 2016, 5-27; Scott R. Stroud, "Echoes of Pragmatism in India: Bhimrao Ambedkar and Reconstructive Rhetoric," in Robert Danisch (ed), *Recovering Overlooked Pragmatists in Communication: Extending the Living Conversation about Pragmatism and Rhetoric* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019; Arun P. Mukherjee, "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy", *New Literary History* 40 (2), 2009, 347-348; Keya Maitra, "Ambedkar and the Constitution of India: A Deweyan Experiment", *Contemporary Pragmatism* 9 (2), 2012, 301-320.

Section 2:

Ambedkar on the question of Religion

Ambedkar's Rethinking of Religion

Prathama Banerjee

It is urgent that we return to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's thoughts on religion today. He helps us in our immediate fight against a resurgent Hindutva that targets Dalits, Muslims and dissenters in general. More generally, he helps us develop both a critique and an understanding of religion as a phenomenon. Ambedkar's rethinking of religion has not been studied enough. One, because the religion question in India has historically been reduced to the "Hindu-Muslim question". And two, because "progressives" have always neglected religion – liberals by insisting that religion is or should be a matter of private faith and Marxists by insisting that religion is false consciousness of people who do not recognize their own true economic interest. Yet religion continues to play a determining role in our contemporary society – both in politics and in ordinary people's everyday lives – and most of us remain but helpless witnesses to this fact.

Ambedkar's rethinking of religion is a vast subject. Here, I can only foreground a few important aspects of it and invite the readers to elaborate on them further. First, Ambedkar combined fearless and trenchant criticism of religion with a deep sympathy and understanding of it. This was unique – because in his times, public figures either criticized religion for being a divisive or irrational force, or like Gandhi, felt that all religions were true and worthy of respect. Our modern-day sensibility of *sarvadharmasamabhava* – equal treatment of all religions by the state, which stands in for Indian secularism – partakes precisely of this idea that all religions are intrinsically good. While Ambedkar insisted that religion was both inevitable to and necessary for public life, he strongly denied

that all religions are good. When he diagnosed Hinduism as a religion of inequality because it sanctified caste or when he converted to Buddhism with his followers, Ambedkar (even at the cost of alienating sympathizers such as the Jatpat Todak Mandal of Lahore, which then refused to let him deliver his *Annihilation of Caste* lecture) was saying that religion can be and must be criticized. This was not to reject religion but to actually arrive at a more just and righteous religion.

Secondly, Ambedkar fought against the reduction of religion to identity. Modernity, we know, emerged in Europe by pitting Reason against Religion and State against Church. Yet modernity failed to either abolish religion or turn it into private faith. Religion continued to play a role in public life, including in the shaping of the modern European state, as the German philosopher Carl Schmitt pointed out, and philosophers of modernity, such as Hegel, conceptualized the world as a map of religious units (Christianity/Europe, Hinduism/India, Confucianism/China, Islam/Near East and so on). Religion thus re-entered discourses of modernity, but through the backdoor as it were. Religion was now recognized not as religion per se but as the mark of culture/civilization. This (patently false) equation between culture and religion came to be universalized through colonial rule, which anthropologized and administered people across the world as religio-cultural communities. Consequently, nationalism, such as in India, also predominantly took on the form of religious nationalism.

Hence, in Ambedkar's times, criticism of religion had become a doubly difficult task because it was perceived as a criticism of national culture. So when Ambedkar criticized Hinduism, it offended many of his contemporaries, including Gandhi, because it appeared to be also a criticism of Indian nationalism. But this did not deter Ambedkar. He openly stated that a nationalism that excluded and persecuted a large section of the nation's people – namely, the Untouchables – was hardly nationalism worth its name.

Along with Rabindranath Tagore, Ambedkar was a rare courageous individual who dared critique nationalism at the height of India's nationalist movement – a risky enterprise for any public figure. "I have no country," he said to Gandhi. (This reminds us of Marx's famous statement that the working classes have no country.) Importantly, when Ambedkar called Untouchables a "social minority" and asked for separate electorates for Depressed Classes, on a par with separate electorates for Muslims, he actually redefined the categories of majority and minority from being religio-cultural to being juridico-constitutional categories. This, as we know, was crucial for the history of our democracy in post-1947 India.

But this was not all. Ambedkar also argued that to reduce religion to cultural identity was really to empty religion of its real significance. His task then was to rescue religion from self-proclaimed religionists, who had reduced religion to merely a set of cultural markers and practices, and return to religion the two critical dimensions of philosophy and theology. This was the third important aspect of Ambedkar's rethinking of religion that we must turn to. In his text *Philosophy of Hinduism*, Ambedkar said that religion was constitutive of the human condition because it dealt with elemental questions of life such as of birth and death, nourishment and disease. But to say that religion is part of human ontology does not at all mean that religion is basically the same in all places and at all times. Quite to the contrary. The history of religion is a history of revolutions, Ambedkar said, and to understand religion we must pay attention to the convulsive changes that religion has gone through in the world. "Revolution is the mother of philosophy," Ambedkar said. Interestingly, Ambedkar did not go by the conventional narrative of modernity. The rise of science and its alleged triumph over religion was not really the defining event of his story. To Ambedkar, the most important revolution in the history of religion was the invention of God!

This is the most fascinating aspect of Ambedkar's account of religion. Through an anthropological study of "primitive" religions, Ambedkar argued that early forms of religion did not have a concept of God or even of morality. Religion, concerned as it was with death, disease, birth, growth, food, scarcity and so on, propitiated forces of nature, such as sun, rain, wind, pestilence, etc. These forces were neither good nor evil. They were a-moral; they were simply there to be placated, harnessed, and sometimes even fought. Morality did exist in society in the form of norms of human interaction, but that was a domain separate from that of religion. In other words, religion was simply about life in all its exigencies, dangers and flourishing.

GOD AND A 'POLITICAL SOCIETY'

It was only in ancient, as opposed to primitive, times that the idea of God came to be integrated into religion – leading to the first revolution in the history of religion. The concept of god had an extra-religious origin. It probably emerged from out of deference to great and powerful men – heroes and kings – or from out of pure philosophical speculation about the author/architect of the world. The invention of God was followed by a second major revolution. That was the integration of religion with morality. In earlier times, the relationship between God and humans was imagined as a form of kinship – Gods often called fathers/mothers. "Political society" – a term Ambedkar uses here – was thus composed of descendants and worshippers of a common progenitor-god – and consequently, competing polities had competing gods. In other words, lineage and kinship rules applied to human interaction more than abstract moral rules. In later times, however, once society came to be imagined as composed only of humans, and God became transcendental figure lying outside political society, the God-human relationship changed from being that of kinship to that of faith and belief. Instead of watching over public and civic life of the community, God now appeared to watch over the individual – and regulate his/her personal

conscience and conduct. Lineage loyalties came to be replaced by moral injunctions. Morality and religiosity came to coincide. Henceforth, it also became possible to imagine a polity composed of people worshipping different forms of God, just as it became possible to imagine a universal God, overseeing the affairs of a universal humanity irrespective of the fact that humanity was divided between different nations or polities. From then on, a change of religion no longer implied a necessary change of nationality.

Notice that Ambedkar's is not the standard story of secularization, but a more complex story of change in the relationship between politics and religion. It is not as if religion becomes irrelevant to politics in modern times. Rather because of the change in the nature of religion and in the nature of human-god relationship, in modernity, religious belonging and political belonging no longer have a straightforward relationship. They come together in complicated ways, and sometimes even compete with each other. Religion continues to have a role in public life but in terms of very different normative principles. To quote Ambedkar,

The Religious Revolution was not thus a revolution in the religious organization of Society resulting in a shifting of the centre – from society to the individual – it was a revolution in the norms. … There may be controversy as to which of the two norms is morally superior. But I do not think there can be any serious controversy that these are not the norms. [p 22]

In other words, in modernity, debates around religion take the form of debates around the normative framework of public life – when, that is, religion is not reduced to mere cultural identity.

This brings us to the fourth important aspect of Ambedkar's rethinking of religion – namely, his take on the relationship between religion and morality. On the face of it, Ambedkar was saying something very simple – that a religion must be judged in terms of the morality it fosters among its followers. On those terms,

Hinduism is clearly wanting, because it sanctifies hierarchy, inequality and untouchability. Buddhism, on the other hand, is a moral religion because it does not discriminate on grounds of caste, gender and species – it historically admitted low-castes and women into the *sangha* and critiqued the sacrifice of innocent animals in the Vedic fire. But Ambedkar, clearly, is making a far more complex move here than just valorizing morality in the name of religion. In *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, written just before his death, Ambedkar offers us a conception of religion in its purest and barest form, ie a religion without the mediation of God and prophets and without grounding in any notion of an eternal inner being such as soul or *atman*. For him, the religious subject and the subject of religion is not god, not soul, but the ordinary, mortal, finite human being in his or her everyday life. He distinguished Buddha from Krishna, Christ and Muhammad based on the fact the Buddha never claimed to be either God or God's messenger. Neither were his words of the nature of revelations or god's words. Nor did Buddha claim any miraculous powers or special insights into extra-worldly questions (such as what happens after life, what is the nature of the self and so on). Buddhist texts were simply meditations on the human condition, no more and no less – centred around the philosophical concepts of *shunyata* (emptiness), *dukkha* (suffering, both social and personal), impermanence of the world, "dependent origination" (ie the interconnected and inessential nature of all things) and *ahimsa* or non-violence. Based on this understanding of the world as ephemeral and ever-changing, without the guarantees of God's grace and of an afterlife of the soul, but for that very same reason, imbued with the infinite possibility of transformation, Ambedkar proposed new Buddhism as a religion of the world, meant to change lives for the better right here right now, by inspiring responsible action and moral conduct among its followers. Hence his emphasis on *sila* – without which even knowledge was futile. And hence Ambedkar's statement that in *navayana*, religion is morality and morality religion.

REVISION OF THE KARMA THEORY

As we know, Ambedkar was a trenchant critic of the traditional, brahmanical conception of *karma* – which said that sufferings in this life were the result of sins in a previous life. He was also a sharp critic of the modern nationalist theory of *karma* – which said that one should undertake action as sacrifice, without either fear of or desire for the fruits of action. According to Ambedkar, the former justified the current plight of the Untouchables as caused by their own prior failings and the latter denied political status to the Untouchables' efforts at liberation, because it was evidently desirous and interested action. Through a critique of the *Bhagavadgita* in his *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in India* and through a reframing of Buddhist texts, Ambedkar proposed a revised theory of *karma* to imply that every action had an inescapable consequence, however delayed or deferred it might be, which fructified right here in the world and affected collective lives. In other words, every actor was ultimately responsible for his or her actions because it came to bear not only upon themself but upon the world in general. To own up responsibility was thus to be moral. Through this revision of the *karma* theory, what Ambedkar did was to foreground ordinary, everyday activities of life as the critical site of moral judgments – the realm of the quotidian, where caste really played out in all its violence and discrimination – thus denying the centrality ascribed by the nationalist elite to spectacular revolutionary, exceptional or sacrificial action.

But to be moral, Ambedkar further argued, was not simply to follow the right rules. In fact, morality was not about rules at all. It was about principles. Rules told us exactly what to do and how to do it. Rules called for conformity. *Manusmriti* was precisely such a set of elaborate rules that demanded faithful following. Principles however do not tell us what to do. They call for interpretation and judgment. Rules generate obedience, principles generate creativity. Rules determine, principles produce a responsible freedom. A true

religion is a religion of principles rather than rules, because it fosters a creative, responsible and free religious subject. To quote from *The Annihilation of Caste:*

The principle may be wrong but the act is conscious and responsible. The rule may be right but the act is mechanical. *A religious act may not be a correct act but must at least be a responsible act*.

A remarkable and counter-intuitive statement if anything – that an act qualifies to be a religious act when, wrong or right, it is undertaken in responsibility!

RELIGION FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

It could of course be asked that if Ambedkar's real stake was in morality as responsible action, then why call it religion at all. The story becomes even more interesting here. It is clear that Ambedkar had quietly moved away from the modern Kant-ian sense of morality as a purely mentalist and rational judgment (Kant said that morality needed no religious backing). Ambedkar's morality clearly called for certain sanctity, which was beyond merely the sanctity of reason. It required a commitment that was akin to religious faith, inspiring, if necessary, a fight to the end, even sacrifice. This was not because Ambedkar was a traditionalist in the conventional sense (though he did take tradition quite seriously, both as an object of critique and as a source of new ideas, as proven by his lifelong engagement with Sanskrit and Pali texts). This was because, as Ambedkar said in his 1950 essay *Buddha and the Future of his Religion*, "the new world needs a religion far more than the old world did". That is, morality as religion is particularly the need of modernity. Harking back to his earlier distinction between rules and principles, Ambedkar said that the new world needed a religion because law (the regime of rules as it were), in which we as moderns put too much faith, was an ineffective and unreliable instrument for the transformation of society. To quote him again:

[The law] is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality, must therefore, remain the governing principle in every society.

This, coming from the greatest constitutionalist and legal reformer of our times, unmistakably tells us that Ambedkar was rethinking religion here with reference to the limits of the modern state and modern liberalism's "rule of law". (It was not accidental that he finally converted to Buddhism after his resignation as law minister from Nehru's cabinet, having experienced the impossibility of fully reforming the Hindu joint family, the crux of both caste and gender discrimination in India, by law.)

This then is the last important aspect of Ambedkar's rethinking of religion that I want to emphasize – namely, that Ambedkar posits religion as a force that operates at the limits of state and law. The greatest testament to this fact is that on 2 December 1956, just four days before he died, Ambedkar wrote up "Buddha or Marx"! In this essay, he shows how Buddhism and Marxism share some basics – including the understanding that private property is the source of all inequalities (hence the Buddhist conception of the *bhikshu* and the Marxist conception of the proletariat, referring to those who have nothing to lose and therefore those who potentially are the real force of change). But Marxism parts ways with Buddhism, because having wished away religion as the "opium of the people", it inevitably turns to the State as the primary instrument of social change (as did, in his times, both Soviet socialism and Nehruvian socialism). The result, as we know, is dictatorship and violence. To ensure equality, thus, Marxism sacrifices liberty. Ambedkar contrasts the "dictatorship of the proletariat" with the ancient Buddhist *sangha*, which, according to him, institutionalized democratic governance of those who voluntarily entered the community of the adept. Buddha, he said, was more flexible about the principle of non-violence than

he was about the principle of democracy. Unlike Gandhi and the orthodox Jains, Buddha understood that in some cases violence was inevitable and even just. But Buddha never condoned dictatorship – for he believed that right conduct could never be enforced or coerced; it had to emerge from changed dispositions. The changing of disposition required not law but religion. The following is as clear a statement as can be, of Ambedkar's argument that religion emerges where the jurisdiction of the state ends:

The Communists themselves admit that their theory of the State as a permanent dictatorship is a weakness in their political philosophy. They take shelter under the plea that the State will ultimately wither away. There are two questions, which they have to answer. When will it wither away? What will take the place of the State when it withers away? … The Communists have given no answer. At any rate no satisfactory answer to the question what would take the place of the State when it withers away, though this question is more important than the question when the State will wither away. Will it be succeeded by Anarchy? If so the building up of the Communist State is a useless effort. … The only thing, which could sustain it after force is withdrawn, is Religion.

Let me end here by pointing out Ambedkar's unmatched originality in the rethinking of religion. As opposed to the modern secularization thesis, which sees pure politics emerging after the cessation of religion, Ambedkar's proposition is that religion comes into play precisely when secular politics fails or is exhausted. It is therefore a mistake to believe, as many do, that Ambedkar conceptualized religion as a subordinate instrument for politics. It is true that he named "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" – the unmistakably political slogan of the French Revolution – as ideals of his religion. But it must not be forgotten that unlike anybody else, he made Fraternity the basis on which Equality and Liberty became possible. Fraternity was a community of understanding and compassion (*karuna* in Buddhist terms), which could only be

ensured by good faith and *silata* towards others, i.e., by a religious disposition and not by mere disciplined or rule-governed behaviour, nor by pure political rationality. In other words, Ambedkar's rethinking of religion cannot be understood within liberalism's framework of secularism and religious tolerance. It cannot also be understood, as some seek to do, within the framework of "civil religion", as proposed by Jean Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract.* For one, civil religion is a religion, shorn of the church and of theological elaboration, clearly in service of the modern state. For the other, civil religion is based on a concept of a natural and originary equality of all humans – as Rousseau famously said, "all men are born equal" – thus making possible the imagination of a primordial and pre-given political community. But as Ambedkar never failed to remind us, all men, rather humans, are not born equal. There is no prior political community that gets corrupted in later times and can therefore be recovered from an earlier pristine and primitive state. Political community has to be built, painstakingly, against all odds and for the first time ever, from an ancient condition of hierarchy and exploitation. Hence, the need for a new and unprecedented religion, because nothing short of or less than religion will do.

Epistemological basis of Ambedkar's Navyana

Sadaf Rukhsar Yusuf

On 6 October 1956, barely two months before his death, in a hotel in Nagpur, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar declared, "I will accept and follow the teachings of Buddha. I will keep my people (Mahars) away from the different opinions of Hinyana[34] and Mahayana[35], two religious orders. Our Bouddha Dhamma is a new Bouddha Dhamma, *Navayana*."[36] He founded *Navayana,* the "New Way", as a sect of modern Indian Buddhism. It was meant to be the vehicle for the emancipation of the Untouchables. Anne M. Blackburn, a historian of Buddhism, has argued that Ambedkar understood Buddhism, religion, kinship and nationalism as a related set of terms

---

[34] **Hīnayāna**, (Sanskrit: "Lesser Vehicle") the more orthodox, conservative schools of Buddhism; the name Hīnayāna was applied to these schools by the followers of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition in ancient India. The name reflected the Mahāyānists' evaluation of their own tradition as a superior method, surpassing the others in universality and compassion; but the name was not accepted by the conservative schools as referring to a common tradition. In one sense, all of the so-called 18 schools of ancient Buddhism are Hīnayānist, in that they predate the emergence of Mahāyāna ideas as a separate doctrine. The modern upholders of the ancient Hīnayāna tradition are the Theravādins (followers of the Way of the Elders), who are but one of the 18 ancient schools.

[35] **Mahayana**, (Sanskrit: "Greater Vehicle") movement that arose within Indian Buddhism around the beginning of the Common Era and became by the 9th century the dominant influence on the Buddhist cultures of Central and East Asia, which it remains today. It spread at one point also to Southeast Asia, including Myanmar (Burma) and Sri Lanka, but has not survived there. The movement is characterized by a grandiose cosmology, often complex ritualism, paradoxical metaphysics, and universal ethics.

[36] Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Press interview on 13October 1956 at Sham Hotel, Nagpur, Navayan: Homeland for Ambedkarite Buddhism.

with social and political implications and drew upon Buddhism to create a model for a moral community ideologically coexistent with, although not subordinate to, Brahmanical Hinduism and Indian nationalism.[37]

According to historian C.A. Bayly, even before Ambedkar's announcement of his intention to renounce Hinduism, he had grappled with the idea of constitutionalism and argued in favour of "legal recognition" over "social recognition", stating that he was dealing with the case of a society where dominant groups didn't accord even common humanity to Untouchables and many other lower castes. Ambedkar's idea of nationality built on common memories, myths of origin and history seemed to have hinted at a common identity that could have prescribed equality to the Untouchables.[38] Author and academic Ananaya Vajpeyi maintains that the failure of law, legislations and politics to solve the problems of untouchability made him seek the conversion of Untouchables to Buddhism, which provided a religious identity and self-respect to the Untouchables. Implied here is the centrality of the State in Ambedkar's beliefs and philosophy. He had concluded that the majority had lost the will to reform itself by 1951, when Nehru's cabinet withdrew its support to the Hindu Code Bill (a watered-down version of which was passed subsequently in 1955); he had resigned as law minister on this issue. The conviction grew on him that the liberation of Dalits no longer lay within Hinduism but rather

[37] Anne M. Blackburn, 'Religion, Kinship and Buddhism: Ambedkar's Vision of a Moral Community', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies,* Vol 16, No 1, (1993), pp 1-2.

[38] C.A. Bayly, Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2012, p 29

it was Hinduism from which Dalits needed liberation.[39] The role of the State becomes relevant here.

Hermeneutic[40] criticism is also evident. In the final section of *Annihilation of Caste,* he not only explained the absurdities and inequities propagated in ancient Sanskrit texts of Hindu law, the Vedas and the Shastras, but also their inadequacy to act as a guide to life and India's independence struggle. In Ambedkar's words, "Hindus must consider whether they should conserve the whole of their social heritage or select what is helpful and transmit to future generations only that much and no more."[41] Ambedkar elaborately engaged with the Hindu "sacred" texts: He critiqued Vedas from all possible angles; he questioned the origin of the "Aryans" who composed it (asked whether there existed an "Aryan invasion") and the subjugation of the Untouchables in these texts by analyzing the origin of the terms such as *dasas* and *dasyus*.[42]

"Prof. John Dewey, who was my teacher and to whom I owe so much, has said: '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 realizes that it is

---

[39] Arvind Sharma, 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the Aryan Invasion and the Emergence of the Caste System in India', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol 73, No 3 (2005), p 865.

[40] The term *hermeneutics* refers to the interpretation of a given text, speech, or symbolic expression (such as art). However, it is also used to designate attempts to theorize the conditions under which such interpretation is possible.

[41] B. R. Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi' (1936), in *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol 1, compiled by Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979), p 79.

[42] Arvind Sharma, 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the Aryan Invasion and the Emergence of the Caste System in India', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol 73, No 3 (2005), pp 843-870.

responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements but only such as to make a better future society." [43]These words provide ample hint towards the influence that philosopher John Dewey had on Ambedkar. It must also be noted that Ambedkar had also tried to accommodate Dewey's concept of "endosmosis"[44]. Ambedkar employed it frequently in his writing as a metaphor for communication in a democratic society. It referred to the fluidity of the channels through which groups and individuals in a democracy are linked and interact with each other freely. Ambedkar argued that "social endosmosis" is blocked because of the societal division between the "privileged and the subject class". This division surfaces wherever one group has interests "of its own", which prevents it from having a full interaction with other groups. The group safeguards its own interests, instead of choosing to reorganize and progress through wider relationships. This explains the exclusiveness of India's high-caste groups and the failure of "social endosmosis". In contrast, Ambedkar said, "in an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis." Dewey's influence is being discussed here, because his ideas and methodology shaped, to some extent, Ambedkar's earliest analysis of the caste hierarchy (and its evils) and the ways to do away with it. Ambedkar also inherited from Dewey the notions of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' (which Dewey discussed as a part of his lectures but did not endorse in his books).

According to Bayly, Ambedkar diverged from classical liberalism in the sense that in his formulation as a constitutional

---

[43] Ibid

[44] 'Endosmosis' or '**Social endosmosis**' is the natural flow and exchange of ideas, values, practices, knowledge and energies between and across groups.

liberal thinker, the Universalist idea of rights paved way for a positive discrimination in favour of the oppressed.[45]Equality would imply the equal treatment of and equal opportunities to the Untouchables and liberation from the dominance of high-caste Hindus (as seen in his concept of Nirvana). Fraternity to him, meant democracy, not merely a form of government but a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience with an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.[46]His idea of fraternity is also evident in his consistent emphasis on the "collective" and the notion of kinship.

Bayly has written that even before Ambedkar's endorsement of conversion of the Untouchables to Buddhism as a social tactic, he had been attracted to it for its emphasis on social harmony, promoting reverence rather than worship.[47]Ananya Vajpeyi recognizes a few reasons for Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism – it being one of the first religious systems in the history of Indian to challenge the caste system, its inclusive nature, its global character and the revivalism Buddhism underwent in different regions (Buddhism witnessed renaissance in the 20th century in Victorian Britain and its colonies in South Asia; Sir Edwin Arnold published his poem on Buddha, "The Light of Asia" in 1879; T.W. Rhys Davids founded the Pali Text Society in England in 1881, etc).[48]On the eve of his conversion, Ambedkar described his conversion as the

---

[45] C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2012, p 306 and p 310.

[46] Arun Mukherjee, 'B.R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy', *New Literary History*, Vol 40, No 2 (2009), pp 345-370.

[47] C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire,* Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2012, p 303.

[48] Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India*, Cambridge, MA, 2012, p 216.

least harmful route for the country since Buddhism was indigenous.[49] Ambedkar wanted inclusion and parity for the Untouchables and not seclusion within the Hindu India. Therefore, he refrained from conversion into Christianity or Islam (which would perhaps "denationalize" the Untouchables).[50]

Ambedkar believed that Untouchables in the caste order were erstwhile Buddhists who were incorporated by the Hindus into their own social order as servants and slaves; thus, a return to Buddhism for the Untouchables would be to claim their rightful home.[51]Ambedkar, as mentioned in his declaration, departed to a large extent from the earlier sects of Buddhism. Ambedkar's Buddha was a *marga data* (giver of a path, guide) and not a *moksa data* (giver of the transcendental emancipation, deliverer), who did leave to attain enlightenment but with full knowledge and consent of his family members who, later, themselves became the earliest converts to Buddhism. Buddha, to him, was a mortal who didn't transcend human conditions; rationality, verifiability, humanism and "scientific temper" in Buddha's teachings drew his attention. According to Ananya Vajpeyi, Ambedkar found in Buddhists elements of intellectual curiosity, ethical doubt, rich and diverse life experiences and questions about the larger meaning of moral existence and a range of human emotions; they tried to disassociate

---

[49] Anne M. Blackburn, 'Religion, Kinship, and Buddhism: Ambedkar's Vision of a Moral Community', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies,* Vol 16, No 1, (1993), p 10.

[50] According to Ananya Vajpeyi, for Ambedkar, Christianity was "alien" to Indians mainly because of its association with colonialism. He turned down Islam largely because of the experience of the Partition; conversion to Islam would have sent the message that Untouchables too were opting out of India; the millions of Muslims who had stayed behind in India became a numerically as well politically diminished minority.

[51] Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

themselves from the base and humiliating roles assigned to them in the Hindu narratives. Thus, she concluded that Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism wasn't positive (an attraction towards Buddhism) and negative (a rejection of other religions especially Hinduism).[52]

The doctrine of "selflessness" or "no selfhood" of original Buddhism that rejected the notion of unitary, stable and identifiable self, which could be used in favour of the collective, also appealed to him. [53]Thus, most of the modifications and alterations in the basic tenets of Buddhism introduced by Ambedkar's *Navayana* were aimed at paving way for the collective.

Ambedkar's *Navayana* didn't accept the Four Noble Truths because if suffering was everything, a social order could never be established. Ambedkar interpreted *dukkha* as collective social suffering – suffering that is socially constituted and historically specific and conquered only via a creed that placed suffering at the centre of its ethical structure – i.e., it was Buddhism that could relieve the Untouchables from their discrimination and denigration at the hands of caste Hindus.[54]

Navayana rejected the concept of rebirth; it was oriented towards collective deliverance and not individual liberation, the purpose being a better "this life" and not the care of the afterlife. *Navayana* provided a new dimension to the concept of *nirvana,* aiming at the anchoring of the experientially knowledgeable self within its material surrounding rather than in the abstract imaginings of a Universal Self or other selves conceived outside of humanly cognizable space and time. *Nirvana,* therefore, lay not in self-

---

[52] Ibid, pp 214 – 215.

[53] Ibid, p 232.

[54] Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

realization but in an equal society; it emphasized understanding of suffering, knowledge, etc, on a social – instead of an individual – basis.[55]

Ambedkar realized that if Buddhism continued to be an intimidating and highly institutionalized order of renunciants, priests and intellectuals, it would never be able to absorb India's Untouchables. Hence, *Navayana* also intended to rearrange the sangha or Buddhist community in a way that the *bhikkhu* (monk) and *bhikkhuni* (nun) are on an equal footing with the lay practitioner (*upasak/upasika*); it further alluded to associating the figure of the *bhikkhu* with an ethic of social service rather than with the highly anti-social discipline of self-knowledge and self-realization.[56]

However, Anne M. Blackburn assumes a different stance. According to her, Ambedkar articulated a view that the forces of kinship and religious sanction generate and sanction feelings of individual self-worth and moral responsibility, which would redress social inequality. This strength doesn't, however, proceed simply from a sense of unity. Ambedkar's vision of ancient Buddhism as a tradition of egalitarian social reform and his exegesis of key Buddhist concepts are clearly crucial to his belief that Buddhism would, indeed, protect such values. Although Ambedkar doesn't explicitly link these views to political mobilization, it appears from his continued involvement in political affairs as well as his views on nationalism that Buddhists, fortified by the forces of religious kinship, are expected to contest social inequality in the political

[55] Ibid, p 230.

[56] Ibid

arena rather than in an area of shared morality.[57] Thus, *Navayana* not only had social and moral but also political.

[57] Anne M. Blackburn, 'Religion, Kinship and Buddhism: Ambedkar's Vision of a Moral Community', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol 16, No 1 (1993), p 10.

Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Right to Conversion

Pramod Meena

Backed by the BJP, the RSS and its ancillary organizations have launched a concerted attempt to inject the poison of communal hatred into society and have been running a "Ghar Wapsi" (homecoming) re-conversion campaign, a new form of the Shuddhi movement. They have launched a jihad against the Dalits and Tribals embracing Islam or Christianity. This campaign has emerged as a new, potent threat to national integrity and unity. On the one hand, the BJP is trying to get a foothold among the Dalits using the name of Ambedkar, while on the other hand, by launching a campaign against conversions and for Hinduizing converted Tribals and Dalits, it is going against the grain of Ambedkar's firm belief that emancipation of the Dalits lay in abandoning the Hindu religion. The Hindutvavadi political and so-called cultural organizations like the BJP and the RSS, which do not tire of describing themselves as nationalists, forget that Ambedkar was for annihilation of caste. Anyone with even an elementary knowledge of history and politics knows that the caste system, which enjoys the patronage of Hinduism, is at the root of the practice of untouchability and justifies the inhuman discrimination against Dalits. That is why Ambedkar saw quitting Hinduism as the way for the emancipation the Dalits. But the Hindutvavadi organizations, despite being well aware of these facts, are trying to ignore this basic truth in their political ideology. It is the responsibility of every true nationalist to expose the saffron conspiracy, which is aimed at pitting Dalits and the Tribals against Muslims and Christians. In fact, exposing this conspiracy is imperative if we are to protect our country from being

torn asunder. Today, Ambedkar has become the symbol of Dalit identity. Given the central government is trying to divert attention from the basic socio-economic ills plaguing the country by raising unwarranted issues like conversions of Dalits and Ghar Wapsi, we need to revisit the exchanges or disputes between Ambedkar and Gandhi on the issue of religious conversions. This is also necessary to puncture the saffron propaganda that the Congress and Gandhi were anti-Hindu and that the RSS and the BJP are the only true saviours of the majority community.

AMBEDKAR'S WELL-THOUGHT-OUT CONVERSION

All of us know that on 14 October 1956 Ambedkar embraced Buddhism with lakhs of his followers in Nagpur. This fact needs to be remembered by all Dalits and the Hindus, for it is of great consequence to them. A mature thinker and Dalit leader like Ambedkar would not have switched to Buddhism on the spur of the moment. This backdrop of this conversion is the exploitation and oppression of the Dalits for centuries, Ambedkar's disillusionment with the Hindu reformists and Gandhi's adamant attitude. All these factors had forced Ambedkar to quit the Hindu religion. Despite being aware of Ambedkar's formidable following among the Dalits, Gandhi could never really reconcile himself to the fact that Ambedkar was the unquestioned leader of the Dalits. Gandhi's refusal to accept Ambedkar as the representative of the Dalits and his 1932 fast-unto-death against a separate electorate for Dalits challenged the self-respect of Ambedkar and the Dalits. Next, as part of a strategy to obliterate the distinct identity of the Dalits, Gandhi and the Congress started using the word "Harijan" to denote the Dalits. This left Ambedkar with no option but to end his association with the Hindu religion. But all this should not be seen as merely a clash of egos. Ambedkar had arrived at the decision of quitting Hinduism after a long and serious study of the realities of the life of Dalits.

Like his father and his other family members, Ambedkar had great reverence for Hindu saints and in the evening of his life, he was even working on a book on them. But death intervened. He did quit Hinduism but he was never an atheist like Bhagat Singh. Bhagwandas has claimed in one of his articles that in the conference of Dalits convened in Bombay after his return from Britain, where he had been to study for his PhD, Ambedkar was requested not to embrace any other religion, especially Islam, as it would lead to an alien culture dominating the Aryan culture of this country.[1] One cannot vouch for the truth or otherwise of Bhagwandas' claim but what we know for a fact that Ambedkar had talked about quitting Hinduism publicly for the first time at a convention of the Untouchables held in Yevla (Maharashtra) on 13 October 1935. That was after the 1932 Poona Pact. It is clear that while Ambedkar might not have been against conversions of Dalits but he was not for it either. He had even led an agitation demanding that Dalits be allowed to enter the Kalaram Temple in Nasik.

It is apparent that the Poona Pact had much to do with Ambedkar's decision to break free from the Hindu religion. It was due to Ambedkar's intense efforts that the British government, under the Communal Award of 1932, agreed for separate representation for the Dalits. However, Gandhi outmanoeuvred Ambedkar by embarking on a fast-unto-death against it and Ambedkar was forced to agree to a joint electorate, with some constituencies reserved for the Dalits. Gandhi did not stop at that. To nip the emerging independent political consciousness among the Dalits in the bud, he launched an aggressive movement for the emancipation of the "Harijans". Ambedkar's Dalit perspective saw in Gandhi the tallest Hindu leader after Shankaracharya. Gandhi was about to extinguish the spark of independent consciousness of the Dalits in the name of the Harijan movement. Rather than compromise his Dalit consciousness and self-respect, Ambedkar decided to quit the Hindu religion. It is pertinent to note here that at

the Yevla conference, Ambedkar blamed the Hindu reactionary leadership, which had failed the movement of the Dalits demanding their rights as members of the Hindu community, for his decision.[2] Ambedkar, who had earlier agitated for the Dalits' right to enter Hindu temples, said from the dais that the money, time and effort spent on that movement had gone waste.

Citing the antiquity and survival instinct of the Hindu religion as a mark of its greatness, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and Gandhi showered profuse praises on it. It seemed as if they were advising Dalits not to convert to any other religion given the proven greatness of Hinduism. Writing in *Young India* (24 November, 1927) Gandhi said, "After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of the Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilization. Cast a look around you – where is Rome and where is Greece? Can you find anywhere today the Italy of Gibbon or ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy?"[3] But Ambedkar, while conceding Gandhi's point about the comparative antiquity of Hinduism, emphasized the difference between just being alive and living with dignity.[4] He stressed that Hinduism did not give the majority backward castes, including Dalits, the right to live with dignity. Brahmins had thrust ignorance and poverty on the Shudras.

Gandhi believed that the Dalits' emancipation was possible only if they continued in the Hindu fold. He did not blame the caste system for their plight. In fact, he was of the view that it was the caste system that had saved Hinduism from disintegration. Gandhi used to support the caste divisions on the ground that they were a natural division of work, approved by the Varnashram Dharma. Ambedkar considered the caste system not a division of labour but of labourers. He believed that inequality and discrimination were in the DNA of Hinduism and was of the strong view that Dalits cannot be emancipated if they remain in Hinduism. That was why, in a convention of Mahars in Bombay in 1936, he appealed to them to give up the Hindu religion and its rituals.

SIKHS EYED AMBEDKAR AND CO

Ambedkar's decision to quit Hinduism and begin dialogues with representatives of other religions triggered a political tumult. The Hindus feared that it would dilute their numerical superiority. The Muslim communalists were lying in wait for such an opportunity. They had always insisted that Dalits should be seen as separate from the Hindus. This was their response when the Hindus boasted of their superior numerical strength. Although Ambedkar did not want his Dalit brothers to become pawns of Muslim politics, his move did make the Muslims more sympathetic towards the Dalits. Christian missionaries launched a fund collection drive in the Western nations, eyeing the vast Dalit population as potential converts to Christianity. Bhagwandas writes that the community which was most enthused by the announcement was the Sikhs because they thought that they would become the third biggest religious community in the country if Dalits took to Sikhism.[5] The possibility of an increase in the number of reserved seats in the legislatures must have encouraged the Sikh community leaders to bring Dalits into their fold.

Gandhi's attitude towards the different communities drooling over Dalits seemed to be somewhat illogical. In 1940, in reply to a question from a Muslim, he said that untouchability was an internal problem of the Hindus; the savarna Hindus had committed this sin and they would have to atone for it. Gandhi was strictly against any interference of other religionists, as far as the question of untouchability was concerned. Gandhi insisted that the savarnas had the responsibility of banishing untouchability. However, Ambedkar had given up on Hindu social reformers and did not want to turn to savarna Hindus for bringing untouchability to an end. In any case, why would a self-respecting person wait for someone else to take the initiative to solve his problems?

At the root of the sharp differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi on the issue of conversion of Dalits were their different primary commitments. Gandhi said that he represented India as a whole but Ambedkar was not ready to accept him as a representative of Dalits. Ambedkar said that Gandhi was the most prominent protector of Hindu interests since Shankaracharya. Ambedkar was proven right when Gandhi opposed a separate electorate. Gandhi was not ready to accept any division of Hindus, even at the cost of Dalits. Conveying his firm resolve to go ahead with his fast-unto-death to protest the proposed separate constituencies, Gandhi wrote to the British prime minister warning him that he was an outsider and should not interfere in any issue that divides the Hindus. "In establishment of a separate electorate at all for 'Depressed' classes I sense the injection of a poison that is calculated to destroy Hinduism and to do no good whatsoever to 'Depressed' classes. You will please permit me to say that no matter how sympathetic you may be, you cannot come to a correct decision on a matter of such vital and religious importance to the parties concerned."[6] Clearly, for Gandhi, the interests of the Dalits were secondary. His first priority was saving Hinduism from the so-called destruction. On the other hand, Ambedkar considered upliftment of the Dalits his foremost responsibility. He had nothing to do with Hinduism.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Just as their respective commitments defined Gandhi and Ambedkar's attitude towards conversions, they had different views on religion. Gandhi saw conversion as a fruitless exercise while for Ambedkar it was the path to the emancipation of the Dalits. After all, Dalits were seeking freedom from social and economic inequalities and biases. Ambedkar had reservations about Gandhi's concept of religion being a private affair between man and the Almighty. He also did not agree with the contention that religion does not have any social aspect.[7] Ambedkar held that the theological aspect of a religion is secondary. What is of primary importance is

its customs, traditions and rituals. Ambedkar felt that the attitude of the Hindus towards Dalits was not determined as much by the theology of Hinduism as by its rules of conduct and behaviour. According to him, life and its preservation was the gist of all religions. He insisted that even the religions of barbaric societies were not confined to superstitious rituals but were related to the exercise of survival. He said that the gist of the modern religions was also the same. "It is true that the real gist of the religion has been lost in the dazzle of science in the modern society and has passed out from our memory. But it is an incontrovertible fact that in the modern society also, life and its preservation is the gist of religion."[8]

Clearly, Hinduism could never be the religion of Dalits in terms of Ambedkar's definition of religion – for the Hindu caste system deprived the Dalits of their right to live with dignity. The *Manusmriti* prescribes harsh punishments for the Untouchables and the Shudras even for petty crimes. The Hindu caste system scrupulously deprives them of education, owning property and conducting cultural activities. Despite being a part of Hindu community, Dalits were forced to lead the life of an ostracized people. Ambedkar explained why Dalits cannot consider Hinduism their religion. As a representative of the Dalits, he wanted to know from the Hindus: "Does the Hindu religion accept them as human beings? Does it support their equality? Does it want to give them freedom? Does it strengthen the ties between Hindus and them? Does it teach Hindus that the Untouchables are one of them? Does it tell the Hindus that it is a sin to treat them worse than animals?"[9] Unfortunately, the Hindu community was not in a position to answer any of these questions in the affirmative. Given this situation, how could the Dalits have felt any affinity at all with the Hindus?

Unlike Gandhi, for Ambedkar, religion was not important because it made a person spiritual. It was important for him because it universalized social values; it deeply ingrained these values in the

mind of a person and decided what a person would do for the wider social good. For Ambedkar, it was the social values of a religion that were the touchstone of spiritualism. The traditional concept of spiritualism had no meaning for him. Ambedkarite spiritualism was the one that prioritized social good over personal interests. As religion exercised much stronger control over people than any government or law, the Hindu upper castes could not have been forced to embrace Dalits and given up the biases against them by making a law proscribing caste system and untouchability, which enjoy the sanction of Hindu religion. Clearly, the social structure of Hindu religion was seething with the bacteria of untouchability and discrimination and no soap of Gandhian spiritualism could cleanse it. Hence, Ambedkar believed that the salvation of the Dalits lay in becoming the part of a religion that emphasized egalitarian social values.

Gandhi saw religion as the path to spiritual salvation and was a bitter critic of conversion of Dalits carried out with allurements. The fact is that Gandhi couldn't bear to see Dalits, influenced by the service of Christian missionaries, converting to Christianity. He believed that it was not pure humanistic feeling but the disguised objective of increasing the number of their followers that was behind the service of the missionaries. He also saw foreign funds and governments behind the work of the missionaries. According to a report published in *Young India*, in a discussion with a Christian missionary Dr Siresol at Wardha, he straight away levelled the charge that missionaries do not do social service to serve humanity but to proselytize. "Why should not service be its own reward?" he wondered.[10] Gandhi might be charging the Christian missionaries with converting Dalits into Christianity by luring them with promise of material gain or facilities[11] but Ambedkar did not agree with him and his followers. Ambedkar said, "It is an indisputable fact that the Christian missionaries are trying to give healthy body to Indians and healthy mind to those taking refuge in them."[12] He also sought to

remind the Hindus that their religion had nothing to do with serving society, that it was dominated by customs and rituals. While Ambedkar praised the missionaries for their work in the fields of education and health, he wasn't oblivious to the fact that it was mostly the savarnas who had benefited from the work done by the missionaries in the fields of education and health.[13] From the angle of Dalit Christians, he considered the money being spent by Christian missionaries in running schools, colleges and hostels as a waste. In a satirical tone, he said that Gandhi and his Hindu religion had no problem in accepting the material things and services offered by the missionaries but they did not want to give anything in return.

'ALL RELIGIONS ARE THE SAME'

One argument used by Gandhi to oppose conversions was that all religions are equally true and none is superior to another. Hence, he believed that one should not switch to other religions. Rather, he said, one should follow one's own religion with complete sincerity: That if one follows the basic tenets of one's religion with complete faith and with a pure heart, one is sure to attain salvation. Clearly, this implied that as the caste system is a part of the Hindu religion, a Dalit, if he wants freedom from the cycle of rebirth, should fulfil the responsibilities enjoined on him by the caste system with a pure heart and with complete faith! But did Gandhi not know that the objective of the Dalit movement was not to attain spiritual salvation but salvation from the hell of untouchability and from the compulsion to perform a certain set of tasks? But as Gandhi considered all religions as different paths leading to the truth, his advice to Hindus, Muslims and Christians was to keep away from trying to convert other religionists to their faith and instead prove themselves as true followers of their own religion. He wrote in *Young India*, "If you are a Hindu, you should not pray that a Christian should turn a Hindu and if you are a Muslim, you should not pray that Hindus or Christians should become Muslims. Even in solitude we should not pray for anybody's conversion. Instead, we

should pray from the depths of our heart that one who is a Hindu should become a better and truer Hindu, one who is a Muslim should become a better Muslim and one who is a Christian should become a truer Christian." [14]

Gandhi might have advocated for considering all religions equal and believing in Sarva Dharma Sambhav, keeping in mind his wider objective of forging Hindu-Muslim unity, but Ambedkar considered all religions equal only up to the point that all of them say that doing "good" is what makes life meaningful. But then, Ambedkar argued, different religions have their own concepts of "good" and they use different means to spread their version of "good". Quoting Professor Tilley, Ambedkar argued that religion has played both positive and negative roles.[15] Some religions are violent, some are non-violent. Some religions make their followers human, others turn them into barbarians. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar did not believe that religions were paths leading to God. Say, for argument's sake, all religions are paths that take one to God, still, "It cannot be said that all religions will definitely take one to god and neither can it be said that any path, even if it leads to god, is the right one." [16]

Here, you can see a marked difference between the approaches of Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi might have believed more in the purity of the means of attaining an objective than attaining the objective itself but while talking of all religions as being different paths leading to God, he ignores the differences in the means. On the other hand, Ambedkar, who was considered a practical leader, wanted that the paths shown by different religions to be tested on the touchstone of morality. Ambedkar saw shrewd diplomacy in Gandhi declaring all religions equal. He thought that it was a stratagem for brushing aside the demands of the Dalits to examine the tenets of Hinduism on their merit. The theory of all religions being the same is the gift of comparative theology, which while seeking to debunk the illogical concept that the religions not founded by human beings were superior, brought the new religions, which cannot claim a

divine origin, on a par with the ancient religions. A logical person like Ambedkar also did not accept that religions that were not created by men were superior to the others but he did not, to the extent that Gandhi did, consider all religions equal. Ambedkar believed that religions could be better or worse in terms of their merits. This justified the decision of the Dalits to quit Hinduism and embrace another religion that was better for them.

Ambedkar believed that conversion to another religion was the only way Dalits could be emancipated from their ostracization and the inferiority complex generated by it, provided, of course, that their new religion was free from the boycott, indifference and biases which they faced in Hinduism. He said that once the Dalits started believing that they are equal to others, the ingrained inferiority complex would wither away.[17] Ambedkar took great pains to emphasize that Dalits could be freed from their alienation by becoming part of a religion free from the concept of caste. He said that once Dalits started believing in the god of the new religious community, the community would start considering them its members and that would benefit the Dalits just as a family would. He said blood relation was a mandatory condition for becoming the member of a community and now, commonality of religious beliefs has taken the place of blood relation. Ambedkar considered it important for Dalits to become members of a community that believed in egalitarianism because that would secure them the support of a group in fighting the oppression by the Hindus. Remaining in the Hindu religion was a double blow to the Dalits. They were ostracized by the savarna Hindus while non-Hindus maintained a distance from them because in the eyes of the non-Hindus they were Hindus. Ambedkar told Dalits that they would have to quit Hinduism for their emancipation. Otherwise, they would never get justice. Ambedkar considered justice as something that only a community could give to its members; the Untouchables would never get justice, as Hindus did not consider them part of

their community. In Hinduism, justice is a privilege that only savarnas enjoy.

Ambedkar saw the futility of the attempts by some Dalits to break free from their Dalit identity by changing their names or by not disclosing their caste. It was not that Ambedkar, like Shakespeare, was asking "What's in a name?" He was in favour of a new name for Dalits only if it belonged to "a community other than the Hindus. It should be such that Hinduism cannot distort or deride it."[18] The experience shared by Dalit autobiography writers in Hindi and other languages has been that if Dalits think that they can win respect by keeping savanrna-like names, they are only chasing a mirage because by hook or by crook, the Brahmanvadis will discover their caste and deride them for keeping savarna names.

ON SHUDDHI AND GHAR WAPSI

In the context of the Shuddhi movement launched by the Arya Samaj and its contemporary saffron form called Ghar Wapsi, it is important for not only the Dalits but for all Indians to understand that neither Gandhi nor Ambedkar was a supporter of the Shuddhi movement. As we have seen earlier, Gandhi did not believe that conversion induced by hunger or force or the lure of money was a change of heart and if such converted Hindus wanted to atone for their sham conversion and return to Hindu religion voluntarily, they need not undergo any process of "Shuddhi".[19] Here, we must keep this possibility in mind that Gandhi might have been showed his disagreement with the Shuddhi movement to preserve and promote Hindu-Muslim solidarity.

Arya Samaj and some other organizations had launched the Shuddhi movement to counter the dilution of the numerical strength of Hindus with Dalits converting or being made to convert to Islam due to historical and socio-religious reasons. Some conservative Hindus had reservations about the movement as they believed that the Hinduism has an inherent strength that had always protected its

religion and culture and there was no place for conversions or for propagation of religion in Hinduism. Ambedkar could not have agreed with this egotism of conservative Hindus. Quoting Prof Jolly and other scholars, Ambedkar argued that some time in the past, Hinduism must have been a proselytizing religion; otherwise, he said, it could not have spread to all parts of the Indian sub-continent. However[20], he was aware that the Hindu religion had lost the capacity and will to propagate. Ambedkar also threw light on the factors that had led to Hinduism losing its proselytizing capacity. He held the varnashram system, and the caste system born of it, responsible for it. There is no place in Hinduism for a person of another religion or country because its rigid caste system leaves no space for them in the Hindu societal set-up. Ambedkar felt that there was scope for only mass conversion in Hinduism so that the converted people could form a new, separate caste. But communities rarely converted to another religion en masse those days.

Ambedkar saw Hinduism as a confederation of castes in which every caste was confined to within its boundaries. Clearly, such a regimented religion cannot assimilate a person from another faith. With the Hindu religion being a closed system, some reactionary elements used to raise the bogey of Shuddhi movement, etc to counter the numerical strength of the Muslims and the Islamization of the Dalits. Like Gandhi, Ambedkar too was not in agreement with the movement. Gandhi rejected the possibility of conversion of Dalits, hence he considered Shuddhi movement theoretically flawed and against religious harmony. Ambedkar believed that Hindu religion and society have no place for conversions. For different reasons, both believed that Shuddhi or Ghar Wapsi were untenable.

Commenting on the futility of the Shuddhi Movement, which was aimed at increasing the Hindu population of the country, Ambedkar said that numbers are not the determinants of the strength of a community. He wanted the Hindus to accept the fact that despite being less in number, the Muslims were able to overwhelm

them. The secret of the strength of the Muslims did not lie in their numbers but in the superior organization of their society. Therefore, Ambedkar's advice to the Hindus was that if they wanted to emerge powerful and build a bright future for Hinduism, they would have to strengthen the unity of the Hindu community. He said that eliminating the divisive caste system was an essential pre-condition for uniting Hindus – the more the number of castes, the more scattered and divided the Hindus would be. Ambedkar felt that the Shuddhi Movement would only serve to quicken the pace of disintegration of the Hindu community[21], as on the hand, it would antagonize the Muslims and the person who was brought back into the Hindu fold through Shuddhi would be left out in the cold. He would quit his religion only to discover that he is a stranger in the socio-religious life of Hindus – his new religious community.

'DALITS CAN'T UNDERSTAND THEOLOGY'

Gandhi had a biased view on the wisdom and analytical capabilities of the Dalits. He did not think they were capable of objectively comparing the merits and demerits of different religions and arrive at a logical decision regarding the religion they should adopt. Discussing conversion to Christianity with Dr. John Mott, chairman of International Missionary Council, Gandhi said, "Had you prayed for the welfare of the Harijans, I would have understood. But you make an appeal to become Christians to people who lack the capacity to understand what you are telling them. I am sure they are not capable enough to understand the differences between Jesus and Mohammed and Nanak and founders of other religions."[22]

If here, Gandhi was referring to the philosophical aspects of religions or to theological debates, obviously, the majority Dalit community, which was largely unlettered, could not have grasped the complicated arguments and the fine reasoning on these complex issues. In any case, the toilers hardly have the time and the energy to indulge in intellectual hair-splitting. But then, the objective of the

Dalits was not to master the spiritual and philosophical aspects of religions. Their problem was the socio-economic system of the Hindu religion that gave them the status of a second-rate citizen, which meant being considered less than a human being. The discourse of the lower classes today has little to do with Gandhi's contention that the Dalits do not have the wisdom to analyze what is good and what is bad for them and choose a religion suited to them. On the other hand, Ambedkar believed that the conversion of Dalits was the first ever real conversion in the history where the people had decided to switch religions after evaluating their comparative merits and values.[23] Ambedkar wanted to know why Gandhi had doubts about the propriety of the Untouchables' conversion.

FOR AND AGAINST CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

As we have already seen, Gandhi's statements had the air of the Dalits' self-proclaimed messiah. He was dead against Christian missionaries converting Dalits by providing them educational and medical services and luring them with the promise of pecuniary benefits. But Ambedkar saw in Gandhi's stand a somewhat soft corner for the conversions done by Muslims. It is a historical truth that one of the objectives of the Muslims who invaded India was to forcibly convert the Hindu inhabitants of the country to Islam.[24] Even during the contemporary freedom movement, the plans of the Muslim communal elements to convert the Untouchables to Islam were no secret. At the 1923 annual session of the Indian National Congress at Kakinada, Dr. Mohammed Ali, who was the chair, had presented a programme to this effect, which Ambedkar quoted as an example. Ambedkar wanted to know from Gandhi why he did not oppose the drafting of Untouchables into Islam with as much clarity and firmness that he did the conversion of Dalits by Christian missionaries. Gandhi could not have answered this question owing to his political compulsions. Ambedkar sheds light on the political compulsions and dual stand of Gandhi. Ambedkar knew very well that the answer to the question lay in the numerical strength of the

Muslims. Being friendly with the Muslims was politically beneficial for the Congress and Gandhi, as otherwise the Muslims could have put hurdles in the path of the nationalist movement. But Gandhi should have realized that compromising with communal powers gave them the much-needed sanction and validity. We had to pay the price for it in the form of the Partition.

Ambedkar did criticize Gandhi for his double standards on conversion but it cannot be said that he (Ambedkar) preferred the conversion of Dalits into Christianity to their conversion into Islam. While Ambedkar regretted that the missionaries had adopted the wrong strategy on conversions in India by prioritizing Brahmins and other upper castes over the Dalits[25], he also condemned the caste-based inequality among the Christians. Thus, Ambedkar's Dalit perspective neither gives any special treatment to Christianity and nor, unlike Gandhi, allows Muslims to proselytize. According to Ambedkar, one reason the missionaries could not get expected success in India was that in their initial days, they tried to draw Brahmins to Christianity by engaging them in debates over the merits and demerits of Christianity and Islam. The missionaries thought that once they succeeded in winning over the Brahmins, other castes would follow them into Christianity. This might have happened but what the missionaries forgot was that the Brahmins, who saw that the Chaturvarna system protected their interests, would never embrace a religion that sent out the message of brotherhood. That is why Ambedkar wanted the missionaries to stop luring the upper castes and concentrate on the Dalits instead.

But Ambedkar was not very hopeful of the Dalits gaining anything from becoming Christians. He had had a personal experience[26] that casteism lingered even among the converted Christians. That was because the missionaries gave them some concessions. They were allowed to continue worshipping idols and were not persuaded to give up their caste identities completely. That was why when the Hindus became Christians they took their castes

along with them into their new religion. Thus, there were Dalit Christians and savarna Christians. The result was that the Dalit Christians were the victims of hatred of the savarna Christians and the savarna Hindus both. To make matters worse, they had to endure the boycott by their Hindu counterparts' too.[27] Ambedkar observed that casteism was more rampant among the Christians in south India than in the north and that the Catholics were more casteist than the Protestants. Like Gandhi, Ambedkar too believed that embracing Christianity did not bring about any improvement in the social status of the Dalits and did not free them from the scourge of untouchability.[28] But while Gandhi, due to this and some other reasons, was strongly opposed to the conversion of Dalits, Ambedkar wasn't. He only wanted the missionaries to correct their mistakes and he regretted, as has been mentioned earlier, that the missionaries did not pay adequate attention to the Dalits.

THE ALOOF DALIT CHRISTIAN

Ambedkar was disappointed to find that the Dalits who had converted to Christianity lacked Dalit consciousness and kept away from political and social movements and gatherings of the other Dalits aimed at liberating them from untouchability and other social evils.[29] Ambedkar blamed the basic character of Christianity for this attitude. The missionaries wanted their religion to be basically spiritual. The missionaries did not allow the converted Dalits to feel angry or resentful about their pitiable social status. They held the Dalits' sins and not the social system responsible for their situation. On this point, there was no distinction between Hinduism and Christianity as far as the Dalits were concerned. While the former blamed the sins committed by them in their earlier births for their fate, the latter declared that it was the outcome of the sins of their ancestors.[30] Ambedkar saw that even after becoming Christians; the Dalits could not free themselves from the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Though the Christians were the most educated and awakened community, they still had the tendency of discriminating

against Dalits. Ambedkar believed that this was because of the lack of interaction between the educated and the uneducated Christians. While the educated Christians were converts from the savarna castes, most of the uneducated Christians were Dalits. Thus, there was a class difference between the savarna and the Dalits among the Christians too.

While Ambedkar believed that the lack of community consciousness among Indian Christians was due to the caste system, he also noted that they lacked the capacity and the will to join political struggles. That was because the Indian Christians of that era were living under the patronage of the foreign missionaries and the British Government. While Ambedkar never questioned the patriotism of the Christians as Gandhi did, he found that they were cut off from the mainstream public life due to their obsequiousness.[31] Gandhi was opposed to the conversion of Dalits to Christianity as he believed that it would promote anationalism. He saw that the Indian Christians felt ashamed about being Indians and were not comfortable with the families they were born into. They had divorced themselves from the mother tongues and hated their ancestral religion and dresses.[32]

At the end, we should not forget that despite being a modernist and moralist, Ambedkar was never under the illusion that modern education and religious morality would end untouchability.[33] Ambedkar was too intelligent not to realize the limitations of the wisdom born of education. He took with a pinch of salt this claim of the intellectuals that once everyone became educated, untouchability would automatically vanish. He used to ask how many educated Brahmins had stopped believing in or practising untouchability. He knew only too well that the wisdom one acquired through education stood no chance against vested interests, and that untouchability was in the interest of the Brahmin. Similarly, Ambedkar could have called upon the believers in religious morality to realize that practising untouchability was morally untenable, but he believed

that the force of religious morality would remain confined to within the four walls of one's own community. Since the savarnas did not consider Untouchables part of their community, Dalits could harbour no hopes from Hindu religious morality.

Ambedkar thus held no bias against any religion, including Hinduism. He had irreconcilable differences with Gandhi on the issue of conversions. He saw the emancipation of Dalits in walking out of Hinduism. But he wanted that the Dalits to retain their independent identity. Therefore he wanted the Dalits to embrace a religion that accepted them as humans and didn't make them a pawn of its own politics. Ambedkar's finally concluded that Buddhism was the only religion that fit the bill on both these counts. Still, he made many necessary changes to Buddhism in keeping with the expectations and the needs of Dalits.

The differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar over the issue of conversions and related questions can show us the right path amid the din of the state-sponsored Ghar Wapsi campaign.

References:

1. Bhagwandas, *Ambedkar Dharmantaran Ke Path Par* (Ambedkar on the Road to Conversion), Ed Devendra Swaroop, *Manthan,* Issue 1, Volume 5, p 60.
2. *Ambedkar, Speeches and Writings*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979, Volume 1, p 80.
3. *Young India*, 24 November 1927.
4. Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste'*, Speeches and Writings*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979 Volume 2, p 66.
5. Bhagwandas, *Ambedkar Dharmantaran Ke Path Par*, Ed Devendra Swaroop, *Manthan*, Issue 1, year 5, p 68.
6. *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay* (The Complete Works of Ambedkar), Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi, volume 10, p 260.
7. ibid, p 337.
8. ibid, p 338.

9. ibid, p 343.
10. Quoted in Prof K.S. Vasvani, 'Gandhiji Aur Dharmantaran Ki Samasya' (Gandhiji and the Problem of Conversion), Devendra Swaroop Ed, *Manthan,* Issue 1, Year 5, p 86.
11. *Harijan*; 1926, p 140-141
12. ibid, p 392.
13. ibid, p 392.
14. Quoted in Prof K.S. Vasvani, 'Gandhiji Aur Dharmantaran Ki Samasya', Devendra Swaroop Ed, *Manthan,* Issue 1, Year 5, p 76.
15. *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi, volume 10, p 336.
16. ibid, p 390.
17. ibid, p 350.
18. *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi, volume 10, p 351.
19. 'Christian Mishanon Ke Sath Gandhiji Ka Samvad' (Gandhiji's Dialogue with Christian Missions), Quoted in Prof K.S. Vasvani; 'Gandhiji Aur Dharmantaran Ki Samasya'; Devendra Swaroop Ed, *Manthan,* Issue 1, Year 5, p 100.
20. *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi; volume 10, p 356-357.
21. ibid, p 359.
22. 'Christian Mishanon Ke Sath Gandhiji Ka Samvad', Quoted in Prof K.S. Vasvani, 'Gandhiji Aur Dharmantaran Ki Samasya'; Devendra Swaroop Ed, *Manthan,* Issue 1, Year 5, p 192.
23. *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi; volume 10, p 335.
24. In his book *Pakistan Athva Bharat Ka Vibhajan* (Pakistan or the Partition of India), Ambedkar has given a detailed historical account of the invasions of India and forced conversions by Muslim assailants and has argued that the myth of Hindu-Muslim unity in the past will not be able to stand the heat of solid historical facts. For detailed description, see Chapter 4 of the book titled Ekta Ka Vightan, *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi; volume 15.

25. *Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi; volume 10, p 376-377.
26. In this context, Ambedkar has quoted a memorandum submitted by the Dalit Christians to the Simon Commission. In South India, Dalits Christians were deprecatingly addressed as pancham or periya. See *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi; volume 10, p 397-397.
27. *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi, volume 10, p 396.
28. *Harijan,* 25, quoted in Prof K.S. Vasvani, 'Gandhiji Aur Dharmantaran Ki Samasya', Devendra Swaroop Ed, *Manthan,* Issue 1, Year 5, p 86.
29. *Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi, volume 10, p 416-417.
30. ibid, p 418.
31. ibid*,* p 421.
32. *Young India*, 20, quoted in Prof K.S. Vasvani, 'Gandhiji Aur Dharmantaran Ki Samasya*'*, Devendra Swaroop Ed, *Manthan,* Issue 1, Year 5, p 96.
33. 'Asprashyon Ko Chetavani' (A Warning to the Untouchables), *Dr. Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay*, Dr. Ambedkar Prathishthan, New Delhi, volume 10.

(This article is translated from Hindi by Amrish Herdenia).

Section 3:

Different Aspects of Ambedkar

Ambedkar: The Unsentimental Historian

Anirudh Deshpande

There is nothing that I have urged in support of my thesis which I have asked my readers to accept on trust. I have at least shown that there exists a preponderance of probability in favor of what I have asserted. *It would be nothing but pedantry to say that a preponderance of probability is not a sufficient basis for a valid decision* … I am not so vain as to claim any finality for my thesis … my critics [should] consider whether this thesis is not a workable and therefore, for the time being, a valid hypothesis *if the test of a valid hypothesis is that it should fit in with all surrounding facts, explain them and give them a meaning which in its absence they do not appear to have*. I do not want anything more from my critics than a fair and unbiased appraisal. [Emphasis Added]

- B. R. Ambedkar, Preface to *The Untouchables*, 1948

This article is a commentary on Ambedkar's historical method from the perspective of a professional historian educated, trained and employed in India. It presumes that the establishment of Indian historians has not, so far, acknowledged his historical approach to politics as a legacy of his prodigious intellect. I don't remember my respected *Marxist* professors referring to him *as a historian* during my student days at the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU – the premier establishment for historical research in India – in the 1980s. Nor do I remember his name being taken alongside Jawaharlal Nehru's as a historian of India either in college or in any Indian university. Even in the Department of History, Delhi University, where I have taught history to post-graduate and research students since 2009, Ambedkar is usually not recognized as a historian

despite the deep historicity of his overall work on the Indian caste system.

This state of affairs has come to pass because of the following causes. First, questions of caste and untouchability, in general, have not been accorded the importance they deserve in Indian historiography despite the rise of the Subaltern Studies in the 1980s and 1990s. Generally, in Indian social sciences, sociologists or anthropologists deal with matters of caste. Two, most Indian history departments teach historical methodology in a Eurocentric context. The "models" of history writing included in their methodology and theory curriculum are usually Western: Whig, Utilitarian, Marxist, Prussian, Annales, Structuralist, Post-Structuralist, Postmodern, etc. This in itself is not unproductive but leaves little scope to teach historical methods arising from modern Indian thinkers like Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar. For instance, whenever Indian history departments raise the importance of hermeneutics they may refer to R.G. Collingwood or William Dilthey or Martin Heidegger but never a tradition of modern hermeneutics going back to at least Jotiba Phule in the 19th century.

This article seeks a redress of this imbalance by drawing attention to the immense hermeneutic potential of Ambedkar's writings on caste and other political and economic matters. It proceeds on the assumption that in engaging with the theory and structure of caste and the problem of untouchability in India, Ambedkar had pioneered a constructive method of deconstruction long before the relativism and subjectivism of postmodernism and deconstruction developed by anti-Marxist philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida confounded the practice of history writing post 1945. By the 1980s, an influential section of Indian social scientists, including historians, were affected by the linguistic, cultural and feminist turns. In such conditions, the question of seriously taking Ambedkar as a historian did not arise. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s he was not paid enough attention because

nationalists and Marxists held sway over Indian historiography. To the nationalist the Nation, and to the Marxists Class remained central; both tended to underestimate the role of caste in Indian history and the specific problems of the *Antyaja Jatis*.

NATIONALIST AND MARXIST HISTORY OVERLOOK CASTE

To understand Ambedkar as a historian, a visit to the intellectual climate of late colonial India is necessary. This period of Indian history was dominated by the rise of nationalisms that either militated against colonialism or each other. Since these ideologies were socially aggregative in character and objective, they usually undermined the divisiveness and oppression caused in Indian society by caste. The writing of history followed this political trend. Further, it was unusual for Indian historians to debate questions of historical methods in the 1940s; the official archive and colonial historical methods reigned supreme over their imagination and the difference between the Imperialist and Nationalist historians was one of objectives and not methods. Most Indian historians were content with the canons of historiography taught to them by their British professors who, in turn, were mostly Whig in orientation. The Indian nationalist historians of all hues wrote history with the help of these canons, which had influenced their minds to favour Western historiography. Perhaps, some exceptions to this rule were the Marxists, like D. D. Kosambi, who applied Marxism and field work to the study of Indian history in the first few decades of the 20th century. Notwithstanding the remarkable advance in historical insights achieved by the Indian Marxists, much of their work concentrated on the *working class as a class* to the detriment of caste-based studies.

Indian historiography in the 1940s rarely dealt with the questions of caste, tribe and gender, which were generally left to the sociologists many of whom were interested in divesting these topics

of politics altogether. The model of *Sanskritization* emanated from Indian sociology and underestimated the contradictory nature of caste relations in the Indian everyday life. B. R. Ambedkar's innovative views on the conception of, and writing, history appear nothing less than astonishing in this context. At a time when the "salt and pepper" professional Indian historians like Sir Jadunath Sarkar rarely ventured beyond the narratives of historical individuals and events in their writings, Ambedkar reflected on those aspects of historiography that exercise our minds today. He conceived history as a synthesis of art, science and storytelling underscored by the historian's fertile and creative imagination as early as 1948 when history departments in the Indian universities rarely taught historiography as a subject unto itself; history innocently existed in the official archive for them to be discovered and narrated as professionally as possible. In this context, his suggestion that the historian must be self-conscious in the task of raising scientific consciousness among his readers rings true for all time. The fact that only by a conscious critical engagement with the historian's sources, which in Ambedkar's case comprised the texts produced by Brahmans and Buddhists in Ancient India, could social history as a subject be conceived, underlines his entire corpus of writing. Since the historian always makes an argument his view of the sources can never be informed by simple positivism, which drives history towards individuals and events to the detriment of the interpretative contexts within which they are always located.

A TUG OF WAR FOR AMBEDKAR

Dr B. R. Ambedkar's legacy thrives in an intriguing intellectual and political milieu. His differences with the Congress, on questions of caste and the Congress leaders' attitudes towards the Dalits, and other matters like the Hindu Code Bill, have not deterred the Congress leaders from manufacturing and appropriating a false image of him. Since its rout in the 2014 General Elections the Congress is hard pressed to regain its image as India's premier

centrist-liberal party. Therefore, it is desperate to claim Ambedkar primarily as a constitutional expert. It is true that Ambedkar collaborated with Nehru in laying down the foundations of post-colonial India but this collaboration between two modernists should not make us gloss over the fundamental differences between Ambedkar's politics and the Gandhian morality that guided the Congress at least till 1947. On the other hand, the *Hindutva* forces that rule India today are trying to appropriate Ambedkar to their cause. In 1997, right-wing journalist Arun Shourie had called Ambedkar a pro-British false god unworthy of worship. Now that position is passé. These days, the BJP-RSS wants to convert the millions of Dalit and Shudra followers of Babasaheb to its mission of creating a Hindu Rashtra. At the same time, the Indian state and the educational institutions, under Hindutva influence, continue the policy of persecuting and ostracizing Dalit students and activists. The newfound BJP's love for Ambedkar demonstrates nothing but the politics of symbolism best summarized in the Hindi adage '*Muhmein Ram, bagalmeinchuri*'. The Hindutva ideologues know that India cannot be turned into a Hindu Rashtra by only alienating and demonizing the Muslims. The BJP's 2015 defeat in Bihar, preceded as it was by the tactless pronouncements of the arrogant RSS chief on reservations, forced it to reconsider its hostility to Ambedkar. However, the impressive electoral success of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh in 2017 and the appointment of a "Yogi" as the state's chief minister has infused more energy in the anti-Dalit Hindutva forces in the state. Despite these developments, the symbolic RSS appropriation of Ambedkar proceeds in line with the objectives of the Hindu Rashtra. However, these selective misleading appropriations of Ambedkar do not square with his critical reading of Indian history; Babasaheb nether squares with the RSS nor the Congress.

These attempted appropriations of Ambedkar necessitate periodic visits to his multifarious and prodigious intellect. So far he

has been examined and accepted as an expert on the Indian caste system, the politics of constitutionalism and an organic intellectual of the Indian untouchable and lower castes. There is no doubt that these are germane aspects of his overall thought but I would argue that the sum total of his razor sharp intellect exceeds these achievements and rises to a level of philosophical reasoning rarely achieved by learned Indians in colonial and even post-colonial India. His belief in the universal *Enlightenment* values made him a modernist and a lifelong adversary of *Sanatan* Hinduism – there was no room for a flirtation with romanticism, superstition or mysticism in his historical vision. He was of the belief that God did not create society and its various grotesque features like caste and untouchability. His critical understanding of Indian history also negated the sentimentality that Gandhi demonstrated for the Hindu *Varnashramdharma* and the idyllic pre-modern village – clearly a myth suited to Savarna hegemony and the notion of *Ramrajya*. All this makes the appropriation of Ambedkar by the Congress from a liberal-Hindu viewpoint impossible; Ambedkar viewed Indian society and the Indian village from the viewpoint of the oppressed castes. Unlike Gandhi and other Congress leaders, he did not favour caste reconciliation but desired the complete abolition of caste. Gandhi, for instance, favoured a reform of the caste system but not its abolition. In contrast, Ambedkar's objective was the abolition of the caste system. Gandhi was a reformer from above, Ambedkar a revolutionary from below. The historical explanation of India offered by both men differed in accordance with their political objectives.

This brief intervention in the omnipresent vexed dialogue which post-colonial Indian modernity has with Ambedkar asserts that his profound engagement with the universal and scientific values of the Enlightenment, with a mix of dialectics, logic and reason at their centre, made him an "anti-myth" historian par excellence much before history moved in the direction of becoming a critical

discipline in select Indian universities post 1947[1]. His writings as a historian and essayist, pace Voltaire, Goethe and Gorky, who influenced his thinking, are too critical of the Hindu religion and therefore cannot be appropriated by the descendants of those who he criticized with an academic rigour rare in his day. In his hands the craft of history assumed a unique ambition; the destruction of an unjust order based on caste distinctions. Since his politics were a product of his unsentimental vision of Indian history and *vice versa,* his historical views and method need a reappraisal in the context of a cow-worshipping, caste valorizing and anti-Dalit Vedic *paligenetic nationalism* which governs popular historical imagination in the times of globalization[2]. The *Annihilation of Caste* and several of his rigorously argued essays places him in the rich tradition of counter-culture omnipresent, but under-taught, in India.

STARTING WITH CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL QUESTIONS

A full examination of Ambedkar's writings, spread over thousands of pages, from the viewpoint of discovering him as a historian is beyond the scope of this article. Though such an enterprise might prove fruitful in future, at hand I have one text, *The Untouchables*, the preface of which comprises a succinct comment on the historical method that Ambedkar followed as he set out to deconstruct the scriptural shibboleths of caste and thereby the basis of Hinduism[3].

The essays in *The Untouchables* and the method of history outlined in its preface demonstrate at least three crucial attributes of Ambedkar's historical thought. One, and here we are reminded of the idea of history visualized by R. G. Collingwood, Babasaheb's historical inquiries began with contemporary political questions directly related to power. This political approach to history places him in the category of scholars like Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci and Paul Thompson, for whom the study of history, ie the

examination of causes, consequences and discourse, was related to the exercise of power and its legitimization by the ruling classes. The tension and resolution of social contradiction is central to this historical approach. The primary political questions, and the dominant view of a subject pertinent to them, exercised Ambedkar's intellect and he embarked on a vigorous mental journey to answer them.

Two, and in this respect Ambedkar's method came close to his contemporary, and the founder of the Annales School, Marc Bloch, was his pursuit of a regressive method of historical analysis. His historiography was interdisciplinary. Its objective was to prove or disprove generalizations regarding the present and possible future of Indian society. His salutary research aim was to show how the present was produced by the past – there is no room for studying the past for its own sake or entertainment in his historiography. The mythology of the nation or community is absent from his work. His view of Indian society was structural and caste appears in it as a *longue duree* factor (long term historical phenomena).[4] Caste is both the base and superstructure of Indian society; both relations of production and power are mediated through it. His essays confirm his deep understanding of the interaction of the past and the present – the hallmark of a good historian forever alert to the politics of his age.

Three, his essays convey his fertile historical imagination and superb command over language – qualities essential to the practice of any meaningful social science. Here, it should be remembered that while majoring in Economics at Columbia he had read history and sociology as ancillary subjects. This inter-disciplinary training enriched his approach to the problems of inequality in Indian society throughout his career. His insightful essays prove that he applied a lawyer's skill of cross-examination to the sources of history and tradition to arrive at conclusions with which it is difficult to disagree. Some of these conclusions *may* appear dated or overstated

today but that in no way diminishes the *hermeneutic* method he used to arrive at them.

Since Ambedkar's becoming a historian of Indian society was intimately connected with his negation of caste and thereby the Hindu religion, he began the preface by coming to the point straightaway by raising the political question which inspired his historical research. The preface shows that what Marx is to Capitalism, Ambedkar is to Hinduism; to the former, the relations of production produced by capitalism comprised the core of any meaningful analysis of capitalism and to the latter caste were at the heart of the relations of power that sustained Sanatan Hinduism. According to the preface, the "Hindu Civilization" is "a diabolical contrivance to suppress and enslave humanity. Its proper name would be Infamy."

Furthermore, the Hindus, throughout history, had neither searched for nor *rationally* investigated the origin of their own civilization, ie the *varna-jati* system. Hence the first question: Why did the Hindu not scientifically investigate his so-called civilization? Because the Hindu did not consider the existence of the caste system and untouchability a "matter of apology or shame". He felt "no responsibility either to atone for it or to enquire into its origin and growth". Reminiscent of what Alberuni wrote of the Hindus in his *India*, he explains that "every Hindu is taught to believe that his civilization is not only the most ancient but that it is also in many respects altogether unique. No Hindu ever feels tired of repeating these claims … The inculcation of these false beliefs in the sanity, superiority and sanctity of Hindu Civilization is due entirely to the *peculiar social psychology* of Hindu scholars." [emphasis added]. This social psychology was a product of the long-term pedagogical hegemony that the Brahmans in India have wielded since time immemorial. This hegemony had given them a scriptural and ritual authority in Indian society and the British rule, among other things, reinforced this scriptural-ritual authority.

‘LEARNED MEN, NOT INTELLECTUALS’

The Brahmans were learned men no doubt, but not intellectuals in the true sense of the term. To understand the unenlightened approach of these learned men to their own historical condition, Ambedkar delved into comparative history and the history of ideas. “Today”, he mentioned in 1948, “all scholarship is confined to the Brahmins. But unfortunately no Brahmin scholar has so far come forward to play the part of a Voltaire who had the intellectual honesty to rise against the doctrines of the Catholic Church in which he was brought up; nor is one likely to appear on the scene in future. It is a grave reflection on the scholarship of the Brahmins that they should not have produced a Voltaire.” For an intellectual to arise and gain respect in society certain necessary and sufficient historical conditions must prevail; these conditions were absent from Indian history. Critical introspection of the self happens in peculiar historical circumstances and the Brahmins, by virtue of their addiction to their traditional learning, had proved themselves incapable of such an effort. Therefore, the Brahmin scholar was “only a learned man” and “not an intellectual”, though he claimed to be a social reformer in colonial conditions; on closer inspection this claim appeared false.

Having written this, Ambedkar drew upon European history and the Enlightenment to dilate on the meaning of the word intellectual: “There is a world of difference between one who is learned and one who is an intellectual. The former is class-conscious and is alive to the interests of his class. The latter is an emancipated being who is free to act without being swayed by class considerations. It is because the Brahmins have been only learned men that they have not produced a Voltaire.” The ability of an individual to grasp objective reality with the help of critical thought was central to this Enlightenment-informed approach to society and history. The difference between subject and object was central to the philosophy

of Ambedkar; he did not oppose caste just because he was a Mahar but because he was genuinely enlightened.

According to Ambedkar, the only way to disprove the unreasonable assertions of the Brahmins and the so-called scholars aligned with them was to raise questions and answer them by developing a "new way of looking at old things". Admittedly, his own answers to the questions raised by untouchability in India were a "result" of the "historical research" he conducted. Further, he consciously followed the ideal of objective history writing laid down by the German statesman-historian-philosopher-poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe with whose maxims and reflections he was familiar. According to Goethe's prescription, the historian's duty is to "separate the true from the false, the certain from the uncertain, and the doubtful from that which cannot be accepted".

IMAGINATION AND INTUITION

Ambedkar took seriously Goethe's comparison of a historian with a juror: "Every investigator must before all things look upon himself as one who is summoned to serve on a jury. He has only to consider how far the statement of the case is complete and clearly set forth by the evidence. Then he draws his conclusion and gives his vote, whether it be that his opinion coincides with that of the foreman or not." Goethe inspired but did not constrain Ambedkar. The latter was alert to the possibility of missing links arising in the study of the past events. What should the historian do in cases where "relevant and necessary facts" and "direct evidence of connected relations between important events" are not available to him? Should he stop working "until the link is discovered?" Ambedkar's answer to this question is a valid negation of academic pedantism:

I believe that in such cases it is permissible for him to use his imagination and intuition to bridge the gaps left in the chain of facts by links not yet discovered and to propound a working hypothesis

suggesting how facts which cannot be connected by known facts might have been interconnected.

The point, according to Ambedkar, was not to quibble over the distinction between direct and inferential evidence to examine whether a thesis violated "the canons of historical research" but to avoid a "thesis based on pure conjecture". Thus the difference between creative imagination and fantasy was maintained in his historical method. The crucial difference between *pure conjecture* and a *possible thesis* led him to a deconstruction of the sources to "divine what the texts conceal" and the "task of gathering survivals of the past, placing them together and *making them tell the story of their birth*". This work of the historian, in Ambedkar's words, is:

> analogous to that of the archaeologist who constructs a city from broken stones or of the palaeontologist who conceives an extinct animal from scattered bones and teeth or of a painter who reads the line of the horizon and the smallest vestiges on the slopes of the hill to make up a scene. In this sense the book is a work of art even more than history… It cannot but be that imagination and hypothesis should play a large part in such a work. But that in itself cannot be a ground for the condemnation of the thesis. For without trained imagination no scientific inquiry can be fruitful and hypothesis is the very soul of science.

In conclusion, it can be said that the revolutionary philosophy of Ambedkar was predicated upon a patient, laborious and critical reading of the primary sources he selected to fashion a rational argument debunking the caste system in general and untouchability in particular. His articles prove that deconstructing the discourse of the ruling classes/castes is the primary objective of the historian. By claiming no "finality" for his thesis and underlining the difference between pure conjecture and theoretical possibilities in a system of historical analysis, Ambedkar pioneered an *open-ended* approach to social history at a time when most Indian historians rarely ventured

beyond the ideology of nationalism and the battlefields of the past. Ambedkar's historical method remains resilient and alluring in our times because his reflections highlighted the important political difference between imagination *and* fantasy, conjecture *and* possibility and a credible story *and* academic pedantry in the formulation of his historical submissions. As a modernist, he desired rational knowledge and a new egalitarian society, and not another myth, to replace the sophistry of the establishment. Hence, the task of deconstructing the ideology of Indian society did not begin and end with deconstruction in his thought. Reading a text critically was a means to a political end for Ambedkar and not an end in itself as it has become in much of anti-Marxist theory since 1945; deconstructing the ideological representation of history was crucial to his mission of reconstructing a new progressive society. The question of power remained important to him, and, like Lenin and other revolutionary intellectuals, he did not evince a cynical view of power that became the hallmark of the postmodern approach after 1945. He urged his followers to read, criticize what they read and evolve a new way of life based on a rational critique of the past. He worked in an age when the professional historians of India wore the Prussian straightjacket of Leopold von Ranke with aplomb and the method of positivism reigned supreme over their narrow, pretentiously apolitical minds. To accept and validate history as a credible artistic and scientific story told by the imaginative historian on the basis of a critical reading of contemporary and historical sources in 1948 was to anticipate many future and exciting developments in historiography. It is a pity that Ambedkar has been, perhaps unwittingly or conveniently, reduced to a "Dalit" intellectual-philosopher in the Indian schools and universities. Indeed, this *anti-myth* Indian pioneer of *revolutionary deconstruction* should have been taken seriously by this country's fraternity of historian's decades ago. That would have given history writing a different purpose in a country obsessed with national and regional identities and the projection of these on the past.

References:

1. Dorothy M. Fugeira's characterization of Phule and Ambedkar in *Aryans, Jews Brahmins: Theorizing Authority Through Myths of Identity*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2015.

2. The word *paligenetic* means the discovery of an ancient mythical romanticized nation in the hoary past. In some senses all nationalisms are *paligenetic* but Fascist and Nazi nations, following Roger Griffin's submissions on the subject, more so.

3. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, Siddharth Books, Delhi, 2008 [First Published 1948].

4. The concept of *longue duree* was pioneered by the French Annales historians. It refers to the long-term influences on human history like geography but some scholars include culture in this definition. According to the French historian Fernand Braudel, geography, demography and economy comprised the *longue duree* but scholars also insist that *mentality*, ie cultural attitudes which would include caste in India, is also a long-term phenomenon which changes imperceptibly.

Ambedkar: An Educationist of the Marginalized

Meenakshi Meena

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's writings played an important role in turning him into an international figure. For the Dalit community, Dr. Ambedkar was a hero towering over all others and a social activist, but for the world at large, Ambedkar was an alert and alive thinker. His credentials as a thinker were established through his articles, books and magazines, and also the newspapers that he published. Among his own books were *The Problem of Rupee*, *Provincial Finance in British India*, *Annihilation of Caste* and *Who were the Shudras?* The Education Department of the Government of Maharashtra has published a compilation of his writings and speeches in 21 volumes.

Some of his books have been translated into and published in Hindi. They include *Achoot Kaun Aur Kaise*; *Shudron Kee Khoj*; *Buddh Ya Karl Marx*; *Dharmantarana Kyon*; *Hindu Nari Ka Utthan Aur Patan*; *Hindu Dharma Ki Riddle*; *Ranade, Gandhi Aur Jinnah*; *Buddh Aur Unka Dhamma*; *Jatibhed Ka Uchhed*; *East India Company Ka Prashashan Aur Vitt;* and *Pracheen Bharatiya Vanijya*.

Ambedkar's writings on education include his deposition before the Indian Statutory Commission in the Bombay Presidency on "State of Education of the Dalits". His deposition forms part of the compilation *Dr. Ambedkar: Sampoorna Vangmay* (Volume 4). In addition, his article titled "Subsidy for Education" has been included in *Dr. Ambedkar: Sampoorna Vangmay* (Volume 3); this is based on his speech to the Bombay Legislative Council, delivered on 12

March 1927, in which he pleads for increased subsidy from the Government on education and also underlines the need for inexpensive education for the deprived sections. In *Dr. Ambedkar: Sampoorna Vangmay* (Volume 19), among other concerns of the SCs, their concerns on education is also listed. They are divided into two parts – under 'lack of assistance for higher education' and 'lack of facilities for technical training'.

STRUGGLE FOR DALITS' EDUCATION

Whenever we talk of freedom, we forget about the freedom of Dalits. Shortly, we are going to celebrate the anniversary of our freedom from the British. This is the perfect time for talking about the freedom of Dalits. The Dalits were victims of double slavery – and it was Ambedkar who freed them from it. Shaken to the core by Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience Movement, the British Government convened a Round Table Conference in London on 12 November 1930. A young barrister attending the conference startled everyone by refusing to acknowledge Gandhiji as the leader of all Indians. His name was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He said that most of the Congress leaders believed in caste-based discrimination and they would not allow the Dalits any say in constitutional processes. That was why, he added, there was a need for separate electorates where the candidates and the electors both would only be Dalits.

On 6 August 1932, British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald announced the Communal Award, under which the Dalits were recognized as distinct from the Hindus and a provision was made for a separate electorate for them. At the time, Gandhiji was incarcerated in the Poona jail. He saw this announcement as a conspiracy to alienate Dalits from the Hindus. On 20 September 1932, Gandhiji began a fast-unto-death in protest against the Communal Award, sending the nation into a tizzy. Dr. Ambedkar was urged to save the life of Gandhiji. Bowing to the pressure mounted on him from all sides, Ambedkar agreed for a compromise

but on the condition that the Dalits are provided reservations at all levels. Gandhiji agreed, and he broke his fast on 26 September.

In the second half of the 19th century, social reformers had launched an acerbic attack on brahmanical rituals through their books. Jyotirao Phule's *Gulamgiri* was one of them. In the South, Periyar and Narayan Guru sounded the bugle against the Varna system. A few decades later, Ambedkar was given the responsibility of drafting the Constitution of the newly independent India in due recognition of his merit and scholarship. He became the country's first law minister. Since then, Ambedkar's thoughts have grown in relevance with each passing year.

Even before Independence, he was recognized as a jurist of rare intellect. He raised some pertinent questions about education in Indian society while speaking in the Bombay Legislative Council on 12 March 1927. He was deeply concerned that India was lagging behind in education.

Referring to a report of the Government of India, which said that if the progress of education went on at the rate at which it is going on then, it would take 40 years for boys and 300 years for girls of school-going age to be brought under education, Dr. Ambedkar said, "We have in this presidency two departments, which if I may say so, are working at cross purposes. We have the Department of Education, the purpose of which is to moralise and socialise the people. We have, on the other hand, the Department of Excise which is working, if I may say so, in the reverse direction. Sir, I think that it is not asking too much if I plead that we should at least spend on education the same amount that we take from the people in the form of excise revenue. The amount of expenditure that we incur per individual in this presidency on education is only 14 annas, but the amount of money that we recover in the form of excise revenue is Rs 2.17 [35 annas]. I think it is only fair that our educational expenditure should be so adjusted that we should spend on the

education of the people as much as we take from them in the form of excise."[1] Today, when, besides students, other pro-change sections are also taking to the streets demanding more budgetary allocation for education, Ambedkar's thoughts can show us the right direction.

Raising another issue in the same debate, Dr. Ambedkar said, "At present, the amount of money which we are spending on primary education is to a large extent really wasted. The object of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school does leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life. But if we take the statistics, we find that out of every hundred children that enter a primary school only eighteen reach the fourth standard; the rest of them, that is to say, 82 out of every 100, relapse into the state of illiteracy." [2]

We have yet to overcome the problem of school dropouts. Dr. Ambedkar had grasped this problem long ago. He realized that only sending a child to school was not enough. It is also important to keep them in school till they have attained primary education. Only planting a sapling is not enough. It is also necessary to tend it with water and fertilizers; otherwise it will die sooner or later. That is why, Ambedkar said, "I therefore request the honourable education minister to spend more money on primary education, if for nothing else, at least for the purpose of seeing that what he spends bears some fruit ultimately."

Dr. Ambedkar also dwelt on the commercialization of education. He said, "Going over the figures which give us information as to the manner by which we finance education in this presidency I find that out of the total expenditure, which we incur on arts colleges, something like 36 per cent is financed from fees; out of the expenditure that we incur on high schools, something like 31 per cent. is financed from fees; out of the expenditure that we incur on middle schools, something like 26 per cent is derived from fees.

Now, Sir, I submit that this is commercialization of education. Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone."[3] As Dr. Ambedkar had deep concern for the lower sections of society, he added, "We are arriving at a stage when the lower orders of society are just getting into the high schools, middle schools and colleges, and the policy of this department therefore ought to be to make higher education as cheap to the lower classes as it can possibly be made."

He cites another important issue: "The census report of this presidency has, for the purpose of comparing the advancement of the different communities in the matter of education, divided the total population into four different classes. The first class is called "advanced Hindus", the second class is called "intermediate Hindus" and it includes those people, who, for political purposes, have now been designated as non-Brahmins, i.e., Marathas and allied castes. There is a third class called the backward classes which includes the depressed classes, Hill Tribes and the Criminal Tribes. Then, we have the fourth class which covers the Mahomedans. Bearing these divisions in mind, one sees a great disparity in the comparative advancement of these different communities in the matter of education."[4] The disparities informing Indian society were the main cause for concern for Dr. Ambedkar. He said, "This country is composed of different communities. All these communities are unequal in their status and progress … Economically speaking or socially speaking, backward classes are handicapped in a manner in which no other community is handicapped. I, therefore, think that the principle of favoured treatment must be adopted in their case. As I have shown, their position is worse than that of the Mahomedans and my only pleading is that if the most favoured treatment is to be given to those who deserve it and need it most, then the backward classes deserve more attention of Government than do the Mahomedans."[5]

To sum up, Dr. Ambedkar's views on education were in consonance with India's geographical, social and economic situation and reflected scientific reasoning.

'EDUCATE, UNITE, STRUGGLE'

Dr. Ambedkar's views on education have yet to be studied deeply – this despite the fact that he had been working in the field of education since he founded the Hitkarini Sabha in 1924. Ensuring that more and more of the backward classes got an education was among the priorities of the Sabha and with that purpose, it established a number of colleges, hostels, libraries and reading centres. At the initiative of the students and under the guidance of the Sabha, a monthly titled *Saraswati Belas* was launched. The Sabha established hostels in Sholapur and Belgaun in 1935 and a free reading centre, a hockey club and two hostels in Bombay. In 1928, Dr Ambedkar constituted the Depressed Classes Educational Society. In 1945, he founded the Lok Shaikshik Samaj for to ensure that the backward classes got higher education. This organization started a number of colleges and middle schools. It also extended financial assistance to hostels. In brief, the Lok Shaikshik Samaj played an important role in making higher education accessible to the Dalits.

Dr. Ambedkar's writings pertained not only to economics, the law, the Constitution and political science, but also to sociology, philosophy, religion, anthropology, etc. He also had an abiding interest in education. It was not limited to theorizing. He took pains to give a practical shape to his views.

Ambedkar believed that education was the most important means of raising the people's standard of living. His slogan was "Educate, unite, struggle". However, his views on education were eclipsed by his seminal work for Dalit emancipation.

"Educate" is the first word of his famous slogan. The reason is education's undeniable role in the building of human character and consciousness. Only an educated person can understand his class interests and bring about class unity. Education propels a person on the path of struggle. Dr. Ambedkar said, "Education is what makes a person fearless, teaches him the lesson of unity, makes him aware of his rights and inspires him to struggle for his rights." He believed that education is a movement. If it does not fulfil its objectives, it is useless. Dr. Ambedkar unambiguously stated that an education that does not make a person capable, that does not teach him equality and morality, is not true education. True education cradles humanity, generates sources of livelihood, imparts wisdom and imbues us with egalitarianism. True education makes society alive.

OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION

Ambedkar's social-philosophical views rested on the bedrock of egalitarianism. Human dignity and self-respect were central to his social philosophy. He wanted to use education to establish justice, equality, fraternity, freedom and fearlessness in society. He wanted to replace the birth-based society with a value-based one. It goes without saying that these moral values can be promoted only through education.

Ambedkar was deeply influenced by Buddhist philosophy and he advocated development of morality in all people. He said only such objectives of education are meaningful that aid in making humans happy and prosperous and helping society progress. He was also in favour of making education relevant to employment. Education can help make society stable. Good behaviour and good conduct arise from logical reasoning and that can be acquired only through education, experience and dialogue. Ambedkar's objectives of education were the same as his social, economic and political objectives. He was a strong proponent of logical and scientific education.

ON CURRICULA

Dr. Ambekar has had a practical approach regarding curricula. He believed that utility should be the basis for deciding curricula. But he was not in favour of inflexible curricula. He said, “Nothing is immortal. Nothing is binding for an indefinite period of time, everything needs to be tested and examined, nothing is final, everything is bound by the cause-effect relationship, nothing is everlasting; everything is changeable. Things are happening continuously.”

The Bombay University Reforms Committee had sent a questionnaire to Dr. Ambedkar to seek his opinion on various issues. Among the questions were:

- Are you generally satisfied with the subject and curricula at present prescribed for the various University examinations? If not, can you indicate the changes you desire?

- Are you in favour of establishing (a) an absolute or (b) a greater differentiation of the pass and honours courses? How would such differentiation affect the colleges and students?

- Would you approve of an absolute exclusion of science from the arts courses? Do you approve of the present dissociation of literature and arts from the study of science?

- Do you consider the existing courses for the graduate and postgraduate degrees provide a sufficient variety of options and satisfactory combinations and correlations of courses of study?

In answer to these questions, Dr. Ambedkar wrote: “I should leave these questions to the newly constituted faculties. My opinion is that the curricula, even of the honours course, provide a poor fare to the students.”

It is clear that Dr. Ambedkar was not in favour of an external agency imposing curricula on an educational institution. He believed that the teachers concerned should design it themselves. He believed in democratic curricula, which should be put together by teachers concerned, in keeping with the demands of the subject and the students. He was in favour of curricula that would help students get employment and would make them capable. Dr. Ambedkar emphasized on complete and compulsory education. For him, technical education was a priority, as were scholarships for the weaker sections and higher education in general.

Ambedkar took a pragmatic view of things. He considered education as a means for self-expression, for building self-esteem and character, for determining proper conduct and for learning through experience. He believed that the students should try to understand and unravel earthly and transcendental mysteries. He advocated instructing children in different regional languages. Despite having respect for all languages, he felt the need for a common language that would become the means of communication between people of different parts of the country and thus promote unity and integrity. He was for scientific methods of teaching, especially vis-à-vis higher education. He said that real education should not awe us; it should appeal to our logic and reason. He believed that religious instruction had no place in curricula. He was for using a worldly yardstick to assess the value of education. He stood for a uniform education for all classes and that was why he advocated scientific and progressive curricula, based on the principles of social democracy.

THE IDEAL TEACHER

In Dr. Ambedkar's scheme of things, the teacher had a big role to play in the process of learning and imbibing. He himself was deeply influenced by his teachers; in fact, he had added the surname "Ambedkar" of one of his teachers to his name. That teacher,

incidentally, was a Brahmin. This shows the great respect Ambedkar had for his teachers. He was not against the Brahmins as a caste. He was against brahmanical ideology. Talking about the ideal teacher, Ambedkar said, “He must not only be well-read but also a good orator and an experienced person.” In Dr. Ambedkar’s view, “It is not necessary that we should agree with the conclusions of our teacher, and the teacher who recognizes this fact is the true teacher. The teacher’s job is to understand the mental abilities of the students and to develop them. He should guide his students. A good teacher is the friend, philosopher and guide of his students.” According to Ambedkar, a teacher should be knowledgeable about the reality of society so that they can interperse their teaching with anecdotes and make it relevant to the real world. Such a teacher deserves the respect of his students.

TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Dr. Ambedkar favoured the use of scientific teaching methodologies starting with primary education. Good health is key, he said, and the emphasis should be on hygiene and physical education. As for the children of the deprived classes, he said, “The first daily lesson in a school for these children should be a bath followed by changing into clean clothes; and the second should be a meal of clean, wholesome food; those who do this should be encouraged so that others learn from them.” He also emphasized on inculcating the right values and the right habits in the children from the beginning.

According to him, “Good manners, for instance, are the result of continual and rigid self-control, and of consideration for the comfort and convenience of others; children learn manners chiefly by imitation from well-bred parents and teachers and, secondarily, by suitable precept and reproof. If, at the school, they are to be made to associate with children not thus trained, they will quickly fall into the ways which they see around them. For, until good habits are

rendered fixed by long practice, it is far easier to be slipshod than accurate, to be careless than careful. Gentle speech, well-modulated voice, pleasant ways, these are the valuable results of long culture."

Dr. Ambedkar was not a professional educationist and he has not made any theoretical analysis of teaching methodologies. But despite that, he has put forward excellent ideas on education. He was convinced that there shouldn't be much difference between the teaching methodologies for graduate and postgraduate classes. He believed that teaching shouldn't be separated from research. He advocated autonomy of Universities in admissions, teaching, examinations and appointments.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION

For Dr. Ambedkar, the lack of education among women was the biggest problem facing Indian society. He held Brahmanism responsible for the pitiable state of women in India. He believed that Brahmanism and masculism were inextricably linked. "There is no social evil and no social wrong to which the Brahmin has not given his support. Man's inhumanity to man, such as the feeling of caste, untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability is a religion to him. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that only the wrongs of man are a religion to him. The Brahmin has given his support to some of the worst wrongs that women have suffered from in any part of the world. In India widows were burnt alive as satis and the Brahmin gave his fullest support to the practice. Widows were not allowed to remarry. The Brahmins upheld the doctrine. Girls were required to be married before 8 and the husbands were permitted to claim the right to consummate the marriage at any time thereafter."

It is believed that women enjoyed many rights in the Vedic age, but that their position deteriorated afterwards. Dr Ambedkar showed that the *Manusmriti* had accorded women a status even lower than that of servants. They were deprived of education and the right to

own property was snatched away from them. He insisted that women be treated with dignity and given adequate opportunities for growth.

He drafted the Hindi Marriage Act, which didn't permit men to have more than one wife. It also gave women succession rights and the right to hold property, which had been denied to them by the *Manusmriti*. Ambedkar's Constitution gave women equal status in the eyes of the law. He bitterly criticized all such traditions and norms which militated against equality of women. He favoured economic independence of women. Madanmohan Malaviya and Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee had opposed the Hindu Marriage Bill. But despite that it was passed. Its passage marked a milestone in the history of women's struggle in the 20th century. Articles 14, 15(3), 16(1) and 16(2) of the Constitution have provisions to ensure that women are not discriminated against. Ambedkar's views on women's education and development of their personalities were no less radical than those of the feminist movements under way today. He was in favour of compulsory education for women, but only up to the matriculation level, after which, he suggested that they acquire home-management skills. He was not in favour of uniform education for men and women. He felt that both have different roles in society, hence their education should also be different.

However, as the chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution, he made ample provisions for development of women and their economic self-dependence. These provisions enabled women claim a status equal to that of men in independent India.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Most of the educationists have not clarified their views on religious education for the fear of offending the religious feelings of the masses. They fear the opprobrium it would earn them. But Dr. Ambedkar was not a timid man. He took a clear-cut stand on the issue. He had already emerged as the most controversial Hindu of

his time. He had to face brickbats all his life but that did not affect him a bit. He kept on calling a spade, a spade. He said, "My social philosophy is a mission. I have to work for religious conversions." Dr. Ambedkar had no faith in God. He wanted to reorganize Indian society, not on the basis of religion but on the basis of liberty, equality and fraternity. He never refrained from borrowing good things from different religions but he was inclined to Buddhism. He admitted that his philosophy was rooted in the teachings of Buddha. Liberty and equality were the cornerstones of his philosophy but he also knew that unlimited freedom destroys equality, and perfect equality undermines freedom. Law could protect freedom and equality to an extent, but he believed it was fraternity that was the real protector of freedom and equality. For him, there was nothing better than religion to teach fraternity and the inclusion of the value of fraternity in education was imperative.

TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR DALITS

"They [Scheduled Castes] have not progressed in science and engineering education," Ambedkar said. "Education in arts and law cannot be of much value for the scheduled castes. They will benefit more by advanced education in science and technology."[6]

At the time, technology and technical education were not as advanced in India as they are now, but specialized educational institutions in these fields had been set up. If Ambedkar emphasized engineering and science education for the Dalits, there was a reason for it – and that was the employability of students who had studied engineering and science. That is true even today. In India, even now, students who have studied science and technology stand a better chance of securing employment than those who have been trained in humanities. He urged the Government of India to take steps to ensure that Dalit students are admitted to the Indian School of Mines after he discovered that not even one of the 97 students in the school was a Dalit.[7]

Technical education, being very costly, was out of the reach of the Dalits. According to Ambedkar, "The Government of India can do a lot for improving the future of the Dalits. The SC boys can be kept as apprentices in such industrial units [such as the Government printing press or railway workshops] which are under the control of the Government of India or are run by it, where there is a possibility of giving technical education."

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DALIT STUDENTS

Dr. Ambedkar demanded scholarships for Dalit students. Then, scholarships were being given only to students of religious minorities. He said, "Without Government aid, the Scheduled Castes will never be able to gain access to advanced education in science and technology and it will only be just and proper that the Government of India comes forward to extend help to them in this regard."[8] He proposed that: "1.Such Scheduled-Caste students who take admissions in science and technology courses in universities or in other scientific and technical training institutions should be given scholarships worth Rs. 2 lakh per year. 2. Rs. 1 lakh as grant-in-aid should be provided to SC students for studying science and technology in Universities in England, Europe, America and the Dominion."[9]

Dr. Ambedkar also showed to the Government the way this could be done. He proposed that instead of grants, scholarships should be given in the form of loans.

RESERVATIONS FOR DALIT STUDENTS

Reservations proved to be the most successful instrument for ensuring the representation of Dalits in institutions of higher learning. Ambedkar proposed "reservation of some seats for such boys of Scheduled Castes who have attained the minimum standard of education for seeking admission."[10] He proposed setting aside of 10 per cent of the seats for such students. His objective was clear –

to give representation to Dalit students. He also wanted similar participation of the Dalits in statutory bodies. He raised the issue of representation of SCs in the Central Education Advisory Board.

ASSESSING DR AMBEDKAR'S THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION

Dr. Ambedkar's ideas were challenged by Gandhi ji. Or, we could say that Dr. Ambedkar challenged the ideas of Gandhi. In the course of this debate, both refined and improved on their ideas. As Ambedkar had little interaction with other educationists, we only have Gandhi to compare him with.

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar were not only individuals; they were schools of thought, they were institutions. Since none of them believed in treading a beaten track, they triggered controversies when they were alive and continue to do so when they are long dead and gone. Their goals were almost the same, but their ways of getting there were entirely different. What is painful and unfortunate is that the followers of both have confined themselves to impermeable fortresses, leaving no scope for dialogue. Ambedkarites firmly believed that Gandhi was anti-Dalit and Gandhians are equally sure that Ambedkar was a traitor. How can we expect Gandhians to study Ambedkar when they are not ready to read even Gandhi? The Ambedkarites are no different. The fallout of this has been that the values and struggles of Ambedkar and Gandhi have been overlooked.

For the Congress and Gandhi, "emancipation of the Untouchables" was an internal problem of the Hindus while for Ambedkar; it was the most important issue. Like in the case of the zamindari system, Gandhi sought solution to the problem of untouchability in a change of heart. He was for eradicating untouchability while keeping the Varna system intact. Ambedkar held that Varna and caste were at the root of untouchability and wanted to annihilate both. Gandhi was driven by a feeling of

“mercy” and “sympathy” for Dalits, while Ambedkar wanted their rights to be restored.

Their differences were never as stark as just before the Poona Pact was signed. Gandhi’s fast had created a big dilemma for Ambedkar. On the one hand was the struggle for the rights of the Dalits and on the other hand was Gandhi’s life. Ultimately, a compromise was worked out.

Gandhi and Ambedkar had different views on almost everything under the sun. That was true about their views on education too. Gandhi was dead opposed to the British education system and proposed his own “Buniyadi Shiksha”. Gandhiji wanted to bring about spiritual growth of students so that they could lead a life of truth and non-violence. His educational philosophy was idealistic. In contrast, Ambedkar wanted his education to reach the weakest of the weak and wanted to build a system based on liberty, equality and fraternity. His concept of Dhamma, based on the philosophy of Buddhism, stressed moral development. He was not against British education but wanted to give it a humanistic face. He was in favour of an educational system that would produce men of reason and logic; that would help build a society based on logic and reason. He wanted education to not only make a person egalitarian but to liberate his mind and make him capable of objective, logical and critical analysis. He believed that a common education system was essential for building a democratic and socialist state. He said that the curricula should be modern, based on scientific reasoning and should cover the modern means of production. He favoured nationalization of all means of production. He said that the students should be introduced to the means of production and a socialist way of life.

If one compared the thoughts of Gandhiji and Ambedkar, one would realize that despite some commonalities, the gulf between them was too wide to be bridged. Gandhiji was a respecter of

traditions; Ambedkar was opposed to almost all traditions. Both had concern for the poor but Ambedkar was more concerned with the right to equality of the weak and fought for it all his life. Gandhiji held no grudge against the elite of society; Ambedkar was against the elite and considered them a threat to humanity. Gandhiji was more concerned about the country as a whole while Ambedkar was focused on the backward classes. Gandhiji wanted the spinning wheel to reach every village and all rural residents to get a basic education. Ambedkar was concerned about those sections that had been deprived of education for centuries. He wanted that the Government provided free and compulsory primary education to all. Gandhi favoured vocational education from the primary level; Ambedkar believed that literacy should be the prime objective of primary education. Ambedkar also laid stress on cleanliness, physical education and cultural development. He believed that primary education should inculcate such cultural and civilizational values in children that would help them become part of a civilized society.

Gandhiji did not give much thought to higher education but Ambedkar talked about it in detail – so much so that he even proposed the administrative structure of an ideal university. His views on higher education are valid and relevant even today. Gandhi advocated religious education, but Ambedkar was least interested in it. The basic difference between their thoughts was that one (Gandhi) was religious while the other was secular. One was a protagonist of a life close to nature, the other for modernity. Character building was the objective of one while the other focused on building a man of reason and logic. Both, though, were for teaching in regional and local languages.

Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts are not only relevant for the Dalit community but for the entire Indian society. Today, we talk of enhancing the budgetary allocation and expenditure on education. But what we envisage is a maximum two per cent of the total

budget. Ambedkar had raised this demand long ago. While we have implemented Right to Education for the primary classes, no one is concerned about what a student will do after acquiring primary education.

If we have to pick one person from the Indian history who paved the way for education and employment for the Dalits, who made them aware of their rights, who freed them from the exploitation by other classes, who showed to the world that they were second to none in intelligence and capabilities – then there can't be anyone other than Dr. Ambedkar. He did not expound on education like Mahatma Gandhi or Dayananda Saraswati or Vivekananda but whenever an opportunity came his way, he did express his views on education explicity. He wrote:

"If the Government is sincere about promoting education among the Depressed Classes, there are certain measures which it must adopt:

1. Unless the Compulsory Primary Education Act is abolished and the transfer of primary education to the school boards is stopped, the education of the Depressed Classes will receive a great setback.
2. Unless primary education is made mandatory and the admission to primary schools is strictly enforced, conditions essential for the educational progress of the backward classes won't be created.
3. Unless the recommendations made by the Hunter Commission regarding the education of the Mohamedans are applied to the Depressed Classes, their educational progress will not be realized.
4. Unless entry in the public service is secured for the Depressed Classes, there will be no inducement for them to get an education."[11]

He made such provisions in the Indian Constitution which would help the Dalits and the deprived get education and employment. Some instances are:

Article 15(A): Making special provisions for any community or SC/STs who are educationally backward

Article 17: Abolition of untouchability and equal status to all persons.

Article 29: About admission of weaker sections in Government educational institutions.

Article 30: About minority educational institutions.

Article 30(ii): About monetary aid to educational institutions.

Article 39: That the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means to livelihood.

The Poona Pact between Ambedkar and Gandhi paved the way for reservations for Dalits. It was reservations that brought about a basic transformation in their educational levels and standard of living. If, today, Dalits have a presence in different walks of life, it is primarily due to reservations. Ambedkar was always concerned about the education and employment of Dalits. His ideas continue to be relevant for the Dalit community even today.

References:

1. *Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay* vol 3, p 55-56
2. Ibid vol 3, p 56
3. Ibid vol 3, p 56-57
4. Ibid vol 3, p 57
5. Ibid vol 3, p 59
6. Ibid vol 19, p 2
7. School of Mines is a Dhanbad-based centre of higher learning in mining, engineering and geology under the Government of India.

8. *Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Sampoorna Vangmay* vol 19, p 24
9. Ibid vol 19, p 24
10. Ibid vol 19, p 25
11. Ibid, vol 4, p 146

(This article is translated from Hindi by Amrish Herdenia)

Ambedkar: A Jurist with No Equals

Sumit

Dr. Ambedkar had a mastery over many disciplines and the law was one of them. Ambedkar would spend hours and days poring over the laws and Constitutions of different countries of the world. From his student days, he had great interest in developing an understanding of the ancient and the modern laws of India and the world. With time, he became an expert on different aspects of law and forged ahead of his contemporary jurists.

AMBEDKAR AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

By the beginning of the 19th century, the law had started emerging as a profession in many countries of the world. The contours for teaching and learning law were being drawn so that specialists in the law could be produced. New laws, rules, and norms were coming into force. The countries which had thrown away the yoke of imperialism had started writing their own Constitutions. In India, studying and practising law came to be associated with prestige and influence towards the end of the 19th century. Indians, especially those from well-off, upper-caste families, began studying law. Initially, students of law had no option but to pursue their studies in foreign lands, for there were few if any, institutions teaching law in the country. By the 20th century, the law had become a very prestigious profession in India and a degree in law became the dream of students. In India, almost all the leaders at the forefront of the freedom movement were trained in law. They included Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Vallabh Bhai Patel, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Dr.

Rajendra Prasad and of course, Bhimrao Ambedkar. They gave independent India a strong foundation. Ambedkar did not directly participate in the freedom struggle because other national leaders cold-shouldered him for the stand he took on social, economic and political issues. All his life, Ambedkar continued to be a bitter critic of both the British imperialists and the Indian national leaders. He was outspoken on issues, including those affecting the Untouchables (Dalits), Backwards, women, and laborers. He turned them into national issues and suggested launching movements to highlight them. But other national leaders were averse to the idea. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ambedkar was the most brilliant jurist among all of them.

STUDY OF LAW

In October 1916, he was admitted to Gray's Inn for Law. His quest for knowledge led to him poring over books from 8am to 5pm in different libraries of London. He was so single-minded in his pursuit of knowledge that he often skipped his meals. His thirst for knowledge wasn't quenched till his last breath. His life was characterized by rigorous scholarship, intense self-respect, great dreams, lofty ideals, incessant hard work, broadmindedness, and a spotless personality. He wanted to obtain another degree in Economics. But his study grant was for only three years. At his request, it was extended by a year. But his request for a further extension of two years was turned down and he was forced to return to India. But Ambedkar had obtained permission from the universities and institutions concerned to renew his studies within a period of four years. Shahu Maharaj offered to sponsor him.

On 30 September 1920, Ambedkar was back in London to continue his studies at Gray's Inn. He spent a lot of time among the books and documents in the University General Library, Goldsmith Library of Economics, British Museum and India Office Library. He never allowed theatres and restaurants to distract him. Karl Marx,

Lenin, Giuseppe Mazzini and Savarkar had also studied in the British Museum Library. On 28 June 1922, Ambedkar became a Bar-at-Law. What is noteworthy is that with his two doctorate degrees (PhD and DSc) in economics and Bar-at-Law, Ambedkar had the highest qualification among the Indians and Asians of his times. There was no one in the Indian sub-continent who could match his academic accomplishments. After completing his education, Ambedkar immersed himself in reflecting on the socio-economic problems of the world. There is no doubt that his life as a student was full of struggles. Gail Omvedt has described his scholarship as "Promethean" (rebelliously creative and innovative).

AMBEDKAR AS A JUSTICE-LOVING LAWYER

After Ambedkar's return from London in 1923, he had to fend for his family, which included his wife, his children, his sister-in-law, and nephew. He wanted to practice law but for that, he needed to be registered with the Bombay High Court. He did not have the money to pay the registration fee. His friend Naval Bhatena came to his rescue and gave him the requisite Rs. 500. In 1923, he was admitted to the Bombay Bar Council and began his practice. He pleaded in the Bombay High Court as well as in the district courts of Thane, Nagpur, and Aurangabad. But soon, the economist Ambedkar overwhelmed the lawyer Ambedkar. He wanted to do social work but had no time to spare. In order to pursue his career as a lawyer, he had turned down the offer of Rs. 2500-a-month job in the British Government. He had also refused to join the Kolhapur State Services. Ambedkar wanted to have an office but again he lacked finances. With the help of his friends, he rented a small room at the Social Service League, Poyabaodi, in Bombay, and later moved to the first floor of Damodar Hall, Parel. A portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte hung from his office wall.

Now, he had an office but he was not getting cases due to the jaundiced attitude of the Hindus towards him. Some of his friends

tried to help him but it was months before he got his first case and that too of a Mahar. Lokmanya Tilak's nephew also helped him. But the greater faith of the litigants in British lawyers and non-cooperation from high caste Hindus came in the way of Ambedkar. Despite all these odds, he was determined to achieve success in the profession. "I will become a judge of the High Court", he would say. He had a penchant for buying books and that made his wife Ramabai's task of running the household more difficult. But slowly, things began looking up once his office and his library had been set up and with the support of his friends and Mahars. Due to his poverty and "low-caste" status, he had to face many bitter experiences. For the likes of Nehru, it was easy to give up practicing law to participate in the national movement, for they had the backing of their prosperous families. But for a poor and 'low-caste' person like Ambedkar, it was not easy to do so, for he had to run his family too. He had to keep working.

In 1926, Ambedkar got two important briefs. One was about Dinkarao Jawalkar's book *Deshanche Dushman* (Enemies of the Country) and the other about Philip Sprat's book *India and China*. Lokmanya Tilak, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar and their supporters had been spreading disinformation about Jyotirao Govindrao Phule. Jawalkar, in his book, described Brahmanvadis like Tilak and Chiplunkar as "enemies of the country" and declared that Gandhi was a much better alternative to them. Jawalkar had written his book to answer Phule's critics. A case was filed against Jawalkar. Despite there being no direct evidence of Phule having embraced Christianity, the judge ruled in favour of Tilak and co. Ambedkar argued that the judge who had given the judgment was prejudiced in believing that Phule was a Christian. In October 1926, Ambedkar won the "enemies of the country" case, which was perceived as a battle between the brahmanical and the non-brahmanical forces. This victory augmented Ambedkar's stature. Tilak's son Shridharpant Tilak became his follower and friend. Tilak was pro-

Brahmin but Shridharpant was the president of a branch of Samaj Samta Sangh founded by Ambedkar and, unlike his father, was opposed to untouchability and the chaturvarna system. Hounded by his relatives and brahmanical elements, he ultimately committed suicide. Ambedkar said that Tilak's son and not Tilak was the "real Lokmanya". Ambedkar also won Philip Spratt's case. Spratt was a British communist who was sent to India to spread communism here.

In 1933, Ambedkar pleaded another historic case, which had international implications. He pleaded the case of Raghunath Dhondo Karve, son of Dhondo Keshav Karve and the editor of *Region* magazine. Karve, through his magazine *Samajswasthya,* spread awareness on sex-related issues. He was charged with spreading vulgarity. Ignoring the stiff resistance of reactionaries, Ambedkar pleaded in defense of Karve. He argued that "vulgarity is not in the content but in the expression". What is vulgar and what is not does not depend on its meaning but in the way something is said or written. He marshaled extensive arguments about the meaning of vulgarity but lost the case. But his arguments showed that he was willing to study in depth and understand any issue at hand. Ambedkar was an independent thinker and a supporter of progressive ideas. He defended communist writer Spratt; he rose to the defense of Jawalkar, who had lost to the brahmanical forces; and ignoring the aggressive posturing of the conservatives, he took up the case of Karve and defended his right to spread awareness on sex-related issues. It shows that he was justice-loving, had a deep understanding of the law and was devoted to his profession.

A large number of people used to gather to see Ambedkar appear in court. His career as a lawyer was historic and inspiring. He was very generous and liberal with his clients. Hindus, Christians, Muslims, people of all castes and classes, workers, factory laborers, and small shopkeepers approached him for litigation. Even prostitutes wanted him to plead their case. He had a formidable

knowledge of the law and was capable of presenting lucid and convincing arguments. His office had copies of the crucial judgments of all the high courts in the country.

Initially, Justice John Newmont, a judge of the Bombay High Court, was hostile to Ambedkar but gradually, as Ambedkar acquired the reputation of a good lawyer, Newmont became his admirer, especially because of the way Ambedkar argued criminal appellate cases. On occasions, he invited Ambedkar for tea. Attorney-at-Law N.H. Pandiya and B.G. Kher, who were the editors of *Bombay Law Journal*, invited Ambedkar to become a member of the editorial board of the magazine. In 1927-28, he was a special invitee of the advisory and editorial committee of *Bombay Law Journal*. In October 1928, he quit the committee as he increasingly occupied himself with the task of transforming society.

By the 20th century, secular laws had started taking the place of Smriti laws. Ambedkar's laws replaced *Manusmriti*'s laws. On 25 September 1927, when Ambedkar joined his Hindu and Dalit supporters to publicly burn *Manusmriti,* he posed the biggest cultural challenge to the antiquated laws. This historic burning of the symbol of Brahmanism, casteism and cultural slavery brought Ambedkar on par with Gandhi. Although he wanted to lead the life of a professor and a scholar, circumstances sucked him into politics.

RENOWNED PROFESSOR OF LAW

Ambedkar could not earn enough as a lawyer, so he started looking for a teaching job. From June 1925 to 1929, he taught commercial law at Batliboi Accountancy Institute as a part-time lecturer. Starting in June 1928, he taught in Government Law College, Bombay, for about a year. He also earned some extra income by evaluating the answer sheets of Bombay University examinations. Nationalist sentiment was at its zenith in the 1920s and he became a victim to it. He presented a memorandum before the Simon Commission as the representative of Dalits when the

national leaders were boycotting the commission. As a result, nationalist students began boycotting his classes. His supporters, however, declared that the memorandum was the “Manifesto of the Human Rights of Dalits”.

In 1933, Ambedkar was appointed a “scholar” in the Department of Law and Humanities of the Bombay University. In June 1934, he returned to the Government Law College as a part-time lecturer. He wrote brief comments on the British Constitution as part of preparing his lectures. Newmont was very impressed with his work as a lawyer in criminal appeals and wanted to appoint him principal of the college. He was appointed to the post on 2 June 1935. He taught jurisprudence there. Newmont was very happy with the appointment. At the time, this post was considered a stepping stone to judgeship of the High Court. One of the quips that went around then was that if Ambedkar continued teaching in the college, the walls of the college, unable to hold the intensity of his thoughts would collapse. Acharya Ishwardutt Medharithi described him as a “fearless leader of the youth”.

Ambedkar presented a plan to the Bombay Government for improving the academic standard of the college. He wrote an article titled “Thoughts on improving law education in Bombay State”. The article elaborated on various aspects of law education, including curricula, subjects, and the age at which students should begin studying the law, and on how to polish the linguistic skills and logical reasoning of the students. He believed that law should not be taught only at undergraduate and postgraduate levels but it should be introduced to the student after he passes the tenth grade examinations. He said that if that was done, students would be able to make up their mind about the profession after clearing their matriculation examinations and start specializing in the subject of their choice. He also suggested that law curricula should also include sociology, psychology, logic, and public speaking, command of language and felicity of expression. His article titled

"Dr. Ambedkar's analysis of decisions of Privy Council in the period 1829-31" dwelt on ways to develop an understanding of the law. He emphasized the interdependence of various disciplines. The January 1936 issue of the magazine of the college praised Dr. Ambedkar's deep understanding of law. "Dr. Ambedkar is a well-known scholar who has studied economics with great diligence. He is famous as an authority on Constitutionalism in India and elsewhere."

In May 1938, he resigned as principal of the Law College. The monthly bulletin of the college said, "The students had great regard for Dr. Ambedkar's knowledge and his skills as a teacher. His lectures were the thoughtful gist of his wisdom. His thoughts on jurisprudence were always revolutionary." Was this praise only a formality or did he really deserve it? His radicalism came through in his writings and speeches. For example, he wrote in *Annihilation of Caste*: "The idea of law is associated with the idea of change, and when people come to know that what is called Religion is really Law … they will be ready for a change, for people know and accept that law can be changed … Hindus must … recognize that there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing sanatan."

A JURIST WITH NO EQUALS

Ambedkar was not only a professor of law and jurisprudence and an accomplished lawyer but he had a vast legislative experience as well. He was a member of the Bombay Legislative Council from 1927 to 1939 and the Labour Member of Viceroy's Executive Council from 1942 to 1946. As the Labour Member he worked for the welfare of the workers. But even earlier, he had fought against exploitation of the workers by capitalists and the Government. He analyzed caste by keeping caste at its centre. He agreed that a division of labour was essential for the functioning of any civilized society but argued that a birth-based division of labour was unnatural. He said that the caste system limited a person's capability

and skills. In Ambedkar's words, "Caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers."

Whenever he got an opportunity, he went about doing the groundwork for laws meant for protecting the rights of labourers. In 1934, he founded the Bombay Kamgaar Sangh and in 1936 he became the president of Nagar Palika Shramik Sangh. His first political outfit was called Independent Labour Party. In 1937, he presented bills in the Legislative Council for the abolition of Khoti, Mahar Vatan and Halai systems, which were meant to perpetuate feudal, casteist and religious exploitation, and campaigned against them. He joined hands with communists and others to oppose the Industrial Disputes Act of 1938, which sought to limit the right of the workers to strike, and achieved historic success. As the Labour Member, he was in charge of labour, irrigation, power, social work and mines. He had the working hours of the industrial labourers reduced from 14 to 8. He also introduced the provision for paid leave and had employment exchanges established for skilled and semi-skilled labourers. He played a key role in getting bills on Employees State Insurance, review of the parameters for fixing wages of labourers, labour welfare fund, minimum wages, maternity leave for women and many other welfare measures passed and also had them implemented. He did not do all this for any political gain and there was no difference between what he practised and what he preached. Besides promulgation of labour laws and policymaking, he played a key role in the formulation of water and energy policies and in economic planning. All this made him the "creator of modern, scientific India" (see *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Sampoorna Vangmay*, Volume 18).

He was appointed the first law minister of independent India by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. As the law minister, he had laws passed to grant rights to the deprived sections, gave them equal status, strengthened their liberty and sought to end the notions of high and low. These laws were milestones in the history of India. On

29 August 1947, he was elected chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution. The Constituent Assembly had members from all classes and castes. The Shudras, the Untouchables and the women, who were considered unworthy of education, worked together along with the others to produce the best Constitution in the world. The Indian Constitution is the longest written Constitution in the world but it has enough flexibility to deal with the changing times. Ambedkar faced untouchability, humiliation and demeaning behaviour during his student days and later as a lawyer and as a professor. When he joined public life, he drew flak for criticizing Gandhi and for being a stooge of the British. But India chose this man who had burnt the *Manusmriti* – the symbol of the Varna system, caste system and social disharmony – to write its Constitution. Centuries ago, Manu had conspired to deprive the Untouchables, Shudras and women of education and other rights through his code of social conduct. But one of the Untouchables (who are now called Dalits, though untouchability continues to linger on in Indian society in many forms) became the creator of India's highest code of law. India emerged as an important democratic republic in the comity of nations. Even Ambedkar's ideological opponents could not help but praise his excellent and peerless work on the Constitution.

Some Hindu leaders compared Ambedkar with Manu and branded the Constitution as "Bhim Smriti" and "Mahar Law". They said Ambedkar was a "Modern Manu". But this comparison was entirely unwarranted. There were fundamental differences between Manu's laws and the Constitution that Ambedkar had drafted. Ambedkar had a very clear and cogent understanding of the nature of the law and of laws made for and by human beings. Manu had created a set of unequal social codes that were meant to protect the privileges of the Brahmins by granting them divine status. He had scripted a conspiracy. For Ambedkar, there was nothing divine about laws. They were entirely human creations. For Manu, as the

laws were divine, they were eternal, unchangeable and infallible. For Ambedkar, laws were meant to fulfil the needs of society and could be changed to keep pace with the times. Manu's laws were meant to serve the interests of the Brahmin and Kshatriya Varnas (classes), while Ambedkar's laws were for everyone – for Hindus, for Muslims, for Christians and Sikhs – and they did not brook any discrimination on grounds of birth, gender, race, religion, caste, creed, class or region. The world wholeheartedly praised the values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity embedded in the Indian Constitution. The Indian Constitution became the guiding light of other newer independent nations too. It became a symbol of humanism.

It was Ambedkar who laid the foundation of the laws giving equal status and rights to women. He had played a seminal role in freeing women from the shackles of patriarchy. A committee was set up under the chairmanship of Ambedkar on 9 April 1948 to study the Hindu Code Bill. The Hindu Code Bill was prepared by Benegal Narsing Rau. Ambedkar studied the earlier legislations regarding women's rights, besides Hindu scriptures, ancient texts, Smritis and other codes, and strengthened the provisions of the Bill. Ambedkar hoped to secure women's right to property, ban polygamy, allow divorce on grounds of domestic violence and infidelity, and provide for inter-caste marriages and adoption through the Bill. This epoch-making piece of legislation had to face stiff resistance from the conservative Hindus.

Initially, both Nehru and Ambedkar worked together to demolish the arguments of the conservatives but later Nehru backed out. Even women, who were living in slave-like conditions for centuries, began opposing the measures mentioned in the Bill. Faced with opposition from both inside and Parliament and Nehru's refusal to issue a whip to facilitate the passage of the Bill, Ambedkar declared that Nehru was unwilling to let the Bill pass, had divided it into many parts and had surrendered to the obscurantists. He then

resigned from his post. In his letter of resignation, Ambedkar also raised other issues like failure of the Government to set up the Backwards Classes Commission; him not being given the charge of the planning ministry; and the foreign policy of the Nehru Government. Ambedkar, who had written the world's best Constitution just a year earlier, was not even allowed to read his resignation letter in the Lok Sabha. He had to give copies of his letter to the members and journalists. He wrote in his resignation letter: "The Hindu Code was the greatest social reform measure ever undertaken by the legislature in this country. No law passed by the Indian Legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it in point of its significance. To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of Hindu Society untouched and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap."

A few years later, with Nehru's efforts, the bills that Ambedkar drafted for securing the interest of women were passed in bits and pieces. The Hindu Marriage Act was passed in May 1955, Hindu Succession Act in May 1956 and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act in December 1956. In 1961, the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed.

After Ambedkar's unexpected defeat in the 1951-52 elections, his influence on the political scene in India started waning. But his stature continued to rise in the international arena. Two more degrees were added to the long list of his academic accomplishments. On 5 June 1952, the Columbia University conferred on him an honorary doctorate in law. The citation for the degree, besides recounting his academic achievements, described Ambedkar as the maker of the Indian Constitution, a member of the Rajya Sabha, a former minister, a leading citizen of India, a great social reformer and a vigilant protector of human rights. Osmania University conferred on him an honorary doctorate in literature on

12 January 1953 for his achievements, leadership and his role in the making of the Indian Constitution.

Ambedkar continued with his mission of reminding the people of their duties and rights and making them aware of the law. On 22 December 1952, he inaugurated the Pune district law library and gave a lecture on "Essential conditions for successful democratic functioning" to the members of the Pune Bar Association. This speech was widely discussed and debated in newspapers and magazines for many days. In his speech, he said that for the success of a democratic setup, it was essential that there was no social inequality and were no oppressed classes; the majority community should not hold sway over the minorities and there should be a powerful opposition for pointing out the mistakes of the government; all should be equal in the eyes of the law and the administration; and Constitutional morality should be adhered to and the social morality inherent in democracy should be followed. He said that there should be public goodwill and even revolutionary changes should be possible without a bloodbath. Barring exceptions, no party's Government in India has tried to follow these tenets.

As a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly, as a Labour Member of Viceroy's council and as a Rajya Sabha member, Ambedkar always had the concerns of the last man in the last row of society uppermost in his mind. He was consistently thinking about ways and means of strengthening the nation, ensuring its progress and uniting it. For instance, during the debate on the Constitution of a separate Karnataka state in Bombay Legislative Council, he insisted that national interest should get precedence over all other interests. His speech contained a clear delineation of the path towards building a prosperous nation. He said: "Personally I say openly that I do not believe that there is any place in this country for any particular culture, whether it is Hindu culture, or a Muhammadan culture, or a Kanarese culture or a Gujarati culture. There are things we cannot deny, but they are not to be cultivated as

advantages, they are to be treated as disadvantages as something which divides our loyalty and takes away from us our common goal. That common goal is the building up of a feeling that we are all Indians. I do not like what some people say, that we are Indians first and Hindus afterwards or Muslims afterwards. I am not satisfied with that; I frankly say that I am not satisfied with that. I do not want that our loyalty as Indians should be in the slightest way affected by any competitive loyalty whether that loyalty arises out of our religion, out of our culture or out of our language. I want all people to be Indians first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians". (Bombay Legislature, 1938).

He wanted Indians to have a shared identity, rising above the divisions of religion, class, caste and high or low culture – "a feeling that we are all Indians". He was constantly on the lookout for ways to end inequality and usher in equality. He did not believe that the brahmanical Hindu religion – which was divided into castes and determined a person's destiny on the basis of their birth – was amenable to any major reform. That was why he wanted leave the Hindu fold and associate himself with an ideology/religion that was free from dogma, rituals and inertia, a religion that could make humans the best creation of nature, a religion that aided in the progress of men and nation, a religion that was based on the universal values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity and a religion that did not thrust laws and norms of behaviour on the people.

He led the biggest religious conversion (Dhamma Parivartan) in human history (Five lakh people embraced Buddhism on 14 October 1956, another five lakhs on Parinirvan and an estimated 16-17 lakhs subsequently). Before taking this momentous decision, he did an in depth study of all the religions of the world and was drawn towards Buddhism. But he did not accept Buddhism as it is. He was well aware of the rampant corruption in Buddhist sanghas and of the division of Buddhists into Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana, etc. At

the Dhamma Parivartan ceremony, Ambedkar took 22 oaths that he himself had written. These oaths were not shackles, they were not proscriptions. They were the way to salvation. They were about curiosity, progressiveness and emancipation. He called this way "Navayana", that is a new vehicle for living one's life. He envisaged a free-thinking individual who was free from all kinds of restrictions and bindings – a man who is not guided by blind faith or belief but who takes rational decisions on the basis of his own reasoning.

CONCLUSION

When Ambedkar was the principal of the law college, he used to say half in jest, "I will become a judge one day." Of course, he had both the opportunity and the capability to become a judge. But had he confined himself to the bench, he would not have been able to bring about the social, political and economic changes that he has now been credited with. He did not become a judge but he did establish a democratic system imbued with the values of justice and equality. He built a system in which any capable person could become a judge. It was because of his scholarship and abilities that he was chosen to head the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly. It was his juristic brilliance that made him the builder of the Constitution of India – one of the most diverse regions of the world. He accomplished the task entrusted to him with remarkable success and wrote a Constitution that freed the oppressed and suppressed, including Dalits, Tribals, Backwards, women, minorities and workers from their shackles. The laws formulated by him were not meant to limit but to remove all limitations and open the doors to true liberty and emancipation. For him, his identity as an Indian was supreme. He fought all his life for freeing men from the bondage of other men.

Dr. Ambedkar was exceptionally successful in carrying forward his transformational and emancipatory mission. He ensured that the antiquated and obscurantist laws of the land were abandoned.

Instead of them, he laid down objective laws aimed at national welfare and had them implemented. He could do this because of his deep judicial knowledge and understanding. Attempts were made to belittle his contribution and his rich legacy through appropriation, manipulation and wrong interpretation. There were attempts to constrict Ambedkar's humanistic, emancipatory and socialist democratic values based on the lofty ideal of equality. But we must recall the rich legacy of the knowledge and wisdom of Ambedkar – who was not an individual but an institution. Ambedkar had written extensively on economics, history, politics, sociology, education, religion, constitutional law and rights. His philosophy is not only relevant for India but also for the world.

Ambedkar's 'Untouchability' in Indian Anthropology

Abhijit Guha

Western sociologists and anthropologists have largely viewed India as a society characterized by caste in which social hierarchy was translated into a biological, and hence cultural, idiom. Louis Dumont (1911-1998), for example, in his famous book *Homo Hierachicus* (1966) championed this cultural notion of hierarchy to analyze caste system in structuralist terms. On the other hand, anti-Dumont interactionist scholars like Mckim Marriott gave more emphasis to the local and regional variations in the caste hierarchy and M.N. Srinivas propounded a theory of social mobility occurring within the caste system through a process that he termed "Sanskritization". The Marxist scholars viewed the caste system as a kind of class formation. But what was most interesting in these discourses is the absence of the contributions of one of the most original thinkers on the caste system in India, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), who was not only a scholar but also one of the greatest legislators and policymakers of independent India.

Ambedkar's views on caste were also overlooked in the anthropology and sociology curricula in Indian Universities. Ambedkar still does not figure in Indian Anthropology. The students of Anthropology, Sociology, History and Political Science in the Indian Universities have to know a lot about Louis Dumont, H.H. Risely, J.H. Hutton, L.S.S. O'Malley, G.S. Ghurye, D.D. Kosambi, Nirmal Kumar Bose, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, M.N. Srinivas, Surajit Sinha, André Béteille, Rajni Kothari, Mckim Marriott, Ronald Inden, Bernard Cohn, Nicholas Dirks and Romila Thapar but not about B.R. Ambedkar! Ambedkar was treated only as a leader of the

Dalits and one of the makers of the Constitution but social scientists working on India did not give him the status of a scholar in their elite discourses. None of the Indian or Western anthropologists or other social scientists valued B.R. Ambedkar's views on caste. Ambedkar remained an "Untouchable" in the Brahmanical and European scholarly discourses on caste in India.

As early as 1916, B.R. Ambedkar made a novel attempt to explain the caste system in India in a paper he read at an Anthropology seminar that Alexander Goldenweizer (1880-1940) organized in Columbia University. Ambedkar was then 25 years old and a doctoral student of Anthropology. His paper was titled "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development". It was an 18-page paper that contained a pure, detached academic study of the nature of the caste system in India. It had no allusions to personal experiences and was free of opinions. This was a piece of critical, lucidly argued scholarship on the then existing anthropological and sociological literature on caste. In the first part of the paper, Ambedkar dealt with the works of four famous scholars – Emile Senart (1847-1928), John Nesfield (1836-1919), S.V. Ketkar (1884-1937) and H.H. Risley (1851-1911) – and, without being biased, pointed out the shortcomings in their understanding of the essential feature of the caste system. However, even while criticizing these authorities on the subject, Ambedkar did not fail to observe the positive aspects of their contributions:

To review these definitions is of great importance for our purpose. It will be noticed that taken individually the definitions of three of the writers include too much or too little: none is complete or correct by itself and all have missed the central point in the mechanism of the Caste system. Their mistake lies in trying to define caste as an isolated unit by itself, and not as a group within, and with definite relations to, the system of caste as a whole. Yet collectively all of them are complementary to one another, each one

emphasizing what has been obscured in the other. [Ambedkar (1917): 1979:7].

Looking at not just caste but the caste system in which each *jati* is part of the whole was definitely a step forward in social and cultural anthropology. Ambedkar was not ready to accept the idea that the caste system was a "division of labour" that minimized competition among occupational groups. For him, caste system was a division of the labouring classes rather than a division of labour. He observed that marriage outside one's own immediate kin-group, or clan exogamy, was the fundamental and universal feature of human society and in India "tribal exogamy" survived through different stages of civilization, whereas in the modern world this was no longer the rule. He wrote:

With the growth of history, however, exogamy has lost its efficacy, and excepting the nearest blood-kins, there is usually no social bar restricting the field of marriage. But regarding the peoples of India the law of exogamy is a positive injunction even today. Indian society still savours of the clan system, even though there are no clans; and this can be easily seen from the law of matrimony which centres round the principle of exogamy, for it is not that Sapindas (blood-kins) cannot marry, but a marriage even between Sagotras (of the same class) is regarded as a sacrilege. [Ibid (1917): 1979:9].

This is the logical foundation based on which Ambedkar advanced his arguments to elucidate the caste system. He cogently argued that since in India exogamy was the rule and not the exception, endogamy must have been a foreign idea. But then how could caste system, for which endogamy was a prerequisite, come into being in India? The way Ambedkar explained this anomaly is the most interesting part of his original paper.

Nothing is therefore more important for you to remember than the fact that endogamy is foreign to the people of India. The various

Gotras of India are and have been exogamous: so are the other groups with totemic organization. It is no exaggeration to say that with the people of India exogamy is a creed and none dare infringe it, so much so that, in spite of the endogamy of the Castes within them, exogamy is strictly observed and that there are more rigorous penalties for violating exogamy than there are for violating endogamy. Consequently in the final analysis creation of Castes, so far as India is concerned, means the superposition of endogamy on exogamy. [Ibid (1917): 1979:9].

Ambedkar went on to explain how some of the social groups in ancient India that were classes turned into enclosed endogamous groups probably to hold on to the privileges which they accrued from the ancient class system. According to Ambedkar, since the Brahmins and the Kshtriyas were the most privileged classes it was these classes who began to enclose themselves to secure their privileges by becoming endogamous. Later other groups also emulated the higher classes and the system spread over the wider region. So, classes in India were the forerunner to castes, and castes according to Ambedkar were enclosed classes characterized by endogamy.

We shall be well advised to recall at the outset that the Hindu society, in common with other societies, was composed of classes and the earliest known are (1) the Brahmins or the priestly class; (2) the Kshatriya, or the military class; (3) the Vaishya, or the merchant class; and (4) the Shudra, or the artisan and menial class. Particular attention has to be paid to the fact that this was essentially a class system, in which individuals, when qualified, could change their class, and therefore classes did change their personnel. At some time in the history of the Hindus, the priestly class socially detached itself from the rest of the body of people and through a closed-door policy became a caste by itself. The other classes being subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation, some into large, others into very minute, groups … The question we have to

answer in this connection is: Why did these sub-divisions or classes, if you please, industrial, religious or otherwise, become self-enclosed or endogamous? My answer is because the Brahmins were so. Endogamy or the closed-door system was a fashion in the Hindu society, and as it had originated from the Brahmin caste it was whole-heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin sub-divisions or classes, who, in their turn, became endogamous castes. It is "the infection of imitation" that caught all these sub-divisions on their onward march of differentiation and has turned them into castes. (Ibid: 17-18).

Starting with the fundamental anthropological discovery of tribal clan exogamy Ambedkar was able to show how caste endogamy was superimposed on the former. Secondly, his exposition of caste as an extreme form of class system as early as 1917 was also exemplary. However, it found no mention in the works of the world-famous scholars on caste in India. Take for example, G. S. Ghurye. In his famous book *Caste and Class in India* (1957), Ghurye mentioned the name of Ambedkar only once, on page 226, and that too as "the leader of the Scheduled Caste" even though the author discussed at length the importance of endogamy in characterizing India's caste society. The same kind of omission of the anthropological contributions of B.R. Ambedkar could also be observed in the writings of Nirmal Kumar Bose.

Mother India and Ambedkar's India

Neha Singh

Written in the early 1870s in the form of a lyrical *vandana* or a hymn, *Vande Mataram* has been, one, acclaimed as a national song and, two, "…given rise to intense contestation on account of objections raised on the ground of its imagery and rhetoric and implicit idolatry."[1] Later, in 1881, incorporated in the book *Anandamath*, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's song depicted Mother India as a holy icon, as a "… a site for a nation and invested with the divine power".[2] Emphasizing the nation state as a mother goddess, Sumathi Ramaswamy quoted Tagore as saying "have I not told you that in you, I visualize the Shakti [the female principle] of our country?" By the time Rabindranath Tagore wrote these lines in 1915-1916, the practice of imagining India as a female entity – goddess, Bharat Mata, 'Mother India' – had become a habit among patriotic Indians.[3]

This deification of Mother India necessitates an understanding of the relationship between the women and the nation and how society treated them as a separate category that had to be dealt differently. Mother India riding a lion was supposed to resemble power and represent nationalism but in reality Indian women weren't even treated with dignity, let alone given rights on par with men. They had no voice of their own and were controlled by the patriarchal norms of society.

AMBEDKAR'S IDEA OF A NATION

Unlike his contemporaries, Ambedkar rejected the concept of Mother India. Rather, he coined the term "Bahishkrit Bharat" (Outcast India) to convey the reality of a fractured nation. India

comprised multiple identities and communities but they had to contend with the hegemony of brahmanical patriarchy. This brahmanical patriarchy not only influenced social and religious life but also the political arena. The likes of Tilak called for a united nation by raising slogans like "Bharat Mata ki Jai" and "Vande Mataram". These nationalists had no issues with Brahmanism and strongly resented any reforms for women by the imperial power. Tilak strongly opposed the Age of Consent Bill (which rose the age of consent for sexual intercourse for both married and unmarried girls from 10 to 12 years) under the pretext of protection of Indian culture. Thus, even within the political arena, the gendered hierarchy was well maintained. Any reform that benefited women was believed to be a direct attack on the rich culture of the Indian nation and hence met with wide opposition.

> The cultural and religious hegemony and the caste system were thus left intact, although with the advent of the British, Indian society was forced to accept the modern notions of a nation, citizenship and so on. According to Sir Herbert Hope Risley, "History affords no warrant for the belief that the enthusiasm of nationality can be kindled in sordid and denigrate surroundings. A society which accepts intellectual inanition and moral stagnation as the natural condition of its womankind cannot hope to develop the high qualities of courage, devotion and self-sacrifice which go to the making of nations."[4]

Encapsulating the whole discussion on the idea of nation Partha Chatterjee wrote that the "Nationalist discourse is historical in form but 'apologetic' in substance".[5] Thus, it is difficult for the nationalists to retain the autonomy of a nation.

While studying how the idea of a nation came to be, Ambedkar developed a theoretical framework of nationhood. He studied the role of women in Indian society and how their subjugation and exclusion led to the dangerous practices like endogamy, child

marriage, female infanticide and sati. These malaises had not only social but also political repercussions. Almost half of the citizens were kept out of the political arena.

"For woman was at once the seed bed of and the hot house for nationalism in a degree that man could never be," Ambedkar said. "The part played by woman in sustaining nationalism had not been sufficiently noticed."[6] For him, the idea of a nation was never only political but was also embedded in the social. He believed that, "without social union, political unity is difficult to be achieved. If achieved, it would be as precarious as a summer sapling, liable to be uprooted by the gust of a hostile world. With mere political unity, India may be a State. But to be a State is not to be a nation and a State, which is not a nation, has little prospect of survival in the struggle for existence. This is especially true when everywhere nationalism – the most dynamic force of modern times – is seeking to free itself by the destruction and disruption of all mixed States. The danger to a mixed and composite State lies therefore not so much in external aggression as in the internal resurgence of nationalities which are fragmented, entrapped, suppressed and held against their will." [7]

How were the women entrapped and suppressed? Ambedkar said, "From time immemorial, man as compared with woman has had the upper hand. He is a dominant figure in every group and of the two sexes has greater prestige. With this traditional superiority of man over woman, his wishes have always been consulted. Woman, on the other hand, has been an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions, religious, social or economic. But man as a maker of injunctions is most often above them all."[8] He believed that patriarchy in India started with the men controlling women in the family but worked in such a way as to perpetuate caste hierarchies; and the preservation of caste is the basis for the functioning of this patriarchy.[9] The social relation between caste and gender was based on the exercise of power through the use of force.

"This power could have many dimensions: it could be simple and direct in its assertions; it could be complex in not permitting the space for the raising of issues outside the parameters it creates."[10]

Gandhi, for example, involved women in various political and national movements like Satyagraha, Non-Cooperation and created a public space for them. He addressed more and more the plight of women in India, first, by questioning existing Hindu practices that limited the involvement of women in national awakening, like the purdah, and later by affirming and establishing the distinct role that women could play in the national movement. It was a slow process that built his ideas. He linked women to the national movement through the spinning wheel, a process in which if he moves forward he also moved backwards, until by the 1920s he was able to crystallise his thoughts on this problem in a coherent fashion.[11] However, he always stuck to the belief in the binary of the two sexes and in the Varnashrama Dharma that sustained and promoted evil practices like sati, dowry and child marriage. For him, the participation of the women in the nationalist awakening meant spinning cotton at home.[12] Thus, even those who involved women in the national movement were drawing boundaries for them and confining them to within the four walls of their homes.

Therefore, defining the ideal woman as Bharat Mata draped in a white saree holding a flag is a farce because, as Ambedkar said, unless women as individuals were given their due rights and protected, India could never become a democratic nation. In his view, it was imperative to develop State Socialism in our country for achieving socio-economic equality and unity. He maintained that people made a nation by striving for the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Everyone should feel that he has got an equal share in the national wealth, power and opportunities. They should not feel that they are deprived of the social benefits by others. A society of this kind, Ambedkar believed, would constitute a nation irrespective of other differences, such as in language, religion and habits.[13]

He used to say that merely calling this land Matrabhu-Pitrabhu or raising the slogan Hindu Hindu-Bandhu Bandhu was of no use. He emphasized the need for a change in the social structure and social values to turn India into a nation.[14] Ambedkar warned people against the spirit of blind hero-worship because he thought that the service to the people of a nation was nobler than the worship of political heroes. He was of the opinion that "Bhakti" is a path to the salvation of the soul, but in politics, Bhakti or hero worship was a sure road to degradation and eventual dictatorship. He argued that the worship of political heroes had killed the public conscience because the heroes thought only of their worshippers and neglected the common cause of mankind. Rather, he attempted to solve the political, social and religious problems of India using a democratic, humanistic method. Though educated in and impressed by Western culture, he laid stress on the need for cultural regeneration while preserving the best elements of our culture and civilization.[15]

During the framing of the Constitution, Ambedkar saw democracy as an instrument for metamorphosis. The Constitution was not merely for the Government. Rather, it operated within society, influencing the political, economic and cultural spheres. It envisaged the principle of "one man, one vote" giving right to equality and freedom to the woman as an individual. Ambedkar thus safeguarded the identity of woman as autonomous and on par with that of the men. A progressive radical faced with a triumph of myths, customs and religious beliefs over rationality around him, Ambedkar proposed three unique ideas to include women in the formation of a nation.

First, he demanded an autonomous political representation for women not only in the political arena but also in the pursuit of the development, preservation and reproduction. Second, since he doubted the public conscience to allow women's representation, he proposed definitive constitutional measures. This would even enable the women to address common issues and make demands

accordingly. Third, he pitched for supportive policy measures of extending benefits to women in the process of development.

Thus his idea of a nation had an inclusive character – it protected the rights of the women. Later, he propagated the idea of Prabuddha Bharat (enlightened India) after building his Bahiskrit Bharat on the belief that the pillars of a strong India rested upon the consistency of a heterogeneous society. His idea of a strong nation was built on rationality, democracy, liberty, fraternity and equality.

According to Ambedkar, the formation of a strong nation had the identity of an individual as its centrifugal component – be it a woman or a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe. This individuality is always evolving and developing, and engaging with the locality, community, nationality, humanity. The social and the political thought that is attached to this identity (here specifically targeting the woman) has an epistemological capacity to adjust with the facts. For example, the concept of freedom is significant only if the idea of nation is accommodative and pertains to the social reality. Thus Ambedkar rightly said "Educate, Agitate, and Organize" – to not only instil morality among the public but also strengthen the Indian woman to speak out and be an active agent/participant in the nation, for the progress of a nation can only be real when the progress of the woman is encouraged.

References:

1. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Vande Mataram: The Biography of A Song* (2013), Primus Books, New Delhi, p XIII.
2. Geeti Sen, "Iconising the Nation: Political Agendas", *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol 29, No 3/4, India: A National Culture? (Winter 2002-Spring 2003), p 158.
3. Sumathy Ramaswamy, "Maps and Mother Goddesses in Modern India", *Imago Mundi,* Vol 53 (2001), p 106.
4. Sir Herbert Hope Risley, *The People of India* (1969), W. Crooke (ed), Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, Delhi, p 171.

5. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1986), Oxford University Press, Delhi, p 9.
6. B.R. Ambedkar, "Pakistan or Partition of India", Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Volume VIII, Government of Maharshtra (1990), Bombay, p 243.
7. Ibid, pp 193-194.
8. B.R. Ambedkar, *Castes in India: Their Genesis, Mechanism and Development* (2013), Critical Quest, New Delhi p 7. Also, it was originally a seminal paper presented by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on 9 May 1916 in the Anthropology Seminar of Dr. A. A. Goldenweizer at The Columbia University, New York, USA.
9. Wandana Sonalkar, "An Agenda for Gender Politics", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol 34, No 1/2 (2-15 January 1999), p 24.
10. Vasanth Kannabiran & Kalpana Kannabiran, "Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence*", Economic and Political Weekly,* September, (1991), p 253.
11. Sujata Patel, "Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol 23, No 8 (February 20, 1988), p 378.
12. Ibid, p 378.
13. Dr. Pradeep Aglave, Dr. Ambedkar *on Nation and Nationalism,* published by Dr. Ambedkar Chair, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, (2014), Nagpur, p 12.
14. Ibid, p 15.
15. *Constituent Assembly Debates* (2003), Volume XI, reprinted by Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, p 12.

Ambedkar's Understated Feminism

Lalitha Dhara

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is hailed by many names. He is variously known as the architect of the Indian Constitution, messiah of the downtrodden, intellectual giant among giants, eminent jurist, erudite scholar but not many are aware of his commitment to the women's cause.

Ambedkar had tried to bring in gender-just laws through every avenue that was open to him. In 1928, as a member of the Legislative Council of Bombay, Ambedkar supported a Bill granting paid maternity leave to women working in factories. He held the view that since the employer was reaping profits through the women's toil, he must financially support them, at least partly, while they are on maternity leave. Babasaheb exhibited both class and gender consciousness as he drew our attention to the economic and productive dimension of childbearing and child-rearing that working-class women concerned themselves with. The other part of the maternity-leave pay, according to Ambedkar, should be borne by government as, in his words, "It is in the interests of the nation that the mother ought to get a certain amount of rest during the pre-natal period and also subsequently." There is an implicit recognition here of the social aspect of women's reproductive function.

In 1938, again as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Bombay**,** Ambedkar recommended that birth control facilities be made available to women. His logic was that if and when a woman was disinclined to bear a child for any reason whatsoever, she must be in a position to prevent conception. He further felt that conception ought to be entirely a woman's choice. Ambedkar was

arguing for reproductive choice, reproductive control, reproductive rights and reproductive freedom for women.

Between 1942 and 1946, as a Labour Member in the Viceroy's executive committee, Ambedkar passed several progressive legislations relating to better working conditions for women workers. These dealt with casual leave, privilege leave, earned leave compensation in case of injury and pension. These provisions were at least in part a response to the resolutions adopted by the All-India Depressed Classes Mahila Federation in its conference (parishad) held on 20 July 1942. The resolutions included demands for all of these provisions for working women.

THE HINDU CODE BILL

On 9 April 1948, as the first law minister of independent India, Ambedkar submitted the draft Hindu Code Bill (HCB) to the Constituent Assembly. It sought to codify the law relating to the rights of the property of a Hindu, both female and male, who has died intestate. The Bill treated the widow, daughter and son of the deceased equally in the matter of inheritance. In addition, the daughter was given a share in her father's property, her share being half that of the son.

HCB recognized two forms of marriage – sacramental marriage and civil marriage. It prescribed monogamy and made provisions for the dissolution of marriage. Anyone who was married would have three remedies to end the contract of marriage. One was to have the marriage declared null and void; secondly, to have the marriage declared invalid; and thirdly, to have it dissolved. The Bill stated that even where the marriage was declared invalid by a court of law, the invalidation would not affect the legitimacy of the children born.

There were seven grounds on which divorce could be obtained 1) desertion, 2) conversion to another religion, 3) keeping a concubine or becoming a concubine, 4) incurably unsound mind, 5)

virulent and incurable form of leprosy, 6) venereal disease in communicable form, and 7) cruelty.

Two points in connection with Ambedkar's involvement with the HCB stand out. One, he was a political leader of the backward classes and hence represented their interest. Two, by the time he began drafting the HCB, he had decided to leave the Hindu fold and embrace Buddhism. Yet, he took pains to draft a Bill that would have benefited Hindu women, and among them largely those belonging to the propertied upper class\caste, demonstrating thereby a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the condition of all women irrespective of their caste\class status.

Thus we see that Ambedkar had consistently taken steps to promote gender equality using every platform available to him.

PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER

How did Ambedkar understand gender? How did he understand caste? How did he relate the two? In his seminal paper "Castes in India" (1916), Ambedkar explains that castes emerged in the Indian context when differences (classes) developed within groups. Ambedkar refers to castes as enclosed classes characterized by endogamy, namely marriage, within the group. He believed it was the priestly class that first enclosed itself, thus shutting itself in and shutting others out. The other castes were forced to follow suit.

How was the practice of endogamy maintained in the dominant caste? According to Ambedkar, it was maintained by restraining inter-caste marriages. This involved close monitoring of and control over women's sexuality. In Ambedkar's view, gender was used in the formation, maintenance and reproduction of caste. He believed that the caste-gender nexus was the main culprit behind the oppression of the lower castes and women and that it had to be uprooted. Thus, for Ambedkar, gender elimination was an intrinsic part of caste annihilation.

Ambedkar's gender sensitivity drew upon three sources:

1. **His personal experience of caste subjugation as an 'Untouchable'**: He had had several humiliating experiences of being discriminated against. In his famous address before Untouchable women during the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927, he said in anguish, "You have given birth to us men. You know how other people consider us lower than animals. In some places even our shadow is not acceptable. Other people get respectable jobs in courts and offices, but the sons born of your wombs are held in such contempt that we cannot get a job as a lowly peon in the police department. If someone asks you why you gave birth to us, what answer will you give? What is the difference between us and the children born of Kayastha and other caste Hindu women sitting in this meeting?" It was not difficult for Ambedkar to link the downtrodden condition of his caste to women's subjugation under patriarchy.

2. **His theoretical understanding:** Given his intellectual brilliance and scholarship, and rare sensitivity, it was natural for him to arrive at a theoretical link between caste and gender as seen from the bottom of the caste hierarchy. This analysis was put forward in the paper "Castes in India" in 1916, which we have already touched upon.

3. **His leadership of the grassroots women's organizations and their impact on him:** There were three phases to the women's movement led by Ambedkar. **a) Participation of women in the general movement alongside men in the late 1920s:** This included the various temple entry movements in which women participated enthusiastically along with men. **b) Autonomous organizations of women in the 1930s:** With some experience of participation in mass movements behind them, the women became conscious of the need to build their own autonomous organizations to find their space and voice. This was when they

began to mobilize independently. **c) Political organizations of women in the 1940s:** These consisted of the All-India Depressed Classes Mahila Federation conferences which saw women from all over the country come together to deliberate and pass resolutions under the leadership of Ambedkar.

Ambedkar's speeches and thoughts have had a great impact on the women. In particular, his speeches at the time of the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 appear to have brought about a profound change in their lives. His advice to women to not wear the kind of clothes and ornaments that would mark them as Untouchables instilled courage in them, and they began draping their saris differently.

When Ambedkar announced his intention to change his religion in 1935, women held meetings to express support for him. They appealed to him not to lead them into a religion that would impose the purdah on them.

In one of his speeches in 1938, he declared that a woman is an individual and she must have individual freedom. In another speech the same year, he argued for women to have fewer children. He said, "If there are fewer children, women are freed from the terrible burden of childbearing and can use their strength for other tasks."

Throughout the time he led mass movements, Ambedkar was in touch with the ground realities. Heeding his request, his women followers took up low-cost marriage functions. Women were also open to the idea that girls should not be married early, and that inter-caste marriages should take place. Ambedkar was as deeply influenced by the masses of women he mobilized as they were by him. That was the main source of his gender sensitivity.

CONCLUSION

Ambedkar's analysis of Hindu Society is that:

1. It is essentially a caste-ridden, graded, hierarchical society in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt.

2. It rests on the control of women's sexuality and fertility and labour.

3. This caste-gender nexus is kept in place by Manu Dharma's twin pillars, the Varnashrama Dharma and Pativrata Dharma ideologies. We cannot get rid of one without getting rid of the other.

Ambedkar's emotional, intellectual reaction to this understanding guided him throughout his emancipatory project for women and the suppressed people.

Section 4:

Narrative after Ambedkar - what it is and what it should be

Reading Dr Ambedkar as a Narrative for Social Change

Jeremy A. Rinker

Much as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is seen as a father of the Indian nation and an important father of anti-caste activism, fields of study also have their respective "fathers". In the field of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS), many scholars and activists often see Johan Galtung as such a father. We, in the field of PCS, regularly rely on Johan Galtung's seminal typology of violence to understand how to develop peaceful systems. Galtung, in endeavouring to define peace, clearly understood that he first had to better understand its opposite - violence. In his seminal 1969 article entitled "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research"[1] he developed a typology of violence that is often represented as the three sides of an equilateral triangle. With direct, structural and cultural violence representing each side of this triangle, as if each sides understanding was equally critical to realizing and actualizing peace, Galtung's violence triangle simultaneously complicates and clarifies any path towards sustained positive peace. Galtung's (1969) violence triangle helped develop the base understanding for him to coin critical concepts like "structural violence" and "negative and positive peace", which have propelled much writing and thinking on peace research and social change over the last almost half a century. Galtung's concept of structural violence, as it is linked closely with ideas of social justice, has particularly spawned much discussion and new ideas in not just the peace studies and conflict transformation discipline, but also other disciplines as well (see Farmer (2004), Ho (2007), Caprioli (2005), among others as examples of this critical and interdisciplinary discussion).[2] It is argued here that the pervasive

and elusive reality of structural violence in the lives of anti-caste activists is what mobilizes an identity for change and builds an awareness of rights. In critically analyzing what Volkan (1997) calls the "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" of the anti-caste movement we can read the narratives of Dalit activists at strategic opportunities for social and structural change of systems of violence. Though Dr. Ambedkar may not have talked about the realities of caste in the language of structural violence, he understood that what we now call structural violence represents the foundational context to challenge in creating social change. But, how does one challenge the agent-less and systemic beast of structural violence? This, I believe, is the perennial question for those that revere Dr. Ambedkar's anti-caste activism.

Structural violence refers to systematic ways in which social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage individuals in a society. As systemic and structural, unlike direct or personal violence, this form of violence does not have a clear perpetrator. It is often hidden from those attempting to expose and eradicate it. One example Galtung (1969) himself uses to illustrate the concept of structural violence is the disease tuberculosis (TB). If a person died from TB in the 18th century one could not conceive of this as a form of violence because it might have been completely unavoidable – with no understanding of the disease, society had no ability to cure or control it. This lack of individual or collective agency marks such misfortune and suffering as distinct from any form of violence. On the other hand, if one died of TB today that would be an example of structural violence since we (as a global society) have the means to stop and treat TB.[3] Because we are collective agency (what Porter calls "the self-awareness to make self-chosen choices"[4]), any failure to act is a product of structural constraints (whether financial, logistical, or policy-oriented) that produce, for Galtung, an agentless form of structural violence. Note that this distinction has nothing to do with the subjectivities of suffering – no one can doubt that death

by TB in the 18th century would produce equal (if not more) suffering as death by TB today. What marks today's death as structural violence is the means with which we as a society have at our disposal to foreclose such possibility. Failure to use these means of foreclosure is an avoidable failure, even if its implementation might be structurally complex. For Galtung, it is the absence of structural and cultural violence that allows for the possibility of social justice, and eventually the ideal of positive peace. This, of course, assumes that direct violence and its historical legacies are managed, if not transformed.

While direct violence is often the instrument of control to maintain injustice in the present, it is structural and cultural violence that maintains the legacy of injustice into the future. In the words of Galtung "Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong."[5] Even though there is no type of violence that seems to deserve our primary attention over any other type of violence – it is clear that conflict transformation demands more than the absence of simply direct violence. In the case of the caste violence we see across India today, its eradication demands structural change, not simply justice enforcement. In short, we cannot definitively say that Galtung's typology of violence exhausts the human need to understand violence. Each instance of violence (whether direct, structural, or some other type) is unique to the cultural context. For this reason – as the regular litany of new books about human violence should attest[6] – there exists no monopoly on a particular typology of human violence. Writers in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, indeed, continue to grow our understanding of violence, and therefore, expand our means of potentially achieving a lasting positive peace. Such growth of knowledge is crucial to activists and scholars alike and demands critical attention in order to listen to the unique suffering of social actors as they narrate their lived experience of oppression and strive to meet their full potentials.

As example of this knowledge creation, recently Sara Cobb (2013) has written of what she calls "a new kind of violence"[7] – narrative violence. Rather than "new", one might better call it "newly discovered". Narrative violence is a special kind of violence that operates in the subtle spaces of storytelling and discursive communication. Cobb argues that "structural violence, by definition, is difficult to 'story' in that its existence does not seem to accompany specific history".[8] As agentless and systemic, Galtung's sense of structural violence maintains an elusive connection to particular characters and/or settings and therefore makes plotlines blurry and amorphous. An understanding of narrative violence helps to narrow this elusive disconnection as narrative violence creates what she calls a "state of exception"[9] for those embroiled in conflict. In describing this "state of exception" as something more than the impersonal and agentless structural violence described by Galtung, Cobb describes a context and people (or identity) that many Dalit rights activists would readily recognize as actively describing their everyday modern lives.

For Cobb, this "state of exception" is "a place where law has been used to create a place without law, a place that defies narrative itself"[10]. And the people that populate this "state of exception" – i.e., the victims of narrative violence – are "isolated and disenfranchised, they live in the shadows of the public sphere, their relation to state and community broken".[11] The context and peoples that Cobb describes eerily map to Dr. Ambedkar's own descriptions of the Dalit/low-caste experience and resonate closely with modern descriptions of the experience of caste oppression. In privileging the present consciousness and memory of past events, narratives can help explain how an ongoing "state of exception"[12] has been "incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships".[13] Thus, this "newly discovered" narrative violence provides a critical lens to understand caste oppression and anti-caste resistance. Applying this

lens of narrative violence to caste-based violence gives life to the histories and present experiences of anti-caste activists.

In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar writes: "A caste has no feeling that is affiliated to other castes, except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot. On all other occasions each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from others."[14] Living in such a state of exception for low-castes involve a constant process of drawing boundaries between their identity and that of others both higher and lower in rank status. In such context, the telling of stories can be understood as oblique or "hidden transcripts"[15] that challenge any lack of awareness of the low-caste social predicament. In other words, narrative violence creates the boundary conditions for identity, rights, and self-awareness that become, over time, powerful discourses to attempt to challenge, or maintain, the status quo. The "newly" significant type of narrative violence that Cobb identifies is at the core of all systems of oppression and the dynamics of this narrative violence are clearly evident in caste-based oppression, as well as, within the "talk" of social movements that are aimed at ending this oppression.

NARRATIVE VIOLENCE AMONG ANTI-CASTE ACTIVISTS

Ambedkarite activists often tell hagiographic stories about of their patriarch, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In my experience of meeting and talking with Dalit anti-caste activists there is an unquestioned reverence and respect for the life and work of Dr. Ambedkar that can only be compared with a demi-god or modern pop-icon. This reverence is expressed through the telling of stories about Babasaheb's life and work. Like most interactions with Ambedkarites, my own experiences interacting with Dalit diaspora Ambedkarites on the occasion of 125th birth anniversary was no exception to my previous experiences of this phenomenon of hagiographic storytelling. On this jubilant occasion, I spoke to an audience of Ambedkarites at Michigan State University and asked

them to fully consider their own agency as speaking social agents. In being invited to give a lecture to Ambedkarite anti-caste activists there is always a balance between gently suggesting pragmatic action and providing critical analysis of the ongoing anti-caste movement. As should be evident by now, I do not think narrative is an inanimate and agentless fact of social interaction. Nor do I think that stories, or narratives, are just subjective expression of personal truths devoid of any social and political relevance for social change. Therefore, my focus in such "lecture" situations is often to draw attention to the stories that I hear activists themselves voice. As a social constructionist, I believe firmly in the power of stories to influence social and structural change and I am intentional about placing the agency for change among the people who have experienced, and in turn, tell (and retell) such stories. I have written elsewhere about the elliptical character of these stories and their ability to mobilize activism.[16] But, beyond movement mobilization what do stories do? How do they work to strengthen identity boundaries and build awareness of unmet rights and self-worth?

In the words of Michele Foucault: "People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does."[17] In endeavouring to assist anti-caste Ambedkarite activists to understand what their stories do to change (and, at times, support) the social structure, my narrative analysis aims to empower activists to make pro-social change in society. Following Sara Cobb, I believe that narratives matter and have agency – "they have gravitas; they are grave. They have weight."[18] Narratives themselves can act to change discourse, and thus, change systems. Having said that, analysis implies some level of understanding on the part of the analyst. My decade-long interaction with Dalit rights activists has developed some, albeit rudimentary, understanding of the conflict dynamics at play in India's ongoing contentious tryst with caste. While narratives hold within them multiple interpretations and narrative violence has

complex social and psychological sources, this should not deter us from attempting to develop further understanding through attention to narrative's use. Narrative violence, in fact, implores us to analyze it – now that we have learnt of its existence we must think and act in ways that tap into narrative's power to act for social good; to build "justpeace". Below are a few examples that I believe show how stories can be both opportunity and constraint for change activists. Through a brief analysis of these formative identity narratives, I hope that the important opportunities in Dr. Ambedkar's life story and experience can be excavated, built upon, and reflexively mined for their inherent and complex opportunities to create lasting change.

STORIES IN AMBEDKARITE ANTI-CASTE CIRCLES

One of many hagiographic stories of Ambedkar's life involves his 1934 trip to Daulatabad Fort in Maharashtra.[19] Travelling with a group of about 30 "untouchable" friends and arriving late and tired to these historical ruins, the party stopped to wash and refresh by a small tank of water that was near the entrance to the fort. Feeling newly refreshed as they entered the front gate of the fort, an old Muslim man came running to the entrance yelling "The Dheds [meaning 'untouchables'] have polluted the tank!"[20] After some tense debate with the local authorities, the party was eventually allowed to see the ruins of the fort, but not without an armed guard to ensure that they did not "touch water anywhere in the fort".[21] Dr. Ambedkar's own autobiographical sketch of this episode ends with the evaluative statement: "This will show that a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu, also an untouchable to a Mohammedan."[22] Such a story is retold with disbelief and frustration by Dalit activists and recreated as street plays in many low-caste communities. But to what actual effect?

While Dr. Ambedkar clearly told this story towards the goal of illustrating an evaluative judgment about the dehumanizing demerits

of the caste system even outside of the Hindu fold, he also, in telling such a story, must have soon realized how little control he would have over this narrative going forward. Again in the words of Cobb "narrative authorship is partial and dependent" and, therefore, we often "arrive at narratives that we did not make."[23] While such a narrative helps to build a collective identity as marginalized, it also paradoxically positions Dalits in identities that they have little control over. How followers and detractors use this story to make their own evaluative judgments and build support for their own identity concerns represents a crucial question for anti-caste activists pushing for social change. While this story clearly communicates the injustice and inhumanity of the situation Dalits consistently face, it also constructs their identity as distinct from, and possibly in opposition to, Muslims. Such a story, therefore, creates a paradox for Dalit activists. It creates an identity of "other" that supports and reinforces an identity and experience of self as "othered".[24] While it underscores the inhumane and unjust realities of life as a Dalit or Scheduled Caste (SC), it also closes off dialogue with others (in this case Muslims and possibly other "downtrodden" and economically depressed potential allies) by strengthening in-group identity, as well as, portraying Dalits as either victims or a distinct and cohesive community as apart from various "others" in society. Either of these social positions leaves something to be desired for Dalit activists working for social transformation, and, therefore, the retelling of such a story acts to close off the narrative space to dialogue with others. This is not to suggest that Dalits not tell this story, but rather that it is the type of story that should be deployed selectively and strategically in tandem with positive identity and awareness education. Though not a strong example of Cobb's sense of "narrative violence", this narrative does little to challenge the perpetual narrative violence that Dalits face in the public sphere. It does little to "thicken" [25] the narrative life of Dalits. In fact, due to the ambiguity involved in Dalit listeners hearing such a story coming from Dr. Ambedkar's *own* experience, listeners get caught

up in what Francesca Polletta calls "narrative ellipsis" [26] – a process in which the stories activists tell compel other activists to retell the story to better understand the ambiguous meaning of the events described. The story itself has a life. Failure to engage the story as a constantly changing system leaves activists unable to strategically use the story to its full potentials.

By reproducing the inexplicable inhumanity in such a story, the activist unwittingly reifies the community's own sense of separated identity and victimization, and does little to open the opportunity for dialogue and narrative shift among others in the wider public sphere. In addition, high-caste detractors can, and do, use such a narrative to convince low-castes to stay within the Hindu fold reasoning that caste is not just a Hindu problem (which is indeed counter to Ambedkar's own analysis of the caste system). In short, the narrative space this story opens, as it is currently deployed by Dalits, does little to create social agency and/or even the social justice equation for Dalits or low-caste communities. So how do anti-caste activists fashion stories that will better open the space for thick narrative that engenders authentic dialogue with others? This has been the perennial challenge for modern anti-caste activists. Failure to strategically develop and systematically deploy stories of oppression that devalue separateness of identity and simultaneously value liberty, fraternity, and collective awareness of injustice, has fractured and splintered the anti-caste movement. Such fracturing among anti-caste activists has left them unable to influence the hearts and minds of higher caste Indians.

Another more mainstream and consistent narrative that one hears when studying Ambedkarite communities worldwide is the nationalist story of Dr. Ambedkar as the source/father of the Indian Constitution. Yet, such a dominant narrative has divergent meanings in different social communities and contexts. For Dalit communities, the faith in the rule of law is strong and India's 1949 Constitution is a source of pride as the penultimate legal resource to ensure rights

for the marginalized. This is why Ambedkar memorial statues throughout India show the Indian Constitution tucked under his left arm as a steadfast Dr. Ambedkar points toward a desired egalitarian future. As the head of the drafting commission for the Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar is seen by Dalits as *the* author of this important document, despite the more complex negotiated realities of his co-authorship. Even the more complicated and revolutionary aspects of Dr. Ambedkar's long career outside of government seem to be sidelined in nationalist narratives about him. Dalit friends have told me that it is the Constitution more than any other document that Ambedkar authored, including the revered *Annihilation of Caste,* which cements his anti-caste legacy. The narrative of Ambedkar as first law minister and nationalist hero trumps more complicated historical readings of him both within and outside Dalit communities. Indeed, it is within anti-caste activist circles, that an acritical reverence for Dr. Ambedkar as a father of the nation, as well as the progenitor of a mass move to Buddhism, conspires to narrow the narrative impact of Ambedkar outside of Dalit communities. Still, in all strata of Indian society, a shallow collective understanding of Dr. Ambedkar's legacy and impacts exists. In heeding Cobb's call for attention to narrative patterns[27] we must analyze not simply prevailing low-caste narratives of Dr. Ambedkar and his followers, but also the narratives of high castes, if we hope to transform future-going narrative violence.

As an important father of the nation, Dr. Ambedkar is remembered and memorialized by members of the privileged castes in an even more one-dimensional nationalist way than among Dalit communities. For the privileged castes, rather than the father of a democratic rule of law, or a social reformer, Ambedkar is one father (among many) of an India that is independent from outside rule. In the same league with Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and other nationalist forefathers of the nation, in this perspective, Dr. Ambedkar is a symbol of national unity and has little to do with caste oppression or

social reform. Here, Ambedkar is a symbol of freedom and independence, but this freedom is nationalistic and amorphous – not tied to any one community, but to India as a unified and predominantly Hindu independent nation. In turn, Dalit reverence of Dr. Ambedkar as an archetype for the rule of law is understood by privileged castes as simply supporting the nationalist narrative and in no way challenging Hindu privilege. In a sense then, as a source or a father of the Indian nation, Ambedkar legacy is mollified by both Dalits' and privileged castes' nationalistic narrative expressions about him. The reverence for Ambedkar is not lost, but rather transfigured into a call for national unity, as opposed to a critique of power. The dominant one-dimensional view of Ambedkar as nationalist father and author of the Constitution meld together in ways that work to mask more complicated and revolutionary narratives about him and forestall any constructive dialogue and/or criticism about his revolutionary ideas for social change.

The Babasaheb[28] of most Dalits' imagination, a Dr. Ambedkar as a revolutionary-change-agent and public intellect, are secondary narratives for the majority of caste Hindus. The nationalist narrative of Ambedkar as an important father of the independent nation has relegated the intellectual and social revolution he spurred to the domain of divided and contested histories. Such divided histories go unnoticed by the dominant castes and the more radical statements of Ambedkar have become sanitized in the public sphere. Dalits' view of B.R. Ambedkar as revolutionary activist is largely invisible to many privileged higher castes. The fact is that the Dalit conception of Babasaheb, as a change agent and radical, is not a conception most high-caste Hindus ever encounter.

But, it is the politically powerful narrative of Ambedkar as the leader of a "Democratic Revolution", to borrow the title of one of Gail Omvedt's many books on the anti-caste movement,[29] that develops a future-going narrative and provides better opportunities than stories of Ambedkar's own experiences of injustice to

challenge narrative violence. While the nationalist narrative of Ambedkar as a father of the nation has certainly been co-opted by the Hindu right, its more complicated and "thick" retelling in anti-caste activist circles is critical to the process of creating lasting social change for the marginalized. More than stories of injustice, like the autobiographical account of Ambedkar's experience in Daulatabad, stories of low-caste critique of the Indian democracy gain increased legitimacy through widening the circle of retelling. Low castes must, therefore, challenge the simple nationalist retelling of Dr. Ambedkar's constitutional drafting. The foundation of Indian democracy and the dreams of "Incredible India,"[30] which that democracy inspires, are based on caste. High castes must be made aware of this historical trauma and develop a collective awareness of the caste grounding of modern India. In narrating Dr. Ambedkar as a revolutionary, and not just a nationalist, opportunities are created to revisit the prevailing, yet contested, history of India. In much the same way that a figure like Malcom X represents an under-told and revolutionary impetus of the civil rights movement, Ambedkar represents both a mainstream and revolutionary response to historical injustice. How activists tell the story of Ambedkar conditions possible responses, and points towards a desired future.

In *Annihilation of Caste (1936)* Ambedkar writes: "There are, many Indians whose patriotism does not permit them to admit that Indians are not a nation, that they are only an amorphous mass of people…Men do not become a society by living in physical proximity…"[31] Ambedkar's critique of an Indian nation was conditioned by his personal experience of caste and empowered by an anti-caste reading of pre-modern Indian history. Without such a complicated and multi-layered critical history, Ambedkar's relevance too many anti-caste activists are undermined and the opportunity space for any narrative shift on caste is limited. The task of activists embedded in the ongoing dynamics of caste contention is to endeavour to understand the narratives of the marginalized as

teeming with "hidden transcripts"[32] ripe for intervention towards social change.

The nationalist story of Dr. Ambedkar must not be retold without reference to his revolutionary critiques of caste oppression. Ambedkar's nationalism when narrated as inseparable from his critical anti-caste activism, challenges a "thin" narrative of him as a national icon. More than India's first law minister and patriotic organizer of law and order, in this telling, Dr. Ambedkar is change agent both inside and outside the Indian government; he is simultaneously patriot and harsh social critic of a fallible India. More than a brilliant legal mind, Dr. Ambedkar was also an educator on social exclusion and agitator for change! Anti-caste activists must not let the full scope or Dr. Ambedkar's legacy as a social-change agent and an organizer of government policy is forgotten, or denied by those in power. This more complicated narrative of Ambedkar's life and work expands the narrative opportunities for Dalits and allows activists to invite others to take what Joseph Montville calls a "walk through history"[33] with them. In thickening the narrative of Ambedkar as a nationalist and revolutionary anti-caste activist, modern anti-caste activists live out Dr. Ambedkar's constant refrain to "Organize, Educate, Agitate". Still, the fact remains that Ambedkar's revolutionary voice often gets overlooked in mainstream Indian society, even by well-meaning liberals and progressive activists.[34]

The process of taking Montville's (2001/2006) walk through history, inviting others to participate in, is important for anti-caste activists as it is, works to educate the oppressors, while simultaneously developing a liberatory consciousness[35] and self-esteem among the oppressed. Thick narratives, such as Ambedkar as both nationalist leader and anti-caste revolutionary, represent opportunities to educate, build critical consciousness, as well as, create a paradigm shift in India's thinking about history. While such thick narratives have difficulty spreading into more privileged

segments of society, such spread is critical to the peaceful transformation of narrative violence.

RE-APPROPRIATING AMBEDKAR

Organize, educate, and agitate! This is how Dr. B.R. Ambedkar began and ended most of his public speeches. I believe that how we live out his bequest is through the telling of complicated stories of his life and work. Dr. Ambedkar's story is one full of plot twists, unearthly attainments, and great opportunity. Student of John Dewey, prolific author, India's first law minister, agitator for separate electorates, the list could go on. Dr. Ambedkar was an archetype in many ways – he was revolutionary in the sense that he was radically new and innovative for his time. If activists aim to keep him new and innovative, even today, sixty-plus years after his death, the stories they tell about him matter greatly. Unless activists work to complicate the story of his life and work, his legacy and full impact are done a grave injustice. Ensuring his revolutionary legacy requires more than memorialization through the thousands of statues erected in low-caste bastis across India. How activists make Babasaheb new and innovative for this time hinges on how they strategically tell his story; how much they complicate and interrogate it.

As Dalit communities move into the future – as each existent present moment is always new and pregnant with possibility – they must learn how to strategically tell stories about the past. Much of this strategy is developed through historic process of social learning. [36] In being attentive to the collective implications of telling stories, activists can lean on their collective social learning as a resource. This is where the work of Vamik Volkan (1998) can be extremely helpful for building positive identity. Volkan (1998), in writing about the post-war Balkans, writes about collective trauma and the way it is passed through collectivities and generations by leaders and speakers telling stories about "chosen traumas" or "chosen

glories".[37] A chosen trauma for Volkan "reflects a large group's unconsciously defining its identity by the transgenerational transmission of injured selves infused with the memory of ancestors' trauma."[38] Chosen glories on the other hand are "the mental representations of a historical event that induces feelings of success and triumph".[39] The stories of Babasaheb act as chosen traumas and chosen glories for anti-caste activists, but how do past traumas and glories of the Dalit rights movement inform the modern-day work for social change among anti-caste and marginalized community groups? For activists to be effective, they must attentively address this question. Unless social actors are aware of the cycles of harm and retaliation that they are caught up in, they are destined to repeat the cycles of contention. The fact is a narrative in conflict is an agent in itself, not just the data that researcher like me may choose to analyze or study. Being vigilant about the narratives we use, and critically reflective of those we hear and retell, requires active engagement and consistent analytical attention. While centuries of social learning have developed an "infrapolitics"[40] of resistance in low-caste communities, a similar social learning must be fostered in more privileged communities by the strategic selection and deployment of narrative storytelling.

What we know of conflict and past trauma, is that if you fail to address it, it will not go away. Its legacy will re-emerge in collectives and engender structural and cultural violence, and possibly, eventually, direct violence. It is incumbent on anti-caste activists to address conflict through critical attention to narratives, thus modelling the social justice vision they desire. Without vigilant critical attention, conflict narratives are allowed to control as opposed to being controlled. The privileged need to learn about Dalit collective trauma, and while it is not Dalit activists' responsibility to teach this to privileged allies, it is incumbent on Dalit activists to model an awareness of the need for coexistence. The need still exists to re-story and re-appropriate Ambedkar's

history and ideology. Anti-caste activists can do this by strategically re-telling the Ambedkar narrative in a way that does not overlook the complex past traumas of the Dalit masses.

Dr. Jeremy A. Rinker is assistant professor and director of undergraduate studies at the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies in University of North Carolina Greensboro, USA. Rinker was a 2013 Fulbright Fellow at the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research in Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India.

References:

1. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research*, 6, no 3 (1969): 167–91.
2. Paul Farmer. "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," *Current Anthropology,* 45, no 3 (June 2004), 305-325; Kathleen Ho "Structural Violence as a Human Rights Violation," *Essex Human Rights Review*, 4, no. 2 (September 2007); Caprioli, "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict" *International Studies Quarterly*, 49, no 2 (Jun, 2005), 161-178.
3. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", 168.
4. Elisabeth Porter, *Connecting Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2015), 47.
5. Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence", *Journal of Peace Research*, 27, no. 3 (1990), 291.
6. As recent examples see: David Nibert, *Animal Oppression and Human Violence: Domesecration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Mark Pilisuk and Jennifer Roundtree, *The Hidden Structure of Violence: Who Benefits from Global Violence and War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015); and Jeff Lewis, *Media, Culture and Human Violence: From Savage Lovers to Violent Complexity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); among many others.
7. Sara Cobb, *Speaking of Violence, 27.*
8. Ibid, 27.
9. Ibid, 27.
10. Ibid, 27.
11. Ibid, 27.
12. Sara Cobb, *Speaking of Violence, 27.*

13. Vena Das, "The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Poisonous Knowledge, and Subjectivity", 220.
14. Bhimrao Ambedkar, "The Annihilation of Caste: A Speech Prepared by B.R. Ambedkar*"* in *The Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated and Critical Edition*, edited by S. Anand (New York: Verso, 2014), 242.
15. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 183.
16. See Rinker, Jeremy, "Why Should We Talk to People Who Do Not Want to Talk to Us? Inter-Caste Dialogue as a Response to Caste-Based Marginalization" *Peace and Change*, 38, no. 2 (April 2013), 237-262. See also Polletta, *It was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics,* 2006, 43-45.
17. Quoted in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics 2nd Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 187.
18. Sara Cobb, *Speaking of Violence*, 3.
19. Bhimrao Ambedkar, "The Dheds have Polluted the Tank" in *Ambedkar: Autobiographical Notes* (Chennai: Navayana Publishing, 2003), 23-25
20. Ibid, 24.
21. Ibid, 25.
22. Ibid, 25.
23. Ibid, 23.
24. For a good discussion of how processes of "othering" and exclusion relates to protracted conflict, see Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 66-67.
25. For this idea of "thickening" a narrative, I am indebted to both Sara Cobb (2013), op cit, and Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 29-30.
26. Polletta, *It was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics,* 2006, 43-45.
27. Sara Cobb, *Speaking of Violence*, 99, op cit.
28. This is the honorific name and reverent term that most Dalits use to talk about Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Its derivation signifies a fatherly leader and was used by Dr. Ambedkar's followers before his death, likely as a response the hagiographic term 'mahatma' used to describe M.K. Gandhi. For more on these honorifics see Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his Struggle with India* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 211, among other writers on the Ambedkar Buddhist movement. For example see, Christophe Jaffrelot,

Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

29. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and The Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994).
30. A prominent marketing initiative, Incredible !ndia, was conceptualized in 2002 by advertising consultant V. Sunil and Amitabh Kant, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism for the Indian Government. The "Incredible !ndia" logo, where the exclamation mark that formed the "I" of India was used to generating a 16 per cent increase in tourist traffic in the first year of the advertising campaign. See http://incredibleindiacampaign.com/ – accessed October 25, 2016.
31. B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: An Annotated Critical Edition,* edited by S. Anand (London: Verso, 2014) 243.
32. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance, op cit.*
33. Joseph Montville, "Reconciliation as Realpolitik: Facing the Burdens of History in Political Conflict Resolution" in *Identity, Morality, Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict*, ed. D. Rothbart and K. Korostelina (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 367–92; and Montville, "Justice and the Burdens of History". In *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence*, ed. M. Abu Nimer, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001): 129–44.
34. For an example of this, see the writings of the Ambedkar Age Collective (2015) where the frustration over the appropriation of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* is argued with little direct reference to his revolutionary voice. Ambedkar Age Collective, *Hatred in the Belly: Politics Behind the Appropriation of Dr. Ambedkar's Writings* (Hyderbad: The Shared Mirror, 2015).
35. See Barbara Love, "Developing a Liberatory Consciousness" in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (New York, Routledge, 2000), 599-603.
36. See Albert Bendura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977).
37. Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 48.
38. Ibid, 48.
39. Ibid, 81.
40. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, 183.

Section 5:

Chronology

Life and Times of Dr B.R. Ambedkar

For a comprehensive understanding of Ambedkar's mission, a good place to start would be the sequence of events in his life. A properly drawn-up chronology of his life's events would show us the various obstacles he had to negotiate during his struggle for social justice and how various experiences informed his conclusions. Given below is such a timeline which has been put together using reliable sources:

1891: In **14 April**, Bhimrao is born in the British-founded town of Mhow in Central Provinces (today's Madhya Pradesh) to Ramji Sakpal and Bhimabai; Mhow, near Indore, was and still is a cantonment.

1897: Bhimabai (Bhimrao's mother) passes away in Satara.

1900: In **November**, Bhimrao joins the government high school in Satara. He got his primary education at a school in Dapoli, a small town in Ratnagiri District, in Konkan Maharashtra.

1904: Bhimrao joins the Elphinstone High School, Bombay.

1907: Matriculation from Elphinstone High School, Bombay, with 382 marks out of 750. Marriage with Rami (Ramabai), daughter of Bhiku Walangkar.

Bhimrao passes the high-school exam. This is a special moment not only for Bhimrao but also for the whole community. The community organizes a celebration. Krishnaji Arjun Keluskar, well-known Marathi author and social reformer, presents him with a copy of his new book,

Life of Gautama Buddha. This probably is Ambedkar's first "encounter" with Buddha. Marriage follows. Bhimrao marries Rami, renamed Ramabai, at a simple ceremony in the vegetable market in Byculla.[1]

1912: Graduation from Elphinstone College affiliated to University of Bombay. His BA has papers in Persian and English. He scores 449 out of 1000 marks. While he is studying for his BA, Bhim's father runs out of funds. Keluskar helps Bhim get a scholarship of Rs 25 rupees a month from the Maharaja of Baroda. In **December**, son Yeshwant is born.

1913: Joins Baroda State Force as a lieutenant. On **2 February**, Bhim's father, Ramji Sakpal, passes away. In **July**, Ambedkar arrives in New York for higher studies in Columbia University[2].

1915: On **June 5**, Ambedkar is awarded an MA. He majors in Economics; Sociology, History, Philosophy, Anthropology and Politics were the other subjects of study. For his MA, he wrote a thesis titled "Ancient Indian Commerce".

1916: On **9 May**, he reads a paper titled "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" at Dr. Alexander Goldenweiser's anthropology seminar. It is published in *Indian Antiquary*, Vol XII (New York) in May 1917.

In **June**, he writes another MA thesis, *National Dividend of India – A Historic and Analytical Study.* Later that month, he goes to London, and in October, joins Gray's Inn to study Law. He also takes admission at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He requests the Maharaja of Baroda to grant him permission to pursue his studies in London.

Ambedkar with his professors and friends at the London School of Economics

1917: He starts working on his thesis, but he is informed that the period of his scholarship is over. He returns to India after spending a year in London working on the thesis for the MSc (Economics). In **July**, he is appointed Military Secretary to the Gaikwad of Baroda; he had agreed to join the Baroda service as a condition of his scholarship[3]. In **September**, he travels to Baroda to take up his job.

He meets Annie Besant in Calcutta. The Indian National Congress adopts a resolution endorsing "the justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes" for the first time in its history.

1918: In the new *Journal of Indian Economics*, he reviews Bertrand Russell's book *Principles of Social Reconstruction* under the title "Mr Russell and the Reconstruction of Society".

In the new *Journal of the Indian Economic Society*, he publishes *Small Holdings in India and Their Remedies.* He publishes his paper *Castes in India* in the form of a book.

Ambedkar becomes Professor of Political Economy in the Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics, in Bombay.[4]

1919: He testifies both orally and in writing before the Southborough Committee, which is investigating franchise matters in the light of the planned Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. Ambedkar demands separate electorate and reserved seats for Depressed Classes, in proportion to their population.

He comes in contact with Shahuji Maharaj of Kolhapur through Dattoba Powar.

1920: On **31 January**, with the help from Dattoba Powar, Ambedkar launches *Mook Nayak* (Leader of the Dumb) newspaper. (Ambedkar was not its official editor, but he was the man behind it, and it was his mouthpiece. Nandram Bhatkar was the editor. Dyander Gholap succeeded him.)

In **March**, Ambedkar presides over a conference of Untouchables, in Mangaon in Kolhapur state. Shahuji Maharaj is in attendance, too.

In **May**, Ambedkar is a prominent personality attending the first All-India Conference convened by Untouchables presided over by Shahuji Maharaj of Kolhapur.

Ambedakar resigns from his teaching job at Sydenham College to return to London. The Maharaja of Kolhapur and Naval Bhathena provide financial support. He attends the London School of economics and also Gray's Inn to read for the Bar. He is a frequent visitor to the British Museum, where the likes of Marx, Engels, Mazzini and Lenin worked.

1921: On **21 June**, LSE awards Ambedkar an MSc in Economics. His thesis is titled "Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India".

1922: In October, he completes his thesis, "The Problem of the Rupee", and submits to LSE. He is also called to the Bar. He was not able to take the Bar examination earlier because of his work on the thesis.

1923: Ambedkar travels to Bonn University, Germany. However, after around 3 months there, in **March**, Professor Edwin Cannan asks him to return to London. It is because his thesis is challenged on political grounds. However, after resubmission it is finally accepted. It is at once published in London by P. S. King & Son Ltd. He dedicates this work to his father and mother. Edwin Cannan[5] himself has written the introduction.

In **April**, he returns to India. Ambedkar decides to start practising law. He does not have money to pay for the sanad, though. In **June**, Naval Bhathena comes to his rescue.

1924: In **June**, he starts practising in the Bombay High Court. On **20 July**, he launches the *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* (Group for the Wellbeing of the Excluded), to mobilize Depressed Classes. Its motto is "Educate, Agitate, and Organise". Ambedkar is the chairman of the managing committee.

1925: Ambedkar's LSE MA thesis as *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* is published by P.S. King & Son Ltd; it is dedicated to the Gaekwad of Baroda ("for his help in the matter of my education"), and has an introduction by Columbia's Prof Edward Seligman.

1926: Ambedkar submits evidence before the Royal Commission on Indian Currency (Hilton Young Commission).

The Governor of Bombay nominates him as a member of the Bombay Legislative Council.

He leads the Satyagraha in Mahad to secure the right of Untouchables to draw water from the Chavdar Tank. He ceremonially takes a drink of water from the tank, after which local caste Hindus run riot, and Brahmins take elaborate measures for the ritual purification of the tank.

1927: On **3 April**, Ambedkar launches his Marathi fortnightly *Bahishkrit Bharat*. He himself is the editor.

On **June 8**, he is formally awarded a PhD by Columbia University. His PhD thesis is titled *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* (Note: different dates are given in different sources for this event, but this is the one given on his own official transcript, preserved in the Registrar's Office, Columbia University.)

In **September**, he establishes "Samaj Samata Sangh".

On **2 October**, he presides over a conference of the students from the Depressed Classes in Poona.

On **24 December**, he addresses a second Depressed Classes Conference in Mahad.[6]

1928: Dr Ambedkar becomes professor at the Government Law College, Bombay; his term ends in 1929. In **March**, he introduces the "Vatan Bill" in Bombay Legislative Council. Dr. Ambedkar is selected by the Bombay Presidency Committee to work with the Simon Commission. The Congress boycotts the Simon Commission because it has no Indians in it. In **May** he submits statements to the Simon Commission on behalf of the *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* suggesting measures that need to be taken to improve the condition of the Depressed Classes.

1929: Dr. Ambedkar closes his second journal, *Bahiskrit Bharat* ("Excluded India"), which started in 1927, and replaces it with *Janata* ("The People").

On **October 23**, during a visit to Chalisgaon, he meets with an accident, and is confined to bed until the last week of December.

1930: In **March**, he leads a satyagrah at the Kalaram Temple in Nasik to secure for Untouchables the right of entry into the temple. On **August 8**, Dr. Ambedkar presides over the Depressed Classes Congress in Nagpur, and delivers a speech favouring Dominion status.[7]

Dr. Ambedkar is invited by the Viceroy to be part of the First Round Table Conference, and leaves for London in **October**.

1931: Ambedkar and Gandhi attend the Second Round Table Conference held from **7 September- 1 December**

Ambedkar and Gandhi at the Second Round Conference in London (1931).

1932: The All India Depressed Classes Conference, held at Kamptee, near Nagpur, on 6 May, backs Dr. Ambedkar's demand for separate electorates for the Untouchables, rejecting compromises proposed by others.

By **September 23**, though, a very reluctant Dr. Ambedkar is forced to accept joint electorates, with Gandhi fasting unto death in Yerwada jail, Poona, against the separate electorates granted to the Depressed Classes by Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award. The result is the Poona Pact. (In 1933, Gandhi replaces his newspaper "Young India" with "Harijan", and undertakes a 21-day "self-purification fast" against untouchability.)

1933-34: Dr. Ambedkar participates in the work of the Joint Committee on Indian Legislative Reform (Also Indian Constitutional reform), examining a number of significant witnesses. He also writes a treatise on the Indian Army.[8]

Ambedkar in a family photo alongside wife Ramabai (to his left), son Yeshwant (to his right), sister-in-law Laxmibai, nephew Mukundrao and pet dog Tobby (1934).

1935: On **May 26**, Dr. Ambedkar's wife Ramabai dies after a long illness. In **June**, Ambedkar is appointed as principal of Government Law College, Bombay. He is also appointed the Perry professor of Jurisprudence.

On **October 13**, Dr. Ambedkar presides over the Yeola Conversion Conference, held in Yeola, in Nashik district. He advises the Depressed Classes to abandon all agitation for temple-entry privileges; instead, he says, they should leave Hinduism entirely and embrace another religion. He vows, "I solemnly assure you that I will not die as a Hindu."

1936: He writes, but does not publish, a brief, moving, and largely autobiographical memoir called *Waiting for a Visa*.

On **February 29**, Dr. Ambedkar's conversion resolution is supported by the Chambers of East Khandesh.

On **13-14 April**, he addresses the Sikh Mission Conference in Amritsar and reiterates his intention of renouncing Hinduism.

In **late April**, the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal withdraws its invitation to Dr. Ambedkar to deliver the presidential address at the Mandal's annual conference in Lahore, after reading the text of his speech. On **15 May**, he publishes the speech text, with an introductory account of the whole controversy. The result is the now-famous *The Annihilation of Caste*.

On **31 May**, Dr. Ambedkar addresses a meeting of the Mumbai Elaka Mahar Parishad (Bombay Mahar Society) at Naigaum (Dadar), in Bombay – the only time he would address an audience of just the people of his community. His speech in Marathi is vivid and poignant.

On **15 June**, a conference of Devdasis is held in Bombay to support Dr. Ambedkar's resolution on conversion.

On **18 June**, Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. B.S. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha hold talks on conversion.

In **August**, he founds the Independent Labour Party.

On **18 September** Ambedkar deputes 13 men at the Sikh Mission in Amristar to study Sikhism.

1937 Dr. Ambedkar publishes the second edition of *The Annihilation of Caste*, adding a concluding appendix that features a debate with Gandhi over the speech text. This work would be a bestseller, going through many editions and creating much controversy.

He forms the Municipal Workers' Union, Bombay.

On **17 February**, the first general election under the Government of India Act 1935 is held. Dr. Ambedkar is elected member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly. Dr. Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party wins 17 seats.

On **17 March**, Mahad Chavdar tank case is decided, and Depressed Classes are allowed to use public wells and tanks.

Dr. Ambedkar receives a grand reception at Chalisgaon railway station.

On **17 September**, Dr. Ambedkar introduces the Bill to abolish the Mahar Watan in the Assembly.

1938: In January, Congress introduces a Bill for the amendment of the Local Boards Act in which the Untouchables are defined as Harijans, i.e., sons of God. Dr. Ambedkar criticizes the nomenclature as in his opinion the change of name would make no real change in their condition. (He is against the use of this word in legal matters. In protest of this Bill, the Labour Party members walk out of the assembly.)

On **23 January**, Dr. Ambedkar addresses a Peasants' Conference in Ahmedabad.

On **12 February**, he addresses a historic conference of railway workers at Manmad in Nasik.

In **April**, he opposes the creation of a separate state of Karnataka in the national interest.

In **May,** he resigns as principal of Government Law College, Bombay.

In **August**, he attends a meeting at R.M. Bhatt High School, Bombay that was held to expose Gandhi's discriminatory attitude towards an untouchable man.

In **September**, he speaks on "Industrial Disputes Bill" in Bombay Assembly. He opposes it because it takes away the worker's right to strike.

In **6 November**, industrial workers go on strike. Dr. Ambedkar leads a procession in Mumbai from Kamgar Maidan to Jambori Maidan (Worli).

On **10 November**, he moves a resolution for adoption of birth control measures in the Bombay Assembly.

1939: On **29 January**, he delivers a lecture titled *Federation versus Freedom* at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics. It is published later in the year.

Ambedkar in Bombay, 1939

In **July**, Dr. Ambedkar addresses a meeting of the Rohidas Vidya Committee.

In **October,** Dr. Ambedkar and Nehru meet for the first time.

In **November**, the Congress leaves the government. Jinnah arranges for a celebration calling it the "Day of Deliverance", and Dr. Ambedkar enthusiastically joins him. Dr. Ambedkar is careful to emphasize, however, that this is an anti-Congress rather than an anti-Hindu move; if Congress interpreted it as anti-Hindu, the reason could only be, he says, that Congress was a Hindu body after all.

1940: In **May**, Dr. Ambedkar founded the Mahar Panchayat.

In **July**, he meets Subash Chandra Bose in Bombay.

In **December**, Dr. Ambedkar publishes the first edition of his *Thoughts on Pakistan*.[9]

1941: In **January** Dr. Ambedkar takes up the issue of recruitment of Mahars in the Army. As a result, the Mahar Battalion is created.

On **25 May**, Dr. Ambedkar forms the Mahar Dynasty Panchayat Samiti.

The viceroy appoints him a member of the Defence Advisory Committee.

1942: He founds his second political party, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, which goes on to perform poorly in the 1946 elections. Dr. Ambedkar is inducted into the Viceroy's Executive Council as Labour Member, a position which he holds until his resignation in June 1946.

Congress launches the "Quit India" movement. Dr. Ambedkar severely criticizes this move.

In December, he presents a paper on *The Problems of the Untouchables in India* at the conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations held in Canada.

1943: Dr. Ambedkar speaks on "Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah" at the 101st Birth Celebration of Mahadev Govind Ranade held in Gokhale Memorial Hall, Poona. It was published in book form in April, under the title *Ranade, Gandhi, and Jinnah*[10].

In **September** he publishes the paper he presented the year before at the conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Canada, as the book titled *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*.

On **25 October**, he addresses the Reconstruction Policy Committee meeting. The speech titled *Post-War Development of Electric Power in India* is published in *Indian Information* on **15 November**.

On **26 October**, he writes *Urgency of Industrialisation of India* (Times of India, 26 October).

1944: On **29 January**, he presides over the second meeting of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, in Kanpur.

He founds The Building Trust and the Scheduled Castes Improvement Trust.

On **May 6**, he addresses the annual conference of All-India Scheduled Castes Federation at Parel, in Mumbai. This speech is later published under the title *The Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve it.*

1945: In February, he publishes a revised version of *Thoughts on Pakistan*; this second, expanded edition is titled *Pakistan or the Partition of India*. (The third edition of this book is published in 1946.)

On **6 May** he addresses the annual conference of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, held in Parel, Bombay. This speech is soon published as *The Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve It.*

In **June**, he publishes a political manifesto, detailing the problems of dealing with the Congress and accusing it of many acts of betrayal: *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*. (He publishes a second edition, with major revisions in one chapter, in 1946.)

In **June**, he founds Siddharth College of Art and Science, in Bombay, as an institution of the People's Education Society that he established earlier in the year.

In **July**, he exchanges letters with W. E. B. DuBois, comparing Untouchables with Africian Americans. In October, he publishes *Who Were the Shudras? How They Came to Be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society*. He dedicates the book to the great reformer, Jyotirao Phule. It was published in 1946 by Thacker and Co, Bombay.

His book *Mahatma and the World* is published by Thacker & Co.

1946: Bharat Bhushan Printing Press, founded by Dr. Ambedkar, is burnt down in a clash between Depressed Classes and Caste Hindus.

In **September**, he goes to London to urge British Government and opposition parties to provide safeguards for the Depressed Classes.

He is elected member of the Constituent Assembly. In his first speech in the Constituent Assembly, he calls for a strong and united India.

1947: In **March**, he publishes *States and Minorities: What Are Their Rights and How to Secure them in the Constitution of Free India*, a memorandum on fundamental rights, minority

rights, safeguards for the Depressed Classes, and the problems of Indian states.

On **29 April**, the Article 17 (forbidding and abolition of the practice of untouchability) of Indian Constitution is passed.

In **August** (after Partition and Independence), Dr. Ambedkar accepts Nehru's invitation to become Minister of Law in the first Cabinet of independent India. On **29 August**, he is appointed chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution.

Ambedkar is sworn in as India's first law minister by president Rajendra Prasad as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru looks on (1947).

1948: In the last week of **February**, Ambedkar submits the Draft Constitution for public discussion and debate.

On **15 April**, Dr. Ambedkar marries Dr. Sharda Kabir (a Saraswat Brahmin) in Delhi; she adopts the name Savita. By then he is a diabetic and frequently ill, and she takes care of him.

On **4 October**, Ambedkar presents the Draft Constitution to the Constituent Assembly.

In **October**, he prepares a memorandum on Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province for submission to the Linguistic Provinces Commission. It is later published by the Maha Bodhi journal, Calcutta.

He publishes *The Untouchables: A Thesis on the Origin of Untouchability* (New Delhi: Amrit Book Company), as a sequel to his book on the Shudras.

On **20 November**, the Constitution adopts Article 17 of Indian Constitution, abolishing and outlawing untouchability.

1949: In **September,** Dr. Ambedkar meets Madhavrao Golwalkar, chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in Delhi

On **26 November**, the Constituent Assembly adopts the Constitution of India.

1950: On **11 January**, Dr. Ambedkar addresses the Siddharth College Parliament on the Hindu Code Bill.

Dr. Ambedkar speaks on Buddhism on several occasions.

He founds Milind College in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. President Dr. Rajendra Prasad lays the foundation stone.

His essay "Buddha and the Future of his religion" appears in the journal *Maha Bodhi* Vol 58, April-May.

He speaks on the merits of Buddhism at the meeting arranged on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti in Delhi.

In **December**, he goes to Colombo, Sri Lanka, as a delegate to the World Buddhist Conference.

1951: In **February**, he introduces in Parliament the Hindu Code Bill that he drafted to enhance rights of women; it proves very controversial, and consideration of the Bill is postponed.

In **June**, his essay "The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women" is published by the Maha Bodhi Journal, Calcutta.

In **9 September**, Dr. Ambedkar resigns from the Cabinet, embittered over the failure of Nehru and the Congress to back the Hindu Code Bill as they had earlier pledged to do. He becomes the leader of the Opposition.

On **15 April**, he lays the foundation stone for the Ambedkar Bhawan in Delhi.

In **July**, he founds Bhartiya Buddha Jan Sangh.

In **September**, he compiles the Buddhist Prayer Book *Buddha Upasana Palha.*

1952: In **January**, Dr Ambedkar suffers loss in the first Lok Sabha Election of independent India. Congress' Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar defeats him. However, he enters the the Rajya Sabha representing Bombay.

On **1 June**, he leaves for New York. Columbia University confers on him an honorary LLD, as part of its Bicentennial Special Convocation. The president of the university describes him as "one of India's leading citizens – a great social reformer and a valiant upholder of human rights".

On **22 December**, Dr. Ambedkar delivers a talk at the Bar Council, Pune, on conditions required for the successful working of Democracy.

Ambedkar and American poet Wallace Stevens after receiving honorary LLD in Columbia University (1952).

1953: On **12 January**, Osmania University confers the honorary degree of LLD on Dr Ambedkar.

In **April**, he contests the Lok Sabha by-election from the Bhandara Constituency of Vidharba region but is again defeated by a Congress candidate.

In **May**, Ambedkar establishes the Siddharth College of Commerce and Economics in Bombay.

His political thinking includes analysis of the issue of linguistic states; he publishes *Need for Checks and Balances* (*Times of India*, 23 April 1953) on this question. (In 1955, he is still working on the subject, as the preface (dated 23 December 1955) to *Thoughts on Linguistic States* testifies.)

1954: His health gives way; he is confined to bed for two months.

While dedicating a new Buddhist Vihara near Pune, Dr. Ambedkar announces that he is writing a book on Buddhism and that as soon as it is finished, he will formally convert to Buddhism. He also claims that the image of Vithoba at Pandharpur is actually an image of the Buddha, and says that he will write a thesis to prove this claim.

In **May**, he visits Rangoon, Burma, to attend a function to be held on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti.

In **June,** the Maharaja of Mysore donates 5 acres of land for Dr. Ambedkar's Proposed Buddhist Seminary in Bangalore.

In **September,** he speaks on the Untouchability (Offences) Bill in the Rajya Sabha.

In **October,** a talk by him, *My Personal Philosophy,* is broadcast on All India Radio.

In **December**, he attends the third World Buddhist conference in Rangoon.

1955: Dr. Ambedkar delivers a speech on "Why religion is necessary"

In **May**, He establishes the Bharatiya Baudh Mahasabha.

In **December**, his book *Thoughts on Linguistic States* is published.

Ambedkar and his second wife Savita after their conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur (1956).

1956: Dr. Ambedkar completes the manuscript of *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

In **June**, he established the Siddharth College of Law in Bombay.

From **June** to **October**, he is bedridden in his Delhi residence. His eyes are failing and he suffers from the side-effects of the drugs he is taking for his diabetes; he goes into depression.

On **14 October**, his formal conversion takes place in Nagpur, a town selected for reasons he explains in his moving speech, *Why*

Was Nagpur Chosen? Many thousands of Mahars and other Dalits accept Buddhism along with him. The place is now known as Diksha Bhoomi.

After his conversion, *Janta* is renamed *Prabuddha Bharat.*

In **November**, he flies to Kathmandu to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference. Here, he delivers his speech on "Buddha and Karl Marx".

Ambedkar speaks in Kathmandu as King Mahendra looks on (1956)

On **2 December**, he completes the manuscript of *The Buddha or Karl Marx*, and gives it for typing.

On the night of **5 December** or the early morning of **6 December**, he dies in his sleep at his residence, 26 Alipore road, New Delhi. The place is now known as Mahaparinirvan Bhoomi.

On **7 December** a huge crowd joins his funeral procession in Bombay, and he is cremated with Buddhist rites on the seashore. The place is now known as Chaitya Bhoomi.

1957: *The Buddha and His Dhamma*[11], Dr. Ambedkar's own version of a Buddhist scripture for his people, is posthumously

published, by Siddharth College Publications, Bombay. His work *Gandhi and Gandhism* is also published this year.

1987: *Philosophy of Hinduism, India and Prerequisite of Communism, Revolution and Counter Revolution in India*[12] and *Buddha and Karl Marx* published posthumously as part of *Dr. Ambedkar Writings and Speeches: Vol 3*

1990: Ambedkar is posthumously awarded India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna.

Copy-editing: Anil

References:

1. According to Dhananjay Keer, Ambedkar passed matriculation and his marriage took place afterwards. However, according to the *Encyclopedia of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* by Raj Kumar, Marriage with Ramabai took place (in 1906) before matriculation (in 1907).
2. The Maharaja of Baroda wanted to send some students for higher studies to Columbia University, USA. On 4 June 1913, Ambedkar signed an agreement to study prescribed subjects and serve the Baroda State for 10 years after completion of studies. In July he arrived in New York. He took Political science, Moral Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology and Economics as the subjects for his study.
3. But he did not enjoy the experience. He had to pay for his travel to Baroda, for which he used the compensation paid by Thomas Cook and Company for his luggage that was lost when the ship carrying it was torpedoed. According to his bond, he had to serve the State of Baroda for 10 years. However, he quit shortly after joining the service due to the ill treatment he faced for belonging to a low caste.
4. This position came about through the recommendation of his London acquaintance, Lord Sydenham, former Governor of Bombay. He was mostly successful with his students, but some of the other professors objected to his sharing the drinking-water jug with them.
5. Ambedkar's Economics tutors included Professor Edwin Cannan.
6. The following important resolutions were adopted here:
    a) Declaration of Human Rights.

b) Condemnation of the Manusmriti. On 25 December, Untouchables placed the Manusmriti on a pyre in a specially dug pit and ceremoniously burnt it.

c) That Hindu society be reduced to one class only.

d) That the priestly profession be turned into a democratic institution.

7. In his speech he criticized Gandhi's Salt March and civil disobedience movement, saying they were ill-timed. He also criticized British colonial misgovernance that oversaw famines and economic impoverishment of the masses. He believed that the Depressed Classes must shape their course themselves.

8. Ambedkarism: Essays on Select Economic and Cultural Issues , edited by Praveen K. Jadhav.

9. In this work, he argues that though the Partition would be unfortunate, it wouldn't be the worst possible outcome, and if the Muslims wanted it they had a right to claim it. The first edition was published in 1940 and revised edition was published under the title Pakistan or Partition of India in 1945.

10. Ambedkar compared Ranade with Gandhi and Jinnah. He was of the view that personal ascendency mattered the most to Gandhi and Jinnah.

11. Ambedkar started writing the book in 1951. He began working simultaneously on 'Revolution and Counter Revolution in India' and 'Buddha and Karl Marx'.

12. Ambedkar started working on this book in 1954. He wrote how Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the president of India, washed the feet of Brahmins on the banks of the Ganges.

(Compiled by: Lokesh Kumar)

Writer's Intro

Premkumar Mani is a leading Hindi writer and thinker. In politics, he is known for his advocacy of social justice.

Kanwal Bharati (born February 1953) is a progressive Ambedkarite thinker and one of the most talked-about and active contemporary writers. Dalit Sahitya Kee Avdharna and Swami Achootanand Harihar Sanchayita are his key books. He was conferred with Dr. Ambedkar Rashtriya Award in 1996 and Bhimratna Puraskar in 2001.

Scott R. Stroud is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies, the University of Texas at Austin. Stroud is the author of 'John Dewey and the Artful Life' (2011) and 'Kant and the Promise of Rhetoric' (2014). Currently, he is completing a book manuscript that tells the story of Bhimrao Ambedkar's brush with Deweyan pragmatism at Columbia University during 1913-1916 and how it shaped his innovative pursuit of social justice in India. Stroud's research on Ambedkar and pragmatism has appeared in 'Rhetoric Society Quarterly', 'Journal of Religion', 'Rhetorica', and 'The Pluralist'.

Prathama Banerjee is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. She is interested in political theory, intellectual history, literary studies and philosophies of time. Her earlier book was on Politics of Time: 'primitives' and history-writing in a colonial society (OUP, 2006). Her current work, on histories of the modern political in India, between late nineteenth and mid twentieth century, is forthcoming in 2020 from Duke University Press.

Sadat Rukhsar Yusuf Sadaf is a Research Scholar at University of Delhi. She is working on 'Narratives, Perspective and Imagination: Indic Tradition in South Asian Persian Text'.

She is currently teaching as guest faculty in Government Girls' General Degree College, Kolkata.

Pramod Meena is an associate professor in the Hindi Department of Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Motihari, Bihar. He has previously taught in Pondicherry University, Puducherry.

Anirudh Deshpande is a professor in the Department of History, University of Delhi. A former Nehru Fellow, he is the author of The British Raj and its Indian Armed Forces (2002); British Military Policy in India 1900-1945 (2005); Class, Power and Consciousness in Indian Cinema and Television (2009); and numerous articles in newspapers and magazines, and research papers and reviews in reputed peer-reviewed journals. He has recently been named Motilal Nehru Centenary Biography Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Teen Murti. His Naval Mutiny and Street Nationalism, 1946 (Primus Books) is forthcoming.

Cynthia Stephen is an independent writer and development policy analyst with a focus on issues related to gender, poverty and exclusion.

Meenakshi Meena is the managing editor of the quarterly 'Adivasi Sahitya'.

Sumit Kataria is a Research Scholar in the Department of History, University of Delhi, where he is researching Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's thoughts and ideas and his contribution to the field of education.

Abhijit Guha is a Senior ICSSR Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata. He has co-authored a book entitled 'Criminal Tribe' to 'Primitive Tribal Group' and the Role of Welfare State: The Case of Lodhas in West Bengal, India" (2015) with Santanu Panda.

Neha Singh teaches Political Science in Kirori Mal College in University of Delhi. She is also a Doctoral scholar at the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Jawaharlal Nehru University. The title of her doctoral thesis is "Women Subjugation in a Multi-Religious Urban Space: A Case Study of Old Delhi in the Twentieth Century." Her M. Phil thesis was on "The Hindu Code Bill: An Idea and its Political Discourse." For more than eight years, she has been incessantly working on the issues of caste, gender and social justice. She has worked with several research organisations such as Indian Institute of Public Administration, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Her areas of research interest comprises of women studies, religions and urban spaces, policy analysis specially in relation to caste and gender issues, discrimination and exclusion, human rights, affirmative action. She has several articles, books published pertaining to the inter-sectionality between caste and gender in India in various books and journals.

Lalitha Dhara is a retired academic. She was the head of department, Statistics, and vice-principal, Dr. Ambedkar College of Commerce and Economics, Mumbai. She has researched and authored a number of books, including Phules and Women's Question, Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Women's Question, Chhatrapati Shahu and Women's Question, Periyar and Women's Question, Lohia and Women's Question, Kavya Phule (English translation of Savitribai's first collection of poems).

Jeremy A. Rinker is Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of North Carolina Greensboro's (UNCG's) Department of Peace and Conflict Studies where he is currently engaged in research that explores the intersections between marginalization, collective trauma, and systems of

oppression. Dr. Rinker's research and writings have long focused on South Asian communities, untouchability, human rights, and narrative meaning making in social justice movements. His past work emphasizes the skills and practices of nonviolent conflict transformation in decision making, justice advocacy, and identity formation. Rinker was a 2013 Fulbright Fellow at the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research in Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. He is currently the editor of the Journal of Transdisciplinary Peace Praxis.

Lokesh Kumar is an engineering graduate and MBA in finance. He has work experience in the software Industry in India and abroad. He has authored articles on Socio-economic and political issues at and work on content editing at forward press.

This book sheds light on some hitherto unexplored aspects of the life and works of Dr Bhimarao Ambedkar, arguably the greatest influence on Indian society in modern times. It is a maiden attempt to provide authoritative and comprehensive information on these two topics.

Pramod Ranjan, a well-known scholar of Dalit-Bahujan ideology, has taken pains to produce a well-rounded volume on Ambedkar. The first section of the book throws light on the factors that shaped Ambedkar's ideology. The second section analyses Ambedkar's views on religion.

Five articles compiled in the third section spell out the significance of Ambedkar's contribution as a historian, educationist, jurist, economist, and anthropologist. This Section includes a succinct write-up on Ambedkar's feminism.

The fourth section is centered on the future of Ambedkarism and also seeks to explain what Ambedkarism is and isn't. The fifth section contains a comprehensive chronology of the life and works of Ambedkar.

This book is not only useful for university students and research scholars engaged in the study of social justice movements but is also a must-read for social workers interested in acquiring a deeper understanding of Ambedkar and Ambedkarism.

Pramod Ranjan is an Assistant Professor of Hindi at the Rabindranath Tagore School of Languages and Cultural Studies of Assam University. He has been editor of Jan Vikalp, Forward Press and many other journals. He has edited three books focused on EV Ramasamy Periyar in Hindi: Jati Vyavastha Aur Pitra Satta (Caste system and patriarchy), Dharma Aur Vishwa Drishti (Religion and worldview) and Sachchi Ramayan. Sahityetihas Ka Bahujan Paksha (Bahujan aspect of history of literature), Bahujan Sahitya Ki Prastavna (The case for Bahujan literature), Mahishashur: Ek Jannayak (Mahishasur: A people's hero), Mahishasur: Mithak Va Paramparayein (Mahishasur: myths and traditions) and Shimla Diary are among his notable works. The English translations of some of his books have also been published. They include The Case For Bahujan Literature (co-edited) and Mahishasur : A People's Hero.

BFC PUBLICATIONS

9 789356 320239

BFC Publications
bfc_publications
@BfcPublications
www.bfcpublications.com