CHAPTER - V
EARLY LIFE AND GLIMMERINGS ON AMBEDKAR

The political theory of emancipation, restructuring and development of the untouchables remain incomplete without the contributions of Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ramjee Ambedkar. Ambedkar was born at Mhow, near Indore in Madhyapradesh, on 14-4-1891, in an untouchable family of Ramji Sankpal, Headmaster in Military School, in the rank of Subedar-major. Ambedkar was born in a devotional, religious family and he was very much influenced by his father, a faithful. His grandfather was in the Bombay Army of the East India Company. His father belonged to the Sankpal Mahars, the ancient inhabitants of Maharashtra. His mother Bhimabai came from the untouchable Murbadkars, belonged to a well to-do family of village Murbad in the Thane District of Bombay State. The maternal
grandfather and six uncles of Ambedkar were Subedar-majors in the Army. Bhimrao Ambedkar was the 14th child of his parents and of the 14 only 5 survived three sons and two daughters. In the school records his name was Bhiva Ramji Ambavadekar, the surname of his family was Sankpal. The surname Ambedkar is derived from the name of his ancestral village, Ambavadekar. Bhimrao had a teacher in school with the surname of Ambedkar, he was a Brahmin teacher and his teacher changed the surname of Bhimrao from Ambavadekar to Ambedkar in school records.

The ancestors of Ambedkar belonged to the devotional Kabir School of thought that strongly believed in the humane attributes of compassion, charity and resignation to God. Young Ambedkar was much influenced by his father and he used to offer prayers morning and evening everyday with his father. The family of Ambedkar worshipped Rama and Krishna, and Bhakti school denounced caste
system. His father Ramji Maloji Sankpal was a devotee of Shiva, a Shaivite he was and a strict vegetarian and teetotaler. Parents of Ambedkar lead a very pious life, religious and devotional life with prayers, hymns and songs in the morning and evenings, and this was a compulsory routine at home. This left an indelible imprint on young Ambedkar. Also, his father was an admirer of Mahatma Jyothiba Phooley, socio-religious reformer of Maharashtra and he was very much concerned with the social problems of the day. This also went into moulding the character of Ambedkar.

In Bombay while as a schoolboy Ambedkar and his family lived in a labour colony, in a hutment, a one-room house. This helped him gain a good experience of what the labour faced; he directly witnessed the social and economic plight of the labour class as a small boy. In the earlier phase of schooling Bhima was not very good at studies, he fancied in gardening and even went for rearing goat.
Later he became very studious and did well in school. He turned out to be a voracious reader and his father encouraged him by supplying books on different subjects from his meager pension. Earlier during his school days Ambedkar lost his mother, she died in 1897, and after the death of his mother Ambedkar was looked after by his aunt, he was just six years old when his mother died. Ambedkar imbibed a lot of qualities from his father, his love for knowledge; piety, uncompromising longing for spirituality and social commitment all were imbibed by Ambedkar from his father. His father died in 1913. At the age of 17 Ambedkar got married to Rami, who was nine that time. After marriage Rami was renamed Ramabai.

Bhim Rao Ambedkar completed his primary education at Satara; he was educated at the Government High School. As an untouchable he had to face humiliation and ill treatment and hence, schooling days were not very pleasant for Ambedkar.
Even the facility of drinking water was denied to him while in school. Segregation was practiced in the school, along with his brother, Anandrao. Bhimrao had to sit at a distant corner of the classroom on a gunny bag that they ought to carry with them. Some teachers practiced segregation or exclusion by not touching their books and some even refused to address the untouchables. Since he was an untouchable Sanskrit was not taught to him and he had to opt Persian as second language in school. In 1907 Ambedkar passed High School course and then joined the Elephinstine College. A monthly stipend of rupees 25 was allowed by the Maharaja of Baroda to pursue his studies, and after completing college studies in 1913 Ambedkar went to the Columbia University with a stipend from the Maharaja of Baroda for higher studies. In 1915 he received his Master of Arts and in 1916 his Ph.D. thesis was submitted to the Columbia University. In 1916 he joined the London School (of Economics and Political Science) for his M.Sc.(Economics) and
D Sc. (Economics). Later in 1920 he joined the Gray's Inn for Law for the degree of Bar-at-Law. In 1917 (June 15) Ph.D. was awarded to him by the Columbia University. In 1921 he completed his D.Sc. thesis and submitted it to London University. In 1922 he went over to Bonn University for purposes of taking admissions there. But after a short stint of 3 months at Bonn, he was called back to the London University for re-writing his thesis as some specific parts of the thesis were found to be revolutionary in nature, not palatable to the British in India. He ran out of funds, so returned to Bombay. The thesis was restructured by Ambedkar and was accepted by the London University in 1923, and he was awarded D Sc. Prior to this, in 1921 the London University awarded him the degree of Master of Science in Economics. By then Ambedkar had a Doctorate in Science from the London University. Doctorate in Philosophy from the Columbia University, he obtained Bar-at-Law in 1922 and had with himself his
studies at Bonn University. He began his life as a Barrister in 1923.

Ambedkar was a rationalist to the core. He was a thorough going teetotaler. Influences of Lord Buddha, Kabir, Ranade, Mahatma Phooley, John Dewey, Carlyle and Karl Marx were very pronounced on Ambedkar. Mukteshwar, Tukaram, Kabir, all Bhakti saints, along with Maratha Bhakti saints also socio-spiritual reformer Mahatma Jyotibha Phooley had great influence on Ambedkar. A host of Bhakti saints like Chakradhar, Ekanath, Tukaram, Rebidas, Chokamela who preached equality through Bhakti cult influenced Ambedkar. His family belonged to the devotional Kabir School of thought that found food (moral and spiritual) in Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. His mentor at Columbia University John Dewey along with Booker T. Washington, J.S. Mill, Justice Ranade, stories from Mahabharatha and Ramayana helped inculcate values in him. He came to know about the morals of Buddhism in 1908, when he
completed his high school he read the biography of Gautma Buddha. Attracted by the morals of Buddhism he converted to Buddhism in 1956 October 14. at Nagpur.

The intellectual influences on Ambedkar were many. At the intellectual plane Bhakti school of thought was found attractive by him for it denounced the caste system. Kabir school of thought that strongly believed in the humane attributes like compassion, charity and resignation to God helped shape his attitudes. In fighting the evils of caste system Maharaja of Kolhapur rendered assistance to Ambedkar. Maharaja had found "Association of the Dumb" and started a fortnightly 'Mooknayak'; it was an association aiming at the eradication of untouchability and the educational uplift of the depressed. Ambedkar closely associated himself with it. The 19th century Maharashtra reformers, M.G. Ranade, Dadoba, Lokahitavadi, Vishnubuva Brahmachari, Mahatma Phooley all were against
unnatural caste divisions and stressed unity, this appealed to Ambedkar. Mahatma Phooley found Sathya Shodak Samaj (Society for the search of Truth) in Maharashtra in 1873 to assert the worth of man against caste. Phooley had started schools for non-Brahmin girls and boys in 1848 and a school for untouchables in 1851. In 1884 Phooley pleaded for the compulsory free education of the untouchables before the Hunter Commission. Ambedkar was greatly influenced by this reformer and his activities aimed at advancing the cause of the downtrodden. Also by the time Ambedkar completed his schooling and joined for higher studies, movements by Shivram Jamba Kamble, an untouchable social reformer, and also movement by Karmaveer V.R. Shinde had been started. the latter started the Depressed Classes Mission of India in 1906 with the support of Sir Narayan Ganesh Chandravarkar to draw attention to the plight and problem of the depressed classes. The tyrannous repression by the Britishers in India started in 1912, the deportation of Tilak to Mandalay
prison and the deportation of Savarkar brothers to Andamans caught the mind of Ambedkar. After graduation he was appointed as a Lieutenant in the Baroda State Forces, under his benefactor, the Maharaja of Baroda.

While a student in America Ambedkar was deeply influenced by the Constitution of the United States of America, and the 14th Amendment thereto, that declared the freedom of the Negroes. Along with this the life and work of Booker T. Washington, a reformer and educator of the Negroes influenced him. Booker T. Washington propagated among the Negroes the doctrine of education of the head, heart and hands, thus Booker T. Washington was instrumental for breaking the shackles of bondage of Negroes that crushed them physically, mentally and spiritually. This highly influenced Ambedkar. Ambedkar's political favourites were Edmund Burke as well as J.S. Mill. The intellectual mind set of Ambedkar at the beginning of his career can be
known from the 12 editorials he wrote for the 'Mooknayak', only 6 of these are available, the first issue was published on 31 January, 1920. Ambedkar was the first untouchable leader of the untouchables in Maharashtra region. Social reformer like Jyothiba Phooley (1827-1890) and Agarkar left strong influences and imprint on the minds of Ambedkar in taking up the ideological stand that social reform and social change shall precede self-rule. Both the French Revolution and Irish Movement appealed to him very much. A brief survey of the career of Ambedkar relating to social and political reforms gives an idea about a wide range of publications and organizations started by Ambedkar to champion and uphold the cause that he relentlessly fought for. The year 1920 was the starting point for the movement by Ambedkar. Marathi weekly 'Mooknayak' (Leader of the Dumb) was started in 1920 with financial support from Chhtrapati Sahu of Kolhapur. It was renamed as 'Bhahishkrt Bharat' (Excommunicated India) in 1927 and the last issue of this Marathi fortnightly
periodical came out in 1929. The early ideas of Ambedkar about caste practice and untouchability were published through the 'Bhahishkrit Bharat'. This fortnightly was renamed as 'Samata' (Equality) in 1930, again in 1931 its name was changed into 'Janata' (People) and in 1956 it was renamed as 'Prabhuddha Bharat' (Enlightened and self-disciplined India). These publications were used by Ambedkar to spread the messages of social, political and economic changes. The 'Bahishkrit Hitkarani Sabha' ('Society to serve the interests of the outcastes') was established by Ambedkar in (20 July) 1924. Between 1924 and 1927 the movement spearheaded by him had a lethargic tempo. He organized the Mahad Conference of the untouchables in 1927. Ambedkar started the Samata Sainik Dal in 1928. This organization was created to work as an army of the depressed classes to oppose the practices of man made inequality in society. The Samata Sainik Dal was banned in 1948 after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Ambedkar was
the president of the first session of the All India Depressed Classes Association held on August 8th of 1930. Also the Bharathiya Bahishkrit Samaj Seva Sangh, Samaj Samata Mandal et al were established by him.

Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party in August 1936. The Independent Labour Party was to maintain a separate identity in the trade union front from the communist led trade unions and from the Indian National Congress also. The Independent Labour Party welcomed the Government of India Act of 1935 and participated in the elections of 1936 envisaged by the 1935 Act. Ambedkar prepared the election manifesto of the Independent Labour Party, in 1936, for fighting the elections under the Act of 1935. Ambedkar prescribed two qualifications for candidates of the Independent Labour Party. They were to have proficiency in English language and willingness to convert out of Hinduism. This kept the untouchable castes like Chambhar, Mang, Dhor, and
Bhangi (who never consented to convert) away from the Independent Labour Party. The party, thus, remained predominantly a Mahar outfit. The pro-poor pro-worker policy of the Independent Labour Party was not acceptable to the well-to-do untouchable associates of Ambedkar. This also weakened the Independent Labour Party. Ambedkar had agitated against the exploitative land revenue system and also against the anti-labour policies at the industrial sector through the forum of the Independent Labour Party. He wanted the abolition of the Khoti system and Mahar Watans. Ambedkar was selected to the Executive Council of the Viceroy in 1942; it had 5 Europeans and 9 Indians representing all prominent communities. This had the effect of him folding up his political outfit, the Independent Labour Party, which was a class-based political platform, a platform for the poorer and the depressed segments of Indian Society. Now he began to resume his role as the sole spokesman only of the untouchables. And the All India Scheduled
Castes Federation was started in 1942. It became a very powerful forum of the depressed classes to be reckoned with in the politics of India that time. The new organization was meant only for the 'scheduled castes' of India. In 1942 Ambedkar drafted the manifesto for the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, and again for the All India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1951, for elections to the first Parliament of Independent India. The All India Scheduled Castes Federation lost in the elections of 1951, even Ambedkar was defeated. He established the Peoples' Education Society in 1946, to help the poor strata students get access to higher education; and also established colleges under it in Bombay and Aurangabad. The Siddhartha College was started in Bombay. Milind College in Aurangabad and Ambedkar College in Mahad, under the Peoples' Education Society.

The experiences of Ambedkar were very severe right from childhood through his career and life. He
had the experience of getting beaten up for drinking water stealthily at a public watercourse. Local barber will not cut his hair so he had to get it cut by his sister. He was not allowed to opt for Sanskrit language in school because of his status as an untouchable and had to opt for Persian.

The social location of Ambedkar, as a Mahar subjected to humiliations and discriminatory treatment coloured his vision. It has special significance here that Ambedkar treated three great men as his perceptors, the first was Kabir who attracted him to Bhakti cult, Mahatma Phooley inculcated in him anti-Brahminism, education of the downtrodden and their uplift, economic and spiritual, and Buddha who provided for Ambedkar the mental and metaphysical satisfaction for emancipating the untouchables. The life at Columbia University shaped the character, outlook and political perception of Ambedkar a great deal. With a scholarship from the state of Baroda for higher
studies Ambedkar arrived at Columbia in July 1913. Life in the university was a new experience for Ambedkar. There was no untouchability, he was free to live, and move around and read with other students, including Indian students, on equal terms, without discrimination of any kind.

The period of struggle and career of Ambedkar lasted five decades from 1910 through 1956. Four distinct and important periods can be discerned in the making of Ambedkar. The period from 1918 - 1928 was the time when he obtained his degrees and prepared himself for his future political role, he organized the Mahad Satyagraha during this period. During the period 1929 - 1936 he was engaged in a constitutional fight to secure separate electorates for the untouchables. Between 1937 and 1946 he organized the Independent Labour Party, functioned as leader of the opposition in the Bombay Provincial Legislature, and he became a member of the Executive Council of the Viceroy in 1942 and
continued in that post up to 1946. During 1946-1956 period he was involved in the drafting of the Constitution for independent India and also functioned as Minister in the Central Cabinet. He became Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, also became the law Minister in the first cabinet of independent India, he resigned from the cabinet later and was the leader of the opposition in Parliament.

Ambedkar had a variegated career in different fields as a teacher, lawyer, advisor on military matters, and an advisor in stocks and shares, a constitutional expert and a statesman. In 1917 July he was appointed Military Secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda. But he had to return to Bombay as a result of caste antagonism and maltreatment at Baroda. Thereafter he took up the profession of a private tutor in Bombay and also did the work of advising dealers in stocks and shares. Even though these activities yielded a good income he had to
close down his activities because his clients refused to deal with an untouchable. From November 1918 to March 1920 he was Professor of Political Economy in Sydenham College, Bombay. Here too the shade of untouchability haunted him. In 1923 he started practice as a lawyer in Bombay High Court, he was treated as an outcaste lawyer. In 1927 he was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council. In 1928 he was appointed Professor in Government Law College, Bombay. Later he was appointed as the Principal and Perry Professor of Jurisprudence in the Government Law College, Bombay. After the Act of 1935 was introduced Ambedkar joined active politics. That time Congress was lead by Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and C.R. Das etc. Ambedkar’s entry into the mainstream politics as the sole spokesman of the outcastes gave new turn to the cause of the depressed sections undertaken by the Congress, especially by Mahatma Gandhi. Ambedkar opposed both the orthodox sections of Hindu society and the British Raj. His reactions towards the orthodox Hindu
sections were severe than to the British Raj. Ambedkar became a member of the Defence Advisory Committee of the Viceroy of India in 1941, and in 1942 he was appointed Labour Member in the Executive Council of the Government of India. In July 1947 he became the Law Minister of India, in August 1947 he became the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly of free India. On difference of opinion with Nehru he resigned from the Union Cabinet in 1951. In 1956 Ambedkar took Diksha and converted to Buddhism at Nagpur in a function presided over by Mahasthaveer Chandramuni, the 83 year old Buddha Bikhu of Kushinara. Ambedkar died in 1956 December at the age of 65.