"Political democracy" said Ambedkar, "cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy." Such was Ambedkar's view although some may question this proposition. To those who were disposed to question it, Ambedkar asked a counter-question. "Why did parliamentary democracy collapse so easily in Italy, Germany and Russia? Why did it not collapse so easily in England and the USA? To my mind, there is only one answer. It is that there was a great degree of economic and social democracy in the latter countries" ¹

The thinking of Ambedkar, as in the case of many thinkers, was shaped by various factors such as social environment, external conditions like family atmosphere, the type of education, the quality of close associates and the prevailing opinions on various issues. Varying experiences gained from different sources and situations account for the build up, or change in one's outlook and that is the true of Ambedkar. "The ills, insults, and wanton humiliations, hurled on this lad by the schizophrenic society left an indelible impression in his tender mind. There was an intense influence on Ambedkar of many persons and events." ²

Although J. Phule's works and ideas, Kabir's philosophy and the gospel of Buddha had a deep impact on Ambedkar's mind yet his education overseas predominantly changed his outlook. While studying in America and England, he was greatly impressed by the humanitarian traditions and trends in these countries. "Ambedkar's American experience seems to have marked him in

The study of the western liberal philosophy gave him not only peace of mind but also inspiration to solve the problems, which had tortured and tormented the helpless untouchables of India for centuries. Ambedkar himself came from an untouchable family whose touch and shadow were considered polluting by the caste Hindus. The untouchables were denied the use of public wells, and were left to use unhygienic water from the pond if they could not afford to have their own well. They were compelled to eat a particular type of food, to wear a particular dress and forced to live in dirty, dingy and unhygienic houses built on the outskirts of the village. Their children were not admitted to schools. The Hindu temples were closed to them. The caste Hindus did not show any sympathy for them. For ages, they were denied admission to all public services including police and military services. They took birth as untouchables, they lived as untouchables, and they died as untouchables. In these conditions, on April 14, 1891 Ambedkar was born at Mhow in Madhya Pradesh. His parents belonged to the Mahar community, which at that time was considered ‘untouchable’, but of all the untouchable communities in the fold of Hindu society, the Mahars are the most robust, adaptable, intelligent, fighting, brave, virile and leading community. Keenly sensitive to their inferior position, they are conscious of their slavery. Thanks to the rigid Varna Vyavastha (class system) prevalent in the country ordaining a human being to lead a predetermined life on the basis of his birth. “India was at that time probably the most rigidly stratified society in the world with almost negligible chances of upward social mobility.” Education was primarily the privilege of the upper castes. Ambedkar had personally to go through many an ordeal during his

school as well as college days. He was made to experience segregation and resultant isolation. The teachers would not care to check his homework. Some of them did not even ask him to recite poems or put any questions to him for fear of being polluted. It was during his school days that Ambedkar began to feel what it meant to be an untouchable.

One day, during summer, Ambedkar and his brother along with his little nephew were traveling by a village bullock-cart to meet his father. The Hindu cart man, after coming to know that his cart passengers were untouchable boys, in a fit of rage, "threw them out on the road as one overturns the dustbins; for he felt they had polluted his wooden cart and destroyed the purity of his domestic animals!" And they helplessly walked a long distance. They became thirsty but, being untouchable, they could not get even water anywhere. "This was the first rude and shattering shock to the budding mind of Bhim". Another bitter experience was the refusal by the barber to cut his hair lest the razor of the barber gets polluted. It was indeed a touching scene when Bhim came to know that his hair defiled the purity of the razor of the barber who regarded even the buffalo shaving as a better and holier affair than tonsuring a human being who was his co-religionist and his countryman. He used to get his hair cut by his sister. A few days later, this impression became confirmed. Mad with thirst one day, he was drinking water stealthily at a public watercourse; he was beaten mercilessly after discovering that he was an untouchable Mahar boy. Facing such indignation did not deter Ambedkar from pursuing his studies. In spite of such humiliation, he was able to pass matriculation examination in 1907 and successfully completed his graduation in 1912 with financial aid of Rs. 25 per month awarded by Maharaja Sayaji Rao of Baroda. After passing his B.A., Ambedkar joined the Baroda State’s service. His graduation and stated

service could not come to his rescue to free him from the curse of untouchability. The peons in his office used to throw office files at him lest they should get polluted through personal contact.

Ambedkar in USA

In 1913, Ambedkar got an opportunity to go to USA for higher studies on a Baroda State scholarship. He was the first Mahar to study in a foreign University. His biographer, D. Keer writes, “…indeed, it was an epoch-making event! An untouchable, an abominable Mahar, going to a foreign land to cultivate the best, the enduring and the ennobling influence and imbibe the spirit of the age.”9

The years 1910-1913 saw the progressive movement in the USA particularly since the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, which combined two potentially contradictory strands in American political thought. These were “a belief in ‘direct’ democracy, which inevitably made its protagonists suspicious of too great a growth in the powers of the central government, and a conviction that in strengthening of the powers of a democratically elected government and capture of the legislative power by the alliance of corrupt politicians. There is danger of majority dictatorship and tyranny upon the minority. The progressive’s belief in direct democracy was expressed in the evolution of various devices such as referendum, recall, initiative, direct primaries to select political candidates and direct election of senators etc. Due to this, by 1914, over 20 states had adopted the initiative and the referendum and 10 states, the recall. Two thirds of all the states had adopted the direct primary in state elections and in 1913, the 17th Amendment made direct elections of Senators part of the American constitution.”10

Not only this, the increasing number of posts in the civil service were being put beyond the scope of political appointment; municipal home rule and company administration were put beyond the reach of corruption. However, the conflict between the belief in direct democracy and the concomitant drive to strengthen the powers of the federal government as the only means of taking progressivism from the state to the national level broke into the open. Theodore Roosevelt allied himself with the progressive wing of the Republic Party whose belief system, he called the ‘New Nationalism’, the essence of which was a whole-hearted use of central government’s powers to serve social justice and alter existing economic relations. As is well known, he failed to capture the party’s nomination for the Presidential election of 1912 and the party nominated Woodrow Wilson, who was a democratic conservative. As a reformer, however, Wilson was hampered by his respect for the rights of the states and his belief in the essential rightness of the normal processes of American politics, provided they were used in a democratic way. He distrusted the ‘New Nationalism’ of Theodore Roosevelt and adopted the more traditional American approach, which called for the dispersal of power and reduction in size through anti-trust Legislation. He believed in the ‘organization’ of the common interest of ‘the People’, against the ‘Special Interests’, who were corrupting American democracy; and the two themes, respect for State Rights, and belief in the unalterable virtue of the common people, given strong executive leadership, were central, both to his domestic and foreign policy.

It was in such atmosphere that Ambedkar entered the Graduate school of Columbia University. “Among the first-rate Indian political leaders, Ambedkar was the first to receive instruction in the land of Lincoln and Booker T. Washington.”

---

It seems the American experiences did influence Ambedkar’s thought. As a student at Columbia University, Ambedkar explored as widely as possible the economic and social aspects of American development. Living in America, the following lines of Shakespeare;

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,”

impressed him to fully utilize the moratorium granted to him. His aim was not only to be a holder of the highest University degrees but also to be the master of social sciences. He took an enormous number of courses: political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, moral philosophy etc. It is not surprising that a person deeply affected by the vicissitudes of a social and economic system would try to understand the ways in which social and economic systems function. The place where he explored the principles of the social sciences is not common; it was in Columbia University of New York, almost, literally under the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. It was probably in this phase of his life that he discovered and absorbed in his mind the basic tenets; those were to be at the core of his philosophy of life. Moreover, Wilson’s policy of giving preference to people’s interest as well as rights of the States seemed to have influenced chiefly in developing Ambedkar’s views on Federal system with strong centre.

Life in the Columbia University was a revelation to him, and it enlarged his mental vision. He could move there with a status of equality; “Life in America, a foreign land, was a unique and moving experience in life that Ambedkar met with in New York...It was a new world, it enlarged his mental horizon, a new kind of existence began, and his life gleamed with a new meaning.”

15. Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p. 27.
untouchability, the exposure to western values and ways of life was a wonderful and moving experience for Ambedkar. He wrote a letter to one of the friends of his father and suggested a remedy to diagnoses of the ills of his community. He opined that the parents could mould the destiny of their children by giving them proper education. He also stressed to accelerate female education along with males. “Let your mission”, concludes the young man of twenty, “therefore, be to educate and preach the idea of education to those at least who are near to and in close contact with you”.

The academic degrees, which he received in USA not only enriched him in ideas but also made him conscious of his social obligations towards his community, and perform them to the best of his ability. He recalled in 1931, “Nobody would have believed, in the period of my student career, that an untouchable person like me would represent the Depressed Classes in Round Table Conferences in London and will participate prominently in framing free India’s Constitution. Leave aside others, but personally, I, myself, also could not have dreamt of it…. except my personal well-being. I had no specific aim before me when I had started my journey for America for education. I had not even the slightest glimpse of the matter that I will become one with the grievances and sorrow of my people and lead them to the proper destination within so short span of time”.

**Academic Achievements**

After two long years of toil, he obtained M.A. degree in 1915, for his thesis ‘Ancient Indian Commerce’; simultaneously working on another thesis that he submitted for the degree of Ph.D. entitled ‘National Dividend of India – A Historical and Analytical Study.’ It was published eight years later under the title: ‘The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India’, by P.S. King &

16. Ibid, p. 27.
17. Quoted by Dinkar Khabde: Dr. Ambedkar and Western Thinkers, (Pune, Sugava Prakashan), 1989, p.34.
Sons Ltd., London. This book was dedicated to Maharaja Sayajirao and had an introduction by Professor R.A. Seligman who taught Ambedkar the first lesson in Public Finance, stating, “Nowhere, to my knowledge, has such a detailed study of the underlying principles been made.”

It is interesting to note that the topics of his master’s and doctoral theses indicated that he was interested at that time in the historical analysis of Indian social and economic system. In his Ph.D. thesis, Ambedkar tried to trace the growth of the financial arrangement from the Act of 1833 under the British system. His thesis was critical of the British Imperial system and its harmful effect on Indian development. “The style of the Professor becomes one with the soul of the patriot, Ambedkar, who bitterly exposes the British bureaucracy, denounces the designs and objects of the Imperial system and also lashes out at all the reactionary forces in the country.” Decades later, the members of the Indian Legislative Councils and Central Assembly found this famous book very helpful at the time of budget discussions during the British regime.

The other major publication that came out of the Columbia experience was a paper on “Castes in India, Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development”, which he presented before the Anthropology Seminar of Dr. Goldenweiser in May 1916. He deals with the subject of Caste system from the Anthropological point of view and observes that the “Super in position of endogamy on exogamy” is the main cause of formation of caste groups”. He further stated that “to transgress the boundary, marry outside and import offspring that is foreign to caste.”

19. Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p. 30
Thus his paper on caste was not a diatribe against the iniquities of the caste system but rather an effort to present a theory of the development of system. Though there is no development of a theory of untouchability in the paper, his later theory of the development of untouchability was based on the observations that he made in this paper i.e. – that Indian culture was basically unified and valuable and caste inequalities were a social development without a racial origin.

His writings make it clear that although Ambedkar was studying in America, his attention was centred on using that knowledge to analyze the Indian situation. It seems that the study of anthropology and sociology under Goldenweizer and others at Columbia had a long lasting impact on Ambedkar. Certainly, he felt such systematic study of society was valuable, for he later instituted a Department of Sociology at Siddharth College in days when the subject of sociology was not usually offered by colleges in India. Further, Ambedkar’s lengthy testimony before the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Commission stressed the lack of ‘endosmosis’- ‘like mindedness’ between touchable and untouchable phrases evidently borrowed from American social analysis. Ambedkar’s solution was - educate and politicize the disadvantaged groups and make full use of popular assemblies so that the new political institutions would not continue the hardships and disabilities entailed by the traditional social system.

He may have observed the ethnic groups in New York, the Irish, the Italians and the Jews, gaining political power through unified political pressure. The twentieth century American dream of social and political equality in the great melting pot was apparent during Ambedkar’s time at Columbia. Both Ambedkar’s study and experience would have encouraged him to look beneath the cultural differences for a basic national cultural unity and to look to the political process as the way in which different groups attained their proper place on the scene.
At Columbia University, Ambedkar seems to have interacted with as many of the top-ranking professors as he could. Columbia at that time was in its Golden Age, and scholars with whom Ambedkar studied represents a catalogue of important early twentieth century American thinkers. John Dewey, Edwin Seligman, James Harvey, Robinson, Franklin Giddings, and Alexander Goldenweiser were all men of great importance in the development of American thought, and probably nowhere else could Ambedkar have received such a broad and deep exposure to an optimistic, expansive, pragmatic body of knowledge.

It seems that Professor Edwin R.A. Seligman, a well-known economist, left the lasting impression on the mind of Ambedkar. As Keer writes, “Ambedkar took to Seligman as a duck takes to water and ran after the Professor from class to class. He taught well and guided his students with affection and thus it all had a lasting effect on Ambedkar.” It shows that Ambedkar was sincerely guided by his teachers in USA, the country in which the liberalism had made itself felt dominantly in the field of education. He could read and write at his own liberty.

**Influence of John Dewey**

Ambedkar was deeply influenced by the writings and teachings of Professor John Dewey, who happened to be his teacher at Columbia University. The influence of Dewey has been clearly mentioned by Blake Clark in an article “Ambedkar, the untouchable” published in Christian Herald in 1950, ‘of all the Professors in the University, Dr. Ambedkar was influenced much by John Dewey’. It is said that he took down every word that the great teacher uttered in his teaching. Ambedkar used to tell his friends that, ‘If Dewey died, I could reproduce every lecture verbatim’. Ambedkar, himself

---

22 Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p. 28.
once said; “Professor John Dewey, who was my teacher and to whom I owe so much.” It is relevant to furnish a brief sketch of Prof. Dewey.

Dewey, born at Vermont, was a great scholar and a philosopher of a pragmatic and scientific approach, having joined Columbia University in 1904. “When Ambedkar became his student, the former had already established himself at the apex of American intellectual life. Through his philosophy of pragmatism and various ideas on education, etc., he had left indelible mark on everyday life of average man in the USA. In this connection, it is proper to quote Lane W. Lancaster, the great historian writes about Dewey. “Prof. Dewey remained in Columbia University as a professor of philosophy until his retirement - a retirement spent in the tireless propagation of his beliefs and in the organization of various movements in the broad areas of education and public affairs. He was never, therefore, merely a philosopher. Although his influence on philosophy in technical sense was profound yet he was also concerned in numerous practical enterprises.

John Dewey criticized the old philosophers who advocated idealism and obsolete things. Ambedkar too criticized the ancient Indian philosophers like Manu, Kapila and religious books as Manu Smriti, the Vedas and the Upanishads. He appealed to the Hindus to consider whether they should or should not worship the past as supplying its ideals, which are totally outdated in the context of the modern times. In order to illustrate his argument, he quotes Dewey. “Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past and with what is positively perverse... As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such that make for a better future society.

23. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, op.cit., Vol.1, p. 79.
25. Quoted by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, op.cit., Vol.1,p. 79.
Ambedkar was no doubt influenced by Dewey’s pragmatic and dynamic approach that sought to offer a way out from the troubles in which humanity was caught. Ambedkar could appreciate it since it was similar to Buddha’s approach to know the cause of ‘Dukha’ (sufferings) and remove it from its root. Lane W. Lancaster writes about the nature of Dewey’s philosophy as “Dewey’s primary interest, as a social and political philosopher, was in helping to resolve the problems that plague mankind. These problems are the common place ones of bad sanitation, poor working conditions, inequitable distribution of income and the exclusion of the mass of men from the material and cultural values produced by the technological revolution. He called his philosophy ‘instrumentalism’ because he thought of it as a tool for dealing with concrete problems in contrast to the traditional philosophies that concerned themselves with such abstractions as, Being, Essence, Truth and Reality. He subscribed to Francis Bacon’s aphorism that “Knowledge is Power” and repudiated the kind of contemplative knowledge that was uninterested in controlling the environment, and contented itself with the barren victories of scholastic disputation.”

Dewey’s philosophy of instrumentalism led Ambedkar evidently towards a detailed analysis of the concrete problems facing humanity. He wrote volume after volume to explain the nature of the caste-ridden Indian society and emphasized the need to get rid of it. Ambedkar fully endorsed Dewey’s emphasis on education as a means to change the world and not merely to understand it. He wrote a letter to one of his father’s friends suggesting to educate both male and female children in order to live a life of dignity. Later on, when he came back to India, he continuously advised his fellow brethren to educate themselves and their children. He also established the People’s Education Society, in Mumbai in 1946 in order to raise the cultural level and

26. Lane Lancaster W., op.cit., p. 333.
enlarge the mental horizon of the depressed and oppressed classes, which were denied the educational facilities for centuries. Dewey’s ideas provided him the basis for a systematic analysis of problems relating to society, religion, politics, economy and history.

“There is a thread running through these problems which calls for an integral rather than a piecemeal approach. This integral approach enabled Ambedkar to find that society is equally, if not more, as aggressive and tyrannical as the government.”27

**Jefferson’s Influence**

The Declaration of American Independence, drafted by Jefferson during the war of Independence, also seems to have had some impact on Ambedkar’s mind. It eloquently speaks of the independence of America and denounces slavery and slave trade forcefully; Ambedkar too was sincerely possessed by the idea of liberating his fellow beings, the untouchables, from their ‘slavery’ in India. Indeed, the idea of full liberty was the basis of Jefferson’s democratic philosophy. Still the implementation of ‘Declaration’ could not be effected in America in its true spirit. This has become clear with regard to the treatment meted out to the Negroes. Jefferson had a sense of remorse for this matter. So did Ambedkar; the fact is that even this much comfort the untouchables cannot hope to have from the caste Hindus. The Hindus have no sense of shame and a sense of remorse as much as felt by Jefferson. I should have thought the Hindus would be too ashamed of this stigma on untouchability on them to appear before the world with a demand for their freedom.28

Jefferson was also a greatconstitutionalist and a practical thinker. He stood for the flexibility of the constitution, as is evident from the following statement he made:

"The constitutions should not be treated with sanctimonious reverence. The Law and the Institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. The institutions must advance with the cleaning circumstances and keep pace with the time. Each generation has a right to choose for itself the form of governments it believes most promoter of its own happiness. A solemn opportunity of doing this is provided by the constitution." 29

Ambedkar cited the same thought of Jefferson in a memorable speech on November 25, 1949 on the third reading and adoption of the newly prepared Constitution drafted by him and his colleagues. He emphasized the point that neither the Fundamental Rights nor any clause embodied in the constitution is unamendable or absolute. Ambedkar said that ‘what Jefferson said is not merely true, but it is absolutely true... one has only to examine the provision relating to the amendment of the constitution. The Assembly has refrained from putting a seal of finality and infallibility upon this Constitution and allowed the people the right to amend the Constitution. 30

Ambedkar’s frequent reference to Jefferson’s thoughts particularly on constitution, ideas of liberty and equality and substantiating his own arguments with Jefferson’s references clearly show that there was a great impact of Jeffersonian thoughts on Ambedkar. Keer writes, “While in America, Ambedkar’s mind must have been deeply impressed with two things. The first was the constitution of the USA and more so the fourteenth Amendment to that constitution which declares the freedom of Negroes. The second was the aim of Booker T. Washington whose death occurred in 1915.” 31 While studying in America, Ambedkar also studied American history and the Civil War of 1860.

between the South and the North Americans, and concluded that the constitutional guarantee did not really help Negroes. It was the fourteenth amendment, which conferred citizenship on all persons including the Negroes born or naturalized in the United States.\textsuperscript{32}

Booker T. Washington was the foremost black educator of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, who founded Tuskegee Normal in 1881 and Industrial Institute on the Hampton Model in the Black Belt of Alabama and became its Chief Black Exemplar and Spokesman. Tuskegee’s programme provided students with both academic and vocational training. Under his leadership, this institute became an important force in the education of the Black race disseminating among the Negroes the doctrine of education of the head, heart and hand, breaking shackles of bondage, which had crushed the Negroes for ages - physically, mentally and spiritually. He had propagated among the Negroes the industrial and vocational education, which helped them to become farmers, domestic servants, carpenters, etc. He said “For years to come, the education of the people of my race should be so directed that the greatest proportion of the mental strength of the masses will be brought to bear upon the everyday practical things of life, upon something that which they will be permitted to do in the community in which they reside.”\textsuperscript{33}

Actually, Booker T. Washington was educated at Hampton Institute and influenced by the teaching of General Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Samuel viewed that labour was also a spiritual force, along with a way to increased wage earning capacity. Due to this philosophy, Washington was disinterested in political and civil rights for Negroes. He was also disinterested in modern education and advised Negroes to satisfy themselves being domestic servants and contented with the good treatment given by the Whites to the Negroes.

\textsuperscript{32} B.R. Ambedkar: What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables, (Bombay, Thacker & Co.), 1945, p. 168.

community. According to Washington, Negroes should be useful to the Whites and should be law-abiding citizens.34

After going through the philosophy of Washington and studying the life and works of Ambedkar, it seems that the man like Ambedkar, who was revolutionary in thought, was not impressed by Washington’s philosophy. Despite the fact that both had undertaken the same type of social work, Ambedkar has nowhere quoted Washington’s views in support of his argument. Actually, Ambedkar was revolutionary in thought as well as in action as compared to Washington’s policy of lenience, compromise and conciliation. Ambedkar discarded the traditional education in India. He never considered the untouchables to be domestic servants the upper classes. Rather, he advocated the spread of modern education, which helped them to rise against those who have done injustice to them, confront them with demand for establishing the status of equality. Ambedkar struggled all through his political career with the Indian National Congress leaders and other orthodox sections for securing the civil and political rights for the untouchables. He criticized the Harijan upliftment programme of Gandhi and said that hundreds of saints in the Hindus society have come and gone; they raised the dust but they could not raise the level of the untouchable.35

He even burnt Manusmriti, the sacred Hindu text of laws in 1927, at Mahad. Actually, Washington had never been insistent on political rights of the Negroes. According to Ambedkar, this was shortsighted view of Washington. Keer writes in this regard, “Ambedkar had his own diagnosis of the Indian situation. The jobs in the lower categories of civil services and army that were demanded by Ambedkar for the depressed classes were not enough to raise them in the scale of life. Ambedkar knew well that, more the education more are the chances for progress and easier are the ways of getting opportunities for

34 .Ibid, p. 192.
35 .Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p. 166.
his people. But he thought that by investing his people with political equality and political power, the problem of their education would be automatically solved through Government efforts and those of other social reformers. He devoted his time and talent more to securing political rights than to securing educational facilities."³⁶

Why was Ambedkar not content with just educating people of his community? While explaining this point, in April 1929, at Chitagong (now in Bangladesh), he said ‘If one’s achievements in the education field and academic career were enough for a respectful and honourable living in Hindu society, he himself and others of the depressed classes would never have been ill-treated by the caste-Hindus.’ Therefore, Ambedkar sincerely appealed to his people never to be submissive and tolerant of discrimination. He advised them to go in for education, but warned them, at the same time, never to forget that the political rights are more important than mere educational and academic progress.

Ambedkar was also greatly impressed by the views of William Garrison of America, who worked sincerely for the emancipation of Negro slaves and fought for their civil liberty. The following views of Garrison that he wrote down in the first issue of ‘Liberator’, were the most favourite of Ambedkar,

“I shall strenuously contend for the immediate emancipation of our slave population…. On this subject, I do not wish to write, or speak, or think with moderation, No, No! Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm. Tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher. Tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen, but urge me not into moderation in a cause like the present. I am in

³⁶ Ibid, p. 126.
earnest – I will not excuse - I will not retreat a single inch and I will be heard.”

He was so charged with the desire to do something lasting for improving the status of his fellow beings that he even launched a Satyagraha for re-establishing the right of the depressed classes, and marched to the Mahad Tank on Dec. 26, 1927 and expressed his feeling thus, “Dragging on life somehow or to live like an Oak standing for a thousand years is not the only and worthy way to live in this world. Life can be ennobled and immortalized by sacrificing it for a lasting good such as the cause of truth, a vow, honour or country. For the protection of human rights, several great men have immolated themselves at the altar of duty. Better to die in the prime of youth for a great cause than to live like an oak tree for a thousand years and do nothing.”

### Change in Ambedkar’s Attitude

After getting the University degrees, he realized his own academic capabilities, along with the experiences of a new life of dignity and honour, which was denied to him in India, brought about a noteworthy change in his objectives. Earlier, when he was in India, he believed that education will enable the depressed classes to qualify for the government services, but his own education and experience in foreign lands inspired his dormant reformatory spirit and he began to think seriously about the diagnosis of the real ills of the untouchables in India.

Hence, he came to the firm conviction that mere spread of education among the untouchables will not be sufficient and only the recruitment of Scheduled Castes in the government services, as he had thought formerly, will never solve the disabilities. It became self evident for him that the depressed classes should be made conscious about their rights in political, social and

cultural fields. For this task, he decided to imbue new dynamism in them. This was the aim that Ambedkar put before himself when he was in America.

The First World War broke out when Ambedkar was still in the USA. At the outbreak of the World War I in Europe, the United States Administration had declared on August 4, 1914, its intention to pursue a policy of strict isolation. President Woodrow Wilson appealed to his fellow countrymen to ‘act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned’. This attitude of America impressed Ambedkar.

However, in April 1917, the United States declared War on Germany and in December the same year on Austria; its commercial interests were affected due to Germany’s unwarranted action of capturing American ships carrying merchandise to Britain and France. The intervention of the United States was god-send to the Allies. But for its business interests, America

---

**Reasons for American’s Intervention**

President Wilson had proclaimed neutrality at the beginning of the War in Europe and urged Americans to be neutral even in thought. But Germany’s devastating submarine warfare made this almost impossible, or very difficult. When Germany started her submarine warfare, she warned the US that she would sink without warning neutral as well as enemy ships caught carrying goods to Britain or France. The US said that this violated international law, according to which persons on board must be taken to safety before a ship was destroyed. When the sinking of the British passenger ship, Lucitania, lost American lives, anti-Germany sentiment arose in America.

There were other reasons why the people of US favoured the Allies. The reported brutal treatment of the Belgians by the Germans was one of them. Then, too, Americans favoured the democracies of England and France, rather than the autocratic government of the German empire. Many Americans, also, had financial interest in an Allied Victory, for they had made loans to Britain and France.

The Allies used propaganda to win Public opinion in this country to their side; at the same time, German methods were designed to frighten the American people. Most Americans had wanted to remain neutral, many had even favoured even Germany when the war was started in 1914. Three years later, however, public opinion had so changed that President Wilson asked the Congress to declare war.
could not put at their disposal her billions of dollars, her useful metals, her plentiful foodstuffs, her numerous shipyards, her powerful fleet, her vast manpower, most significant of all, her fresh enthusiasm and her selfless idealism of maintaining neutrality.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{The Sojourn in Great Britain}

On completing his studies at Columbia University, USA, Ambedkar left for England in June 1916, when the World War First was still going on. In the same year, he joined Grays Inn for Law and London school of Economics for the study of Economics. As his studies in economics were far advanced, so the professors in London gave him permission to prepare for the degree of D.Sc.

Prevailing conditions in England at that time were not normal as World War 1 began in July-August, 1914. Great Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914 and the reason for Britain to join the war in the words of Mr. Asquith, the then Prime Minister of England, were as follows:

“If I am asked for what we are fighting. I reply in two sentences: in the first place, to fulfill a solemn international obligation, an obligation which, if it had been entered into between private persons in the ordinary concerns of state, would have been regarded as an obligation not only of law but of honour, which no self respecting man could possibly have repudiated. Secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle...that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering power.”\textsuperscript{41}

---


There was thus provided a high ethical sanction for the war, by supplying the necessary emotional boost to unite the nation in a chivalrous defense of right against might as well as a very wide appeal was made to the conscience of the civilized world against the violators of peace treaties and the ravishers of little nations. There was a vast propaganda, in the form of books, lectures, reprints of diplomatic documents and reports of atrocities by the Germans in Belgium, in order to create a public opinion in favour of supporting Britain in its war pursuits. Lord Bryce was especially entrusted this responsibility in order to win the united support of the nation for the war, and also to win sympathy and possibly help from neutral countries.

**Socialist Trends**

At the time of out-break of the First World War in August 1914, the Liberal Party was in power having alliance with Irish Home Rule Party and the Labour Party. Mr. Herbert Asquith was Prime Minister and Lord Kitchener was War Minister. As the elections in Great Britain were due in 1915, the Conservatives agreed with the Liberals that new elections should be postponed, at first, for a year, and later, until the end of the war.

Besides Britain’s military and naval contributions to the war, their factories produced a large number of shells, munitions and other military equipment. Britain also advanced large sums of loans to the Allies. In the beginning, there was no realization in Britain about the terrible character or the long duration of the war. As soon as the war began, there was a revolutionary rise in prices. The gold, the usual form of money in England, disappeared from circulation and was replaced by paper money. Further, due to the enormous use of materials by the world’s armies, the reduction of men from productive work, which tended to increase wages and the over issue of unsecured paper money for extending the war loans, the value of money fell sharply. As a result, the
conditions of working classes worsened day by day and they demanded state’s intervention in industries to limit profits.

This provided an impulse to the State for extraordinarily enlarging its power over individual subjects and national resources. The government itself had already adopted a policy of state control, in view of the necessity of supplies of war materials and of the inefficiency of the then capitalist organization in producing them. In the name of welfare and the need of time, the state began to maximize its control over important factories through industrialization. The result was replacement of British skilled labourers by automatic machines. That is why trade unions became active to check the extension of machines and to protect the life and the privileged position of their members.

They worked out such ideas as nationalization of industry with local control by the workers, which they called Guild Socialism. They had called a general strike of all workers in the Clyde in the summer of 1916 and later on gave different calls of strike. The new unions of all workers and their use of the general strike were revelations to all people of enormous portent for the future. Perhaps it is here that Ambedkar became aware of the use of strike by unions as a chief weapon against injustice. That’s why, later, as a member of Bombay Legislative Assembly in 1942, he raised strong objections to the proposed ‘Industrial Disputes Bill’, which put a ban on the workers’ right to strike. He opposed vehemently the clauses of the bill and advocated the restoration of workers’ right to strike as he considered it as the best method to express grievances against aggressive masters.

Further, while discussing his views about trade unions, Ambedkar referred many times to the examples of British trade unions and justified the formation of trade unions. This was evidently due to his exposure to British Labour Party’s policy and actions.
The Indian Interlude

He had hardly started his research in the university; he was informed that the term of the scholarship was over. With a heavy heart, he returned to India on August 21, 1917 without accomplishing his desired object. But before leaving England, he had secured permission from London University through Professor Edwin Canning to resume his studies, within a period not exceeding four year from October 1917. In accordance with the bond, Ambedkar had signed committing himself to serve the Baroda State for ten years. He joined the Baroda state services as Military Secretary to the Maharaja Sayajirao, much lower than his actual potentialities and capability. So far as his qualifications were concerned, he deserved to be Finance Minister. Nevertheless, he did not stay on this position for long as he had to leave Baroda in sheer disgust in view of the continued harassment and ill treatment at the hands of the caste-ridden society. Even as a man of learning and high official in the administration, he was subjected to the same treatment of humiliation and discrimination as before that his self respect refused to take any more. No hotel or hostels accepted him. He took shelter in a Parsi inn, from there too he was driven out. He appealed to the Maharaja but went unheard the Dewan of Baroda expressed his inability to do anything in the matter. “Tired, hungry and fagged out, he sat under a tree and burst into a flood of tears.”42

Realization dawned upon him that even his personal attainment could not soften the prejudices of the caste Hindus, although he was a man of learning and a thousand times superior to those creatures who wallowed in the mire of ignorance, superstitions and evil customs. “So in a helpless mood, in deep glooms, and utterly disgusted with the insulting environment, Ambedkar

42. Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p. 34.
returned in middle of November 1917 to Mumbai, and spent about one year doing odd jobs in Mumbai. He published a paper entitled ‘Small Holdings in India and their Remedies’, dwelling on the limitations of small holdings of land and suggesting industrialization as the sound alternative to the agricultural problems of India. He joined as a Professor of Political Economy in Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics, Mumbai in November 1918. No doubt, his exhaustive exposition and thoughtful style gripped the minds of his students, yet his success as a Professor could not mitigate the evils of untouchability as the prejudice about caste linkage continued to obsess his pupils.

So overbearing was the discriminatory condition that Ambedkar on his own presented the demand of separate electorate and reserved seats for the depressed classes in proportion to their population before the Southborough Committee dealing with the issue of franchise to be listed in the Montague – Chelmsford Reforms. To highlight the cause of the depressed people, he also started a fortnightly paper under the title ‘Mook Nayak, meaning the leader of the Dumb, on January 31, 1920 with financial help from Maharaja of Kolhapur to highlight the cause of the depressed people. In Ambedkar’s view the backwardness of the non-Brahmins was due to lack of education and power. In one article of Mook Nayak, he asserted that it was not enough for India to be an independent country. “She must rise as a good state guaranteeing equal status in matters like religious, social, economic and political, to all classes, offering every man an opportunity to rise in the scale of life and creating conditions favourable to his advancement.”

Ambedkar also attended various conferences of the untouchables i.e. on 21 March, 1920 at Mangaon in the Kohlapur State, May 1920 at Nagpur etc. to discuss the problems of the depressed people. Speaking at the conference of

43. Ibid, PP.34-35.
44. Ibid, p. 41.
untouchable at Mangaon on March 21, 1920, Shri Shahu Maharaja of Kohlapur declared “You have found your saviour in Ambedkar. I am confident that he will break your shackles... Ambedkar will shine as a front-rank leader of all-India fame and appeal." He was already receiving recognition as the great champion of the cause of his community. It seemed that the intellectual urge was pulling him to finish the pending commitment of ‘Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India, a thesis for getting the degree of Master of Science, and another thesis, ‘The Problem of Rupee’ for the degree of Doctor of Science.

Back to England

With some financial help from the Maharaja of Kolhapur and a loan of Rs. 5,000 from his friend, Mr. Naval Bhattena, he left for England and reached there in September, 1920; joined the Grays Inn for Bar at Law and also resumed his studies for Ph. D. The World War had ended causing heavy damage to the British Exchequer besides loss of men, not counted, perhaps as they came from its colonies. The general elections were held in 1918 and Lloyd George won the election under a coalition of Liberal and Labour parties. Lloyd George was now a renowned world statesman and slipped easily into dictatorial ways. He treated distinguished colleagues, as subordinates and handled every problem himself; be it peace abroad, or reconstruction at home, Ireland, the Empire. Immediately after the general elections, Lloyd George went to Paris to participate in the peace conference, which started on 18 January 1919, and on June 28, 1919, signed the peace treaty.

In Britain, freedom burst out overnight as price control and control of raw materials and foreign trade, direction of industry, were swept away. As a result, prices rose twice as fast during 1919 as they had done during the worst years of the war and so did the wages. British manufacturers had assumed that

45. Ibid, p. 42.
there would be an insatiable demand for their goods at any price they liked to charge. But soon, the over production of primary products dominated the inter-war years, and the impoverishment of these producers brought something near ruin to the old British industries. Prices in Britain thus tumbled faster than they had risen. Industrialization resulted in great unemployment. The ‘Economist’ declared the year 1921 as ‘one of the worst years of depression since the industrial revolution’.  

Further, without any foresight or calculation, the government extended insurance against unemployment virtually to the entire working class. The foundations of Laissez Faire were shaken. Men were no longer driven to work at lower wages, even in harsher conditions, or by the lash of hunger. If they could not find employment at their usual jobs, they drew prolonged benefit at the expense of the taxpayer and the employed. When the unemployed rioted, this was to get higher rates of ‘benefit’, not to bring down the system that had made them unemployed. “Once labour had demanded ‘the Right to Work’. Now it demanded ‘Work or Maintenance’, and the emphasis was on maintenance.”

The face of the British Empire also changed; war underlined the difference between the Dominions and the Colonies. The Dominions, now known collectively as the British Commonwealth of Nations, were next door to independent sovereign states, represented separately at the Paris Peace Conference and, thereafter, at the League of Nations. They had some interests in common – as all produced raw materials - wheat, gold, cooper, wool timber, which Britain consumed but now they aspired to develop their own industries. They were now bound to Great Britain predominantly by sentiment – a common past, similar institutions, and, to a large extent, the same language.

47. Ibid, p. 149.
Yet, the colonies were still administered autocratically. In 1917, in order to get support of Indians in war, responsible government was promised to India as an integral part of the British Empire policy,48 but, after the war, “... no transfer of power, mere pictures of still life were offered to a hungry man. The viceroy still ruled as a despot. The India office in London still wielded final authority.” 49 The hardships of war, and the influenza epidemic at its end, provoked widespread discontent. The Indian National Congress, which had long represented India’s interest in a modest way, soon strode into action under an inspiring great leader- Gandhi.

How contradictory! On the one hand, the U.K. had proclaimed that the First World War was fought to make world safe for democracy, to protect the sovereignty, independence of the countries. It was “The ‘war to end war’ and ‘to make the world safe for democracy’ and ‘ensure the freedom of small nationalities’ and for ‘self determination...” 50, but on the other hand, Britain continued its policy of imperialism and colonialism. Such was the political scenario, when Ambedkar resumed his studies in London with the aim of completing the thesis ‘Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India’ spending long hours in the London Museum, “.... where the ruins of the antique world were displayed and where Karl Marx, Mazzini, Lenin and Savarkar had dug for knowledge and digested it”.51 He also read several volumes and old reports in the India office Library, in the London University Library and in other city’s Libraries and took down voluminous notes with the objective to finish his studies as early as possible with the dogged and ceaseless persistence.52 He took a sum of Rs. 2,000 from his friend, Mr. Naval Bhathena, to buy German exchange and went to study at Bonn University in 1922, but he was called back by his Professor, Edwin, to rewrite his thesis. In June 1921, he

52 . Ibid, p. 46.
was awarded the degree of Master of Science for his thesis ‘Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India.’

Major Arguments in his Thesis aimed at establishing that the problem before a Chancellor of the Exchequer is how to bring about equilibrium in the budget. If one scans the history of provincial finance in British India with a view to discover the method of meeting the problem of equilibrium in provincial budgets, one finds that Provincial Finance has evolved through three distinct stages, namely, Assignments, Assigned Revenues and Shared Revenues. Also, it refers to the policy of Decentralization of Indian finances. He gave a detailed analysis of the origin, basis and mode of collection of land tax in British India by pointing out that the land tax levied in British India had adverse effect on agricultural production. He also said that the taxation in British India was not justifiable for internal and external duties were levied more on political instead of economic basis, resulting in weakening (1) the competitive ability of Industries in International market, and (2) Imposition of heavy taxes restricting the expansion of the market even within India. The financial arrangement between the imperial power and provinces has been dealt with at length; he suggested a set of financial and budgetary procedures to be observed by the provincial government. This, indeed, was a comprehensive record of all significant changes in Indian public finance emphasizing that good administration depends upon good finance.

In October 1922, he completed his other famous thesis, ‘The problem of the Rupee’ for the degree of Doctor of Science. This thesis was published in London in 1923, dedicated to his parents and his teacher, Edwin Cannon. Cannon found ‘stimulating freshness in his views and reasons.’ The thesis dealt with inflicting crushing hardship on Indians and how the relationship of the rupee to the sterling pound was manipulated to the greater profit of the Britishers, in place of the existing gold exchange standard; he effectively
argued in favour of an ‘inconvertible rupee’ with a fixed limit of issue. He wrote that: “I would propose that the government of India should melt the rupees, sell them as bullion and use the proceeds for revenue purposes and fill the void by an inconvertible paper.....”54 It is important to note that Ambedkar did not agree with many propositions of J.M. Keynes, the classical economist, about reforming Indian currency and the recommendations of Flower Committee about it. On the theoretical side, the difference proceeds from the very fundamental fact, which, according to Ambedkar, seems to be quite over looked by Keynes, that nothing will stabilize the rupee unless we stabilize its general purchasing power.55

The thesis begins with the evolution of money system in India through the ages, bringing out the significance of money in a modern economy as trade activity is an important apparatus in a society and all necessary transactions are carried out in terms of money. Where the distribution of produce is against money, “in such a society, money, therefore, necessarily becomes the pivot on which everything revolves. With money as the focusing point of all human efforts, interests, desires and ambitions, a trading society is bound to function in a regime of price, where successes and failures and results are based on calculation of price - outlay as against price-product.”56

The thesis explains the evolution and working of the gold standard and the gold exchange standard. The problem of rupee under the British rule in India was not related to the use of gold. As such, Ambedkar asserts, it was related to the denomination of money and finding a balance between gold coins and currency notes in circulation.

Therefore, Ambedkar has suggested the following plan for reforming Indian currency:

53. Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p. 50.
56. Ibid, p.335.
(1) Stop coinage of rupees by absolutely closing the units;
(2) Open a gold mint for the coinage of a suitable gold coins;
(3) Fix a ratio between the gold coins and the rupee;
(4) Rupee not to be convertible in gold and gold not to be convertible in rupees, but both to circulate as unlimited legal tender at the ratio fixed by law.\textsuperscript{57}

Items (1) and (4) suggested by Ambedkar were intended to impart greater elasticity into Indian currency system. Further, the problem of suitable denominations and stability of value of Indian currency were sought to be achieved through recommendations (2) and (3).

During his days in London, Ambedkar had audience with Montague, the then Secretary of State for India, and Mr. Vithalbhai Patel who then happened to be in London and discussed the grievances of the untouchables. In the Act of 1919, for the first time in Indian history, the existence of the Depressed Classes was acknowledged. One representative of Depressed Classes was included among the 14 non-official members nominated by the Governor-General to the Central Legislative Assembly. Similarly, in the Provincial Legislatures also, the Depressed Classes got representation.

\textbf{Influence of Edmund Burke:} Sir Edmund Burke was a great political thinker of Ireland of 18\textsuperscript{th} century. He was known for his book, ‘The Reflections on the Revolution in France’, predicting that the terrorism in the revolution will be followed by a military despotism in France and establishment of Napoleon’s despotism proved Burke to be right.\textsuperscript{58}

It is interesting to note that although Burke was a conservative yet Ambedkar had developed an affinity for his thoughts. Despite Burke’s

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, p. 630.

conservative views, Ambedkar actually found in Burke a champion of the suppressed people. Burke also received considerable recognition as an orator in the House of Commons by launching a powerful opposition to the duties imposed on American colonies. He had also criticized Warren Hastings for the corruption of East Indian Company’s administrators; his book ‘Thoughts on Present Discontent’ published in 1770, attacked vehemently George III who had revived the power of the Crown and had tried to undermine the sovereignty of the people. Therefore, although known as a conservative, “Burke’s political liberalism”, writes Robertson, “is seen in his defense of the American Colonies, neither his patriotism nor the notions of prestige prevent his sense of justice and concern for humanity from stating that England is wrong and America is right…. England may have the legal right to render America miserable, but he argues that when it is a case of humanity, rights and privileges are of no avail, the latter killeth, the spirit giveth the life…”59 Burke endeavoured throughout his life to inculcate the spirit and principles of morality into the conduct of public affairs, and from where Ambedkar seems to have acquired it and developed the notion of moral regeneration of society, as reflected in his talk on Ranade’s birth anniversary. Ambedkar categorically stated that the rights are protected not by law but by the social and moral conscience of society. The recognition of social conscience will make law safe and secure. Ambedkar cites the example of American Negroes, and says that although the principles of equality and civil rights are guaranteed by the American constitution, which have no use for the Negroes in practical life, since they are opposed by the majority of the whites in USA. The law cannot punish the masses but few individuals in case of the breach of it. In this connection, he quotes E. Burke: “There is no method found for punishing the multitude, law can punish a single solitary recalcitrant criminal, it can never operate against the whole body of the

59. Robertson: Burke’s Speech on Conciliation with America, (Karachi, Educational Pub. Co.),1953, p.11
people who are determined to defy it.”60 That was strongly articulated by Burke while delivering his speech on conciliation with American colonies, as is evident from his speech. At the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar agreed with Burke’s views that the use of force alone is but temporary. Public Opinions cannot be changed by the lashes of whips or by using the police or the military force. Ambedkar profusely quoted these views at two places; first in his speech at the Round Table Conference in England in the first session appealing to the British not to use force in turning down the demands of the down-trodden, and second in the Constituent Assembly debates while talking about the futility of force for solving Hindu-Muslim problem. He cited Burke: “The use of force…. may endure for a moment, but force failing, no further hope of reconciliation is left…. A further objection to force is that you impair the object by your very endeavour to preserve it. The thing you fought for is not the thing which you recover, but depreciated, sunk, wasted and consumed in the context.”61 Like Burke, a politician with a reformer’s bent of mind, one finds in Ambedkar a combination of politician, administrator and social reformer.

J.S. Mill, the British liberal thinker, born in 1806, also seems to have made an impact on Ambedkar’s thinking. His book ‘On Liberty’ (1869) is viewed as ‘The Bible’ of democracy, advocating the broadest possible freedom of thought and expression. Mill considered the study of society and social institutions more important for providing good governance. In his memorable speech on November 25, 1949 in the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar stressed on the spirit of democracy appealing that the hero-worship should be totally done away with because of its inherent danger to the progress of democracy. He quoted J. S. Mill, in this connection, “The second thing we must do is to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who

60. Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb, op.cit., Vol.1, p 222.
are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to entrust him with powers, which enable him to subvert their institutions.”\textsuperscript{62} This caution is all the more necessary in the case of India than any other country. For in India ‘Bhakti’ or what may be called the path of devotion or hero worship plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any country in the world. ‘Bhakti’ in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul; but in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and eventual dictatorship.\textsuperscript{63}

Taking the cue from Mill’s view, Ambedkar writes in the context of Indian society, that, “In India, the majority is not a political majority. In India, the majority is born; it is not made (as in European Democracies). That is the difference between a communal majority and a political majority. A political majority is not a fixed or a permanent majority. It is a majority, which is always made, unmade and remade. A communal majority is a permanent majority fixed in its attitude, one can destroy it but one cannot transform it. If there is no much objection to a political majority, how very fatal must be the objection to a communal majority”.\textsuperscript{64} Ambedkar frequently quoted from Mill’s ‘On Liberty’.

**Voltaire**, popularly known as the master-mind of European history and a great critic of papacy and superstition, exposed the inhuman traditions, the blind beliefs and abuses in the church affairs. Ambedkar found his description of the religious superstitions of Catholics in France quite similar to that of the traditional beliefs of upper class Hindus and like Voltaire in France, he was also preoccupied with the same work in India.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 414.
\textsuperscript{64} Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar op.cit., Vol.1, p 377.
Daniel O’Connell, an Irish campaigner against the Act of Union in 1800, also had some influence on Ambedkar’s thought, as in order to illustrate his argument, he referred to Daniel’s statement, “No man can be grateful at the cost of his honour. No woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of its liberty.”  

Harold J. Laski was another liberal thinker, whose monumental works ‘A Grammar of Politics’ and ‘Parliamentary Government in England,’ Ambedkar read and observed keenly during his stay in England. In 1922 in London, Ambedkar had read a paper on ‘Responsibilities of a Responsible Government’ before the students union, expressing a severe criticism of British Government in India. There were different reactions about this paper. Laski who was present at the Seminar, expressed his view that, “the thoughts in the paper were of revolutionary nature.”

Ambedkar had quoted Laski’s views, regarding moral order of society in particular. While describing the essential conditions for the successful working of democracy, Ambedkar held that, “Democracy requires the functioning of the moral order in society.” For Ambedkar, in democracy, ethics is something separate from politics. It is an astounding proposition that one may learn politics and may know nothing about ethics as though politics can work without ethics. Ambedkar thought that democracy was often spoken of as a free government and that’s why it meant that, “in vast aspect of social life, people are left free to carry on without interference of law, or if law has to be made, then the law maker expects that society will have enough morality in it to make the law a success.” Ambedkar wanted that the law must govern people not so much as by morality. In order to support his argument, he refers to Laski; “The only person who I think has referred to this aspect of democracy is Laski. In

---

66. Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p. 49.
68. Ibid.
one of his books, he has very categorically stated that the moral order is always taken for granted in democracy. If there is no moral order, democracy will go into pieces...”

**Influence of Western Constitutions**

Ambedkar had studied in detail the constitutions of America, England, Canada, Australia and many other countries in order to prepare a draft constitution of India. He had also gone through all the important books of western constitutionalists i.e. Prof. Dicey, Walter Begot, and John Adams, et.al. and often referred to a number of examples and quotations from them. While preparing the draft of our constitution, he seemed to have studied the functioning of many institutions in these countries such as parliamentary form of government, speaker, the position of the house, single constitution, single law, etc. from Britain, and distribution of powers between the centre and states, fundamental rights, strong Judiciary, Judicial review, checks and balances etc. from America, which will be discussed in detail in the last chapter.

Thus, the works of thinkers like John Dewey, Seligman, J.S. Mill, J. Harold, Laski, Edmund Burke, Wilson, Carlyle, Lord Acton, Dicey, James Bryce, John Adams, Jefferson, Walter Begot and a host of constitutionalists had greatly contributed in shaping the thoughts of Ambedkar. He travelled into the domain of philosophical schools from Socrates of the ancient Greece to Bertrand Russell of the 20th century England. Ambedkar studied their thoughts deeply and, therefore, had developed a fascination towards these thinkers, since he found in their works the solutions to the problems, which had tormented his mind and made him restless.

However, the study of Ambedkar’s life and thoughts reveals an independent original mind. The extensive reading of the Western thinkers

---

69. Ibid.
helped him clarify his ideas and motivated him to reflect and write on Indian social, political, economic and moral issues.

He was discerning in absorbing the views of the social thinkers, and unhesitatingly rejected which did not convince him. For example, he thought that, “Freedom of a country is the same as the freedom of the people in the country and once the freedom of the country is secured the freedom of the people is also thereby assured.” He did not find conviction with him since it did not distinguish between the freedom of the country and the freedom of the people living therein. But Ambedkar stated that even in the free and independent countries, people are enslaved as bonded labourers. He has exemplified this matter by putting forth the case of Negroes in America and untouchability in India. The resistance to the civil rights bill in independent America by the Negroes and the perpetuation of the untouchables and caste segregation even in free India are the glaring examples. Ambedkar also explains the shortcomings of the definition of ‘Great Man’ given by Voltaire and Carlyle by pointing out that merely military conquests, sincerity and intellect without the purpose of well being of the society is of no use. “A great man must be motivated by the dynamics of a social purpose and must act as the scourge and scavenger of society. These are the elements which distinguish an eminent individual from a great man and constituted his title deeds to respect and reverence.”

It seems that Ambedkar was quite discriminating in imbuing the ideas of these great thinkers. He carefully rejected what did not relate to his idea of democracy. Keer maintains that Ambedkar was deeply impressed by the life of Booker T. Washington and the 14th Amendment of USA constitution. In fact, it appears, after studying the life and works of Ambedkar that he was influenced by neither the life of Washington nor the 14th amendment of the American

---

70. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, op. cit., p. 203.
constitution. The reasons have already been mentioned in the beginning of the chapter (page 22). Lincoln had also made sincere efforts to abolish slavery and brought about equality in America. But Ambedkar’s detailed study of Lincoln revealed that the reforms introduced by Lincoln and his emancipation of Negroes was a matter of political expediency. Ambedkar, a sincere and honest social reformer, could not be swayed by the political slogans of Lincoln in connection with the freedom of Negroes since it was his political motive. Ambedkar believed that half-hearted and politically motivated social work does not lead to emancipation of the enslaved humanity. “Who has greater courage, the social reformer who challenges society and invites upon himself excommunication, or the political prisoner who challenges Government and incurs sentence of a few months or a few years imprisonment? There is also another difference, which is often lost sight of in estimating the courage shown by the social reformer and the political patriot. When the social reformer challenges the society, there is nobody to hail him a martyr. There is none even to be friend to him. He is loathed and shunned. But when the political patriot challenges Government, he has the whole society to support him. He is praised, admired and elevated as the saviour. Then, who shows more courage? The social reformer who fights alone or political patriot who fights under the cover of vast mass of supporters?” 72

Similarly, although it seems that while living in the western liberal countries, Ambedkar absorbed the basic tenets that were to be at the core of his philosophy of life, namely liberty, equality and fraternity yet the statement “Let no one, however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha”73 cannot be ignored.

73. Quoted by Dhananjay Keer, op.cit. p. 456.
Similarly, although Ambedkar was impressed by the western constitutional systems yet while drafting India’s constitution, he never copied them blindly and made requisite changes according to the Indian conditions and aspirations of the people. For example, Ambedkar advocated federalism with a strong centre in contrast to the American Federalism; Fundamental Rights to the Indians were not devised after American Bill of Rights; a republican parliamentary system of government who preferred to the hereditary Monarchy in UK. Many other institutions Ambedkar advocated shall be discussed in chapter V.