CHAPTER - I

THE ROAD TO LEADERSHIP

B.R. AMBEDKAR: The Indian 'Crusader':

BHIMRAO RAMJI AMBEDKAR is a name familiar to all students of Indian politics and Constitution. He emerged on the Indian political scene primarily as a minority leader, and while putting up a stout defence for the rights and privileges of the minorities in India, he was actually participating in the political life of the country, in a remarkable way, during a very decisive period in the struggle for Indian independence. Dr. B.R.-
Ambedkar was a brilliant academician, a popular attorney, an erudite scholar, a great legal luminary, a powerful writer, journalist, a great constitutional pundit, emancipator and champion of the rights and liberties of the dumb, downtrodden and oppressed people, from whose very ranks he sprung. But all these attainments seemed to be inadequate to wipe out the stigma of 'untouchability' that was attached to the caste into which he was born. Nevertheless, it was his privilege to be ranked as one of the top dozen great Indians of the Century. No less a person than Mahatma Gandhi, with whom Ambedkar had acute political differences and had crossed swords often, wrote
of Ambedkar as follows:

"... a man who has carved out for himself a unique position in society. Whatever label he wears in future, Dr. Ambedkar is not the man to allow himself to be forgotten.

"... Dr. Ambedkar is a challenge to Hinduism. Brought up as a Hindu, educated by a Hindu potentate, he has become so disgusted with the so-called Savarna Hindus for the treatment that he and his have received at their hands that he proposes to leave not only them but the very religion that is his and their common heritage ...

"... Dr. Ambedkar is not alone in his disgust. He is its most uncompromising exponent and one of the ablest among them. He is certainly the most irreconcilable among them...

This neatly sums up the personality of Dr. Ambedkar. His courage of conviction and sense of purpose are the keys to an understanding of his philosophy. He was made up of such strong fibre that he would not yield to any pressures for the sake of mere personal platitudes. He was never willing to compromise his principles for personal glory. His resentment for such 'compromise' is very much vocal in a letter of reply to the organisers of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal (an organisation to break caste and casteism) of Lahore, who had requested him to revise

the script of his Address to their Annual Conference as its President-designate, to suit them. He wrote back saying:

"... I also would prefer to have the Conference cancelled - I do not like to use vague terms—if the Mandal insisted upon having my address pruned to suit its circumstances. You may not like my decision. But I cannot give up, for the sake of the honour of presiding over the Conference, the liberty which every President must have ... "

Such was the courage of conviction for which Dr. Ambedkar was known throughout his public life for nearly three decades. But it was rather unfortunate that he was very often misunderstood than being understood properly and appreciated. In his own words, in his undelivered Address to the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, he said:

"... these views are the views of a man who has been no tool of power, no flatter of greatness. They come from one, almost the whole of whose public exertion has been a continuous shower of calumny and abuse from national journals and national leaders for no other reason except that I refuse to join with them in performing the miracle— I will not say trick— of liberating the oppressed with the gold of the tyrant and raising the poor with the cash of the rich...."
But he was not the man to be discouraged by such 
depressing situations. Undaunted by the abuses and the 
calumny that was poured on this stout champion of the 
downtrodden, he stuck to his guns and did not hesitate 
to leave the fold of Hindu religion in protest against 
the injustices meted out to a section of that very 
religion. He went on with his writings and other activities 
in the cause of the 'Untouchables'. Such men are not born 
everywhere and always. They are often the products of 
the social, religious and political environment into which 
they are born. It is essential, therefore, to make a 
brief survey of the social set-up into which Dr. Ambedkar 
was born, with a view to understanding and appreciating 
his writings and his role in the political and constitu-
tional evolution of India.

Traditional social set-up!

The advent of the British rule in India opened 
up a new chapter in our history. It heralded the birth 
of modern India. As a result of the revolution it brought 
about in the field of transport, communication, education, 
law and a number of other fields of Indian life, coupled 
with political subjugation of the Indians to the British, 
the spark of Indian nationalism was set off. Indian 
nationalism, it cannot be denied, is essentially a modern 
phenomenon. The impact of the West, in the form of the 
British rule, on India was mainly responsible to generate
the sense of nationalism among the Indians. But this task was not at all a simple one. The Indian society at the time of the advent of the British rule was a plural society. It was medieval, feudalistic, and caste-ridden without a strong and unified political and economic base. The vastness of its territory, inhabited by a huge population, speaking languages of bewildering multiplicity and professing different religions, posed a real challenge to any ruler. The British inherited all these complexities and set themselves out to rule the country with minimal changes in its composition and characteristics. Such an outlook on their part was understandable, as their main objective, to start with, was to hold a complete sway over the land and its people. They were primarily conquerors and rulers, and not reformers. They had to consolidate their gains in India, once they conquered considerable portions of her territory. In their case, conquest and consolidation went hand in hand. The British, naturally, were following a very cautious policy in so far as the social and religious problems of the Indians were concerned. So much so, the Indian society, during the early phase of the British rule, was not at all different from what it was before its advent. All the old characteristics were retained in tact.

The Hindu religion, which was the religion of over two-thirds of the population with its castes and sub-castes, posed a serious problem in any effort towards
unification of India politically, socially, and economically. The Hindu religion itself is not homogeneous. It is a conglomeration of religious cults leading to serious repulsions for political and social cohesion. On the other hand, this divisive character of the Hindu society had created a number of problems such as the problem of high and low, pure and impure etc., leading to serious social distinctions which were preserved for centuries. The age-old religious practices and outlooks were opposed to the democratic principles of individual liberty, social and economic equality and justice. It was realised by the Indian intelligentsia, who came to be imbued with such liberal ideas under the impact of western education, that unless these religious superstitions are eradicated from the minds of our people, nationalism cannot be rooted firmly in our soil. Hence came a number of movements in the latter part of the nineteenth century. These movements were launched to reform or revolutionise social institutions, religious outlooks, and ethical conceptions, inherited from the past, since they felt that these were obstacles to national advance. They were convinced that the new society could politically, culturally, and economically develop only on the basis of liberal principles such as the recognition of individual liberty, freedom of unfettered expression of human personality, and social equality. It was also realised that the national struggle for freedom from the alien rule and demand for  

Swaraj or self-rule would be ineffective and meaningless without freedom for a large part of the Hindu society itself. Since charity is to begin at home, it was realised that social reform should be given the importance it deserved in the political programme of the country.

The Hindu religious system has brought about, in the course of its long period of evolution, a social organization which has come to be looked upon as tradition-bound, conservative and insular. It seldom yielded to pressures either from within or from without. It did not undergo a transformation, even under the stress of foreign invasions like that of the Muslims and the British. The period of foreign rule witnessed only a setback among the Hindus, but always followed by a period of resurgence. This capacity in the Hindu religion to sustain any onslaught upon it all along, has been due to the assimilability of Hindu religion. This character of assimilability can be considered as a point of strength, but in actual effect Hinduism became loose and flabby on account of this phenomena. Moreover, the Hindu religion never allied itself with the State. It remained politically neutral. It never became subservient to either alien or indigenous despots.

Hinduism has survived a number of empires and emperors.

The Hindu religion, according to Mr. Stanley-Bioe is at once the most tolerant and intolerant of creeds. It does not proselytise; you
cannot become a Hindu as you can become a
mussalman, and those within the fold are
liable to the most rigid restrictions. But
it has always been ready to embrace
aboriginal tribes who are willing to submit
to its laws though it may assign to them
very lowly place and they have always been
kept at a distance and have been excluded
from the temples ...5

A close study of the Hindu society would reveal
that caste forms the inner citadel of Hinduism. It was
'the steel frame of Hinduism.' The outstanding features
of Hindu society are explained thus: (1) Segmental division
of society; (2) Hierarchy; (3) Restrictions of feeding
and social intercourse; (4) Civil and Religious dis-
abilities and privileges of the different sections; (5)
Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation; and (6)
Restrictions on marriage.6

In view of these features the Hindu society
has been a stratified social organisation in which caste
dominates. Caste is not a new phenomenon but is as old as
India itself. The Hindu society embraces social categories
which are expressed in the form of castes. The Hindu
social organisation is based on the stratification of the
society into four classes or varnas: (1) the Brahman; (2)
the Kshatriya; (3) the Vaisya and (4) the Sudra.

5. Stanley Rice; Hindu Customs and their Origins;
p. 113.
6. Ghurye G.S.; Caste and Class in India; 1957; Ch.1.
This four-fold division of the society is described by Manu, the ancient Hindu law-giver, as the Chaturvarnya system of social organisation. His Varnashrama arrangement recognises the principle of division of work based on birth as the basis of social organisation. In other words, a man's avocation, and hence his social and economic status, is determined by his birth alone. This principle of social organisation assumes that one is born into one or the other of these four strata as he is born into a family. According to this doctrine, a Hindu has to be born and remain in a caste essentially. Or else, he is not reckoned a Hindu.

The individual, therefore, will not have any option or choice of his for a particular trade or profession. Such an arrangement was upheld by Mahatma Gandhi as "an ideal system conceived for the highest good of society." 7

Gandhi, in accepting the four-fold division, was simply accepting the laws of Nature, taking for granted what is inherent in human nature and the Law of Heredity. 8

The Chaturvarnya system prescribes that one will have to take to the profession, whatever it is, of his forebears. A Brahmin, who forms the top class of this social hierarchy, was to specialise in learning and teaching. A Kshatriya was to specialise in wielding arms and render protection. A Vaisya was to confine himself to commercial avocation; while the Shudra, the lowest in the hierarchy,

7. Young India - (Ed) K. Gandhi, Nov. 5, 1925.
8. Ibid, Jan. 21, 1926.
was condemned to only manual labour involving inferior work and service to the superior classes. The Shudra could not think of getting education for his children as it was the monopoly of the Brahmin; he could not take to arms and provide leadership as it was the duty of the Kshatriya; and he could not own property as it was supposed to be of no use for him. The Shudra was only to render bodily labour and hence condemned to a position of servitude for ever.

Besides these four castes, there was another group of persons who have come to be described as 'Untouchables'. They are also severally referred to as 'Antyajas', 'Pariahs', 'Atishudras', and, of late, as 'Depressed Classes' and 'Scheduled Castes'. These people were the outcastes and as such were socially ostracised. As the lowest strata in the society, the Untouchable formed the fifth varna or the 'fifth caste'. He was assigned a position much worse than that of the Shudras. Their hereditary occupation was street-sweeping, scavenging, shoe-making, tanning, etc. More fortunate among them could think of tilling the soil, only as tenants. They dared not even dream of owning a patch of land. The Untouchables were not entitled even to some of the bare necessities of life, let alone education and such other luxuries. Their condition was described by Dubois thus: "They live in hopeless poverty, and the greater number lack sufficient means to procure even the coarsest clothing. They go about almost naked, or
at best clothed in the most hideous rags.9

Further, the following description, in the words of John Gunther, gives an idea as to the appalling conditions under which they lived:

"The plight of most Untouchables is appalling; not only are they the poorest of India's poor, but they suffer consequent social indignities. The child of an untouchable in some parts of India may not enter a school-room; untouchables may not use water from the ordinary village well or otherwise in any way mingle with the community; they may not ordinarily enter temples ... an untouchable may pollute a caste Hindu even from a distance; the unfortunate creature as he walks along the road must retreat into the street when a Brahman passes ..."10

They were born as Untouchables, they lived and died as untouchables. There was never a hope of redemption for these unfortunate millions. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born into one of these poor and unfortunate families of Untouchable Mahara hailing from Ratnagiri District of the erstwhile Bombay province, on April 14, 1891.

Untouchables in India do not constitute a single homogeneous group. As if to copy caste, they seemed to have stratified themselves into various classifications. It is estimated that there are as many as 429 communities among the Untouchables. Mahars are but one of these 429 communities that constitute over 50 million Untouchables of India. 11 Mahars are the numerous of all groups of untouchables in Maharashtra. As any other untouchable community, the Mahars were also a deprived section without social and economic justice. They were a socially degraded and economically exploited class. As Mr. R.V. Russell describes it:

"In the Maratha country a Mahar one of the Untouchables might not spit on the road lest a pure-caste Hindu should be polluted by touching it with his foot, but had to carry an earthen pot, hung from his neck, in which to spit. Further he had to drag a thorny branch with him to wipe out his footprints and to lie at a distance prostrate on the ground if a Brahmin passed by, so that his foul shadow might not defile the holy Brahmin." 13

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12. According to the Census of India of 1951, there are 81.7 millions of Untouchables.

They were, in short, to use Mr. Nehru’s language, ‘naked, starving, crushed, and utterly miserable.’ B.R. Ambedkar was born into such a society which was full of such inhuman conditions and practices, without any sense of justice to all classes. Of course, with the growth of industrial complexes and urban communities the rigidities of caste are disappearing, though very slowly and gradually. The mass modes of travel, restaurants, theatres and social necessities of a cosmopolitan society are bound to bring people of different castes and sub-castes into direct physical contacts. This, however, should not be mistaken. The caste has not vanished. In spite of the measures taken during the British rule and after Independence, one finds casteism playing its own important role in more fundamental fields including politics. It has assumed new dimensions under changed circumstances.

THE MAN AND HIS MISSION: Early Years:

A reference is already made to the principle of hereditary skill that formed a part of the Chaturvarnya system. With the principle of hereditary skill as the guiding factor, a born Untouchable like Ambedkar was not entitled for education, as it was not at all his avocation to become educated and use his learning in the service of the society. It was not at all his sphere of activity.

If this principle were to be applied strictly, he would have remained as one of the many unfortunate of his brethren, and to-day one would not have heard of an erudite
eoh jlar, a constitutional lawyer of eminence and above all, a great social reformer and humanist that was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

But fortunately destiny had it otherwise. It so happened that his father Ramji Maloji Sakpal was a Subedar-Major in the Army, attached to the 2nd Grenadiers. It may be noted here that during the British rule a considerable section of the fighting forces was drawn from among the Untouchables till the Government Order of 1892 on the subject, that banned the recruitment of the Sahebra in the army. Till then education was compulsory for the children of the military servants. Here was the opportunity for Ramji Sakpal to give education to his children. But he retired from service when Bhimrao R. Ambedkar was hardly 2 years old. Still Ramji was not deterred from his resolve to educate his children, and under grave hardships and handicaps put his son Bhim into the village school of Dapoli and later moved to Satara town. It is here that Ambedkar, even as a young boy, had the first painful experience of the stigma that was attached to his caste. He was not allowed to sit inside the class-room along with other boys. He had to sit outside the class-room and teachers would not touch him or his books as they believed it would defile their person. He went to Bombay City for his secondary education, by which time he had attained better proficiency in English.

language under the tutelage of his father. The boy was lucky in going to the Elphinstone High School, a leading institution then. Here also the stigma of casteism was reigning supreme. It is said, according to W. M. Shivatarkar, that some of his teachers went to the extent of discouraging Ambedkar from continuing with his studies. It seems Ambedkar, with a sense of self-confidence and courage, asked them to mind their business. While in the school Ambedkar could not take Sanskrit for his study though he very much liked to, as it was sacrilege for a Shudra, and that too for an Untouchable, to even hear, much less to learn, Sanskrit, which was the key to the Vedas. So he was forced to take Persian, much against his will. But he did learn Sanskrit on his own. With all odds and handicaps he passed his Matriculation examination, which was an achievement in itself for an Untouchable lad.

In spite of financial difficulties, Bhimrao entered the Elphinstone College in Bombay City for his higher studies, which he could complete because of a scholarship of Rs. 25/- per month given by the Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad and, as always, because of the determined and unflinching efforts of his dutiful father. Besides, he was also very much encouraged and helped by his professor, one Mr. Muller who used to lend him books and give him

clothes. After graduation in the year 1912, he joined as
a Lieutenant in the Baroda State forces, in the service
of his benefactor. He had served hardly for 15 days when
he had to return to Bombay as his father was seriously ill.
Ramji Sakpal, a man rich in character and poor in wealth,
passed away on February 2, 1913 leaving his son 'behind
to fight the battle of life and break the world to his ways.' 16

A VOYAGE OF LEARNING:

By this time Ambedkar was already married to
Ramabai, a girl of 9 years at the time of marriage. Ambedkar
was burning with the desire for prosecuting his higher
studies, which was a difficult task indeed. Sayaji Rao
Gaekwad, the ruler of Baroda, once again came to his help
at this juncture. Ambedkar was one of the four students
selected by the ruler for a scholarship for higher studies
in the U.S.A. Here was an unique opportunity for an
Untouchable to go to the West and strive to add to the
depth and dimensions of his knowledge and vision.

He went, in right earnest, to the Columbia
University in New York in the year 1913 where, "Under
the stimulating influence of the University's greats
-- John Dewey, Charles Beard, Boas, Seligman, Monroe and

16. Dhananjay Keer: Dr. Ambedkar - Life and
Mission; p. 24.
others, he became absorbed in ancient and modern history, anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics and signed up course after course. When he finished, he had more than double the number of credits usually required for his degree. Of all the Professors in the University, Dr. Ambedkar was influenced much by John Dewey. It is said that "He took down every word the great teacher uttered in his hearing, for four years. If Dewey died, Ambedkar used to tell his classmates, 'I could reproduce every lecture verbatim.' Ambedkar obtained his Master's degree in the year 1913 for his thesis 'Ancient Indian Commerce', and later the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for his thesis 'The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India', which was an amplification of his earlier thesis 'National Dividend in India, -- A Historic and Analytical Study'.

After completing his studies so creditably in the United States of America, Ambedkar moved to London in July, 1916 to continue his intellectual pursuits there. At this juncture Lala Lajpatrai, who was in America, tried to persuade Ambedkar to enter the freedom movement in India.

17. 'Ambedkar the Untouchable' - an article by Blake Clark in Christian Herald, 1950; and in a condensed form in the Readers Digest, March 1950, under the caption 'The Victory of an Untouchable'.

18. Ibid.
But Ambedkar realised that it was not yet the time for him to do so, as he was still a student. He joined the London School of Economics and Political Science, where he registered for his B.Sc. degree in Economics under the guidance of Prof. Edwin Cannan; and at the Gray’s Inn for Law. But he had to return to India in the year 1917, as the Scholarship given to him by the ruler of Gakwad terminated. With permission to return to London within four years, he came back to India, full of liberal ideas but with a sense of disappointment as he could not complete his work in London. Nevertheless, he had determined to go back to London as early as possible.

On his return to his motherland he went to Baroda, the State of his benefactor, to fulfil the terms of the agreement to serve the State for ten years. He was appointed as the Military Secretary to the Ruler, to begin with. Even a well-accomplished untouchable like Ambedkar could not escape the piercing claws of casteism. In his own country he was once again subjected to insulting and humiliating treatment, while he was treated as a ‘man’ with due respect and dignity abroad. The treatment meted out to the Military Secretary of the Ruler was appalling. He was not served by even the office boys and could not get drinking water. Files were hurled at him from a distance, as he was a despicable Mahar! He could
not get a place to stay at, as all hotels were closed to untouchables. He was turned out by force, when he entered a Parsi inn, incognito. As he himself recollected later on, as he "was tired, hungry and fagged out, he sat under a tree and burst into a flood of tears, " spending the whole night without shelter. 19

He represented to the Ruler the difficulties he was facing. The Dewan of the State, who was asked to look into the matter, told the Ruler that nothing could be done, as admitting an untouchable Mahar into the society on equal terms would enrage the caste-Hindus. Even a Ruler with such progressive views as the Ruler of Gaskwad, could not help with a roof an individual like B. R. Ambedkar — a man of great learning and high academic attainments — just because he was an Untouchable! He returned to Bombay, grieved and frustrated. He experienced the pangs of untouchability with deep pain and anguish. If such is the fate of a person like himself, what could be the fate of millions of his brethren, who did not have the attainments he had? No wonder, this was a great challenge to Ambedkar, who had returned from abroad imbued with the progressive views of the West. He had himself seen the treatment meted out to the Negroes in America and also had learnt of the efforts made to eradicate that evil.

19. Ambedkar's speech, The Janata (Weekly), 23rd Apr., 1936; quoted by Dr. K. C. Kaer: Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission, p. 34.
practiced there. He had appreciated the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the U.S.A. Ambedkar was also very much impressed by the life and work of Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee (USA)—"One of the most remarkable men America has produced, a man born in slavery but lifted by his own vision and perseverance to a position of leadership and power. The son of a slave woman, Booker T. Washington struggled to acquire an education for himself, then dedicated his life to educating others. His is a story of almost unbelievable devotion and selflessness, an inspiration to people all over the world as long as men recognize the value of courage and human dignity." How could Ambedkar escape the influence of such a silent revolution that was brought about by Booker T. Washington, about whom he had learned so much while in America? The arrogance and inhuman treatment of the caste-Hindus towards the millions of untouchables of India, naturally, left an indelible mark on the enlightened mind of Ambedkar. No wonder, he was determined throughout his life, in whatever he did, to eradicate untouchability. It had almost become an obsession with him. He made a quiet but firm resolve to fight this evil, root and branch. That was to be the 'MISSION' of his life.


Ambedkar, with a spirit of dedication for the cause of the untouchables, was looking around for guidance in his task. But his immediate problem was to settle down in life, so that he could earn his livelihood and also save the money required to fulfil his earlier resolve to complete his studies in London. He thought, by doing so his hands would be doubly strengthened to fight out untouchability more effectively. He started a firm to advise dealers in Stocks and Shares at Bombay. In the beginning, the practice was encouraging, but once again his being an untouchable came in the way. When the customers came to know that he was an untouchable they avoided his firm. Later on, with the help of Lord Sydenham, former Governor of Bombay, he was able to get a job in Sydenham College of Commerce as Professor of Political Economy, which he accepted on a temporary basis, as he wanted to be free to return to London. He left for London in July, 1920 to continue his studies and he worked in the London Museum from dawn to dusk. He got his M.A., degree in June 1921 for his thesis 'Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance in British India.' In October 1922 he completed his famous thesis 'The Problem of the Rupee' and submitted it to the London University. He was called to the Bar at the same time. Ambedkar proceeded from London to Germany to seek admission to the Bonn University. But he was called back to London by Prof. Edwin Cannan to revise his thesis without affecting the
conclusions, which he submitted later on from Bombay in April 1923, for which he was awarded the D.Sc., degree.

Poor Man's Barrister:

On his return home this time, Ambedkar had no doubt whatsoever in his mind as to his future plans. He had already resolved to fight tooth and nail the battle against Untouchability. He settled down as a Barrister in Bombay City, which, he thought, would give him the means to live and provide the necessary freedom to dedicate himself to the cause of the Untouchables, of whom he formed the brightest part. As an Untouchable he was not flourishing well in the legal profession. He was called the 'poor man's barrister'. Of course, he was not the man to be discouraged by such things, as he was having complete confidence in his abilities.

At this juncture, the Indian National Congress was trying to associate itself with the cause of the Depressed Classes. The Depressed Classes also held some conferences to represent their grievances to the Government. But Ambedkar, on a close study of the situation, grew sceptical about the movement started by the caste-Hindus for the uplift of the untouchables. He was convinced beyond doubt, that only an Untouchable can feel the pangs of agony experienced by his fellowmen; and they can be
emancipated only by self-help. It was an happy augury for the Untouchables' cause that they were not only getting a leader springing from among their own ranks, who was determined to dedicate himself to their service, but was equipped with abundant scholastic learning. He had the courage and also an incisive mind, which were so essential for the purpose. The Untouchables were also becoming conscious of their deplorable position in the society. Though they were conscious of their indignities, they were unable to see a way out of the situation. The social mores and religious customs had, so to say, together conspired to make them accept their lot with a religious resignation. There was none in the offing to awaken their consciousness to their rights and just demands on the society to which they belonged. It, therefore, needed a leader who could spearhead a 'crusade' for them, and this Dr. Ambedkar amply provided. He had not only to awaken them to a new consciousness of human rights, but had to generate new hopes in this downtrodden people. This process was, in reality, something in the nature of political education, not only for his own community but for the entire Hindu Society.

Assumes Leadership:

Dr. Ambedkar launched his struggle against Untouchability in July, 1924 when he founded the 'Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha' (Council for the Welfare
of the Outcastes) in Bombay as an organisation for carrying out the social revolution of his vision. Thus emerged a social revolutionary, springing from among the untouchables themselves. He regarded their woes as his personal humiliations and therefore, he had an vow to make self-respecting citizens out of these virtual slaves. He thought it his mission to enrich the nation's strength, health, wealth, honour and culture by relieving the fifty millions of dumb untouchables. In this endeavour, he avoided in the beginning, open clash and encounter with the British Government; as he thought, it would be inviting another enemy for the cause. So he decided, very prudently of course, to co-operate with the British government in so far as such co-operation would enable him to secure the rights to his people. This, not in the least, was to conflict with his patriotic fervour as he did not hesitate to lash back at the British government whenever it was necessary. He was known for his frank and forthright criticisms. Even as a member of Mr. Nehru's Cabinet in Independent India, later on, he was counted as one among the very few of the critics of Mr. Nehru from within the Cabinet. Vincent Sheean writes: "When I think of the critics (of Mr. Nehru) I am constantly reminded of the late Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who was Minister of Law from 1947 to 1951. Ambedkar was an untouchable-aggressively so and perhaps for this reason, perhaps by temperament, was an inveterate critic of all Indian society."22

the critic in Ambedkar was never found wanting. As Sheean writes further: His diatribes were a healthy corrective, just the same, and there was always something in what he said no matter how much he exaggerated. Few Cabinet Ministers I have ever seen could distribute such tongue lashing to his own associates."

Whether it was in the Bombay Legislature, or the Round Table Conferences, or the Viceroy's Executive Council, or the Constituent Assembly, or in the


24. Ambedkar was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council in the year 1926; and later on he was elected to the Bombay Provincial Legislative Assembly from Bombay in the 1937 Elections. He retained this position till 1942.

25. He was invited to participate in all the three Round Table Conferences (1930-32) wherein he represented the Depressed Classes along with Rao Bahadur K. Srinivasan. He worked on the Minorities; the Provincial and the Federal structure sub-committees of the RTCs.

26. Ambedkar was appointed Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council (expanded) on 2nd July 1942, in which he held the Labour portfolio till June, 1946.

27. In terms of the June 3 Plan of 1946, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India - first from Bengal and then from Bombay. He was Member of the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly on Minority Rights; and Chairman of the Drafting Committee.
Interim Government, or in the Parliament of Independent India, he kept the cause of the Untouchables uppermost in his mind. His position and participation in one or the other of these bodies amounted to his co-operating earlier, with the British, and later, with the Indian National Congress after Independence. He was always prepared to extend his hand of co-operation, while he was also not hesitant to withdraw it when such co-operation was found unhelpful to the cause. In all such situations he would take a decision, which used to be characteristically his own. His individuality was something unique. Speaking about this quality of his, Mr. Sheean writes: "It is a form of genius to be so individual, and it is not much use explaining it by untouchability—I have known a fair number of other untouchables; but nobody at all like Ambedkar."

It is true that his revolt against the Hindu society was volcanic. He was cyclonic by temperament. But

28. He was appointed in the Interim Cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru and held the portfolio of Law, and resigned from the Cabinet on Oct. 11, 1951.

29. He was defeated twice in the elections to the House of the People in 1952 and 1954. But was elected to one of the 17 seats from the Bombay legislature to the Council of States in March, 1952.

it is also equally true that he was sincere in going to the root cause of the evil. He was, perhaps, very much influenced by the philosophy of Edmund Burke; and at the same time was aware of the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita when he said 'Truly speaking the law should be non-violence wherever possible; violence wherever necessary.' He had in him also the sobriety required for the purpose. He did not become maliciously bitter over the fact that a section of the Hindu society was forever condemned by the other sections to lead a life of degradation. No doubt, he had to experience the flings and arrows of an outrageous fortune that had destined him to be born an Untouchable. His make-up was, nevertheless, different because he did not agree that the dispensation of Heaven could be so unreasonable as to condemn so inexorably the Untouchable. He, therefore, was essentially looking out or searching for, not the immediate cause which was sociological, but for the roots in the deeper layer of the Hindu minds. Hence, he was in total engagement throughout his life with the social phenomena, as an humanist who, essentially and charitably, looked for what made true humanity. These wore later to figure in all his endeavours. This could not be the case, had he narrowed himself by his embittered attitude, even though that is understandable, to merely castigate the caste system and its unseedy side.