CHAPTER IV
A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF SHRI BASAVESHWARA AND DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR.

This chapter is a humble attempt to analyse the lives and achievements of Basavaeshwara and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The lives and achievements of these great personalities are well known to everybody, hence here is the short script of their lives.

I. Life of Mahatma Basavehwara

Basava also known as Bhakti Bhandari Basavanna, Basaveshwara (1134-1196) was an Indian philosopher, statesman and a social reformer from Karnataka. Basava fought against the practice of the caste system, which discriminated against people based on their birth, and other rituals in Hinduism. He spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as Vachanaas. Basavanna used Ishtalinga, an image of the Śiva Liṅga, to eradicate untouchability, to establish equality among all human beings and as a means to attain spiritual enlightenment. These were rational and progressive social thoughts in the twelfth century. Basaveshwara is undoubtedly one of the pioneer’s of Indian Democracy. He created a model Parliament called the “Anubhava Mantapa,” which not only gave equal proportion to men and women, but
also had representatives from different socioeconomic backgrounds. He was a man ahead of his time, who believed that conflict should be resolved through debate and not violence. He advocated mercy towards both humans and animals.¹

Basavanna (Basaveshwara) is also called "Vishwaguru" because he is believed by his followers to have been the first ever to know the practicality of transcending to Godliness and demonstrating the technique of becoming God through around 800 Sharanas. Basavanna spread the concept of the path of becoming God through four levels of divinity that exists in one's own body- Unmanifest Chaitanya (Guru), Manifest Chaitanya-Shakti (Linga), consciousness of the manifest chaitanya-shakti in Prana (Jangama) and the Individual consciousness (Jeevatma/Mind). Basavanna taught Sharanas, the technique of transcending the mind with one's own prana through a process of Ishtalinga, Pranalinga and Bhavalinga saadhana and that anybody in the world, irrespective of caste, creed, merit, nationality, etc., can transcend and become God by being in union with prana. He himself declared that he is playing only the elder brother's role and that is how the name Basavanna came to be. He is popularly called Bhakti Bhandari (Champion of Devotion) or "Kranti Yogi". The key aspect of his preaching is a monotheistic concept of God.²
Basava originated a literary revolution through his literary creation called *Vachana Sahitya* in Kannada Language which are derived from the Upanishads and Vedanta. He was the Prime Minister of the Southern Kalachuri Empire in South India. Many great yogis and mystics of his time joined his movement, enriching it with the essence of divine experience in the form of Vachanas.³

**Early Life of Basaveswara**

It is believed that Lord Basava was born into a Shaiva Brahmin family belonging to Shukla Yajurveda, residing in a small town (now Basavana Bagewadi) Bagewadi in Bijapur district of Karnataka state in 1134 CE.⁴ His father was Madarasa, Mahajana or gramani of the Bagewadi Kalamukha Matha in Bijapur district. He is said to have grown up in an orthodox Hindu religious household and rejected many practices in Vedic society based on some of the religious scriptures called Agamas, Shastras, and Puranas in Sanskrit language. After the death of his father, Basavanna’s Elder brother Devaraja was denied the right of Gramani or post of mahajana this led to the migration of his family. Consequently, he left Bagewadi and spent the next twelve years studying at Sangameshwara temple, the then Shaivite school of learning at Kudala sangama.⁵
A monk residing in the Sangameshwara temple at Kudalasangama, Játavéda Muni also known as Eeshánya Guru, was his guru, who was perhaps the first to recognize the greatness of Basava.⁶ There, he conversed with scholars and Vachanakaras and developed his spiritual and religious views in association with his societal understanding. Among the various Vachanakaras Jedara Dasimaiah, Madivala Machaiah, and Ambigara Chowdaiah (who had a forceful anti-Brahmin views) made a strong influence on Basavanna. It was at Kudala sangama that he developed a strong resentment towards Brahmana orthodoxy.⁷

Basavanna started his career as an accountant at Mangalaveda in the court of Kalachuri king Bijjala, a feudal vassal of the Kalyani Chalukya. When Bijjala acquired the power at Basavakalyana, by overpowering Tailapa IV (the grandson of Vikramaditya VI, the great Chalukya king), Basavanna also went to Kalyana. With his honesty, hard work and visionary mission, Basava rose to the position of Prime Minister in the court of king Bijjala, who ruled from Kalyana (presently renamed Basavakalyana). There, he established the Anubhava Mantapa, a spiritual parliament, which attracted many saints from throughout India.⁸
The Anubhava Mantapa started functioning systematically, Allammaprabhu, Channa Basavanna, Akka Mahadevi, Moligeya Marayya, Siddharama, Madivala Machayya and host of elder sharanas raised a new wind Veerashaiva faith and Basavanna’s philosophy. Kalyana achieved great attainement and fame in Metaphysical world due to the activities of these Sharanas. The Anubhava Mantapa became the epicenter of all religious revolution under whose aegis issues concerning all the aspects of life were discussed frankly and conclusions were drawn. Thousands of vachanas were spread throughout the land. Planting of the seeds of revolutionary values went on fearlessly uprooting the traditional weeds.\(^9\)

The movement initiated by Basava through Anubhava Mantapa became the basis of a sect of love and faith. It gave rise to a system of ethics and education at once simple and exalted. It sought to inspire ideals of social and religious freedom, such as no previous faith of India had done. It helped to shed a ray of light and faith on the homes and hearts of people in the medieval age, which was characterised by inter-communal jealousy. Traditional quoists naturally got upset by these activities, they raised rumor that the entire society was polluted and engaged themselves in a reactionary fight to quell the rots of this new socio-religious progressive movement.\(^{10}\)
The reactionists in the court of Bijjala started spreading false rumours against Basavanna and disturbed the faith the king had in him. Several courtier’s charged Basavanna of favouring persons of his own faith and charged that the state treasury was misappropriated and complained the king. They raised furor that the state treasury was spent on the daily Dasoha. Unfortunately, Bijjala and traditionalists began to lend ear and began to doubt Basavanna and the sharanas. “Oh, foolish king how do we present to you the number of devotees wandering about in the town, the medal that you don’t risk to keep in your treasury is shining in the neck of sharanas, the big necklace you fear to touch is adoring the necks of devotees. You are blind to Basava the treasury is being squandered. The king’s treasury is emptied out to devotees”

Like all kings Bijjala having brazen ears paid heed to this backbiting, had the sealed boxes open and saw firsthand that the kingdom’s wealth had increased doublefold, hunderedfold, repented for doubting Basavanna’s integrity and sought his forgiveness. The fear that vachanakaras’ revolutionary religion spreading like a hurricane would sweep off their Sanatana dharma had unnerved the reactionists. It was a question of life and death for them. In indignation and consternation that if the sharanas’ socio-religious revolution is allowed to grow like this there is no survival for themselves, all of them together set out to
oppose it. Complained to Bijjala ‘Bhaktas’ din is too much, they halo is spread out. Besides, if vaishnavas are given bad names, who will meet vaishnavas? 12

Not cowed by down by any such hindrance from traditionalists Basavanna walked boldly on the path chosen by him. Once, Basavanna partook prasada at the home a born shudra, Kambaliya (sambholi) Nagideva which raised indignation among the traditionalists who feared of the pollution and destruction of varna system the base of Hinduism. They warned the king of grave consequences and not to allow Basavanna into the Royal court.13 The king called a meeting outside the royal court and enquired. Either Basavaraja Devaragale or Basava Purana doesnot describe how Basavanna infact, conducted himself in this situation.14 But, the spirit soon disappeared after the intermarriage that Basava facilitated to tie matrimonially the sudra sharana Haralayya and Brahmin sharana Madhuvarasa came to an abrupt end when the couple were punished for the same by the King.15

In the royal household conspiracy and preparation for succession began to appear at about the same time, which divided the feudatories and officers of the empire into two factions. The stir created among the people of Kalyana by Basavanna’s Socio-religious movement gradually spread to politics as well. The anxiety that it would make a prey of his
household began to disturb the mind of the king. The atmosphere at Kalyana raging thus, it must have been inevitable for him to come to a decision. At first, he began to persuade Basavanna in a friendly way to give up such anti-traditional, catastrophic acts uttering, “My dear Basavanna, instead of being happy with righteous conduct doing Shivabhakti so as to please the vipras like gold, taking your too much bhakti to head calling them Hiriya Maheshwaras besides, eating at their houses, it is not proper to come hear and pollute everyone”, said the king Bijjala. But no avail. The sharana community kept intensifying its movement. Ultimately, the traditionalists and the king offered Basavanna two hard choices, by being loyal to worldly customs to withdraw his movement and live happily in Kalyana or else resign his post of commander-in-chief and get out of the capital. This is what happened in world history in such circumstances. Under pressure from the orthodox and the king either sacrifice his conscience like a coward or come what may, boldly ready for being beheaded, imprisonment, or departure from the country. Basavanna, who believed that even if one is under pressure, mustn’t give up determinations and chose the later path i.e., departure from country.\textsuperscript{16}

Basavanna went out of Kalyana, having lost the king’s confidence. Bijjala may have heaved a sigh of relief that it was a good radiance.
Basavanna must have issued, under the circumstances, an important statement in self-justification. But evidence of it not now available to us anywhere. By this time that is a month before Prabhudeva had gone away to Kadali from Kalyana. Siddharama perhaps, had gone to Sonnalige sometime before. He visited Kalyana now and then. Naturally Basavana’s heart was heavy while departing from Kalyana. Bringing his mind under control he bade goodbye thus. Bijjala was murdered it took place as a vengeance for betrayal of *sharanas*. Jagadeva and Molli Bombayya did it. Harihara’s disciple Raghavanka in his *Siddharama Purana* hints that as per Siddharama’s suggestions, brave Jagadeva wiped out king Bijjala and also that after Bijala’s death, Karnadeva moved heaven and earth to succeed him. Inscriptions also provide evidence that in his house conspiracy and internecine fights were going on.\(^\text{17}\)

After the departure of Basavanna, most of the elder *sharanas* do not seem to have had any political relation with Bijjala. They may not have immediately gone out of Kalyana. Some in the hope that the clouds of misgiving would clear up and Basavanna would come back and some others, with the intention of staying on at Kalyana and fighting heroically to protest their faith stayed at Kalyana. Channa Basavana, Madivala Machideva, Sodala Bacharasa, Moligeya Marayya, Rudra
Munideva, Padihari Uttanna and the like might have stayed for sometime at Kalyana to arrange to safely send out innumerable Shivabhaktas. In about three months of time of Basavanna’s departure, the sharana community was in total confusion and the organisation was at shambles. The event of punishing Haralayya and Madhuvarasa may have happened with the political chaos already boiling over, this event must have led to Bijjala’s murder. Thus, evidences available from Veerashaiv poems hold strongly that Basavana departed from Kalyana before Bijjala’s murder and attained Aikya with Sangameshwara. In the opinion of scholars, Basavanna attained Aikya in 1167 CE. But the date and month of it are yet accurately determined.\(^{18}\)

As per evidences in literary works now available, it is learnt that some sharanas accompanied Basavanna to Kudalasangama and were with him until his Aikya. But both the wives of Basavanna, Neelambika, Gangambika did not go with him and stayed on at Kalyana. Nelambika, on hearing of Basavanna’s departure attained aikya with the Linga at Kalyana itself. As far gangambika, she engaged herself in Dasoha and went to Ulavi with Channa Basavanna and other sharanas as described in Kalajnana works. The saharna organization getting feeble after Basavanna’s departure, was under great distress following Bijjala’s Murder. Rayumurari Sovideva’s army chased and subjected them to
cruel torture. The sharanas scattered helter skelter led by Channabasvanna, one band fighting for self protection arrived at Ulavi. By this time, many had fallen victim to the king’s army. Many ran in any direction they found. It must have been a situation wherein there was nowhere to stop to rest. The remaining sharanas reached Ulavi and settled there and attained aikya there itself in the end. Thus, the final curtain fell on the sharan movement which achieved unprecedented socio-religious revolution and uplifted all common men. This was another chapter of misfortune in the history of mankind.\footnote{19}

Thus, Basavanna led such a noble life and passed away. But can it be said he is no more? He lives eternally through the vachanas he has left behind, though his biography penned by faithful poets, more than anything, through the noble energy, which can last for centuries on end, he infused people with. He lives on as long as the high ideals he established and implemented on the life of people. He lives in our hearts as ‘responding when called, right before us if recalled’.

**Religious Development of Basaveshwara**

Basavanna created *Ishtalinga*. He was driven by his realisation; in one of his Vachanas he says *Arive Guru*, which means one's own awareness is his/her teacher, many contemporary Vachanakaras
(people who scripted Vachanas) have described him as *Swayankrita Sahaja*, which means "self-made".20

Basavanna used Ishtalinga (image/linga of God in one's body) to eradicate untouchability, established equality among all human beings and a means to attain spiritual enlightenment. Ishtalinga is very much different from Sthavaralinga and Charalinga. Ishtalinga is the universal symbol of god, Sthavaralinga represents Shiva in Dhyana Mudra and Charalinga is a miniaturized form of Sthavaralinga.21

He believed in the principle *Káyakavé Kailása* (Work puts you on the path to heaven, Work is Heaven). It was at this time that the Vachanas, simple and easy-to-understand poetic writings which contained essential teachings, were written.22

**Philosophy of Basaveshawara**

Basavanna said that the roots of social life are embedded not in the cream of the society but in the scum of the society.23 It is his witty saying that the cow does not give milk to him who sits on its back, but it gives milk to him who squats at its feet. With his wide sympathy, he admitted high and low alike into his fold. The Anubhava Mantapa established by Basavanna laid down the foundation of social democracy.24 Basavanna believed that man becomes great not by his birth but by his conduct in society. This means faith in the dignity of man
and the belief that a common man is as good a part of society as a man of status.\textsuperscript{25}

He proclaimed that all members of the state are labourers: some may be intellectual labourers and others may be manual labourers. He placed practice before precept and his own life was of rigid rectitude. Basava brought home to his countrymen the lesson of self-purification. He tried to raise the moral level of public life, and he insisted that the same rules of conduct applied to the administrators as to the individual members of society. He also taught the dignity of manual labour by insisting on work as worship. Every kind of manual labour, which was looked down upon by people of high caste, should be looked upon with love and reverence he argued. Thus arts and crafts flourished, and a new foundation was laid down in the history of the economics of the land.

The Sharanas had no caste divisions and accepted everyone as equal. Jedara Dasimayya was by profession a weaver, Shankar Dasimayya a tailor, Madivala Machideva a washerman, Myadar Ketayya a basket-maker, Kinnari Bommayya a goldsmith, Vakkalmuddayya a farmer, Hadapada Appanna a barber, Jedar Madanna a soldier, Ganada Kannappa an oilman, Dohar Kakkayya a tanner, Madar Channayya a cobbler, and Ambigara Chowdayya a ferryman. There were women
followers such as Satyakka, Ramavve, and Somavve with their respective vocations. The curious thing was that all these and many more have sung the Vachanas (sayings) regarding their vocations in a very suggestive imagery.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Out of the timeless Parashiva principle}

\textit{Consciousness was born;}

\textit{Embodiment of}

\textit{That immaculate supramental consciousness}

\textit{Is Basavanna; from him}

\textit{Were Nāda, Bindu and Kalā}

\textit{When these were made one, the incarnate light,}

\textit{Integral, perfect, circular shaped,}

\textit{Became the form of Linga,}

\textit{Out of this Mahālinga arose}

\textit{The fivefold Sādākhya. Therefore, I call}

\textit{The timeless Sarana the Primal Linga,}

\textit{Because Linga arose from Basavanna.}

\textit{O Mahālinga Guru Sivasiddhēshvara Lord!}\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Vachanas of Basavanna}

Some of the Vachanas of Basaveshwara are as below,\textsuperscript{28}

1. \textit{Ullavaru Shivalaya Máduvaru Náněnu Mádali Badavanayyā}
   Enna Kále Kambha Dehavé Degula Shiravé Honna Kalashavayyá
   Kúdala Sangama Devá Kelayya Sthavarakkalivuntu Jangamakalivilla

\textbf{Meaning}

The rich will make temples for Shiva. What shall I, a poor man, do?
My legs are pillars, The body the shrine, The head a cupola of gold.

Listen, O lord Kudalasangama deva, things standing shall fall, but the moving ever shall stay.

2. **Gnyanada baladinda Agnyanada Kedu Nodayya**

   
   Jyotiya Baladinda Andhakarada Kedu Nodayya
   
   Satyada Baladinda asatyada Kedu Nodayya
   
   **Kudala Sangana Sharanara Baladinda Atmana Ahankarada Kedu Nodayya Kudala Sangama deva**

**Meaning**

The Power of knowledge destroys ignorance;

The power of light dissipates darkness;

The power of truth is foe of all untruth;

The sharana's experience of god is the sole cure of worldliness;

– Lord Kudala Sangamadeva

3. Don't rob, Don't kill, Never ever lie

   Don't get angry, Don't think negative about others

   Don't self describe, Don't tease others

   This is the way of self respect, this is the way to get respected by the world.

   This is the way of impressing my lord Koodala sangam deva.

4. “Vachanadalli Namamrilta Tumbi

   Nayanadalli Nimma Muruti Tumbi

   Manadalli Nimma Nenahu Tumbi

   Kiviyalli Nimma Kiruti Tumbi
Kudala Samgama Deva
Nimma Charanakamaladolaganu Tumbi "

**Meaning:**

The words spoken (by me) are full of ambrosia of (Your Holy) Name!
The eyes are enriched with the vision of Your Form!
The mind is full of Your thoughts!
The ears are filled with Your Glory! Oh Lord of Kudala Samgama,
in Your Feet as soft as a lotus, I am there as a bee!

5. *neerige naidile sringaara*
   *samudrake tereye sringaara*
   *naarige gunave sringaara*
   *gaganake chandrama sringaara*
   *namma kudala sangana sharanara*
   *nosalige vibhutiye sringaara*

**Meaning**

For the water (pond) water-lily is the charm;
For the ocean tides are the charm;
For the woman character is the charm;
For the sky moon is the charm;
For foreheads of the devotees of the Lord of Kudala Sangama,
the holy ash is the charm.
Kudala Sangama Deva is his insignia of all his vachanas in Kannada. Ramanujam in his book, speaking of Shiva, has translated Basavanna's insignia Kudala Sangama Deva into Lord of the meeting rivers. But that is only literal translation. It does not fit to the Definition of Kudala Sangama Deva given by Basavanna. Basavanna Defines God as below.\(^{29}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jagadagala mugilagal migeyagal,} \\
\text{Nimmagala, pataladindattatta nimma shricarana,} \\
\text{Brahmandadindattatta nimma shri mukuta,} \\
\text{Agammya, agocara, apramana lingave,} \\
\text{Neevenna karasthalakke bandu} \\
\text{Culukadirayya kudala sangamadeva.}
\end{align*}
\]

In this Vachana, Guru Basava has made it clear that, Kudala Sangamadeva in not Lord of meeting rivers. He is infinite, eternal, and beyond the reach of the physical senses. Basavanna gives perfect shape in the form of Ishtalinga to the formless and absolute god. Thus, Ishtalinga represents the eternal, omnipresence, and absolute god.

The movement gave a literature of considerable value in the vernacular language of the country, the literature that attained the dignity of a classical tongue, its aim was the elimination of the barriers of
caste and to remove untouchability, raising the untouchable to the equal of the high born. The sanctity of family relations and the improvement in the status of womanhood were striven for while at the same time the importance of rites and rituals, of fasts and pilgrimages was reduced. It encouraged learning and contemplation of God by means of love and faith. The excesses of polytheism were deplored and the idea of monotheism was encouraged. The movement tended, in many ways, to raise the nation generally to a higher level of capacity both in thought and action.  

30

**Relevance of Basaveshwara in Modern and Post Independent India.**

Mahatma Gandhi spoke thus at the Belgaum session of the Indian National Congress in 1924: 

> “It has not been possible for me to practise all the precepts of Basaveswara which he taught 800 years ago and which he also practiced… Eradication of untouchability and dignity of labour were among his core precepts. One does not find even shades of casteism in him. Had he lived during our times, he would have been a saint worthy of worship.”

The Times of India paid a glowing tribute to Basava: “It was the distinctive feature of his mission that while illustrious religious and social reformers in India before him had each laid his emphasis on one or
other items of religion and social reform, either subordinating more or less other items to it or ignoring them altogether. Basava sketched and boldly tried to work out a large and comprehensive programme of social reform with the elevation and independence of womanhood as its guiding point. Neither social conferences which are usually held in these days in several parts of India, nor Indian social reformers, can improve upon that programme as to the essentials. The present day social reformer in India is but speaking the language and seeking to enforce the mind of Basava.”  

- In honour of Basaveshwara, former President of India Abdul Kalam inaugurated Basaveshwar's statue on 28 April 2003 in the Parliament of India.  

- Basaveshwara is the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms. The former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh was in Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka to release the coins.  

- The British Cabinet Minister for culture, media and sports has approved the planning permission to erect the statue of Basaveshwara along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.
• Basava Dharma Peetha Charitable Trust with the intention of reviving Sharana cultural heritage purchased a land of 3 acres on 21 December 2001 by the side of main road nearby the entrance of Basava Kalyana town. Later on the Trust purchased 17.5 acres just adjacent to the previous land and has built a prayer hall and living rooms. Haralayya Tirtha—an attractive water reservoir is formed. \(^{36}\)

• Sri Basaveswara cave and Akkamahadevi cave have been chiselled and carved beautifully in laterite rock-soil. Sharana village formed pictures the concept of 12\(^{th}\) Century Sharanas engaged actively in their Kayakas(occupations). \(^{37}\)

• The Trust runs an orphanage. There is a beautiful hillock named "Sharana Shaila", which is the highlight of the place amid a rolling landscape on which is erected *Lord Basavanna's statue of 108' height*. It is structured on a pedestal of 24 feet height, 60' x 80' size. \(^{38}\)

II. Life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (14 April 1891-6 Dec 1956)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb, was an Indian jurist, politician and social reformer who inspired the Modern Buddhist Movement and campaigned against social discrimination in India, striving for equal social rights for Dalits, women and labourers. He was independent India's first law minister and the principal architect of the Constitution of India.
Ambedkar was a prolific student, earning a law degree and various doctorates from Columbia University and the London School of Economics and gained a reputation as a scholar for his research in law, economics and political science. In his early career he was an economist, professor, and lawyer. His later life was marked by his political activities, where he became involved in the negotiations for India's independence campaigning by publishing journals advocating political rights and social freedom for untouchables and contributing significantly to the establishment of the state of India. In 1956 he converted to Buddhism, initiating mass conversions of Dalits.

In 1990, Ambedkar was posthumously conferred with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. Ambedkar's legacy includes numerous memorials and depictions in popular culture.

Early Life and Education

Ambedkar was born in a poor low Mahar caste family in the town and military cantonment of Mhow in the Central Provinces (now in Madhya Pradesh). He was the 14th and last child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai. His family was of Marathi background from the town of Ambavade (Mandangad taluka) in Ratnagiri district of modern Maharashtra. They belonged to the, untouchable Mahar caste and subjected to socio-economic discrimination. Ambedkar's ancestors had
long been in the employment of the army of the British East India Company and his father served in the British Indian Army at the Mhow cantonment.43

Belonging to the Kabir panth, Ramji Sakpal encouraged his children to read the Hindu classics. He used his position in the army to lobby for his children to study at the government school, as they faced resistance owing to their caste. Although able to attend school, Ambedkar and other untouchable children were segregated and given little attention or assistance by the teachers. They were not allowed to sit inside the class. Even if they needed to drink water, someone from a higher caste would have to pour that water from a height as they were not allowed to touch either the water or the vessel that contained it. This task was usually performed for the young Ambedkar by the school peon and if the peon was not available then he had to go without water; the situation he later in his writings described as "No peon, No Water".44 He was required to sit on a gunnysack, which he had to take home with him.45

Ramji Sakpal retired in 1894 and moved his family to Satara two years later. Ambedkar's mother died shortly after their move. The children were cared for by their paternal aunt and lived in difficult circumstances. Three sons Balaram, Anandrao and Bhimrao and two
daughters Manjula and Tulasa of the Ambedkars would go on to survive them. Of his brothers and sisters, only Ambedkar succeeded in passing his examinations and graduating to a high school. His original surname *Ambavadekar* comes from his native village 'Ambavade' in Ratnagiri district. His Brahmin teacher, Mahadev Ambedkar, who was fond of him, changed his surname from 'Ambavadekar' to his own surname 'Ambedkar' in school records.  

**Higher Education of Bhim Rao Ambedkar**

In 1897, Ambedkar's family moved to Bombay from Ratnagiri where Ambedkar became the only untouchable enrolled at Elphinstone High School. In 1906, his marriage to a nine-year old girl, Ramabai, was arranged.  

In 1907, he passed his matriculation examination and in the following year he entered Elphinstone College, which was affiliated to the University of Bombay, becoming the first from his untouchable community to do so. This success provoked celebrations in his community and after a public ceremony he was presented with a biography of the Buddha by Dada Keluskar, the author and a family friend. By 1912, he obtained his degree in economics and political science from Bombay University, and prepared to take up employment with the Baroda state government. His wife, by then 15 years old, had
just moved his young family and started work, when he had to quickly return to Mumbai to see his ailing father, who died on 2 February 1913.49

In 1913, he moved to the United States. He had been awarded a Baroda State Scholarship of £11.50 (Sterling) per month for three years under a scheme established by the Gaekwad of Baroda that was designed to provide opportunities for postgraduate education at Columbia University in New York City. Soon after arriving there he settled in rooms at Livingston Hall with Naval Bhathena, a Parsi who was to be a lifelong friend. He passed his M.A. exam in June 1915, majoring in Economics, with Sociology, History, Philosophy and Anthropology as other subjects of study; he presented a thesis, Ancient Indian Commerce. In 1916 he completed his second thesis, National Dividend of India-A Historic and Analytical Study for another M.A. and finally he received his PhD in Economics in 1917 for his third thesis, after he left for London. On 9 May, he read his paper Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development before a seminar conducted by the anthropologist Alexander Goldenweiser. In October 1916 he enrolled for the Bar course at Gray’s Inn and also at the same time enrolled at the London School of Economics where he started work on a doctoral thesis. But in June 1917, he was obliged to go back to
India as the term of his scholarship from Baroda ended. However, he was given permission to return to submit his thesis within four years. His thesis was on the “Indian Rupee.” Ambedkar came back to London at the first opportunity and completed his studies. At the London School of Economics he took a Master’s degree in 1921 and in 1923 he took his D.Sc. in Economics and in the same year he was called to the Bar by Gray’s Inn. His third and fourth Doctorates (Ll.D, Columbia, 1952 and Ll.D., Osmania, 1953) were conferred honoris causa. Incidentally, in his journey (1917) he travelled separately from his collection of books, which were lost when the ship on which they were dispatched was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine.50

His Crusade against Untouchability

As Ambedkar was educated by scholarship from the Princely State of Baroda, he was bound to serve it. He was appointed as Military Secretary to the Gaikwad but had to quit within a short time. He described the incident in his autobiography, Waiting for a Visa.51 Thereafter he tried to find ways to make a living for his growing family. He worked as a private tutor, as an accountant, and established an investment consulting business, but it failed when his clients learned that he was an untouchable.52 In 1918 he became Professor of Political Economy in the Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics in
Mumbai. Even though he was successful with the students, other professors objected to his sharing the same drinking-water jug that they all used.⁵³

Ambedkar was invited to testify before the Southborough Committee, which was preparing the Government of India Act 1919. At this hearing, Ambedkar argued for creating separate electorates and reservations for untouchables and other religious communities.⁵⁴ In 1920, he began the publication of the weekly Mooknayak (Leader of the Silent) in Mumbai with the help of Shahaji II (1874-1922), Maharaja of Kolhapur.⁵⁵

Ambedkar went on to work as a legal professional. In 1926 he successfully defended three non-Brahmin leaders who had accused the Brahmin community of ruining India and were then subsequently sued for libel. Dhananjay Keer notes that "The victory was resounding, both socially and individually, for the clients and the Doctor".⁵⁶

While practicing law in the Bombay High Court, he tried to uplift the untouchables in order to educate them. His first organised attempt to achieve this was the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, which was intended to promote education and socio-economic improvement, as well as the welfare of “outcastes” at the time referred to as depressed classes. For
the protection of Dalit rights he started many periodicals like *Mook Nayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, and *Equality Janta*.\(^{57}\)

He was appointed to the Bombay Presidency Committee to work with the all-European Simon Commission in 1925.\(^{58}\) This commission had sparked great protests across India, and while its report was ignored by most Indians, Ambedkar himself wrote a separate set of recommendations for the future Constitution of India.\(^{59}\)

Ambedkar decided to launch active movements against untouchability. He began with public movements and marches to open up and share public drinking water resources for untouchables. He also began a struggle for their right to enter Hindu temples. He led a *satyagraha* in Mahad to fight for the right of the untouchable community to draw water from the main water tank of the town.\(^{60}\) In a conference in late 1927, Ambedkar public condemned the classic Hindu text, the *Manusmrti* (Laws of Manu), for ideologically justifying the system of caste discrimination and “untouchability,” ceremonially burning copies of the ancient text. On 25 December 1927, thousands of people burnt copies of *Manusmriti* under leadership of Ambedkar.\(^{61}\)

In 1930, Ambedkar launched Kalaram Temple movement. This was a non-violent movement for which he was preparing for three months. About 15000 volunteers assembled at Kalaram Temple
satyagraha making one of the greatest processions of Nashik. The procession was headed by a military band, a batch of scouts, women and men walked in discipline, order and determination to see the god for the first time. When they reached to gate, the gates were closed by Brahmin authorities. This movement was for human dignity and self-respect.62

The Poona Pact

Due to Ambedkar's prominence and popular support amongst untouchable community, he was invited to attend Round Table Conference in London in 1932.63 Gandhi fiercely opposed a separate electorate for untouchables, saying he feared that such an arrangement would split Brahmins and Dalits, dividing the Hindu community into two groups.64

In 1932, when the British had agreed with Ambedkar and announced a Communal Award of a separate electorate, Gandhi protested by fasting while imprisoned in the Yerwada Central Jail of Poona. The fast provoked huge civil unrest across India and orthodox Hindu leaders, Congress politicians and activists such as Madan Mohan Malaviya and Palwankar Baloo organised joint meetings with Ambedkar and his supporters at Yerwada. Fearing a communal reprisal and genocidal acts against untouchables, Ambedkar
was forced into agreeing with Gandhi. This agreement, which saw Gandhi end his fast and Ambedkar drop his demand for a separate electorate, was called the Poona Pact. Instead, a certain number of seats were reserved specifically for untouchables (who in the agreement were called the “Depressed Class”).

Political Career

In 1935, Ambedkar was appointed principal of the Government Law College, Mumbai, a position he held for two years. Settling in Mumbai, Ambedkar oversaw the construction of a house and stocked his personal library with more than 50,000 books. His wife Ramabai died after a long illness in the same year. It had been her long-standing wish to go on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur, but Ambedkar had refused to let her go, telling her that he would create a new Pandharpur for her instead of Hinduism’s Pandharpur which treated them as untouchables. Speaking at the Yeola Conversion Conference on 13 October in Nasik, Ambedkar announced his intention to convert to a different religion and exhorted his followers to leave Hinduism. He would repeat his message at numerous public meetings across India.

In 1936, Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party, which contested in the 1937 Bombay election to the Central Legislative Assembly for the 13 reserved and 4 general seats and securing 11 and
Ambedkar oversaw the transformation of his political party into the Scheduled Castes Federation, although it performed poorly in the elections held in 1946 for the Constituent Assembly of India. Babasaheb Ambedkar contested from Bombay North in the first Indian General Election in 1952 but lost to the Congress candidates Narayan Kajrolkar, who had been his assistant once. Ambedkar became a member of Rajya Sabha, probably as an appointed member. He tried to enter Lok Sabha again in 1954 when he contested the by-election from Bhandara but he was placed third in the ballot won by Congress. By the time the second general election was held in 1957, Ambedkar had already passed away.  

**Drafting of the Indian Constitution**

Upon India's Transfer of Power by British Government on 15 August 1947, the new Congress-led government invited Ambedkar to serve as the nation's first Law Minister, which he accepted. On August
29, he was appointed Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, charged by the Assembly to write India's new Constitution.\textsuperscript{72}

Granville Austin has described the Indian Constitution drafted by Ambedkar as 'first and foremost a social document'. ... 'The majority of India's constitutional provisions are either directly arrived at furthering the aim of social revolution or attempt to foster this revolution by establishing conditions necessary for its achievement.'\textsuperscript{73}

The text prepared by Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar argued for extensive economic and social rights for women and also won the Assembly's support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs in the civil services, schools and colleges for members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and Other Backward Class, a system akin to affirmative action.\textsuperscript{74} India's lawmakers hoped to eradicate the socio-economic inequalities and lack of opportunities for India's depressed classes through these measures.\textsuperscript{75} The Constitution was adopted on 26 November 1949 by the Constituent Assembly.\textsuperscript{76}

Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet in 1951 following the stalling in parliament of his draft of the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to
expound gender equality in the laws of inheritance and marriage. Ambedkar independently contested election from the Bombay (North Central) constituency in 1952 to the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha, but was defeated by a little known Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar, who polled 138137 votes compared to Ambedkar's 123576 votes. He was appointed to the upper house, of parliament, the Rajya Sabha in March 1952 and remained as member till death.

**Opposition to Article 370**

Ambedkar opposed Article 370 in the Constitution, which gives a special status to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and it was put against his wishes. Balraj Madhok reportedly said, Ambedkar had clearly told Sk. Abdullah: "You wish India should protect your borders, she should build roads in your area, she should supply you food grains, and Kashmir should get equal status as India. But Government of India should have only limited powers and Indian people should have no rights in Kashmir. To give consent to this proposal, would be a treacherous thing against the interests of India and I, as the Law Minister of India, will never do it." Then Sk. Abdullah went to Nehru, who directed him to Gopal Swami Ayyangar, who approached Sardar Patel asking him to do something as it was a matter of prestige of Nehru, who has promised Sk. Abdullah accordingly. Patel got it passed when Nehru
was on foreign tour. On the day this article came up for discussion, Ambedkar did not reply to questions on it though he did participate on other articles. All arguments were done by Krishna Swami Ayyangar.\textsuperscript{80}

**Second Marriage of Dr. Ambedkar**

Ambedkar’s first wife had died in 1935 following long illness. After the completion of the drafting of India’s constitution in late 1940s, Ambedkar went to Bombay for treatment. He was suffering from lack of sleep, had neurotic pain in his legs and was taking both insulin and homeopathic medicines. There he met Dr. Sharada Kabir, a Saraswat Brahmin, whom he married on 15 April 1948, at his home in New Delhi. Doctors recommended that he needed a companion who was both a good cook and a possessor of medical knowledge and could thus take care of him.\textsuperscript{81} She adopted the name Savita Ambedkar and took care of him for the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{82}

**Ambedkar’s Conversion to Buddhism**

Ambedkar had considered converting to Sikhism, which saw oppression as something to be fought against and which for that reason appealed also to other leaders of scheduled castes. He rejected the idea after meeting with leaders of the Sikh community and concluding that his conversion might result in him having what scholar Stephen P. Cohen describes as a “second-rate status” among Sikhs.\textsuperscript{83}
He studied Buddhism all his life, and around 1950, he turned his attention fully to Buddhism and travelled to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to attend a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. While dedicating a new Buddhist vihara near Pune, Ambedkar announced that he was writing a book on Buddhism, and that as soon as it was finished, he planned to make a formal conversion to Buddhism. Ambedkar twice visited Burma in 1954; the second time in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955, he founded the Bharatiya Baudha Mahasabha, or the Buddhist Society of India. He completed his final work, The Buddha and His Dhamma, in 1956, which was published posthumously.

After meetings with the Sri Lankan Buddhist monk Hammalawa Saddhatissa, Ambedkar organised a formal public ceremony for himself and his supporters in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Accepting the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk in the traditional manner, Ambedkar completed his own conversion, along with his wife. He then proceeded to convert some 500,000 of his supporters who were gathered around him. He prescribed the 22 Vows for these converts, after the Three Jewels and Five Precepts. He then traveled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference.
Nirvana (Death) of Dr. Ambedkar

Ambedkar had been suffering from diabetes since 1948. He was bed-ridden from June to October in 1954 owing to side effects from his medication and failing eyesight.\textsuperscript{92} He had been increasingly embittered by political issues, which took a toll on his health. His health worsened during 1955. Three days after completing his final manuscript \textit{The Buddha and His Dhamma}, Ambedkar passed away in his sleep on 6 December 1956 at his home in Delhi.

A Buddhist cremation was organised for him at Dadar Chowpatty beach on 7 December, \textsuperscript{93} attended by half a million sorrowing people.\textsuperscript{94} A conversion program was supposed to be organized on 16 December 1956, so, those who had attended the cremation were also converted to Buddhism at the same place.\textsuperscript{95}

Ambedkar was survived by his second wife, who died in 2003,\textsuperscript{96} and his son Yashwant (known as Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar).\textsuperscript{97} Ambedkar’s grandson, Ambedkar Prakash Yashwant, is the chief-adviser of the Buddhist Society of India, leads the Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh and has served in both houses of the Indian Parliament.\textsuperscript{98}

A number of unfinished typescripts and handwritten drafts were found among Ambedkar’s notes and papers and gradually made available. Among these were \textit{Waiting for a Visa}, which probably dates
from 1935-36 and is an autobiographical work and the *Untouchables, or the Children of India's Ghetto*, which refers to the census of 1951.99

A memorial for Ambedkar was established in his Delhi house at 26 Alipur Road. His birth date is celebrated as a public holiday known as Ambedkar Jayanti or Bhim Jayanti. He was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, in 1990. His message to his followers was “Educate!, Organize!, Agitate!” 100

**Writings and speeches of Dr. Ambedkar**

Collection of Ambedkar's writings and speeches are published by the Education Department, Government of Maharashtra (Bombay) in different volumes. They are;

- Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development and 11 other essays
- Ambedkar in the Bombay Legislature, with the Simon Commission and at the Round Table Conferences, 1927–1939
- Philosophy of Hinduism; India and the pre-requisites of communism; Revolution and counter-revolution; Buddha or Karl Marx
- *Riddles in Hinduism*
- Essays on untouchables and un-touchability
- The evolution of provincial finance in British India
- *Who Were the Shudras?*
- Pakistan or the partition of India
- What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables; Mr. Gandhi and the emancipation of the untouchables
- Ambedkar as member of the Governor General's Executive Council, 1942-46
- The Buddha and his Dhamma
- Unpublished writings; Ancient Indian commerce; Notes on laws; Waiting for a Visa; Miscellaneous notes, etc.
- Ambedkar as the principal architect of the Constitution of India
- (2 parts) Dr. Ambedkar and The Hindu Code Bill
- Ambedkar as free India's first Law Minister and member of opposition in Indian Parliament (1947–1956)
- Ambedkar's The Pali grammar
- Ambedkar and his Egalitarian Revolution - Struggle for Human Rights. Events starting from March 1927 to 17 November 1956 in the chronological order; Ambedkar and his Egalitarian Revolution, Socio-political and religious activities. Events starting from November 1929 to 8 May 1956 in the chronological order; Ambedkar and his Egalitarian Revolution – Speeches. Events starting from 1 January to 20 November 1956 in the chronological order
- Ambedkar’s Speeches and writing in Marathi
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