Chapter –V

Educated Dalits And Political Development

In the pre-independent movement, Dalits were inspired by revolutionary Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s ideology. They fought against caste discrimination, untouchability, poverty, slavery and injustice in the society. Dalits were encouraged by Ambedkar’s slogan “Educate, Organize, and Agitate”. It did not only mean a slogan but also it became the vow of the entire Dalit community and it reached most of the Dalit youth. So they took up education and politics seriously. Educated Dalits wrote about their oppression, anguish, and protest through the writings of Dalit autobiographies. After 1960, Marathi Dalit literature was influenced by a new stream called the Dalit literary stream. This new Dalit literary stream gave importance to the Marathi Dalit writers. Thus the Marathi writers began expressing themselves by writings poems, short-stories, novels, plays, and autobiographies.

Educated Dalits participated in political movements with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. They established separate community organizations called Samata Sainik Dal and Schedule Caste Federation. The concept of untouchables was the darkest spot in the Hindu society. So the Dalit society had to develop social equality and political empowerment. Ambedkar led an independent labour party to fight for their own problems. They fought against the caste system during the freedom struggle. Many Dalit writers also fought this battle through their autobiographic writings. Narendra Jadhav’s Outcaste A Memoir (2002) discusses
various stages of his parents who participated political movements after the death of Damu’s father. In 1919, he migrated to Mumbai with his mother and younger sister when he was twelve years old. He worked in Mumbai for several years. He was aware of his rights as a human being and as a participant in Baba Saheb Ambedkar’s social movement. He fought against village traditional duties to reclaim dignity of his community. After years of struggle in Mumbai, he got his first regular job in the Railways. He visited the Tau master and sought his blessings.

In 1927, when Baba Saheb Ambedkar led a procession of untouchables in rows of four, the slogan “Educate, unite and agitate” was chanted in Baba Saheb Ambedkar’s rally that day. Damu returned to Mumbai from his village. It was announced that Dalit meeting would be held in a place called Mahad near Mumbai. Ambedkar’s speeches at the Mahad satyagrah brought about a revolution among the untouchables. He urged the untouchables to do away with the humiliating traditional village duties like carrying away dead cattle. It was on 4th August 1927 when the Mahad Municipality revoked its earlier resolution granting untouchables access to the water tank. Baba Saheb took this up as a challenge and announced that they would hold another protest meeting in Mahad in December.

Ambedkar continued his struggle for social emancipation. In December 1927, in Mahad Satyagraha, Ambedkar said, “If you say your religion is our religion, your rights and ours must be equal. Is this the case? If not, on what ground do you say that we must remain in the Hindu fold?” (Outcaste: A Memoir:
24) In order to lodge a strong protest, Ambedkar publicly burnt Manusmruti (the Holy book of the Hindus) which was considered to be manifesto of caste system. Ambedkar criticized the Manu Dharma Shastra severely. Manu imposed a number of rustications on Dalits. The movement inspired by Baba Saheb Ambedkar gave to him new courage and self-realization. It gave him power to question, reason and act. He looked back on his behaviour with the Fauzdar, he had not done anything wrong in refusing his authority. Baba Saheb had inspired to stand up and reclaim our dignity.

Around 1928 in the month of August, Lord Ganapathi’s festival was celebrated in grand manner. A tent was erected in the space between the two chawls and it was decorated with garlands and streamers. Amid loud music and dancing, an earthen idol of Ganapathi was brought in a procession and placed in the centre. For ten days and nights, fervent devotees worshipped it with ritual prayers. Each house took turns and cooked Ganesha’s favourite sweet as an offering to the god. Each and every corner had an idol of Ganesha. In some places, there were framed portraits of Baba Saheb. The devotees worshipped Baba Saheb too offering flowers with equal reverence. Every night, many programmes like skills, play, folk dances and competitions were performed. They had to walk long distances to attend these programmes. They were singing folk songs about Dr. B. R. Ambedkar with social themes. They performed various social and cultural activities to fight against untouchability and the caste system to educate their children.
The important part of the Ganapathi festival was that, after dinner at night, people gathered to discuss local issues. They talked about Baba Saheb’s thoughts and teachings:

The speakers talked about Baba Saheb’s protest march in Mahad Satyagraha for access of water from the Chavdar tank. They also talked about entering Hindu temples. We were labelled untouchables and not allowed entry into Hindu temples. After all, we too are human beings. Is it a sin to be born a Mahar? Baba Saheb has made us aware that we are as human as any other people. We have to unite and agitate against discrimination. The crowd listened attentively and shouted, ‘Jai Bhim’…… Then they sang bhajans incorporating Baba Saheb’s exhortations (Outcaste: 118).

On the tenth day of the Ganapathi festival, the idol was taken in a procession amidst music and dance. This procession was celebrated in Dalit community also. Actually, untouchables were not allowed to worship Lord Ganapathi, the God of upper caste. After many years, the Ganapati festival was taken on social dimensions. It was good way to unite the masses. The upper castes were certainly not happy about this as their God was polluted by this. Damu often talked to his wife about Baba Saheb’s speeches. Whenever he attended the meetings, he took her along with him. All those speeches had an effect on her and those also changed her attitude.
During the festival of Ganapati, upper caste communities spread a malicious rumour that the untouchables were going to symbolically hang the idol Ganapati instead of immersing it. This had inflamed religious sentiments. At that time, police were deployed at every corner and armed policemen rounded up suspicious looking people.

Their procession contained about 3,000 men and women. They were under police protection and police had decided to let them go fired. The other small procession from different areas came back. Everything was going fine with people dancing and singing to the accompaniment of drums around the cart with the decorated idol. Women and passers-by showered the idol with flower petals. It was a great fun and they were all excited.

Suddenly, someone hurled a stone. This created a commotion and people began screaming. Some people threw stones back in the same direction from which the stone had come. Soon it became a fight and the stones were flying in all directions. Then the volunteers brought the situation under control. Some people started running for their lives in the middle of the procession. Some culprits also mingled with the procession. They saw this opportunity to molest young girls. Some saw a group of men misbehaving with girls under the pretext of controlling the crowds. Dalit women became so enraged at their behaviour at last that the police intervened. Finally, the procession continued and they immersed the idol. This procession was the revolution against the upper caste Hindus with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. It was a political awakening to fight for entering the temples and worshipping Ganapati.
When Damu reached the outskirts of Nasik along his wife for doing works, he wanted to go to Mumbai. Instead, he came back excited and told his wife that Baba Saheb’s posters were everywhere. Someone told him that Baba Saheb would come to Nasik to start a peaceful agitation–Satyagraha–to gain entry into the Kala Ram Temple. Damu had decided that they would stay in Nasik and look for work. They would participate in this social movement. Why should Mahars be prevented from entering the temple? Are not Mahars human beings? God belongs to everyone. All Hindus must be allowed into the temple. It was a question of Dalit rights as human beings and they were going to fight for it.

Many groups of Mahars were attending meeting at Nasik. Everywhere, there were posters with Baba Saheb’s picture on one side and the temple on the other side. A large number of people had gathered there and all of them wore badges on their left shoulder. He realized that Mahars had come from far-off places. He began mingling with the crowds. He was eager to join them and do something. He went to a volunteer and greeted him loudly: “Jai Bhim! Hail Baba Saheb”. Then he went to a small makeshift office in a tent and took two badges after entering their names in the register proudly. He pinned the badges on himself. With the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, many Dalit women devoted themselves to participate in Baba Saheb’s social movements. A few volunteers moved among the crowds and explained to them, “We are launching a Satyagraha and civil disobedience until they allow us untouchables to enter the Hindu temples. We are equally human and, moreover, are Hindus. We must be given entry into temples” (Outcaste: 127).
Their sentiments would explore a united cry of ‘Jai Bhim’: It was just like Mahad agitation. Baba Saheb had carefully chosen the Kala Ram temple agitation. He was guiding them from Mumbai. He would come to Nashik on Ram Navami day. A call was already issued to untouchables all over the state of Maharashtra to come to Nasik and assert their right to worship Lord Ram in the Kala Ram temple. On the day of agitation, there were people everywhere greeting each other with ‘Jai Bhim’ around 20,000 people had assembled there. The meeting began under Baba Saheb’s leadership. Local leaders spoke first about the plan of Satyagraha. When Baba Saheb rose to speak, the great mass of people cheered wildly. He explained the purpose of the struggle and instructed them to make it a peaceful and lawful protest as he said, “We will not die if we are not allowed into the temple, nor are we going to be immortalized by gaining entry. We are fighting for equal rights as human beings, and we are not going to accept anything less” (Outcaste: 128).

After the meeting began, Baba Saheb Ambedkar led a procession. The band followed him. The Mahar Community Association with the army and the volunteers had about 500 Dalit women participating in the movement. This was a big revolution and it was for the first time that Dalit women participated in the movement. They were followed by thousands of orderly protesters walking with discipline and determination. When the procession reached the temple, the gates were closed. A strong contingent of armed police led by Mr. Reynolds, a British police superintendent was guarding the main gate.
Ambedkar spoke to the police superintendent. Then he directed the procession to the river Godavari. Later he announced a peaceful struggle in front of the temple gate beginning the next day. Dalits joined the crowds at the temple's main gate. The temple had four gates with the east gate being the main gate. The atmosphere was tense with hundreds of armed police and protestors gathered at each gate. Mr. Reynolds had set up office in front of the temple and had camped there expecting the agitators to strike in the dead of night.

All the temple gates were blocked. The temple was sealed and nobody was allowed into the temple. Some high-caste people were hiding in houses near by, armed with sticks and batons ready to assault if Dalit’s tried to forcibly enter the temple, but Dalit’s were squatted at the main gate. Baba Saheb’s strict instructions were to maintain a peaceful agitation.

The agitation continued for the sixth day. At that time, Mahatma Gandhi had defied the salt laws imposed by the British government at the town called Dandi. Gandhi had announced a nation-wide civil disobedience movement against British rule on behalf of the Indian National Congress. Some leaders of Indian National Congress supported the ideal of eradicating untouchability and temple entry movements started pressuring Baba Saheb to withdraw the agitation, but Baba Saheb said to continue the movement till he succeeded in claiming their birth right.

On March 8 1930, the Regional Commission came to review the situation. The temple trust committee took up their case with the authorities.
They claimed that the temple was private property but they don’t have documentary evidence of private ownership. The Dalit activists opposed to it. The Dalit activists had evidence that the temple received an annual grant of 1000 rupees from the government. Therefore, it was a public property. After much debate, the Government turned this down and ordered the commissioner’s transfer.

On the day of Ram Navami, the priests allowed only high caste people into the temple. The untouchables were not allowed there. They were traditionally allowed to pull the chariot, but the high caste people objected to carry the chariot. The procession was disrupted and a fight ensued. The police supported the priests and used their sticks to push the untouchables. Many protesters including Baba Saheb were injured. All the untouchables gathered near the temple were forbidden and would warrant arrest. The matter went to court and there was a lull with the decision pending. Baba Saheb met the Home Minister and the agitation was temporarily suspended. At the time, Damu participated Baba Saheb’s movement to fight against injustice at all costs.

After the Kala Ram temple agitation was over, Damu returned to Mumbai. He was looking desperately for work. Wherever he went, he heard only one thing. It was the great depression. He could not understand, but his mother suggested several times that he should go to Tau Master and seek his help. So he went to Tau Master’s house reluctantly. It was Sunday morning in March 1931. Tau Master felt happy when he saw Damu and asked “Where have you been hiding? I heard what a great job Sonu and you did participating in the Kala Ram
temple agitation.” Tau Master explained to Damu about Baba Saheb’s movement. Baba Saheb had just returned from England. He claimed their rights before the king emperor. “We have earned this right. See what Baba Saheb’s movement has won for us!” Damu could not understand and looked at him uncomprehendingly.

Tau Master explained to him that the British government convened a historic Round Table Conference in November 1930. Baba Saheb was one of the two delegates to represent Indian Dalit’s. Damu knew the newspapers of Baba Saheb’s Social Movement. Because he did not have education, he had some difficulty reading the newspapers. On those days, a new Marathi fortnightly started by Baba Saheb, called Janatha.

Tau Master showed him issues of the paper which had details of Baba Saheb’s social movements, as well as his speeches and other issues. He advised Damu to at least make it a point to read the Janatha. He was inspired by Tau Master’s speeches. He wanted to read the newspaper and dedicate his life to Baba Saheb’s social movement. When Baba Saheb was doing so much for Dalits to improve their condition, he was questioning himself – what he could do for his community. At least, he could uplift one family. He had to give his children the best possible education and raise them with the spirit of public service, but he was looking for odd jobs. He needed a job to sustain his family. He must keep trying and trying hard. He read the Janatha Newspaper with the help of some people at the tea shop. He attended public meetings and Baba Saheb’s social movements. No one could stop him from participating in a black flag demonstration against Mahatma Gandhi.
On the occasion in December 1931 cold night, hundreds of Dalits assembled at the Mole Station–the Marine terminal in Mumbai. They were eagerly awaiting Gandhiji’s return from London by ship after the Second Round Table Conference. At that time Gandhi had taken an uncharitable stand against the Dalits and he had strongly opposed Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Earlier, at the first round table conference, when Baba Saheb was leaving for London, Gandhiji’s followers had protested with black flags. This was going to be their return gift to Gandhiji.

As months passed, the differences between Baba Saheb and Gandhiji became sharper. He could not understand clearly the developments during the talks of truce in the Poona Pact in September 1932. After some time, his distant relative Rama alias RD got a decent job. He took RD to see Tau Master for his blessings. He was waiting for this opportunity because he had many questions on his mind. He asked Tau Master, both Gandhiji and Baba Saheb were well-meaning and both of them were working so hard for the country, why they were against each other.

Tau Master explained to Damu that both were great leaders but they had some fundamental differences in their approach to the problems of Dalits. Gandhi only showed sympathy towards untouchability and did not do anything substantial for the deprived sections of the society. Baba Saheb says, “We want our human rights, not sympathy”. Some of our leaders have some differences. In August 1932, the British Government announced their decision in a communal award, which granted separate seats for Dalit’s in provincial
assemblies. This was a resounding victory for Baba Saheb. But Gandhiji, who was bound to accept the British Premier’s arbitration, went back on his word and declared he would fast unto death if separate electorates for Dalit’s were not abolished. At that time, Mahatma started a furious campaign which was launched against Baba Saheb.

Ambedkar was called a monster, a traitor, and a hireling. Gandhi strongly opposed it on the grounds that it would disintegrate Hindu society. He began an indefinite hunger strike at Yerawada Jail from September 20, 1932 to protest this award. As Gandhi’s health worsened, Ambedkar was under tremendous pressure to save the life of Gandhi. Ambedkar feared that should Gandhi die due to the fast, there would be a severe reprisal against the depressed classes by the upper castes. The Poona Pact was made between the leaders of caste Hindus and Ambedkar on September 24, 1932 as an act of compromise.

Then Tau Master discussed with Damu and RD, who asked Damu if he had got a regular job yet? Damu assured that he did not. Later Tau Master recommended him for a job in United Mills. Damu would go and meet the superintendent and join in the United Mills in Parel. After working for many years in the United Mills, he lost his thumb. Loosing thumb was another big blow. He was frustrated earlier, doing odd jobs. Making a rupee or two, but he had no words to describe how he felt now. He turned away from one job to another with bandaged hand. He was organizing Baba Saheb’s social movements. Tau Master sent him to Upshum Guruji for he wanted some work. Upshum Guruji was Baba Saheb’s devoted activist and one of the leaders of the local Dalit movements. Then he joined as an
activist. His job was getting posters printed, sticking them or going from shop to shop collecting subscriptions, and publicizing Guruji’s speeches. Thus he became Guruji’s assistant. In 1935, Dalit movement had lost momentum because of various reasons. Baba Saheb had accepted a job as the principal of Government Law College in Mumbai and there was some talk of him being made a judge in the Mumbai high court or minister in the government.

After long period of calmness, there came the news that Baba Saheb was going to declare or announce the Dalit’s change of religion. Baba Saheb organized a conference in Yeola, a small town near Nashik. About 10,000 delegates attended the conference. Damu was one among the hundreds of activists. Baba Saheb announced a change of strategy in the struggle. He re-divided the efforts towards securing respect, independence and equality with others. Finally, Baba Saheb announced his decision to renounce Hinduism.

When Baba Saheb returned from Europe, he founded a new political party called the Independent Labour Party. Upshum Guruji was elected as one of the secretaries of the party. Damu had become Guruji’s right-hand man and he joined the election campaign activity. No one of them had any experience of elections. All activists were committed to Baba Saheb and were willing to work hard. Along with hundreds of activists, Damu also worked tirelessly. They arranged meeting in every town and distributed leaflets doing door-to-door publicity campaign and organizing demonstrations. Finally, several of Dalit candidates won and Baba Saheb was also elected with a thumping majority.
In March 1937 more good news followed the election triumph and there was jubilation all around. The Bombay High Court settled the protracted Mahad case allowing Dalits to use water from the Chavdar tank. This was the political milestone which Dalits achieved in their favour.

Vasant Moon’s autobiography *Growing Up Untouchable in India* (2002), describes Moon’s political participation at high school level when he was a student in the school. The Dalit community Samata Sainik Dal was established. This branch was established around 1938 by Asaram Paithankar, Sadanand Dongare, and others. Moon started going to the Dal from the third standard on. All the school children and young soldiers of the Dal gathered every evening in the Dal field. The community would discuss all the Dalit issues in the evening. Vamanrao Godbole had established Dal branches throughout the Northern and Western part of Nagpur. When he studied in school, Baba Saheb’s social movements spread all over India. At that time, scheduled caste federation was founded in 1942. In the same year, the students’ organizations were established by high school and college students. After the registration of their membership in the college, they participated in the elections for the students organizations. In his community, every student had studied in the middle school. The elections took place in the Bhide Girls’ School ground. Khapavde and Nandev were standing against each other for the position of joint secretary. During the election campaign, the girl students also participated in the meeting and accompanied together.
Thus untouchable students formed the all India Scheduled Caste Student Federation after the 1942 conference. Branches started in Madras, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Mumbai. The student organization decided to hold a conference on 25th and 26th October in 1946 at the vast field of the Kasturchend Park. D. K. Rantake was the principal secretary of the welcoming committee and V. D. Chahade was elected President. O.Mahipati of Madras, D. S. Motghare, Harbaji Goudane, Begal’s Vishvam and others were the invitees of Baba Saheb to the conference on behalf of students’ organizations. But Baba Saheb could not attend as he had some other works. Thousands of students attended the welcome ceremony. Discussions went on for three days on students issues for the first time to fight their own problems. This conference was filled with enthusiasm on students’ faces.

Moon traces the political connotation in the Quit India Movement. In 1942, the freedom struggle was increased by Congress campaigns. At that time, the schools and colleges were closed and textiles mills were also closed. The young volunteers organized marches and participated with patriotic songs such as “This is my India, an unbroken continent” (Moon: 89) The Dalit community knew Ambedkar’s policy of avoiding Congress campaigns. Scheduled Caste Federation was involved in Dalit movements, especially in Nagpur. The Dalit movement would be changed as a Mahar movement. Many Dalits dedicated their life to the Chambhars (Leather Workers) and Mangs (Rope Makers, also called as Matangs) and joined the Dalit movement. A Matang gentleman named Behade was in the executive committee of the Scheduled Caste Federation and Ramratan Janorkar of
the Bhangi (Sweeper) community dedicated his life to Ambedkar’s movement and also became a Bhuddhist. Later he became a Mayor of the Bhuddhist Community in Nagpur Corporation. In Nagpur, a man called Mahadev Rao Chakole, Chambers gentleman, showed his courage at that time. A photo of Ambedkar was hung in front of his shoe store for all to see. At that time, most of the Chambers in Nagpur were in Congress. He dedicated his life to the Ambedkar Movement. When Baba Saheb came to Nagpur, he enquired about him and visited his house because he was the true and courageous activist of Ambedkar movement.

In 1946, Nagpur city was buzzing with movements. Every day went by meetings, rallies, gatherings. That year, Hindu-Mahar riots blocked the atmosphere. The Ravishankar Shukla Congress ministry was established in the Central Provinces and Berar because Hindus dominated the police and other departments. Whenever there arose the slightest sign of a riot, Mahar youths were put under house arrest. At the time, the supporters of Ambedkar activists were arrested. The disciples of Ambedkar created tremendous self-confidence in the Dalit community. For that reason, other communities also were awed by the Dalits.

In 1947, the Congress began its Quit India Movement against the British rule. At that time, Ambedkar fought for Dalits. The Hindus wanted independence for the country only to gain power for themselves. Baba Saheb’s position was simply that the Hindus and the British government should make clear, before independence, what their share would be. The congress refused to part in the Viceroy’s ministry. They fought against fascism of the British in World War II.
But the attitude that “Congress and Gandhi mean the country” was being spread everywhere. Because of this all the newspapers in India depicted Ambedkar as a traitor. The British government said that if Hindus gave support to the British army, India would be an independent country. Ambedkar and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh also supported Savarkar’s policy to help the British government. Jinnah and the Muslim League demanded an independent country, but no one said that these leaders were traitors.

A cabinet mission was held after the 1946 elections. The failure of the Scheduled Caste Federation in the election meant Ambedkar’s demands for separate electorates for untouchables in India. Consequently, Ambedkar started a Satyagraha in front of all the legislative assemblies in India to condemn the Pune pact. In Nagpur, this Satyagraha was taken in a grand way. It began in the afternoon on 3rd September 1946 before the assembly. At that time, many women and men participated in the Satyagraha. The police had encircled the assembly on all sides. The Satyagrahis came before the assembly. They were arrested by the police and sent to jail. When the vans came near the Patwardhan high school, the Satyagrahis loudly shouted “Victory to Ambedkar”. The jails were filled with thousands of Satyagrahis. Most of the community people left their jobs to go to jail. Women and children also joined the Satyagraha. At that time, many Ambedkarite activists felt a jolt. All the Satyagrahis were put in jail and they were being harassed. The jail police made a lathi charge on them and many women and men were wounded.
In 1946, the government proclaimed elections. At the time, the Scheduled Caste Federation was the only party opposing the Congress in Nagpur. On behalf of Scheduled Caste Federation, the candidate was Radha Bai Kamble, a workers’ leader who lived in Bardi. She became known as a vociferous organizer of woman textile workers. For the workers’ seat, Sakharam Meshram was the Scheduled Caste Federation candidate. Rambhave Raikar had been given the ticket for congress. For the seat reserved for untouchables, Congress had put up Hem Chandra Khendekar. The Congress leaders wearing Congress caps had guts to campaign in the Dalit communities. The Ambedkarite community had boycotted “Harijans” completely barring them from dining or inter-marrying with others. Many Congressite Mahars had to remain bachelors their whole life because of that.

At the election movement, meetings were held everywhere. Most people of the Mahar community were mill workers. If there was strike in the Mills, these untouchable workers would leave Nagpur to search for work. It was a tactic of winning the elections by getting opponents in his favour. Ruikar called for a strike. The Federation leaders like Rekharam Kavade, Sitaram Hadke, Dasharath Patil, and all the activists decided to defeat this call.

The Samata Sainik Dal had decided to have procession that was held on 15 January 1946. All community people gathered from all over Nagpur. All the Dal leaders and activists saluted the flag of Dal. When the parade of the Dal reached Gaya Khet, thousands of people, men and women began to walk behind it and people gave slogans with a thunder strike throughout Nagpur. The Dal leaders
such as Rao Saheb Thavare, Radhabai Kumble, Revaram Kevade and other heads gave speeches. The people, finally, dispersed at Kasturchand Park and returned to their houses with enthusiasm.

The supporters of Ruikar’s went forth for a fight, catching workers and beating them. But the Ambedkarites decided to resist. The women were determined to go to work in an organized manner. The election atmosphere in Nagpur became heated. The newspapers systematically spread emotional propaganda that Ambedkar’s party opposed independence. The Hindus decided to teach a lesson to the Mahars. People of weaver, farmer, and writer castes from the Hindu communities stopped Mahar youth and beat them up when they could be caught alone. But no attacker could dare to attack a group openly.

At the time of election, the Mahar-Hindu quarrel started. There was a famous Hindu wrestler named Pochamma who took the opportunity of attacking Ghanshyam another wrestler before the latter was aware of it. Pochamma had grabbed him with one hand and stabbed him in the waist with a knife held in the other. Fearing that Ghanshyam would die, Mango Wrestler and Raghunath Narake took their knives and just like Shivaji had stabbed Afzal Khan, they split open Pochamma’s stomach. Pochamma died there. Mango and Raghunath were arrested and Ghanshyam went into hiding. Unable to find him, the police harassed his friends and family. At that time, the quarrel continued to flare up and big riot developed. On 3rd May 1946, the weavers and farmers united and decided to attack the Mahar Community at Indore.
The Hindu goons entered Pavpavali, Bhankheda and Military Park, Shaniwar near the cotton market to beat up Mahar youths. People started to run wildly when they saw their campaigns retrieving. Some young activists like Harichand Sakhare, Ghansyam wrestler, Tulsiram wrestler, Sampat Ramteke and Hussain Gajbhiye and many other young men fought for their own life. While they were being beaten, the cries of “Jai Bhim”, “Victory to Ambedkar” came from their mouth. After this a curfew was imposed. Everyone was forbidden to leave his house. The police began to search, entering house after house only for the Ambedkarites. Mahar youth went underground. The aged and senior people who stayed in their houses were arrested. Finally, the young girl, married women, and very old women and men remained in their homes. The police began to fire on them. Some young federation activists lost their lives. Later, the community was inspired by Fago Ustad’s courage. The Mahars of Pottertown came running from their houses.

Mahars continued to go to work in the mills. At that time, the youth took sticks in their hands and stayed forth. Just behind them, led by Radhabai Kamble, many women and youths followed her. Beyond the Brahman and Marwari houses outside of the community was the Oilpressers’ ward, but they did not have the courage to obstruct them.

After Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination in 1948 by a Maharastrian Brahman, not only was a ban imposed on the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, but on all Semi-militant organizations as well, including Samata Sainik Dal. Many activists burned the files of Bahishkrit Bharat, Janata, Dalit Bandhu, and
other Ambedkarites journals. If they were found, the police would harass them. The only newspaper of the Dalits, the *Janata*, came from Mumbai. In Nagpur, around 1946, there was also a weekly named *Dawn* under the leadership of N. K. Tirpude. These newspapers would come to the Dalit organizations for political awakening.

Another autobiography Siddhalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* (2003) explains how the writer participated in many organizations during his college days. When he was studying in eighth standard, he participated in rail blockade agitation. Kannadigas and Tamils were living together in Srirampur. The Kannada writers organized this party and they attended and gave inspiring speeches. Siddhalingaiah used to go listen to them. The senior writers gave speeches and explained what Kannada meant. People were inspired by their speeches and launched a movement. They planned to stop a train going from Bangalore to Mumbai. Thousands of people gathered for this rail blockade agitation. Their main demand was that the Mahajan report be implemented at that time. The man who died in the rail blockade agitation was Govindaraju. He was a Tamil who had been working for a long time for the Kannada course in Bangalore. During his study, the National Days were celebrated in the hostel. The students would get up early on such days and go in a procession in the streets of Srirampura. Those who knew patriotic songs would teach those to the students. Among other patriotic songs, a Kannada song was sung by the boys and girls together.

Later, there would be ceremony where the leaders like S. Nijalingappa, B. Rachaiah, Nagappa Alva, R. Bharanaiah, K. Bheemaiah and
Siddhartha Arakeri gave their speeches to encourage the Dalit boys. The hostel students participated shouting slogan, “Red and white, ready to fight” (Siddalingaiah: 64) Ten thousands Dalits came in a procession from Chikka Lal Bagh to the Town Hall. All the hostel students marched in it. Men, women, and children took part in the procession. Leaders like B. Basava Lingappa and N. Rachaiyah were actively involved in organizing it. They gave speeches about hostel problems on behalf of the Dalit students. At that time, Siddhalingaiah had read several books about Ambedkar and gained enough confidence to speak about him. He had organized students in the hostel and spoke on Ambedkar’s thoughts.

All the Dalit students got together and founded a society called Vicharavadi Parishat, under its banner. They planned a procession of Dalit students. The Vicharavadi Parishat organization visited all Dalit hostels in Bangalore and got to know about the students’ problems. The Dalit students suffered various problems. They would not get proper food and water and hygiene was bad. Two hundred students had to use a single lavatory. Students contended with one another to use the lavatory in the morning. The lavatories did not have doors. Students lived in dread of hostel wardens. Some wardens were autocrats, who pocketed students’ money and deprived them of their food. The students of Vicharavadi Parishat visited every hostel and this instilled courage in the students. The students were impressed upon them and got to know the importance of the procession. They planned to take out the procession. About four thousand students gathered near Mysore Bank. It was the first protest procession taken out by Dalit students in Bangalore. The people were awestruck to see the procession.
The procession reached Cubbon Park and a public meeting was held there. The police officials took the initiative to arrange for their delegation to meet the Chief Minister Devaraj Urs. Siddhalingaiah’s friends asked him to explain the students’ problems to the chief minister. He explained to the Chief Minister confidently that scholarship amount had to be increased, hostel building repaired, and new hostel built. At the end of the meeting, they had coffee brought in for the delegates. The Chief Minister called his personnel secretary J. C. Lynn and instructed him to quickly sort out whatever problems they had complained about. Their problems were solved one by one.

At that time, Siddhalingaiah had become the Secretary of the Students Union of the Dalit hostel. Biligiri Rangaiah was one of the directors of Syndicate Bank. He told the students of the two hostels to arrange a meeting and invite the higher-ups of Syndicate Bank. Besides the bank officials, other directors, senior managers came there. Shivanna, the Finance Minister of the state, K. K. Pai and D. M. Nanjundappa were the Karnataka government financial advisors who came as chief guests. Siddhalingaiah had to make the welcome speech. Another student gave introduction about Biligi Rangaiah who had organized the function by giving them financial assistance. During the college days, he participated in election to the students’ union. He contested for the post of Fine-arts Secretary. He won the election by the supporters of Kannada Dalit Students. Hindu, Urdu, and Tamil students also became his supporters. Later, Dalit students organized a racialist’s convention and representatives from various parts of the state took part in it. He had presided over the convention himself.
This convention took place in the hockey field of Central College. Its objective was to fight for the creation of a casteless, classless society.

Later, he explained Boosa incident. At that time, B. Basavalingappa became a controversial minister in Devraj Urs’ cabinet. He once criticized that Gandhiji did not know the meaning of truth. This amazed many people. On another occasion, he told the Dalits to throw Hindu gods’ pictures into gutter. This shocked the traditionalists. His opponents demanded that he resign.
The agitation did not cool off even after Basavalingappa had offered a clarification. The upper caste people and some leaders in his own congress party opposed him. The Dalit Students all over the state were in favour of Basavalingappa because Basavalingappa had told the agitated students to support him.

The responsibility of heading rallies, organizing Dalit students, and taking out a procession fell mostly upon him. The general caste people opposed to Basavalingappa because the feeling that he was anti-God, anti-Kannada, and anti-Gandhi had got into their minds. When he was organizing students at the hostel, Kalegowda Nagawara arrived there. Basavalingappa and Kalegowda Nagawara were very old acquaintances. Earlier, Basavalingappa had written a letter to Kalegowda and called him over to Bangalore. He came to Dalits’ hostel to guide them. At that time, a secret meeting of Basavalingappa’s supporters took place at Olympus Hotel. The opponents were likely to attack the meeting. Dalit students took out a procession to express their support for Basavalingappa. Their opponents were trying to clash with them. At that time, the students were in the
public meeting and they were informed that they should quickly leave for their hostels and rescue themselves.

Basavalingappa’s aim was to shake a stagnant society. At last, he had to resign from his ministerial position because of pressure from the traditionalists and his political rivals. His resignation made him very popular among the Dalits. During the summer holidays, he attended a camp of the Communist Party of India at Krishna Bhavan in Malleswaram. The Communist Party of India supported emergency. So his mind leaned towards the party. One day, he saw the agricultural labourers marching in a procession from Mysore Bank towards Cubbon Park. They took a rally shouting slogan “Indira Gandhi Socialism, Sanjay Gandhi Car Factory”. The slogan inspired him to get close to the Marxist Party.

Baby Kamble’s autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) explains how she associated herself to contact with Ambedkar’s movement and participated in many cultural programmes. She was a dedicated activist of Ambedkar’s movement since she was a child of seven or eight. Kamble’s hut was right in front of the Chawdi. Both shared a courtyard. Ambedkar’s activists such as her father Pandharinath Kakade, Nane Ahiwade, Laxman Kakade were all educated people.

The activists used to bring two newspapers; Dalit Kesari and Daily Sakal; to the Chawdi and read them aloud to the people sitting in the courtyard. Baba Saheb published a newspaper called *Bahishkrut* in which his speeches were
reproduced. The readers explained the issues of the social and political matters to the people to grow up political awakening. Ambedkar taught them Buddhist philosophy. He wanted to transform the society in the light of this philosophy. During her childhood days, she participated in many cultural programmes along with the community students. They used to compose radical songs to be sung in cultural programmes. The Dalit students exerted their rights as human beings by forcibly seeking entry into temples and hotels by the influence of B. R. Ambedkar. The hostel students discussed and planned to enter the temple. The Dalit students chose to enter Vithal Temple in Shimpi lane which was next to Brahmin lane. The Brahmins came to know their plans. With fire in their blood, the Dalit student activists tried to forcibly enter Viththal Temple. They shouted slogans for Ambedkar’s victory. Some young girls also participated in that movement. The Brahmans surrounded the idol of Vithal to protect it from the polluting touch of the Mahars. They wanted to stop the Mahar boys from entering the temple at any cost. The Dalit activists were equally adamant. Some boys dashed the ring of the Brahmins and managed to touch the idol. This caused a furor. There was a great commotion everywhere. The Brahmins scattered and started chasing the Mahar boys with lathis. The Brahmin priests in the temple announced that the Mahars had polluted the temple. They also declared that God Vithal’s face had become contorted and that tears were flowing from goddess Rukmayi’s eyes. Soon the news of the Mahars having polluted the divine couple Viththal and Rukmaye spread all over Phaltan. In fact, it reached all the eighty four villages in the state of Phaltan. The priests organized the chanting of
scriptures and purification rituals to wash away the pollution with milk and *gomutra*. Finally, after one and half months of incessant chanting, ceaseless worship, and substantial grants from the king, the Brahmin priests managed to cleanse the deities of pollution. They restored the original expression on Lord Viththal face and stemmed the flow of tears from Rukmayi’s eyes. In this movement, Rani Lakshmibai had established the first women’s club and Mahila Mandal in Phaltan. She was very young among them. It was only the Brahmin women who occupied all the positions in this Mahila mandal. The Rani Sahba decided to allow Mahar women into this Mandal. She called Dalit activists like Shrirangappa, Nana Member and her father for a meeting. After the meeting, all these male activists enrolled the women from their locality as members in this Mandal. A women meeting was conducted by the Rani Sahib. She asked Dalit women to attend themeetings in Mangalawar Peth. The women leaders used to take women from all the houses to these meetings. All the young women were excellent speakers. They would wear ‘white saris’ as devoted activists of Dr. B. R. Ambedakar. The meeting was held in the dining hall. All the Brahmins and Maratha women had occupied the chairs. They did not allow Mahar women to sit on chairs. Mahar women stood on one side. At the same time, the Rani Sahiba started to move towards the stage accompanied by her other followers. Thakubai, one of the Dalit women leaders, rushed forward. She shook the Rani by her shoulder and told her, ‘your women are not allowing our women to sit on chairs. Our Ambedkar has told us to demand our rights. I am going to forcefully remove your women from the chairs and seat my women there’. The Rani Sahiba was
taken aback for a moment, but she immediately arranged chairs in the front for all of them. The Dalit women attending meetings was a new activity. By now, they had become more aware because of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. After attending such meetings, Dalit women’s knowledge began to increase and also they became closely involved in politics. Baba Saheb would explain them in the public meetings:

We should learn to do business. The high caste in the village will not buy milk from us. In fact, they will not buy anything from us. Undeterred, we should practice business in our own locality. We should not allow the village to earn at our expense. (Kamble: 133)

Therefore, she started doing good business and earning money for them. They became determined to work harder. She was the first participant in the movement that was inspired by Ambedkar’s thoughts. She sent her children to school. Once they get educated, they can organize themselves and find out various ways of directing the struggle. Baba’s words showed her the way. She decided to begin her struggle through writing. She followed Baba’s advice to start an Ashram Shala for orphans from the backward castes. Then she became the president of Mahatma Phule Dnyan Vikas Prasarak Sanstha to help the poor students.

Omprakash Valmiki, in his Joothan explains his political involvement in the movement in 1964. With the help of a few friends, he started a theatre group called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha. This group began with regular
shows and street plays to acquaint the wider public about contemporary issues. It was the movement of Janatha Party. The country was resounding with the movement. By that time, he had written some good poems, and people began to recognize him as a poet through his poems in Navbharat, Yugdharm, Nai Dunia. He also began to write a column in a Chandrapur weekly called Janapratinidhi.

When Omprakash was staying in Chandrapur, he was involved in the strongest current of the Dalit movements. The self-fulfillment that he experienced in connecting with the Dalit movement was truly from his experience. He was deeply involved in the Dalit movement. Further, many of his friends moved away from him. They had moved away from the right path and were bent on destroying his talent and creativity. Later, he attracted Buddhist philosophy on human freedom and it had sympathy and wisdom that takes a person towards transcendence. He always dreamt of carrying out social work among the Dalits and during his time in Chandrapur, he was able to put his plans into practice. The social works done by Ambedkar and Jyoti Rao Phule had inspired thousands of people to join this struggle. This intellectual revolution provided a new dimension to his writings. His friend Jagdish Rahi was also involved in the Dalit movements. At that time, he published a magazine named Jharna (frozen waterfall) at Chandrapur. Many Dalit issues came out in the society. Rahi was a very close friend of Valmiki. He was also a good singer. They had worked together for Dalit movements.

Educated Dalits and the Dalit panthers had organized a huge rally in Bombay in 1978. Dalits demanded that Marathawada University’s name be
changed to Ambedkar University. The Dalit panthers and activists from all over Maharashtra were gathered in front of Bombay’s Legislative assembly. The Maharashtra State Assembly passed the bill for the change of name. The Savarnas protested against the bill on a very large scale. Riot and destruction of public property took place in several towns and cities. There was a great tension in Anandpur, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Sholapur, Bombay, Nasik and Amravati. The impact of the riot was felt the most in Marathwada. The Dalits were forced and hundreds of people died. The change of the name became a self-hood issue for Dalits. There were incidents of violence in Nagpur. A procession was also conducted in Chandrapur.

The Maharashtra government withdrew the name change bill. The Dalits were disappointed by this decision of the government, but they did not lose heart. However, they were working relentlessly to keep the issue in the forefront. Their entire energy had been channeled into the movements in the battle for Dalits, with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who had fought in his life and unleashed the flow of self-confidence. Amongst the Dalits, he had established the Republican Party to participate in political process. After his death, the party had splintered into several groups. Every leader declared himself to be Babasaheb’s heir, and had joined the race to become the party’s president. Every leader created his own party. At that time, Dalit panthers gave a new direction to the Dalit movement. The leaders and activists of the Dalit panthers were trying out a new experiment by combining Maxism and Ambedkarism. It brought a new mood to
Marathi Dalit Literature. This literature was more progressive than canonical Marathi literature.

Ambedkar’s birth anniversary was celebrated with grand manner in the Ordnance Factory colony, Chandrapur. Valmiki participated in it with great enthusiasm. The community organized poetry reading, panel discussion, art exhibition, and stage plays and street theatre. The Savarna members in the organization could not participate in Ambedkar birth anniversary celebrations. The Dalits boycotted the religious celebrations. They searched for theatre people who were keen to work for a change. Dalits staged many plays and one of these was *Mumbai Nagri* by Daya power.

Valmiki invited Mr. R. Kamal to Chandrapur for a meeting. He was the author of a magazine called *Nirnayak Bhim*. He published Valmiki’s writings in almost every issue of the magazine. He was a very vibrant, electrifying personality who was spreading Ambedkar’s message in the Hindi speaking regions. Mohan Das Naimishray also came to Chandrapur on invitation of Dalits. They gave lectures on Dalit problems in Maharastra. Valmiki’s activities were no longer confined to Maharashtra. He attended many functions in Madya Pradesh on Dalit problems. Valmiki was more active in the Dalit movement. The more suspicious people around him were the Savarnas as though he was working to destroy their hegemony.

Later, he explained narrow-mindedness of Brahman teachers. It was January 1984 when an incident took place in Malkapur in Amravati district.
In a Marathi text book which meant for class seven, there was a lesson on Ambedkar. All the students ripped out the lesson on the orders of a Brahmin teacher. There were some Mahar Students in the class and they felt that ripping out lesson was wrong. The Dalit students quietly picked up the torn pages from the rubbish and took with them to show those to their families. The news spread and protests began. Someone sent a detailed account along with the torn pages to Lokmat’s Nagpur bureau. Lokmat published the story along with the photographs of the torn pages. Rallies and protest meetings began all over Vidharbha as soon as the story came out. This incident became a symbol of Dalit oppression. A huge rally was staged at Bhadravathi where thousands of people came to the rally. Valmiki too addressed the rally. Most of the Dalit Speakers spoke in Marathi, but Valmiki spoke in Hindi. This was a new experience for him. At this movement, he was fully dedicated to the Dalit movement. Day by day, the movement spread to many places. Savarnas threw stones on Dalit marches and rallies. The police were indifferent. The board of education did not take any disciplinary action against the teacher. Dalit meetings were conducted in many places. Most of his time was spent in Dalit bastis. There was a village near the Ordnance Factory called Sumantha. In Bhadravati tehsil, Dalit leaders started many programmes in the Dalit bastis. They opened many schools. Umesh Meshram ran a school and library at Bhadravathi. The library had plenty of books on Ambedkar and Buddhism. He invited Valmiki to give speech. Ballarpur Paper Mills sponsored a drama competition every year. This competition for Hindi and Marathi plays was important not only for the theatre people but also for the audience in Ballarpur.
Meghdoot Natya Sanstha made a name for itself in this competition by staging plays *Aadhe Adhure, Himalaya ki Chhaya, Sinhasan Khali Hai* and *Paisa Bolta Hai*. Dalits had won many prizes. Valmiki was awarded the best actor and the best director prize several times. The Dalit writers, intellectuals, and activists in the Dalit movement had to struggle constantly with their inner conflicts.

Many Dalit writers joined the struggle for social emancipation through their autobiographic writings. Marathi Dalit literature which was influenced by a new stream called the Dalit literary stream first set the example in the country in such type of writing. Narendra Jadhav’s *Outcaste A Memoir* (2002) discusses various stages of Damu who participated in political movements after the death of his father. He fought against village traditional duties to reclaim dignity of his community. It was a question of Dalit rights as human beings and he was going to fight for it. He also joined in Ambedkar’s *satyagraha* for getting permission to enter the Hindu temples. Obtaining Bombay High Court’s order to use water from the Chavdar tank was the political milestone which Dalits achieved in their favour. Vasant Moon’s autobiography, *Growing Up Untouchable in India* (2002), describes Moon’s political participation at high school level. The Dalit community established Samata Sainik Dal and the Dalit students participated in the college elections for the students’ organizations. Moon also traces the political connotation in the Quit India Movement.

Another autobiography, Siddhalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* (2003), explains how the writer participated in many organizations during his college days. When he was studying in eighth standard, he participated in rail blockade agitation as their main demand was that the Mahajan report be implemented at that time. Baby Kamble’s
autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) explains how she associated herself to contact with Ambedkar’s movement and participated in many cultural programmes. She was a dedicated activist of Ambedkar’s movement since she was seven or eight. Omprakash Valmiki, in his *Joothan*, explains his political involvement in the movement in 1964. With the help of a few friends, he started a theatre group called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha. This group began with regular shows and street plays to acquaint the public about contemporary issues. Valmiki’s activities were no longer confined to Maharashtra. He attended many functions in Madya Pradesh on Dalit problems.

Education made the Dalits realize their own stand. They demanded for social equality and political empowerment. The educated Dalits participated in political movements led by Ambedkar to eliminate the concept of untouchables from the society. They established separate community organizations called Samata Sainik Dal and Schedule Caste Federation and fought against the caste system during the freedom struggle. Educated Dalits wrote about their oppression, anguish, and protest through the writings of Dalit autobiographies.
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