Chapter V

Ambedkar and the Political Self

5.1 Introduction

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar carries two major identities in the imaginary of the Indian population. These two identities address two different kinds of groups in India. The caste-Hindu population (which includes three upper castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas) and as well as Muslim, Christian, and other minorities (except the Navayana Buddhism which Ambedkar found) religious groups know Ambedkar as the father of the Constitution of India in recognition of his role as the chair of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution. The other constituency is that of the Scheduled Castes who were previously known as Depressed Classes or untouchables and now known by the label of 'Dalit' (a label given by Ambedkar himself) classes. The Dalits know and identify Ambedkar as their leader who rescued them from tyranny of the caste Hindus. To this group of people Ambedkar is nothing short of a saviour or a messiah. A sense of this can be seen in a Dalit writer from Maharashtra, Daya Pawar's memory of the day Ambedkar passed away on 6 December 1956. Daya Pawar remembers feeling as if a member of his own family had died. Every member of Daya Pawar's family cried on hearing the news. When he went to his place of work for seeking a leave of absence for the day, his boss could not understand why he wanted a leave of absence at the death of a politician. Daya Pawar replied, "Sir, he was of our family. *How could you know the abyss from which he rescued us*?" (in Jaffrelot 2011: 1; emphasis added). The moment is poignant and the division, sharp. The division is epistemic but one that is impossible to be erased. In no way the caste Hindu boss of Daya Pawar could understand what Ambedkar meant for the people whom he called Dalit – broken men. Indeed, this sharp differentiation about the

perception on Ambedkar in the imaginary of Indian populace marked his life and work and it continues to mark it in the present times, almost five decades after his death. That is to say, there is continuity in how Ambedkar is perceived in India today. Ambedkar continues to remain a marginal figure in both the mainstream life of the country as well as in mainstream academia.[1] It is as if Ambedkar, in being the leader of Dalits, cannot claim to be important in the mainstream academia. Writing in the year 2000, Upendra Baxi laments the fact that Ambedkar remains a totally forgotten figure (in Jaffrelot 2011: 2). Baxi's comment has to be read in the context of Ambedkar's presence in the mainstream academia. Arundhati Roy, writing in 2014, states rather sarcastically about the neglect of Ambedkar:

> Ambedkar was a prolific writer. Unfortunately his work, unlike the writings of Gandhi, Nehru or Vivekananda, does not shine out at you from the shelves of libraries and bookshops. (37)

The libraries and bookshops Roy alludes to are the preserve of the upper castes (and upper classes) of the society. Till 1991, authoritative works on Ambedkar by mainstream Indian political and social theorists were virtually non-existent.[2] It was only after 1990 that academic interest in Ambedkar rose. The year 1990 is important for it was in this year that the then Prime Minister of India, V. P. Singh announced the implementation of Mandal Commission Recommendations regarding the reservation of 27% for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs as well as institutions. Suddenly, there was

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[1] Jaffrelot writes, "Official speeches ignored him [Ambedkar] for decades and he was only awarded India's highest honour, the 'Bharat Ratna', in 1990, while V. P. Singh was Prime Minister" (2011: 143). Ambedkar's portrait in the Parliament was installed only 1990, so much for his being the father of the Indian Constitution.

[2] Here my emphasis on Indian mainstream theorists in the second half the twentieth century and I am, for the time being, discounting the works of international scholars here, some of whom remains the most authoritative and also most cited theorists of Ambedkar and Dalit movement and this thesis uses many theoretical insights from them. Eleanor Zelliot, an Amercian, remains the pioneer of Ambedkar studies and still the most important theorist on issues concerning Dalits India. Gail Omvedt is the other most important figure in the field and her life is interesting for the fact that she was born and educated in the USA where she did her PhD. Since 1978 she has been living in India and working in as well as researching Dalit movements in India. She married and Indian and is an Indian citizen now. A third major name in the field is that of Christophe Jaffrelot, French scholar and a major theorist and commentator on Ambedkar and Dalit politics in India.

a flurry of activities in the academia and interest in Ambedkar grew although the initial reaction of many caste Hindu intellectuals was hostile. Even as late as 1997 saw the publication of *Worshipping False God: Ambedkar and the Facts which have been Erased* by Arun Shourie who was to become a cabinet minister in the government of right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the initial years of the twenty-first century. Shourie launches a vicious attack on Ambedkar for being the stooge of British rule, for countering the efforts of Gandhi-inspired social reforms and for being given too much importance to his role in the drafting of the Constitution of India. Many of the charges are not new. Most of the issues Shourie (falsely) rakes up have been raked up by C. Rajgopalachari almost half a century before in 1946 in a book, explicitly titled *Ambedkar Refuted*. What was new in Shourie project was its timing. By the last decade of the twentieth century, even right-wing Hindutva political parties were wooing for Dalit votes and had invoked Ambedkar.[3] The point I wish to make here is that Ambedkar sits uncomfortably in the conscience of the mainstream academic life of India.

I am deliberately repeating the words 'mainstream academia' as it should be evident by the above discussion the 'lack' which I am pointing at. There is another reason for the use of 'mainstream academia'. If we care to look closely, Ambedkar's works have been published and distributed prolifically among the Dalit population across the country. Commenting on the invisibility of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* in the horizon of an average caste Hindu reader, S. Anand notes that:

> While a majority of the privileged castes are blissfully ignorant of its existence, *Annihilation of Caste* has been printed and reprinted – like most of Ambedkar's large oeuvre – by small, mostly Dalit-owned presses, and read by mostly Dalit readers over seven decades. It now has the curious

[3] For a discussion and a strong critique of Shourie's book, see Jaffrelot 2011: 144-150. Jaffrelot links such project at demonising Ambedkar with the rise of political power of Dalits in 1990s. Responses such as Shourie's reflect anxiety on the part of the 'mainstream' or 'elite' sections of the Indian society. Also see Omvedt 2013: 13.

> distinction of being one of the most obscure as well as one of the most widely read books in India. This in itself illuminates the *iron grid of the caste system*. (12; emphasis added)

The iron grid of the caste system is a phenomenon which has remained one of the most controversial sites of debate in modern India for more than two centuries. Its controversial nature rests on whether it should be considered central to all debates on social and political situation of India or it should be considered as a marginal concern in comparison to more pressing needs of the nation-state. The controversy began in nineteenth century with reform movements and continued in the first half of the twentieth century which the high point of Indian national movement for freedom from colonialism. The controversy has spilled over in the post-independent India and refuses to die. Caste, according to Nicholas Dirks, is "a specter that continues to haunt the body politic of postcolonial India" (17). So, intimately caste has been entwined in the history of modern India that Dirk contends that, "Recounting the history of caste … is one way of narrating the social history of colonialism in India" (16).[4] I would add that the social history of caste cast its shadow in myriad ways over the political history and forced the category of the political to reckon with the social. This went on till Ambedkar came on the scene in early twentieth century to turn the tables on the primacy of the political and pushed social as the new political. I wish to look at this travel of caste from social to the political.

This chapter traces the emergence and subsequent development of the concept of caste in Ambedkar over a period of four decades from 1916 to 1956 to examine how the category of caste remained a central trope in Ambedkar's effort to fashion a national self for the community of Dalits and how it informed his effort at fashioning a citizen subject for every individual of India whether 'high caste' or 'low caste'. But the narrative has to

[4] If history of the social can be narrated through the history of the caste, as Dirks asserts, then I may add that invoking Zelliot, this history of the social will cast Ambedkar as the chief protagonist. Zelliot writes, "history of the caste as a whole after the mid-1920s must be written with Ambedkar as the central figure" (Zelliot 2013: 18)

travel back to the childhood of Ambedkar to understand how caste played intimately with his life from early on and why his childhood experiences informed his formulation of caste dealt with both categories: individual as well as collective.

5.2 Locating the Social: Mahar Background and Opportunities for Education

Mahar is one of the sub-castes of untouchable groups in Maharashtra. They formed the greatest part of the untouchable population in Maharashtra. Their traditional role was to perform duties assigned by the village as a whole and they used to get their remuneration from the entire village. The untouchables involved in such works were known as *balutedars* or village servants. They were paid with grains or things in kind which was known as *baluta*. The Mahars were different from other untouchable *balutedars* for they also used to get *watan* that is a fixed amount of land on which they could cultivate crops for themselves (Zelliot 2013: 26). Their duties comprised acting as village watchman, arbitrating in land disputes, acting as guides and messenger to government officials, calling landowners to pay revenue, escorting the government treasury, tracking thieves, repairing the village walls and halls, sweeping the village roads, removing carcasses of dead cattle from the village and bringing firewood to the cremation ground. Apart from these duties, they also were supposed to perform some religious and ritualistic duties (2013: 27). Still, their position was somewhat better as they were not involved in removing the night soil which was done by the Bhangis.

With the onset of colonialism in the nineteenth century and accompanying changes in the economic structure of the village, The Mahars found themselves unemployed. This was compounded by the fact that they had no hereditary craft (such as those of Mangs or Chambhars) on which they could fall back on. As a result they had to move from their traditional villages to other areas in search of employment. Although

their status as being untouchable did restrict their avenues for employment even in factories, they were able to gain employment in labour intensive works such as shore labourers, dock labourers and railway labourers (2013: 35-36). Zelliot notes that two occupations in which Mahars gained entry opened ways for their upward mobility. These two occupations were their recruitment in the army and service in the British households. Both these allowed the Mahars to come in direct contact with the British ways of life and it made them aware of the role of education in life (2013: 37). Opening of these avenues for the Mahars coincided with the anti-Brahmin reform movements which began in the middle of the nineteenth century. This led to opening of schools for the untouchables. This wave of reform coupled with their employment in the army and their proximity to the Christian missionary schools opened opportunities of education for the Mahars. The educational reform activities of leaders such as Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, and Prarthna Samaj also influenced the Mahars to take up initiative on their own to open schools for their community.

The very slow but somewhat steady upward mobility of the Mahar community in the light of their connection with the army and slow exposure to education came to a halt by 1890. Their recruitment in the army stopped as the British colonial government dissolved the old presidency armies. The new recruitment policy adopted a hoary concept of "martial races" (Zelliot 2013: 48) which effectively stopped the Mahars' entry into the army as they were a "non-martial race." This development led to the rise of the Mahar movement. The Mahars felt the necessity to organize themselves into an organization in order to press for their reinstatement into the army. In 1890, Gopal Baba Walangkar, a retired army man, petitioned the government against the decision not to recruit the Mahars in the army. But Walangkar had a more extensive agenda. He launched a full-fledged reform movement through which he challenged the authority of the Brahmins and

criticized the Indian National Congress as a party of the Brahmins. Zelliot observes that the basic plea of Walangkar was that all untouchables, including the Mahars and other sub-castes as well, should be recruited in the army, police and civil administration and also that the government should see to it that the untouchables are treated equally with other caste Hindus (2013: 50). Although Walangkar's plea did not bring any immediate result but his effort did galvanize the Mahars into a unified consciousness.[5] This consciousness found its most appropriate representation in the life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.

The following section outlines the life of Ambedkar and examines the representation of Ambedkar in the most authoritative biography of his to see what lies behind such representations; or in other words, what theoretical frameworks inform such a biography and what lesson it offers in understanding the politics of caste and its erasure in modern India.

5.3 Representing Ambedkar: Imagining/Inaugurating the National Subject

It was during the beginning of the Mahar movement that Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891. As his father and grandfather had army background, Ambedkar comparatively had a better social upbringing than other Untouchable children. His father was a headmaster in an army school and he took a keen interest in the studies of his children (Keer 11). Although caste played intimately in his life, Ambedkar was able to receive education which was a rarity for the untouchables. Education did not save him from the lot of untouchability. The impact of caste discrimination can be gauged from the fact that as a man well into his forties, when he wrote a small memoir in mid-1930s titled *Waiting for Visa,* he poignantly recollects a series of caste atrocities he faced at different

[5] The Mahar reinstatement in the army began in 1910 but it was Ambedkar, in his official capacity as the Labour Secretary to the British government, who was responsible for the establishment of a full-fledged Mahar battalion in 1942.

points in his life. He remembered with clarity the humiliation he suffered at the hand of a bullock cart driver when he was nine years old. He remembered being humiliated by the Parsis in Baroda and his colleagues (and even peons) when he landed in India with multiple degrees from the United States of America and England. Even his education could not save him from the impact of caste. In the same reminiscence, he recounted other instances of his humiliation for being an untouchable. It was through these experiences that he came to the conclusion, an untouchable in India is not a category which is restricted only to the Hindu religion, but it operates in all religions be it Zorastrian, or Islam which claims to be the most egalitarian religion. Despite all this interplay of caste in his life Ambedkar passed his matriculation in 1907 and for this rare achievement, he was felicitated by the untouchable community in a public meeting (19).

Through the help of a sympathetic teacher, K. A. Keluskar, Ambedkar was able to secure a scholarship from the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of the princely state of Baroda which enabled him to enter into Elphinstone College, Bombay for his B.A. He finished it in 1912. But the most important year of his life was 1913 when Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad granted him a scholarship to pursue higher studies in the United States of America. Ambedkar grabbed the opportunity. He landed in the United States of America in July 1913 and enrolled in Columbia University. He finished his M.A. and PhD in economics. His thesis was titled *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*.[6] During this time, he also presented a paper "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" at an anthropology seminar (Keer 29). After finishing his PhD, Ambedkar moved to the London School of Economics in England in 1916 to pursue a degree in Economics. He also enrolled for a degree in Law at Grays Inn. But he received a serious set-back as he was called back by the Dewan of Baroda state informing him that

[6] Although Ambedkar finished the thesis in 1916 but he was awarded PhD only 1927 because he did not had the fund to publish the thesis in a book form. He published it in 1925 and sent the required number of copies to the University upon which he was awarded the degree.

the term of his scholarship was over and he should join his duties in Baroda. Ambedkar got a special permission from his teacher, Prof. Edwin Cannan at the London School of Economics to allow him a break in his studies. He was given permission on the condition that he had to come back within four years and resume his studies. Ambedkar did return to London in September 1920. This time he kept the term at Grays Inn and finished MSc in 1921. The thesis *The Problem of Rupee* was completed in 1922 and submitted to the University of London. He had to rewrite some sections of the thesis as the examiners found the language extremely harsh and critical of the British empire in India. Finally, he resubmitted the thesis in 1923 and was awarded Doctor of Science (DSc) degree soon after (Keer 49).

In India, Ambedkar tried to take up many jobs and each time he hit a caste wall. When he returned to India in 1917, he joined his services at the Baroda state but he could not find accommodation for being an untouchable he was denied room in every hotel and lodge. He had to live incognito in a Parsi inn but soon his identity was discovered and he was thrown out. His life in the office was no better and even peons treated him like an untouchable. Ambedkar remembers these episodes in *Waiting for Visa*. With no option left, he left Baroda for good. Back in Bombay, he tried odd jobs such as giving tuitions and offering advice to stock dealers. But once his untouchable caste was known, dealers refused to come to him. Finally, he got a job at Sydenham College in November 1918. During his next stint in India which began in 1923, he tried different options such as legal profession and teaching positions in different colleges. He was nominated into the Bombay Legislative Council in 1926 and became a Labour Secretary in the Viceroy Council in 1942. In 1947, he was made the chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India and became the Law Minister in independent India. He resigned from his post on the issue of the Hindu Code Bill. During his active career from 1917 to

the end of his life, Ambedkar began many magazines, formed many organizations for the upliftment of the Depressed Classes in India. He submitted numerous petitions and memoranda and made representations before many commissions with the sole purpose of securing political, economic, social and religious rights for the Depressed Classes. He wrote voluminously and as of now, seventeen volume (consisting of twenty books) of his writings and speeches (in English) have been published.

This was in brief a bare sketch of Ambedkar's life. As I depend on Keer's biography of Ambedkar, I wish to look at this biography more critically to understand the theoretical framework or the world view espoused in this text before moving on to focus more closely on Ambedkar's contact with the metropolitan cultures of New York and London. It is also important to do so because Keer's work is a major and authoritative text on Ambedkar's life in English language. Keer's work when compared to Amar Chitra Katha's *Babasaheb Ambedkar* yields an interesting understanding how modernity is used as a tool to deprive the narrative of Ambedkar's life of its radical energy. I argue that efforts have been made and are continued to be made to create hegemony of a normative national subjectivity. Such efforts try to make invisible the radical energy of all other minor subjectivities.

Keer's biography, as noted above, continues to be the standard referent in English language.[7] Authoritative as it is, it is important to look at Keer's work critically in the light of this thesis. In the Preface to the first edition of the book in 1954, Keer writes:

> Thought-provoking and provocative, this life is *highly instructive* to everyone who yearns for human dignity and equality in human relations in society. Besides, it provides a most inspiring example of what a man can achieve by his *indomitable perseverance and great self-denial*, even under the most depressing and destitute circumstances. It provides also a lesson that *one should*

[7] There are more authoritative biographies such as C. P. Khaimode's multi-volume biography in Marathi which provides richer material. My lack of understanding of Marathi language limits my thesis to English language sources only, whether in original or in translation.

> *rely upon one's own effort in life rather than depend upon the help and patronage of others*. Ambedkar's eternal search for knowledge, his incredible industry and his unflinching aim with which he raised himself from dust to doyen, from the life of a social leper to the position of a constitution-maker, and his heroic struggles for raising the down-trodden to human dignity will constitute a golden chapter in the history of this nation and in the history of human freedom as well. (ix-x; emphasis added)

Keer's enterprise here is to produce a pedagogic tool in the process of nation-building where it is the individual who works and sacrifices for the sake of the nation. The above quote obliterates the social completely. The individual is shored up so much that the social becomes irrelevant in Keer. Here, the social has no role at all in the formation of an individual subject. It is the individual who shapes the social by his/her own personal effort. The only way to success is to depend upon one's own effort and not to depend upon the "help and patronage of others." The celebration of Ambedkar is complete with marking his trajectory from a "social leper" to the position of a "constitution-maker" in a single sentence. It is the 'nation' which gets all the glory in Ambedkar's heroic struggle in "raising the down-trodden to human dignity" and this nation is transcended just a bit to incorporate the entire humanity. Humanity collapses into the nation and this nation claims Ambedkar as its own. The story of the nation becomes the story of an individual and this story can safely do away with all other spaces of society. Society does appear here but just as a space where the individual performs his heroic exploits. There is absolutely no effort to question the space itself and how that space controls the relationship between those inhabiting it.

Keer's description of his own effort in his work can be read as an effort in the formation of the national subject. Ambedkar is worth studying not because he represented a community but because of his association with the drafting of the Constitution of the country. Being the chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution was the

pinnacle of success, the completion of the national subject. Keer piles on lists of adjectives inscribed on the body of Ambedkar. Clearly, for Keer, Ambedkar is just a representative of the perfect body of the national subject. Keer's national subject must be industrious, capable of great self-denial, totally self-dependent, refuses any kind of help or patronage, eternal seeker of knowledge, and capable of incredible industry. Only such an individual can raise oneself from dust to doyen and occupy the coveted position of the national subject. It is Keer's belief that by sheer possession of these qualities a person can become great and there is absolutely no necessity for any other kind of social, economic, political, cultural or religious capital.

There is an obvious blindness in Keer's description. It is easy to see that when he writes that Ambedkar's life "provides a lesson that one should rely upon one's own efforts in life rather than depend upon the help and patronage of others," he is committing a serious oversight. In the main text of the biography, Keer does discuss the help Ambedkar received in his life from various people which allowed him to undertake his different projects. Keer also mentions the patronage which Ambedkar received first from the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda and later on from Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur. It was Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad's scholarship which enabled Ambedkar to first finish his graduation in Elphinstone College in Bombay and later on go to the Columbia University for post-graduation and PhD. Similarly, it was the generous help of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur which allowed Ambedkar to return to the London School of Economics in 1920 and finish his thesis, *The Problem of Rupee*. Keer chooses to conveniently forget this contradiction in his own assertions in the Preface of the book. Keer, in his enthusiasm to shore Ambedkar up as the very embodiment of the national subject, forgets that throughout his life Ambedkar fought against the romantic idea of nation where sharp and cruel differences are just made invisible under the over-

arching presence of a national identity. Keer does not mention how the life of Ambedkar can be more effectively read as a life in constant tension and struggle against the very idea of nation which Keer so enthusiastically projects.

A recent critical study in such kinds of representation of life of leading figures of Indian Independence Movement has been attempted by Deepa Sreenivas in her book *Sculpting the Middle Class: History, Masculinity and the Amar Chitra Katha in India*. Amar Chitra Katha is a series of pictorial story books fashioned on the lines of Western comic books. The series was launched in 1967 by Anant Pai who has remained its editor. Sreenivas examines the entire corpus of Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) right from its beginning and establishes its link with the hegemonization project of the right-wing political parties and cultural organizations in India. The hegemonization project is that of the constitution of a proper nation and a national subject. Chapter II of this thesis has discussed how the question of the national subject has remained a site of contestation. Hindutva as the proper mould of a national subject was always present in the mental geography of many Indian elites and it has been propounded by different people at different times in different degrees. Vivekananda, Bankim, Aurobindo, Tilak, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Savarkar were the most articulate proponents of the normativity of Hindu nationalism. In her book, Sreenivas locates ACK in the same mould where the national subject was the embodiment of masculinity, values, character and steeped in the ancient culture of India. This national subject had to perform a double role: immersed in the ancient culture of India, s/he has to show the great origin of the nation as it once was (devoid of foreign elements that came later on to pollute the nation and to unmake it). At the same time, this national subject was to carry the nation forward and through his/her exceptional individuality was to bring glory to the nation. All the mythological or historical figures featured in ACK had this pedagogic function to operate as a template for

the ideal national subject. Sreenivas notes that in each book of the series, it is the individual who is put into the centre stage at the cost of the social. Society becomes an invisible, or at best, an abstract category. There is a direct and one-to-one correspondence between the individual and the nation. The nation is mapped onto the individual and this individual, in turn, writes the nation into existence and also ensures its greatness by his/her deeds which are mostly masculine. Sreenivas traces the in emergence of this series a crisis which beset the Indian nation. Nehruvian socialism failed to match the aspirations of various sections of the society. On the one hand, the elite in the nation were unhappy with the socialist tag of the country which shackled the 'creative' potential of the capitalist class and craved for an open market economy as they found in Europe and America. On the other hand, peasants, tribals and Dalits rose against the state challenging its neglect of their own communities. It was a period of the Naxalite movement which began in West Bengal and spread quickly in parts of erstwhile Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. It was during this time of crisis that the right wing politics, led by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political offshoot Jansangh and later on Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) saw a fertile ground for their propaganda of Hindu nationalism and Hindu nation. Right from its inception in 1925, RSS was heavily influenced by Savarkar's idea of nation which was the ideal of holy land. According to Savarkar, India is the holy land of the Hindus whose veins carry the same blood as the once mighty race of Vedic fathers (Sreenivas 28). In Savarkar's Hindu nation Muslims and Christians had no place as they carried foreign blood in their veins and so they cannot owe their heartfelt allegiance to India. Inspired by Savarkar, RSS aspired to institute a martial, organised and rationalized Hindu community that was the only community fit to be the citizens of India. The critical period of 1970s provided a

ground to such groups to propagate their ideals of nation and nationalism. Sreenivas places ACK in such a framework of Hindu nationalism:

> Developed at a moment, when the 'Nehruvian' consensus was in crisis, it articulates the hegemonic ambitions of a modern Hindu nationalism; a refined, brahmanised, yet modern, masculinity emerges as normative within the discourse of ACK. It seeks to train future citizens of the nation through narratives that centre and foreground an indomitable and persevering masculinity. (4)

Between 1970 and 1990, ACK was hugely popular and sold millions of copies in multiple languages in India. It was able to carve out a pedagogic tool for preparing children to be the future citizens of the country. The citizen subjectivity it sought to create was hinged on the ideals of indomitable and persevering masculinity. Accordingly, only those mythological and historical figures which either conformed to the celebrated masculine ideals or modified to fit such an ideal found a place in ACK. ACK began its series with the mythical figure of Krishna and later on Rama and Pandavas found their place as the prototype of the subjects which Indian children must aspire to. Historical figures such as Shivaji, Rana Pratap and Prithviraj Chauhan also became the subject matter of ACK. It is not difficult to see who the 'enemies of the nation' or the 'demons' whom these historical figures eliminated to protect the honour of the nation were. In the idea of a Hindu nation, consciously or unconsciously, Muslims and Christians can only occupy the position of an enemy of the nation or at best, they can only be second-class citizens.

It is important to note that in the field of historiography a major change was on the horizon in 1970s. Ranajit Guha and other scholars of *Subaltern Studies* group challenged the elite historiography of Indian nationalism and made a case for the voices of the marginalized to be brought into the mainstream history. Their project inevitably challenged the received normativity of the national subject who fought for the freedom of

the country and sought to substitute it with other kinds of subjectivities operating within the nation charting its own course outside the influence of the hegemonic politics of the elite. They sought to read the crisis of 1970s as a time when dominant narrative of the nation came under immense challenge and the subaltern sections of the population were staking their claims in the nation state. For the subaltern historians, this was the opportune moment to challenge the normativity of the national subject. In this sense, they were in direct conflict with the project of ACK. Sreenivas notes:

> *Subaltern Studies* initiated radical ways of conceiving the past which made possible a questioning of the 'normative' power relations of the present. ACK – which narrativises history as the story of great men and a few great women – on the other hand, seeks to re-install a normative politics, and its success cannot be underestimated. In fact, its impact is far-reaching because it takes history right into the domain of popular culture, and thus engages with and reshapes the commonsense of the people. It may be said that Anant Pai sets out to 'make' the very hegemony in the post-Nehruvian period that Guha claims the middle-class India lacks. (19-20)

Sreenivas refers to the Gramscian understanding of hegemony where bourgeois hegemony is secured through rearticulation in the sphere of culture and ideology to understand how and why a project such as ACK, which operates in Brahmanical Hindu cultural logic, features a book on Ambedkar who stood against everything even remotely Brahmanical. Following Gramsci, Sreenivas asserts that it is only by presenting its own goals as universal that the bourgeoisie can forge alliances with the subordinate groups (20). This should explain Ambedkar's place in ACK's pantheon of nation-builders. In order to accommodate Ambedkar in such a pantheon, ACK performs a deft narrative manipulation and presents a de-radicalized Ambedkar who is the model of self-made citizen subject relying solely on his own hard work, grit and determination. Sreenivas writes:

> [ACK's] *Babasaheb Ambedkar* is a tribute to the triumph of the human spirit in the most adverse circumstances. It charts the march of the self and its attainment of the 'neutral' and awesome status

> of the citizen, accessible only to those who successfully erase/rise above the marks of their oppression – of caste, community or gender. (166)

The narrative deftness performed by ACK robs Ambedkar of all his radical charge. Ambedkar's critical relationship with Brahminism as well as the hegemonic state is made invisible in ACK and he is presented as the 'true' nationalist who drafted the Constitution of India and who exhorted his community to work hard and not to depend on the charity of the others. There is no Ambedkar in ACK who argued convincingly how the elite society has kept the Dalits under servitude and made them incapable of rising from their lowly position in any way. Again, in choosing to highlight Ambedkar's assertion of self-help among the Dalits, ACK chooses to gloss over the fact that it was Ambedkar who argued for and got the special reservation rights for the Dalits. The reason for this glossing over as Sreenivas notes is that ACK and the cultural project viewed 'reservations' as against the merit. It impedes the growth of the meritorious individuals and by extension impedes the growth of the nation itself. Ambedkar, the provider of 'reservation' for the Dalits is of no use for ACK. It is the meritorious and scholar Ambedkar who is the fit citizen subject.

Sreenivas' argument and critique of ACK's *Babasaheb Ambedkar* can be extended to Keer's biography of Ambedkar too, especially its Preface, a section of which has been quoted above, where Keer outlines the purpose of the project. Keer's *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* was published in 1954; it precedes ACK's *Babasaheb Ambedkar* by twenty-five years. This huge temporal gap between the two texts does not reflect in the hegemonizing project of the national subject they undertake. Both are cast in the same mould. ACK's Ambedkar was the result of the crisis of the nation-state in 1970s. Keer's Ambedkar, which comes in 1954, was the product of the high times of normative nationalism and the nation building.

5.4 Transcending the Border: Liberation of the Self and Theorization of Caste

As noted earlier, Ambedkar received scholarship from the Maharaja of Baroda to pursue higher studies in the United States of America.[8] The scholarship was contractual in nature in the sense that the person who availed it had to come back and work for the state of Baroda for a period of ten years. The Maharaja's choice of the United States of America as the preferred country is not clear but Zelliot mentions that he had visited USA and was impressed with the education system and had sent his own son to Harvard University (2013: 68).[9] The scholarship was an important opportunity for Ambedkar to get higher education and he reached New York in July 1913, he enrolled himself in the Columbia University. He stayed there for three years. Again it is not clear why Ambedkar chose only the Columbia University and not any other. But it turned out to be the right choice as Zelliot notes that Columbia University was in its golden age and the list of its teachers reads like a catalogue of the most important educators of America (2013: 69). Those three years awakened his own potential (2013: 69). In another place, Zelliot notes:

> John Dewey, James Shotwell, Edwin Seligman, James Harvey Robinson, Franklin Giddings, and Alexander Goldenweiser were all men of great importance in the development of American thought, and probably nowhere else could Ambedkar have received such a broad and deep exposure to an optimistic, expansive, pragmatic body of knowledge. (2010: 80)

Life in New York, according to Omvedt, was an experience of "a scintillating new openness" (2014: 7). Keer describes it more dramatically:

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[8] Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad (1863-1939) was a ruler of Baroda princely state (1875-1939) and is widely considered to one of the most progressive rulers in the country during the period of late nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century. Among numerous activities he carried out, establishment of Baroda college was certainly a major one. It got the status of a university in 1949. The Maharaja invited some of the finest talents and minds from around the country to work for Baroda state. It was Maharaja's influence that saw people such Aurobindo, K. G. Subramaniam, Anand Coomaraswamy, and Raja Ravi Verma coming and staying in Baroda.

[9] One reason may be that the Maharaja was not really keen on England as the preferred destination for its linkage to the colonial rule in India. This can be plausible if we keep in mind that he was keen to develop Baroda into such a place which produces everything it requires and not remain dependent on England for anything.

> Life in America, a foreign land, was a unique and moving experience in life that Ambedkar met with in New York. There, in company with other students and colleagues he could move freely. He could read, he could write, he could walk, he could bathe and he could rest with a status of equality. Meals at regular hours, eating on a table cloth, and napkin! To him life at Columbia University was a revelation. It was a new world. *It enlarged his mental horizon*. A new kind of existence began. *His life gleamed with a new meaning*! (27; emphasis added)

Keer's hero is now in the perfect setting where his mind is getting developed and his life will take on a new meaning. Keer's narrative does not stop at this point to ask why Columbia University and New York offered Ambedkar "a status of equality" and why that status was denied to him even in Bombay, the most cosmopolitan city of India even at the turn of the twentieth century. Keer mentions the setting in one sentence and then goes onto focus on his hero and follows his trajectory of 'self-development'.[10] Even in the narrative of ACK, at this point, Ambedkar is shown to be thinking, "I feel so free here. There are no social restraints on me. I can do almost anything I please" (Pai 14). ACK too notes that the "freedom and equality in the U.S.A. was a novel experience for Bhimrao" (Pai 14). Both the narratives focus on "freedom" and "equality" without any qualification. With the arrival of "freedom" there is "equality" and now the hero is ready to script his victory. In this narrative, caste just disappears and what is left is just the "individual" who can achieve anything because he is free and equal. As discussed above, this narrative is indirectly critical of any kind of special favour being granted to minorities or deprived sections of the society. All they need is "freedom" and "equality."

There is another important narrative maneuver in Keer and ACK. During the initial days of his stay in the United States of America, Ambedkar, as Omvedt notes, "enjoyed himself. He spent his days seeing dramas, playing games like badminton and learning new sports such as ice-skating" (2014: 7). ACK decides to do away with this

[10] The chapter in Keer's book where he discusses Ambedkar's American sojourn is titled as "Self-development" (Keer 2013: 26)

aspect of its hero whereas Keer turns it into an abstraction of even less than a sentence. Keer writes:

> *For a while his mind was diverted*, but he soon woke up to his responsibilities and resolved to engage in his studies with great diligence and thoroughness. There was no time for pleasant idleness, or for the fill of enjoyment of the University life habitual with the sons of rich men. The thought of going to the theatre did not cross his mind, nor did he spend his time in strolling, nor did he loiter in sightseeing in the city of New York. He has a vigorous appetite, but appeased it with a cup of coffee, two muffins and single meat or fish dish, which cost him one dollar and ten cents. Out of his stipend he had to remit some money every month, and so he had to keep down his expenses. (28; emphasis added)

The enjoyment is a distraction of mind for Keer. It is a break in the telos of greatness. Moreover, in Keer's conception of things, a hero has to be the embodiment of self-denial like an ascetic. The distractions are so loathsome for Keer's narrative that he does not even name them. The hero realizes his mistake in enjoying himself soon enough and again embark on the journey. After the "realization," time and space cease to hold any meaning as the hero is so immersed in his work that he does not see anything else. In this stage of ascetic-like devotion to studies, cinema, sightseeing or even strolling does not arise in the mind of Ambedkar. The economic hardship faced by Ambedkar is not questioned in any way. Rather it becomes an important aspect of the heroic struggle. It lends an aura of heroism. Hardship and overcoming of it carries a potent tool of pedagogy. Such inscription of hardship on the body of the hero makes invisible the social construction of poverty and destitution. Such invisibilization does away with all the critical engagements with the problems inherent in the social structures giving rise to poverty, destitution and inequality in all spheres of life and work.

There is no denying the fact that Ambedkar did feel the difference in his status as an individual. He was free from the stigma of his caste and could mix with people easily.

He did associate with Indian students of all castes and classes for the first time. Later in life, Ambedkar himself accepts the importance of USA in his life. Zelliot quotes him:

> 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. (in Zelliot 2013: 69)

Ambedkar's life in Columbia University was marked by a range of courses he undertook. Zelliot notes that he enrolled himself in maximum number of courses possible for a student. Apart from his chief subject economics, he took courses in sociology, history, politics, philosophy, and anthropology (Zelliot 2013: 69). He wrote his PhD thesis, *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* under Edwin R. A. Seligman. The thesis was critical of all aspects of the British rule in India, be it bureaucratic or legislature. He criticized the conservatism in bureaucracy and muzzling of the Press and denial of public meetings (Keer 23). But the most important aspect of Ambedkar's academic endeavours at Columbia University, at least for the purpose this thesis, was his paper on caste which he presented at the anthropology seminar of Alexander Goldenweiser in May 1916. The paper was titled "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development." This was the first time that Ambedkar grappled with the theorization of caste. It was a category which played intimately in his life right from the birth and he was always at the receiving end of this category. In the United States of America, for the first time, he tried to understand it as a category of knowledge. In fact, he began with the assertion that however hoary the institution of caste may be, it can still be knowable (*BAWS* vol. 1: 5). More importantly, knowing caste was not an empty intellectual exercise for Ambedkar:

> The caste problem is a vast one, both theoretically and practically. Practically, it is an institution that portends tremendous consequences. It is a local problem, but one capable of much wider mischief, for 'as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social

> intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem'. (*BAWS* vol. 1: 5-6)

There is a deliberate attempt to project a local problem onto a global scale. In order to do so, Ambedkar invokes Ketkar's notion that caste can be a global phenomenon in case the Hindus decide to migrate to different places in the world (Ketkar 4).[11] The intention is clear in this assertion. Caste is mischievous and must be understood and reined in, or else it will infest the entire world wherever Hindus migrate. There is an implicit longing for practice of intermarrying which, to Ambedkar, is the only way the Hindu religion could be reformed. This awareness of the practicality of his paper is coupled with an added awareness that caste is not an easy topic to grapple with theoretically and many scholars have tried and failed to grasp the structure of caste in its entirety. Ambedkar's contribution is that he concentrates on the mechanism of caste and uses the mechanism to go back in time to trace the origin of it and to see how it developed.

Ambedkar underlines the essential unity of Indian culture. He contends that many people of different stocks came into India. Although they did not amalgamate, eventually they were able to stay together and in the process got homogenized by the inherent unit of Indian culture (*BAWS* vol. 1: 6). This may be read as a very positive assertion almost on the lines of most nationalists. But very soon, Ambedkar comes to the flip side of this unity of culture. It is the unity of culture in India from one end to the other geographical end which makes caste such a difficult phenomenon to explain (*BAWS* vol. 1: 6). India was a homogeneous unit and caste is a parcelling of that unit, so in order to understand the caste one has to understand the process of parcelling (*BAWS* vol. 1: 6). Ambedkar's theoretical framework in the paper was to link caste with endogamy and to explain caste

[11] A sociologist, historian and novelist, Shridhar V. Ketkar, was a Professor at Calcutta University in the first half of twentieth century. A *chitpavan* Brahmin from Pune (Maharashtra), Ketkar travelled to Cornell University (the USA) in 1906 where he obtained his PhD on the topic *The History of Caste in India* which came out as a book 1909. While making his arguments on caste, Ambedkar cited from Ketkar's book.

through an anthropological account of how endogamy is practiced and perpetuated. According to him, caste came into existence when endogamy was superimposed on the practice of exogamy in India. It is a well-known fact that the Hindus do not allow *sapindas* (blood-kin) *and sagotras* (of same class) to intermarry which means that they observe exogamy in such matters. Caste cannot exist in such a case as exogamy leads to fusion whereas caste acts against fusion. So, the only way caste can be explained is when the laws of endogamy were superimposed on the laws of exogamy. It is a case of superimposition and not that of replacement. Both endogamy and exogamy co-exist. Caste is formed through endogamy but within a particular caste, exogamy is observed rigidly (*BAWS* vol. 1: 9-10). Ambedkar then further traces the reasons for endogamy and how it is maintained and he comes up with the concept of *surplus man* and *surplus woman* within a group. Ambedkar asserts that within a group there are more or less equal number of males and females. In order to ensure that conjugal rights of the members of the group are provided from within the group itself, it was necessary to ensure the equality of marriageable males and females. In a group if a husband dies before the wife then the group has one *surplus woman* and if a wife dies before her husband then the group is faced with a *surplus man*. Thus in case of a surplus man or a surplus woman, the group faces the question of how to manage the surplus man or woman. According to Ambedkar, the problem is solved differently for the surplus man and the surplus woman. When it comes to managing the surplus woman, the group adopts one of the three methods: one, to make the woman die on her husband pyre, that is, *sati*; two, enforced widowhood, where the widow is not allowed to marry; and three, girl marriage. Ambedkar says that the practice of *sati* is not very practical; so the second method, enforced widowhood, is more effective in keeping the surplus woman in check. This check is important for two reasons: one, if a widowed woman marries outside the group

then the rule of endogamy will crumble; and two, if a widowed woman marries within the group from the marriageable men, then she is competing with the marriageable women in her own group and in such a situation an imbalance of marriageable units will emerge. So, caste had an important role in endorsing the widowhood. The group, according to Ambedkar, manages the surplus man in a different way. As man is an important part of the group (on the basis of his masculinity) a surplus man cannot be allowed to die on the funeral pyre of his wife or renounce the world. There are only two ways available to deal with a surplus man. One is that he should live the rest of his life in celibacy. This is not a very practical option although some people do practice it. Such people are very few in number. The second way is to find a woman from within the group in such a way as not to jeopardize the delicate balance of marriage units of sexes. This problem is solved by arranging a marriage of the widower with a girl from within the group who is not of a marriageable age. A girl bride is not in direct competition with marriageable women and so she is the safest bet to keep a man from defecting to the other groups/castes. Ambedkar finds in three practices of managing surplus man and woman as the mechanism of ensuring and perpetuating endogamy (*BAWS* vol. 1: 12-13).

After looking at how a group manages its individuals, Ambedkar moves towards the collective. He rejects the idea that the individual is a unit of society. He writes:

> To say that individuals make up society is trivial; society is always composed of classes. It may be an exaggeration to assert the theory of class-conflict, but the existence of definite classes in a society is a fact. Their basis may differ. They may be economic or intellectual or social, but *an individual in a society is always a member of a class*. This is a universal fact and early Hindu society could not have been an exception to this rule, and, as a matter of fact, we know it was not. (*BAWS* vol. 1: 15; emphasis added)

It is not individual but classes make up the society. Class becomes important for Ambedkar because it is only through class that the mechanism of caste can be understood.

Individuals do not constitute caste by themselves but only by being members of a class that they find their place in the caste. Ambedkar declares that "A caste is an enclosed class" (*BAWS* vol. 1: 15). Without class we cannot have the category of caste. It is a class which follows the principle of endogamy and in the process transforms itself into a caste. After establishing the mechanism of endogamy and how it constitutes caste, Ambedkar traces the origin of caste in Brahminism. He argues that all the customs which he outlined as the mechanism of caste are followed most strictly by the Brahmin class in India. The non-Brahmins follow only one of these customs so it must be assumed that they derived their customs from the Brahmins. Based on this, Ambedkar argues that it was the Brahmin class who began strictly following all the rules of endogamy and thus enclosed itself into caste. But in this process of enclosing themselves into caste, Brahmins pushed other classes out and these classes by the rule of imitation of the superior class, formed themselves into other caste groups. So, there can never be a single caste. Ambedkar argues that caste in singular is a misnomer, it can exist only in plural number (*BAWS* vol. 1: 20). It means that one caste leads to the creation of multiple castes by "the infection of imitation" (*BAWS* vol. 1: 18). Ambedkar uses the four *varnas* in the Hindu society to show how over a period of time these *varnas*, which were interchangeable classes to begin with, turned themselves into castes when Brahmins enclosed themselves in a caste group and closed the door of their class for others. Others who were shut out of Brahminism created their own castes in turn leading to the multiplicity of castes. Another point which needs to be highlighted is that Ambedkar's assertion that a person is member of a class allowed him to demand the electoral representation for the Depressed Classes. It also allowed him scope to oppose the special representation demanded by mercantile classes. Ambedkar argued that as most of the representatives are from the caste Hindu classes, they represent their classes too.

Ambedkar's paper on caste reflects his training in diverse disciplines most importantly in anthropology and ethnography. His mode of argument is to set up a hypothesis and to then go on to deconstruct it from all angles. In this paper, he tries to understand caste by stripping it to its bare essential practices; a method which is required for observing caste and theorize those essentials. He traces the origin of those essentials and then reconstructs their subsequent development. This pattern of investigation remains with Ambedkar throughout his life. He uses the same technique to reconstruct the history of Buddhism and to inquire into the origin of untouchability in India. It is not difficult to see why his training in the Columbia University was crucial for his entire oeuvre of writing. Many of the terms Ambedkar uses at the Columbia seminar such as individual, class, society and of course, caste become constant trope in his writings. Zelliot emphasizes the importance of this education in Ambedkar's life as:

> His later theory of the development of untouchability and his work for the eradication of untouchability were based on these theories, namely, that Indian culture was basically unified and basically valuable, and that caste inequalities were a social development without a racial origin. (2010: 81)

Zelliot underlines the influence of Dewey on Ambedkar. Ambedkar found much sustenance in Dewey's theories of education and democracy and also his pragmatic philosophy. As late as in 1954, Ambedkar used Dewey's ideas of democracy to inform his own understanding (Zelliot 2013: 69). Although the paper on caste did not contain any blueprint of how to fight caste, his deep engagement with the question of caste was visible as soon as he came back to India.

5.5 Caste as a Point of Entry into Democratic Representation

One of the first instances of Ambedkar's participation in the public-political life of India was when he deposed before the Southborough Committee on 27 January 1919 on

the question of representative government. The issue at stake was the question of franchise and representation. Ambedkar used the criterion of caste to argue that it will be wrong to believe that Hindu religion is a monolithic block without any internal differences. Ambedkar proposed that instead of Hindu, the category of caste should be used to determine the representation. Ambedkar rejected the idea that a caste Hindu can represent the interests of the Depressed Classes. A person from the Depressed Classes should be given the opportunity to represent themselves. Only in that sense the democracy (that is government by the people) will really come to India *BAWS* vol. 1: 249-250). Ambedkar uses this opportunity to make a strong critique of the prevalent notion among the British that India is not fit for democratic government for it is beset by numerous social, cultural, political and economic divisions so much so that instead of India being one nation, it is rather a conglomeration of many nationalities. Ambedkar argues that the United States of America is equally fraught with social differences but if despite the glaring differences they can work in a democratic set-up, there is no reason that India cannot do so (*BAWS* vol. 1: 248). Evidently, his close study of American social and political system coupled with his own observations during his stay there enabled him to argue the Indian case for democratic representation on the lines of the United States of America.

Ambedkar also rejects the colonial argument that people vote for the programmes put up by the candidates. He asserts that people vote for the person with whom they identify and in India, caste is such a marker of identification. Moreover, he asserts that the proportion of Brahmins in the institutions of power is extravagant when compared to their proportion in the general population of the country. Making a case for the Depressed Classes, Ambedkar says that:

> The Untouchables are usually regarded as objects of pity but they are ignored in any political scheme on the score that they have no interests to protect. And yet their interests are the greatest.

> Not that they have large property to protect from confiscation. But they have their very *persona* confiscated. The socio-religious disabilities have dehumanized the Untouchables and their interests at stake are therefore the interests of humanity. The interests of property are nothing before such primary interests. (*BAWS* vol. 1: 255; emphasis in the original)

The damaging effect of caste on the untouchables can only be set right by giving them the right to representation through an individual of their own community. Theirs is the struggle for the very survival of the 'self' or dignity. This self or dignity can never be protected by a caste Hindu representative. He asserts that the untouchability of the untouchables put them beyond the pale of citizenship and the right to representation and the right to hold office. It is only by making concerted efforts towards giving themselves separate electorates where they can select their own candidate on the lines of Muslims, that untouchables will get any semblance of justice.

The testimony of Ambedkar also reveals his strong resentment towards what he considers the "cunning of the Congress" and the idea that everyone is equal in an electoral fray (as Keer and ACK project would like the readers to believe). Ambedkar writes:

> To educate the Untouchable by Shashtras into pro-touchables and the touchables into anti-Untouchable and then to propose that the two should fight out at an open poll is to betray signs of mental aberration or a mentality fed on cunning. But it must never be forgotten that the Congress is largely composed of men who are by design political Radicals and social Tories. Their chant is that the social and the political are two distinct things having no bearing on each other. To them social and the political are two suits and can be worn one at a time as the season demands. (*BAWS* vol. 1: 263)

Ambedkar is arguing that caste defines the community status of the untouchables. There is no way in which the caste Hindus and the untouchables can be considered as equals. The oppression suffered by the untouchables throughout the history just put them forever in the category of losers. It is only by a special effort to make the field of electoral politics

a level-playing field, can one expect to ensure that the untouchables get better representation. Ambedkar critiques the Congress' propaganda of politics being a level playing field. He not only ruptures the hegemonic national narrative of Congress but also charges Congress as acting in bad faith. He rejects the Congress' claim that they represent the untouchables too. According to Ambedkar, the Congress has no understanding of the social conditions of the untouchables and it does not want to engage with it. The Congress' neat division of the social and the political makes Ambedkar term congressmen as 'cunning'. This can also be read as the manifesto of Ambedkar. The social is more important than the political and that it precedes the political. In this testimony, by putting caste as a defining feature of the untouchables, Ambedkar is making an effort to politicize the social through securing representation for the Depressed Classes. Testimony to Southborough Committee marks Ambedkar's first application of caste in the political and social life after its theorization three years earlier in the Columbia University.

The next public statement of Ambedkar on caste came in 1928 when he deposed before the Simon Commission presenting his views on a range of topics. While deposing before the Simon Commission in 1928, Ambedkar presented a detailed report where he dwelt at length on the very important concepts of political economy such as franchise and representation of minorities. As he did in the paper on "Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development," here too, the method remains same. While examining the relevance of concepts of franchise and representation, Ambedkar poses certain hypothesis and then goes on to evaluate whether the hypothesis survives historical, scientific or experiential scrutiny. For Ambedkar, all three are important. None alone can give a complete picture by itself.

Speaking on the issue of franchise, Ambedkar rejects the views of those who who argued for restricted enfranchisement. For Ambedkar this was a real and dangerous threat

as this provision, which made enfranchisement incumbent upon education and property, effectively closed all the possibilities for the Dalits to seek representation for their community or realize their aspiration to represent their own community. The closure of politics, Ambedkar could clearly see, meant that the Dalits were to remain in their age-old degraded condition. The reason for Ambedkar's insistence to seek the political course of action may also be traced to his experience of the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 where the entire administration conspired with the upper caste Hindus to deny the essential condition of equality to the Dalit community. The Mahad Satyagraha revolved around using a public water tank, named Chawder tank, by the untouchables. The Mahad city council had already passed a resolution stating that all the public places in the city are open to untouchables but no untouchable dared to use it for the fear of reprisals by the caste Hindus. When Ambedkar declared his intention to lead a Satyagraha to drink water from the Chawder tank, the district magistrate stopped him from doing so. The district magistrate's justification was that a suit has been filed in the court by the caste Hindus claiming the pond to be a private property (Zelliot 2013: 99-100).

This clearly was the major event which made Ambedkar realize that mere social activism or social 'reform' will lead the Dalit community nowhere. In such a scenario, political action was the only way open. Indeed, it can be argued that Ambedkar knew very well the importance of political action for the life and survival of a community such as his own. But the political action which he demanded from the government had its roots in the social problems. Continuing his privileging of the social over the political from his testimony to the Southborough Committee in 1919, his submission to the Simon Commission in 1928 was marked by his strong emphasis on the social condition of India and especially those of the Depressed Classes on which he laid his claim to demand special representation for the Depressed Classes. In fact, his submission before the Simon

Commission was marked for its radical demands to the government not only to address the political problems but also ensure that the Depressed Classes have special access to the institutions of education and government employment at the highest level.

In the light of the above, it can be easily seen why Ambedkar made the forceful argument for adult suffrage. He strongly criticized the prevalent tendency of considering the question of franchise as a matter of granting favour. Instead, he posited franchise as an entitlement of all the adult citizens of the country. He held that:

> if franchise is considered a privilege to be given or withheld by those in political power according to their own estimate of the use likely to be made of it, then it is manifest that the political emancipation of the unenfranchised will be entirely at the mercy of those that are enfranchised. To accept such a conclusion is to accept that slavery is no [*sic*] wrong. For slavery, too, involves the hypothesis that men have no right but what those in power choose to give them. A theory which leads to such a conclusion must be deemed to be fatal to any form of popular Government, and as such I reject it in toto. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 337)

The effort, on Ambedkar's part, is to enshrine adult franchise as a universal political right unencumbered by the whims and fancies of those in the ruling class. It is interesting to note that the analogy he uses to compare the unenfranchised is that of slavery. While appealing the British colonial regime which considered itself to be the harbinger of equality and liberty, the analogy of slavery was the best trope which Ambedkar could have used. Ambedkar argued against those who wished to confine franchise to certain limited sections of the society by linking it to economic standards and/or educational qualifications. Ambedkar argued that such people suffer from the tendency of considering the question of franchise as a question of favour rather than a right. Ambedkar clearly is wary of those caste Hindus (such as Gandhi and the members of Congress) who claim that only they have the right to represent everyone or that not everyone is capable of making a rational choice. Such people, according to Ambedkar, would never allow the

untouchables or the marginalized in any society to find a voice of their own. Ambedkar was obviously making his case for enfranchising the untouchables. He may have thought that the British officials could appreciate the position of the untouchables better by an analogy of slavery. The slavery was a potent symbol for the inhuman treatment of the marginalized sections of the society by the elite in both England and the United States of America and after the second half of the nineteenth century both countries considered it as a shameful episode in their democratic history.

Ambedkar's use of words "I reject it in toto" is important because with these words he was claiming an authority as a representative of the Dalits. Ambedkar deposed before the Commission as the representative of the Bahishkrit Hitkarni Sabha. He built an argument to reject the authority of the Congress or other caste Hindus to represent the untouchables. It was only the untouchables who could represent their caste. Moreover, Ambedkar was emerging as a major leader of the untouchables by that period, especially after the 1927 Mahad water Satyagraha. His assertion that "I reject it in toto" underlines a claim that he is speaking for the entire untouchable caste.

While building his argument, Ambedkar uses analytical reasoning to differentiate between the essential and the incidental; Ambedkar rejects literacy as a condition for enfranchisement. He explains it as a superficial and a misunderstood idea of enfranchisement. He said that enfranchisement is not merely the ability to read certain names on the ballot paper; rather it means something more profound. Franchise, he wrote, "stands for direct and active participation in the regulation of the terms upon which associated life shall be sustained and the permit of good carried on" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 337). Franchise is not a mere mechanical act of casting the ballot; it entails a more fundamental outlook towards a social life. Ambedkar called it the "associated life" of all the individuals of the society. This is a powerful phrase, not only for its poetics but also for

its semiotics and semantics. The "associated life" as envisioned by Ambedkar and posited in franchise revolutionizes the concept of social organization in India especially in relation to the Dalit community vis-à-vis the caste Hindus. It tears open the iron curtain which separates the lives of the 'upper castes' and the 'lower castes'. From a vertical relationship between them, the idea of "associated life" brings all castes on the same plane. Casting the ballot is an act of citizenship and Ambedkar is looking for that universalizing potential of citizenship to establish the horizontal camaraderie of all castes. The terms of associated life of workers and their owners must be constantly negotiated and resettled in the better interest of the workers. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 338)

Further, Ambedkar posited adult suffrage not only in the arena of political justice but also in political expediency. He offered it as an alternative to the demand of the Muslim community for separate electorates. According to him, the demand is based on the perceived threat in the Muslim community that in a joint electorate an undesirable candidate may be elected by the majority community. In such a scenario, adult suffrage will considerably expand the number of Muslim voters and this will mitigate their fears. By positioning the concept of adult suffrage across the communal electorate, Ambedkar radically contradicted the political position taken by both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. It is not difficult to see that the position he advocated in 1928 was more universal than the positions of both the major political parties of India at that time. Ambedkar cited the support of different groups to the idea of the universal adult suffrage including the Nehru Committee Report of 1928. Simultaneously, this universality is conjoined to the particularity as it brings all adult Indians into the political life of the country. This entailed a new vision for the country and its politics. In fact, Ambedkar's championing of the adult suffrage meant expediting the formation of a nation-state by making all Indians stakeholders in it.

Apart from using the logic of universal common sense, Ambedkar also invokes the category of law to argue against the criteria of literacy for enfranchisement. He again makes a distinction between an illiterate person and an unintelligent person saying that two do not mean the same thing. Ambedkar's argument assumes its importance in the background of caste as education in India was tied to caste. In a general sense, untouchables were not literate because there was no provision for them to gain literacy; rather the doors of education were shut upon them based on the norms of *varnashramdharma.* The result of such a negative injunction was that an overwhelming majority of the untouchables were illiterate. It became imperative for Ambedkar to argue against the education as a qualification of enfranchisement if he wanted to ensure the right to vote for the untouchables. He argues that if illiterate people across the world including India could manage their own affairs very well, then there was no point in assuming that they could not do the same in the political affairs. He further said, "At any rate the law presumes that above a certain age everyone has intelligence enough to be entrusted with the responsibility of managing his own affairs" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 341). According to him, the real reason why upper castes wished to put the restriction of literacy for franchise was because they did not want to forego their own hold over the political landscape of the country and they could do this only by denying the lower castes the right to vote by insisting on education as a qualification for enfranchisement. Ambedkar's reply links how literacy was a caste privilege and why such a condition amounted to keeping the untouchables forever in the position of servitude and at the mercy of the caste Hindu representative.[12]

[12] For an elaborate discussion of intimate relationship between education and caste and Ambedkar's underlining this relationship as well as his critique, see Dash 2009: 92-100. Dash emphasizes that the English v/s vernacular debate in Education excluded the caste question completely. It was Ambedkar to made a comprehensive critique of such a debate underlining that when a vast section of population is denied the right to education, this debate on medium of instruction holds little ground.

Speaking on the question of representation, Ambedkar, in dissecting the pattern of the membership of the Legislative Council of Bombay, launches a serious critique of the concept of nominated membership which formed around 23% of the total strength (26 out of 114). The nominated membership was of two kinds: (1) officials to represent the reserved half of the government, and (2) non-officials to represent the Depressed Classes, Labouring Classes, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, and the workers in the Cotton Trade. The very concept of such nominated members, for Ambedkar, went against the grain of representative government. In a representative government, the executive is held accountable to the legislature but if around one-fourth of the legislature is filled by nominated members (who are nominated on the advice of the executive itself!), then such a Legislative Council will function as "servants of the Executive rather than its critics" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 345). Further, even the non-official nominated members, although not the servants of the government are nevertheless dependent on the government for their re-nomination and thereby they never question any government decision. They never cast an adverse vote when it comes to the government. Ambedkar writes, "Representation by nomination is thus no representation. It is only mockery" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 346). Although there was a provision for a nominated member for the Depressed Classes in this arrangement, Ambedkar notes that as non-official nominated members are considered ineligible for ministerial position, such representation is only a sham. It is only by finding a place in the Cabinet of the country that the Depressed Classes can hope for any sort of social progress (*BAWS* vol. 2: 346).

Even in the category of elected members, Ambedkar criticized the concept of class electorates, which, for him is nothing but a contrivance by executive to "create legislatures by arranging the franchise and the electorate in such a manner as to give the scheme the appearance of popular rule without the reality of it" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 346).

Ambedkar argues that there is no need for such class-based elected members because even in a general election, a member not only represents his constituency but also his own self and his class. In a powerful invocation, he says, "It is in the nature of things that a man's self should be nearer to him than his constituency" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 347-348). As discussed earlier, this idea of person as a representative of his class comes from Ambedkar's own formulation in his 1916 paper on caste. Further, he says that the only issue which attracts any serious attention is whether such a class of people (belonging to commercial and individual classes) "can secure election in the general constituencies" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 348). In fact, as discussed above, this assertion of individual representing the class is the understanding which Ambedkar borrows from his own explicated theorization of caste in the anthropology seminar he gave at the Columbia University in 1916 where he asserted that it is a fallacy to believe that individuals constitute a society. According to Ambedkar, individuals constitute a class and it a class or classes which constitute the society. An individual's loyalty is not to his/her society but to his/her class. This primacy of class, and by extension caste, remains constant in Ambedkar's formulation throughout his life, especially in those cases where he demands political representation for the untouchables. During the submission to the Simon Commission, he further elucidates this position by giving examples of successful elections of Sardars and Inamdars. He says that there is no question why representatives of such commercial classes cannot fare well in general constituencies. In putting forth such an argument, Ambedkar is doing two things: first, he is trying to control the unwanted and unwarranted representation of any particular group or class in the legislature, and second, he leaves the door open so as to allow for reservation for such groups of people who are totally destitute and cannot secure representation by election in general constituencies. This allows Ambedkar to argue for reserved seats for the Depressed Classes on account of

their social and economic backwardness. This ties the political position of a group to its socio-economic conditions. Ambedkar successfully demonstrates that those groups who enjoyed privileged socio-economic positions in the society are politically influential and those at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid were nowhere to be seen in the political landscape of the country. This left only one option for the betterment of the Depressed Classes and that was to have a forceful say in the political space. According to Ambedkar, the political space would allow the Depressed Classes to influence policy changes which could bring about a positive change in their social and political conditions. Thus, citizenship held out that allure for Ambedkar where he saw the emancipation of the Depressed Classes.

But it is not only the Depressed Classes about which Ambedkar was thinking in his representation to the Simon Commission. He vigorously defended the reserved seats for the Marathas and the allied castes. His defense was on the premise that Marathas and the allied castes, although were in the majority in Marathi speaking part of Bombay Presidency, they were ignorant of their own political power to exercise it. Ambedkar takes this defense to another plane by bringing in the question of representation of lower classes by the higher classes. He preempts such questions by posing a question of his own: "… is there any reason why 'the right to represent', as distinguished from 'a right to representation' should be an unrestricted right" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 348)? This tears into the claim of the the upper classes representing the lower classes and in fact this counter-question by Ambedkar radically shifts the framework of the question of representation. Till now, the question was why the upper classes cannot represent the lower classes or who can represent the lower classes better. Ambedkar brought in a different question altogether. He posed the question back to the upper classes to ask why they should have an unchecked or unrestricted right to represent everybody in the society. He consolidates

this further with the assertion that "Modern politicians have spent all their ingenuity in trying to find out the reason for restricting the right to vote" (*BAWS* vol. 2: 348-349). It is clear by this that Ambedkar is playing out the question of right to represent vis-à-vis the question of franchise. By doing this, Ambedkar successfully takes the battle to the camp of the higher classes, exerting a tremendous moral and intellectual pressure on them. This is an attempt to wrest control of the lives of the Depressed Classes from the higher classes and giving it back to the people of Depressed Classes. The political economy of representative government and enfranchisement has been employed as a tool to secure social and economic mobilization. This is no waiting for a *messiah* or waiting for the goodwill of the higher classes to secure the betterment of the Depressed Classes. The masses are being ushered into the political category of citizenship. Ambedkar not only uses the concepts of the political economy, he also invokes the powerful moral force on the side of the Depressed Classes by characterizing the higher classes as self-serving people who never get over their own petty cares (*BAWS* vol. 2: 349-350). As against this, lower classes, by virtue of their own adverse background, understand the pressing necessity to bring about social change in the society and the nation at large. He writes:

> It is to the lower classes that we must look for the motive power for progress. The reservation of seats to the backward Hindu communities makes available for the national service such powerful social forces, in the absence of which any Parliamentary government may be deemed to be poorer. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 350)

In Ambedkar's vision, it is not only the lower classes who require the the concepts of political economy and the modern nation-state for their own advancement but it is the nation-state which requires them more than ever before. It is the aspirations of the lower classes which will propel the nation towards progress. So much so that, the very future and development of the Parliamentary form of government is doomed in the absence of the critical social energy of the lower classes.

In a separate section on "Representation of Minorities," Ambedkar in his representation to the Simon Commission continues his arguments on the question of representation. Although in this section he focuses exclusively on the question of how a fair representation of the minorities in the Legislative Council could be reached at, he nevertheless, figures the question of socio-economic condition of the minorities in relation to their need for political representation. Ambedkar begins by arguing that the representation should be such that it should do away with the inadequacy as well as supremacy of the minorities. The adequate representation of the minorities could be achieved when any party from the majority community finds it worthwhile to seek an alliance with the minority party. But this does not easily solve the question of the exact figure of representation. In order to achieve greater clarity on the issue, he invokes the category of education and economic conditions of the minorities. He argues that:

> There will be general agreement that the needs of a minority for political protection are commensurate with the power it has to protect itself in the social struggle. That power obviously depends upon the educational and economic status of the minorities. The higher the education and economic status of a minority the lesser is the need for that minority of being politically protected. On the other hand the lower the educational and economic status of a minority, the greater will be the need for its political protection. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 363)

Here once again, the political is tied to the socio-economic conditions. Once again, the idea is not to reduce the Parliamentary government to a mere numerical jugglery of the majority and minority. Ambedkar points to the futility of mere statistics in determining the political requirement of a community. There are far stronger factors which decide the fate of a community and in order to change that fate, it is important to look beyond mere numbers and seek the living conditions of the community. By invoking the socio-economic conditions of minorities, Ambedkar again looks to leverage any undue advantage gained by the majority community in the government. Although, in the above

quote, he does not use the term majority community as such, but the indication is clear enough as to who requires more political safeguards and thus more political representation. If we extend the logic to a pan-Indian level, it is not difficult to see that Ambedkar is pitching for a government where the minorities (especially those of downtrodden castes) have a significant presence so as to change the policies of the government. Also this continues his earlier assertion of the moral and social power of lower classes which will lead to progress of the nation.

Another of Ambedkar's major negotiation of democracy and untouchability came in 1932 during the Second Round Table Conference where Lothian Committee was formed to look into the category of untouchables. The committee decided to have certain common test across the country to ascertain whether untouchability exists in any particular province of the country or not. This was another colonial exercise of enumeration of the groups to resolve political questions.[13] Ambedkar took strong objections to the observations of this committee and made a critique of its proposed 'tests' to determine the extent of untouchability in India. His strongly objected to having a common standard of evaluation in a country as heterogeneous as India. He said:

> India is not a single homogeneous country. It is a continent. The various Provinces are marked by extreme diversity of conditions and there is no tie of race or language. Owing to absence of communication each Province has evolved along its own lines with its own peculiar manners and modes of social life. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 491)

It is important to remember that Ambedkar, throughout his writings, had maintained that India has an underlying cultural unity notwithstanding the fact that there are no homogeneous groups in it. While deposing before the Lothian Committee, he underlines the lack of homogeneity. He proposed that instead of looking for physical conditions of

[13] For a discussion and critique of colonial fascination with the category of caste, see Dirks 2003: 8-10.

the untouchables, it will be more fruitful to look at the attitudes of the caste Hindus towards the untouchables:

> On a correct analysis of the mental attitude they indicate, it will be found that whether the test is causing pollution by touch or refusal to use common well, the notion underlying both is one and same. Both are outward registers of the same inward feeling of defilement, odium, aversion and contempt. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 492)

What Ambedkar is doing here is to distinguish between the literal meaning of untouchability and its notional meaning. In the literal sense, an untouchable is someone whose mere touch becomes the cause of pollution, that other person suffers a sense of defilement from the mere touch of an untouchable. Ambedkar remarks that applying this literal test in India may not yield a correct result. There is a need to understand that untouchability has a notional value. A person may not feel polluted by touching an untouchable but the same person may refuse to use the water of a well which has been used by an untouchable. In its outward appearance, there is no untouchability here but Ambedkar points out that the refusal to use the water of a well arises from a sense of odium and defilement. Ambedkar's point may be understood by what Gopal Guru terms as the construction of the untouchable as a 'sociological danger' as against a biological danger (Guru 2012: 213). Untouchability as a 'sociological danger', Ambedkar seems to point out, will not present itself to the British colonial officers. It has to be perceived as it is the living part of the caste system as prevalent in India and which a British cannot perceive in its entirety.

Ambedkar cautions against the self-congratulatory declarations by social reformers regarding the disappearance of caste. He says that such declarations are false for they do not take into account the notional understanding of untouchability. Moreover, Ambedkar asserts that untouchability will endure because an ordinary Hindu looks upon

it as a religious practice and observance. S/he does not suffer from any moral shame on observing untouchability:

> Based on religion the ordinary Hindu only relaxes the rules of untouchability where he cannot observe them. He never abandons them. For abandonment of untouchability to him involves a total abandonment of the basic religious tenets of Hinduism as understood by him and the mass of Hindus. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 494)

In fact, this assertion can be read as an anticipation of his proposal of annihilation of caste which comes some four years later in 1936 where he says:

> I have, …, no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed, and I say there is nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion. (Ambedkar 2014: 306)

Unless such a religion which gives rise to social structures such as caste system is destroyed, no amount of representative or democratic government can bring about the social change in the society.

In 1946, Ambedkar presented a new understanding of caste and democracy in *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*. The book, in its overall tone, is a scathing critique of the Congress and Gandhi and how they conspired to keep untouchables in the position of permanent servitude. But the book also deals with Ambedkar's ideas about nation-state and the fate of democracy and the untouchables in independent India. In the book, he traces the emergence of the untouchables as a political category in the landscape of the Indian Independence Movement in 1916 when the colonial government announced that it was looking towards the gradual development of self-government in India. This announcement suddenly made the untouchables very important for the Congress and whereas earlier the Indian National Congress had not given any importance to the untouchables as a political category. Suddenly in 1917, they started courting the untouchable leaders with a view to get the support of the entire untouchable community. Ambedkar traces the history of Congress' and Gandhi's

engagement with the question of untouchability and finds that engagement totally hypocritical.

Apart from being a stinging critique of the Indian National Congress and Gandhi, the book is also important for its discussion of the question of democracy in detail. Consistent with his style, Ambedkar interrogates the concept of democracy through various angles. He posits a hypothesis regarding the suitability of democracy to the Indian social conditions by examining its various limitations to suggest how a system of democratic government can be made viable. This intervention should be read in continuation to his earlier interventions in the Southborough Committee in 1919 and the Simon Commission in 1928. Although in 1928, he argued in favour of the adult suffrage as the cornerstone of a vibrant democracy, in 1946, he comes to the conclusion that only by itself adult suffrage cannot be said to "bring about a democratic government, in the sense of the government by the people and for the people" (*BAWS* vol. 9: 444). He uses the historical journey of hundred years of Parliamentary democracy to show that how it has collapsed in various European countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany and Russia. He also foregrounds the growing discontent in other countries where Parliamentary democracy was in vogue. As the questions were being asked in 1946, Ambedkar was examining democracy at a very important moment in the life of the Indian nation-state which was about to come into being within a year. With such an awareness, he writes:

> There is no country in which the urgency of considering this question is greater than it is in India. India is negotiating to have parliamentary democracy. There is a great need of some one with sufficient courage to tell Indians: 'Beware of parliamentary democracy, it is not the best product as it appears to be'. (*BAWS* vol. 9: 445)

By 1946, Ambedkar's use of political categories of democracy underwent some change. Although, the primacy of social over the political remains constant in him, by then the changed political situations led him to engage with the concept of nation-state much more

critically. It was a foregone conclusion by 1946 that the Congress would rule India after the British had left the country and this alerted him to the necessity of engaging with the idea of democracy in a much more rigorous fashion. Of course, at this time, Ambedkar did not foresee that it would fall into his lot to provide for the structure and codes through which the the Parliamentary democracy will function. But that was to unfold in future. Here, Ambedkar examines the question in the manner of a political scientist. He diagnoses the current problem with Parliamentary democracy in its failure to meet the aspirations of the people:

> it can be said in general terms that the discontent against parliamentary democracy is due to the realization that it has failed to assure to the masses the right to liberty, property or pursuit of happiness. (*BAWS* vol. 9: 446)

Ambedkar links the material conditions of the masses with the success of modern governmentality of parliamentary democracy. The link is not given by Ambedkar. He is merely reiterating that the modern democracy fuelled expectations of the masses from the governments and governments failed in fulfilling those expectations. He opines that the reason for this failure can be found in both the wrong ideology as well as the wrong organization of the government. For him, one of the major ideological problems with the parliamentary democracy was the idea of the "freedom of contract":

> The idea [of freedom of contract] became sanctified and was upheld in the name of liberty. Parliamentary democracy took no notice of economic inequalities and did not care to examine the result of freedom of contract in their bargaining power. It did not mind if the freedom of contract gave the strong the opportunity to defraud the weak. The result is that parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to economic wrongs of poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited class. (*BAWS* vol. 2: 446)

This analysis of Ambedkar can also be read as a continuation of earlier strictures of the form of representational democracy in its relation to backward classes which he proposed most powerfully in his representation to the Simon Commission in 1928. Although not

specified in the above quote, it can be noted that one of reasons that parliamentary democracy has "continuously added to economic wrongs of poor, the downtrodden and the disinherited class" may be the lack of the members of these classes in the government which inevitably meant the lack of voice in deciding the fate of one's own community or group. Clearly, the unbound serialities of modern democracy and citizenship are blind to the the presence of the bound serialities in the society.

Continuing this line of investigation, Ambedkar locates the second ideological wrong in the failure of the present form of government understanding that "political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy" (*BAWS* vol. 9: 447). That is to say, the moral universe of political equality cannot be built on abstract foundations. The political equality must have its roots in the material conditions of the society which includes the most downtrodden sections of the society. Using the example of England and France, he says that parliamentary democracy has fared better in these countries only because they have more equality in social and economic spheres. He equates social and economic democracy as "the tissues and the fibre of a political democracy" (*BAWS* vol. 9: 447). For him, democracy cannot be divorced from the idea of equality in all spheres of human endeavour. He writes:

> Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made even a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and did not even endeavour to strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result that liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and a farce. (*BAWS* vol. 9: 447)

It is clear that the inequality which parliamentary democracy gave rise to was perpetrated by the higher classes who have captured the social, economic and political powers of the society and have isolated themselves from the lower classes. It is only by a radical alteration in the existing state of affairs that democracy can survive. Otherwise, sooner or later it will fall into dictatorship as Ambedkar saw happening in Germany and Italy. This

argument, I contend, must be read as one where the trope of caste travels from its theorization in 1916 to explicate the pitfalls in political scenario of the country. This tussle between social and political was elaborated in a comprehensive manner by Ambedkar in his 1937 text *Annihilation of Caste*. This text is an address which Ambedkar wrote for his presidential speech in the annual conference of Jat Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore. The Mandal was a social reform organization of Arya Samaj members who were engaged in the eradication of caste in Hindu society. As it happened, the Mandal cancelled its invitation to Ambedkar on the grounds of his radical critique of the Vedas and the entire Hindu religion. Ambedkar published the address in the form of a book in 1937. *Annihilation of Caste* has occupied a cult status among Dalits and those who work for the eradication of untouchability in India. In the beginning of this text, Ambedkar treats the question of social and political reform in great detail. Caste underlines the entire text as the name suggests but Ambedkar tried to show how the political reformists have never allowed the social reform to take off in India. Here too, Ambedkar critiqued the Congress' high-handedness in scuttling any kind of social reform. He outlines the growth of the Social Conference as the offshoot of Congress in 1887 and its quick demise at the hands of the Indian National Congress:

> But soon the two wings developed into two parties, a 'political reform party' and a 'social reform party', between whom there raged a fierce controversy. The 'political reform party' supported the National Congress, and the 'social reform party' supported the Social Conference. The two bodies thus became two hostile camps. The point at issue was whether social reform should preceded political reform…. The gentlemen who presided over the session of the Social Conference lamented that the majority of the educated Hindus were for political advancement and indifferent to social reform… (Ambedkar 2014: 211)

As can be seen, Ambedkar's discussion of democracy in 1946 is heavily informed by his understanding of the history of the Congress party in India. This history has always done

away with any demand for social reform and focused solely on political reform and attainment of political power. The denial of social reform can also be read in the light of Gramscian passive revolution where the middle class elite did not try to bring about full-scale social revolution and just made alliances with conservative elements to gain political power. To be sure, there were some reforms but only those which never threatened the structure of the society were tolerated. For instance, even with all the efforts of Gandhi, removal of untouchability never became the major agenda of the Congress. Ambedkar's analysis of the failure of democracy to bring about the social revolution can be seen in this light.

Finally, coming to the major point of his analysis of democracy, Ambedkar blames the faulty organization of the political structure of parliamentary democracy as having created the situation of crisis. He says that everywhere the trend is that political societies do get organized into two distinct groups of the rulers and the ruled. There is nothing new to this but the problem is when the rulers are always derived from the ruling class and the ruled never get a chance to be the rulers. For Ambedkar such a situation precipitates the crisis of parliamentary democracy as this situation is no different from the Monarchical system of government. By analyzing further, Ambedkar finds the reason for the persistence of such a situation in the general apathy of the people themselves. He bemoans the fact that after electing a government, people do not bother to check its functioning (*BAWS* vol. 9: 447). It can be surmised that Ambedkar is pointing to the lack of effective checks on the legislative and executive branches of the government by the people. For him, democracy is a daily exercise in which the entire mass of the country participates though various activities. Moreover, the government should be kept constantly in check. This constant check is the only way to pressurize the government to

bring positive changes in social and economic conditions of the people or to lose power to the governed.

In Ambedkar's conception, democracy is not a mere exercise in casting of votes which results in the formation of the representative government. His understanding of democracy is heavily influenced by the American system but caste in India and the constant marginalization of the untouchables in India alerted him to the universalizing tendencies of representative governments where the people on the margins are left forever marginalized. In order to avoid such normative democracy, Ambedkar uses the category of caste to argue that there has to be a special safeguard for the untouchables so that they can be brought into the ambit of citizenship and it can be done only at the level of understanding the untouchables as a category in itself. The framework which Ambedkar uses for the purpose can be understood in the light of 'governmentality' and political society as developed by Partha Chatterjee in his book *The Politics of the Government*.

In his book *The Politics of the Governed* published in 2004, Chatterjee refers to Ambedkar as "an unalloyed modernist" who believed in "science, history, rationality, secularism, and above all in the modern state as the site for the actualization of human reason" (2004: 9). It is not difficult to agree with Chatterjee's portrayal but it is certainly not the complete picture. It leaves out one important aspect of life which Ambedkar kept on grappling throughout his life, that is, religion. For all his faith in reason and modernity, Ambedkar chose a religion – Buddhism – as a source of emancipation for his community from the age-old social oppression. Chatterjee reads Ambedkar's analysis of the historicity of untouchability as:

> The modern struggle for the abolition of caste was thus a quest for a return to that primary equality that was the original historical condition of the nation. The utopian search for homogeneity is thus made historical. It is, as we know, a familiar historicist narrative of modern nationalism. (2004: 9)

But there is a difference. The "familiar historicist narrative of modern nationalism" takes a very particular turn in Ambedkar's scheme of things. Chatterjee writes:

> He [Ambedkar] is fully aware of the value of universal and equal citizenship and wholly endorses the ethical significance of unbound serialities. On the other hand, he realizes that the slogan of universality is often a mask to cover the perpetuation of real inequalities. The politics of democratic nationhood offers a means for achieving a more substantive equality, but only by ensuring adequate representation for the underprivileged groups within the body politic. A strategic politics of groups, classes, communities, ethnicities – bound serialities of all sorts – is thus inevitable. Homogeneity is not thereby forsaken; on the contrary, in specific contexts, it can often supply the clue to a strategic solution, such as partition, to a problem of intractable heterogeneity. On the other hand, unlike the utopian clams of universalist nationalism, the politics of heterogeneity can never claim to yield a general formula for all peoples at all times: its solutions are always strategic, contextual, historically specific and, inevitably, provisional. (22)

What Chatterjee means is that Ambedkar does not merely celebrate the unbound serialities of everyday universals of modern social thought such as nations, citizens, etc. but he is equally attentive to the bound serialities of governmentality. He sought all sorts of political strategies across the board to achieve his goal of emancipating the Dalits from the drudgery of everyday social life. According to Chatterjee, Ambedkar constantly moved between the world of unbound serialities and that of bound serialities[14] as is evident from his efforts as the chairperson of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution. In that capacity, Ambedkar was able to put together the:

> most progressive democratic constitutions in the world, guaranteeing the fundamental rights of freedom and equality irrespective of religions or caste and at the same [time] providing for special representation in the legislatures for the formerly untouchable castes. (Chatterjee 2004: 24)

Chatterjee points out the limitations of the state as felt by Ambedkar which later on drove him to seek the end of caste discrimination in leaving the Hindu religion altogether and

[14] Chatterjee's use of bound and unbound serialities is borrowed from Anderson (1998). For a detailed discussion of Chatterjee's critique of Anderson, see Chapter II of this thesis.

adopting Buddhism. The tussle lasted till the end. The unbound seriality was constantly underlined by the bound seriality in Ambedkar. One can use this frame of unbound and bound seriality to analyze Ambedkar's position on some concepts of political economy which he employed to improve the social and economic conditions of the Dalits.

Chatterjee analyzes Ambedkar's role as the chairperson of the Drafting Committee only. But, his analysis is useful for looking at the entire body of Ambedkar's work. As mentioned earlier, Ambedkar's examination of the functioning of the parliamentary democracy was made at the crucial juncture in the political history of India; he sounds a warning bell to the powers who were to replace the British colonial government in India and usher in the parliamentary form of government in the country.[15] He wished to caution the framers of democratic polity in India to avoid making mistakes which were made by other parliamentary democracies of the world. He says that the fundamental considerations which constitute the foundation of democracy and which the protagonists of democracy must take care of are:

> First: the recognition of the hard fact of history that in every country there exists two exist two classes, - the governing class and servile class between whom there is a continuous struggle for power.
>
> Second: by reason of its power and prestige the governing class finds it easy to maintain its supremacy over the service class.
>
> Third: adult suffrage and frequent elections are no bar against governing class reaching places of power and authority.
>
> Fourth: on account of their inferiority complex the members of the servile classes regard the members of the governing class as their natural leaders and the servile classes themselves volunteer to elect members of the governing classes as their rulers.

[15] Ambedkar discusses this in his 1946 text *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*.

> Fifth: the existence of the governing class is inconsistent with democracy and self-government and that given the fact that where the governing class retains its power to govern, it is wrong to believe that democracy and self-government have become realities of life.
>
> Sixth: self-government and democracy become real not when a constitution based on adult suffrage comes into existence but when the governing class loses its power to capture the power to govern.
>
> Seventh: while in some countries the servile classes may succeed in ousting the governing class from the seat of authority with nothing more than adult suffrage, in other countries the governing class may be so deeply entrenched that the servile classes will need other safeguards besides adult suffrage to achieve the same end. (*BAWS* vol. 9: 448)

The seven points given by Ambedkar not only encapsulate the political crisis but also suggests some of psychological reasons for such crisis. His understanding of the inferiority complex of the servile classes offers itself as a case study for the students of political psychology or the effect of colonization on the ruling classes.[16] But apart from sounding the warning bells, Ambedkar's injunction also holds a tremendous appeal to those who seek to change the status quo of the political order. It clearly advocated for special provisions being made for the members of the servile classes so that they can rise upto their potential and challenge the ruling classes by defeating them in the electoral battles. We have seen that in 1928, he already had made similar demands for the greater political space to the downtrodden sections of the society. This again is in continuation to his effort to posit modern political ideal of citizenship as a way out from their miserable existence for the downtrodden. In a bold statement he declares that the principal aim of the Constitution of a parliamentary democracy must be:

> to dislodge the governing class from its position and to prevent it from remaining a governing class for ever; that the machinery for setting up a democratic government cannot be a matter of dogma; that ousting the governing class from power being the main object the machinery for setting up a

[16] The psychological effect of colonialism has been studied by Albert Memmi, O Manoni, Frantz Fanon and Ashis Nandy among others. The theoretical insights of Nandy has informed thesis thesis as can be seen in Chapter II and Chapter III.

> democratic government cannot be uniform and that variations in the machinery of democracy must not merely be tolerated but accepted for the reason that the processes by which the governing classes obtain their mastery over the servile classes vary from country to country. (*BAWS* vol. 9: 448-449)

It can be easily established that Ambedkar tried to follow and uphold this principle as the chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India. But a close analysis of the Constitution is beyond the scope of this thesis. In the preceding pages, this chapter has tried to show how caste remained a constant trope in Ambedkar's body of work right from his student's days in the United States of America. The chapter has also tried to establish that Ambedkar was influenced heavily by the social and political democracy which he witnessed in the United States of America and saw in it a potential for emancipation of the untouchables in India. It was an exercise in the political realm where social was the site of political and it remained in constant dialogue with the political power. In the final section of this chapter, I wish to examine how Ambedkar sought to undermine or destroy the entire structure of caste beyond the realm of political and what shape caste took in this enterprise.

5.6 *Annihilation of Caste*: Rejection of the Fold and the Future of Dalit Emancipation

Till the year 1935, Ambedkar's preferred category of political action by engaging with the rulers to press for change in the social conditions of the untouchables. Till then, he too worked within the Hindu fold to reform Hinduism by constant effort to eradicate caste. But 1935 marked a decisive change in his approach. On 13 October 1935, while addressing a meeting of the Depressed Classes Ambedkar stated that he is planning to leave Hinduism and also exhorted his followers to do the same:

> Because we have the misfortune of calling ourselves Hindus, we are treated thus. If we were members of another Faith, none would dare treat us so. Choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment. We shall repair our mistake now. I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power. (in Zelliot 2013: 147)

This declaration was made in the same conference where the decision to terminate the Kalaram Temple Entry Movement was taken. Both events demonstrated that Ambedkar came to the conclusion that the only path to social emancipation is that of change of religion. No amount of reform in Hindu religion could cure it of untouchability. This conclusion should also be read in the light of Poona Pact[17] and subsequent formation of Harijan Sevak Sangh[18] and Ambedkar's frustration with the condescending nature of the reform movements inspired by Gandhi and carried out by Gandhians.[19]

Clearly, Ambedkar who till 1935 sought to solve the problem of Untouchability within the ambit of Hinduism using all sort of techniques from Satyagraha to moulding public opinion through journals and magazines to making submissions before the British government for addressing the social and political needs of the untouchables found all doors closed firmly on his face. It is only after all the other avenues failed that he decided to seek emancipation outside the fold of Hinduism. This rejection of Hinduism was not a rejection of religion per se but rather a rejection of particular religious practices based on inequality. The eventual conversion to Buddhism clearly underlines the importance of religion for Ambedkar as a source of emancipation. But here too, Ambedkar's investigation of Buddhism was based on his own framework and he interpreted Buddhism

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[17] Poona Pact was the agreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi in which Ambedkar forego his demand his demand for separate communal representation granted to the Dalits by British government on the lines of one being granted to Muslims. In lieu of his giving up this demand, Gandhi acceded to the increased number of reserved seats in the combined electorate.

[18] Harijan Sevak Sangh was an organization founded at the behest of Gandhi in 1932 for working towards the eradication of untouchability. Initially, Ambedkar supported the organization and was also its member but very soon, he got disillusioned with the working of the organization and resigned very soon. For a detailed discussion on Ambedkar's resignation from Harijan Sevak Sangh, see Srivatsan 2015: 163-181.

[19] See Omvedt 2014: 49-55.

not as a religion but as a *Dhamma* – ideology. But before that, it is important to discuss in detail his rejection of Hinduism which he termed as rejection of the caste system as he attempted in *Annihilation of Caste* which came out in 1937. A brief biography of the text has already been given earlier in the chapter.

As the name suggests, the text outlines Ambedkar's plan of action for the annihilation of caste. The text is a severe critique of the Hindu religion. Ambedkar shows how the structure of caste system does not allow economic, social and political development of the Hindus. It does not allow the development of *sanghatan* among the Hindus as one finds in Sikhs or Muslims and for this reason a Hindu remains a scared person and does not react against injustice. Moreover, the caste system forbids the formation of a society because:

> Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them. The caste system prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being. (2014: 244)

Ambedkar reads into this lack of sharing a common life and links it as a reason for India's falling prey to constant foreign invasions. In a particularly scathing indictment of the pernicious effect of caste on Hindus, he writes:

> The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. (2014: 259)

He reasserts his stand of caste as notional which he emphasized during his submission to the Lothian Committee in 1932. He says that caste is a state of mind and the destruction of caste means a *notional* change (2014: 286). The only way to destroy caste was to

destroy the authority on which it rests. Ambedkar found that authority to be resting in the religion of Hindus which was based on numerous scriptures such as *Vedas, Shrutis and Smrutis*. He asserted that the only way caste can be destroyed is by destroying all these scriptures and the religious behaviour based on these scriptures. It will be important to keep in mind that Ambedkar is making a distinction between religion based on rules and that which is based on principles (2014: 307). He advocates the religion which is based on principles saying that Hinduism is based on rules which are more often than not the basis of caste discrimination. Interestingly, Ambedkar also offers his own blueprint for a new Hinduism which was based on a curious mix of reformists Hindus' version of Hinduism where state has a central role to play in the administrative capacity. Ambedkar, on the lines of Dayanand Saraswati, Bankim, and Vivekananda, advocated a Hindus religion based on one book. He advocated for the abolition of priesthood based on birth. In its place, he envisioned a role for the state. It was a state which had to ensure that anyone can become a priest after undergoing a pre-designed course of study and examination. It is fair to say that the measure advocated by Ambedkar was implausible for the reason that nowhere a state intervenes in establishing or maintaining priesthood. But *Annihilation of Caste* continues to be the text which has comprehensively laid out a roadmap for the annihilation of caste. The radical energy of the text is palpable. It has to be read together with Ambedkar's permanent rejection of the Hindu fold. It took him twenty years to decide upon his new religion but these twenty years were used in preparing a rational, moral and historical ground for the acceptance of the new religion.

Gauri Viswanathan has looked at Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 as a continuation of his effort to find a political space for the untouchables in India:

> Ambedkar had earlier insisted on legislative measures against untouchability, and, while not abandoning the path of legislation altogether, he now acknowledged that legal measures did not alter the caste structure of Hinduism but merely established the limits of caste prejudice. If

> Ambedkar exhorted untouchables to leave Hinduism for cultural self-renewal, he conceived of that departure not as a withdrawal into an autonomous space but as a prerequisite to reclaiming India as the nation from which untouchables had been severed by political disenfranchisement. As is evident, Ambedkar's nationalism struggled to release itself from the stranglehold of Hinduism and relocate national identity in alternative religious systems, for which … a new historical mythology of brahmanism. Buddhism, and "Broken Men" was pressed into service. (2001: 238-9)

Ambedkar's conversion, according to Viswanathan, was as much a religious act as it was a political act. It was an act of reclaiming a lost identity for the untouchables. The choice of Buddhism was based on Ambedkar's historical exploration into the comparative study of religions. He asserted that untouchables were the earliest Buddhists who were defeated by Brahmins in a political battle and were reduced to the status of untouchables. By converting to Buddhism, untouchables were reclaiming their own original identity. One may that Ambedkar travels to Buddhism through two different routes: one, it was a religious route in which one religion was rejected for another, more egalitarian one; two, a historical route which, in Ambedkar, becomes a cyclical route. Untouchables started from Buddhism and via a long and dark historical period come back to their original home. But in both the routes, the social remains the site of the political. Viswanathan writes:

> The translation of moral laws into political rights, for which conversion functions as a trope, is more completely worked out as a strategic maneuver of dissent, which required Ambedkar to go through a separatist route to attain a nation committed to the universalist principles of justice and equality. That the principle architect of the Indian constitution was obliged to traverse such a tortuous route to create the political charter of his ideal nation state suggests the vast gap between his vision and the collective aspiration that the written document was intended to reflect. (2001: 239)

Viswanathan here points to the gap between the constitutional provisions and its material effect on the ground for the untouchables and asserts that this gap forced Ambedkar to

chart a new journey to stake an equal claim to the nation. As this thesis has argued, the formation of a national subject remains a tortuous and contested process, Ambedkar's journey to Buddhism via social and political geography of Indian society and colonial modernity is an exercise in subject formation which refuses to succumb to any idea of normativity.

In this chapter, I have tried to argue that Ambedkar aspired to fashion a national subjectivity for himself as well as for the class of untouchables through social and political means. The organizing trope of his endeavour was caste. It was caste which gave Ambedkar the label of an untouchable. He decided to get hold of the term and use it as a counterforce and destroy the entire structure of caste. His use of caste as a tool for seeking emancipation for the untouchables began with his higher studies when he travelled to the United States of America and later on to England. It was in the United States of America that he grappled with the category of caste and tried to understand its origin, mechanism and working. Throughout his entire life, he depended on this original theorization of caste to argue his case for special representation of untouchables in order to make a difference in their social conditions. He used caste as an organizing principle of the untouchables to stake a claim to their different identity and aspirations. Caste as a tool as well as a living reality travelled with him throughout his life and work and it remains an organizing principle in his last great leap of conversion and fashioning of an entirely new identity—egalitarian and national.