

CHAPTER VIII

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR AND THE NATURE OF THEIR IMPACT ON THE FORMATION OF HIS IDEAS

8.1 Introduction

The continuing processes of transactions and interactions that one undergoes in the society are prime and dominating factors for shaping ideas and mental model of an individual. The process of interaction between a student and his teachers, which is called as the process of education, or, the process of interaction between parent and the child, called as upbringing, are the nature of social processes that go on in the society all the time. The social value system acts as a reference point for an individual and through this anchorage point, he derives 'security'. provided through familial and special relationships. He also perceives 'opportunity' or 'threat' depending on his location in the social system. Depending upon the value system of the society, one may find himself discriminated or advantaged in the society in terms of 'opportunity' in future life. In a society, individual is not free and his relationships are mediated through the mode of his family affiliation, relationships between individual and groups and others. Most of the times, these relationships are not based on 'secular-rational' considerations but on 'notions of hereditary status'. 1 In the following sections, an attempt will be made to examine the influence of familial relationships, the process of education as well as contemporary social events that could influence the process of developing mental model and shaping ideas and vision of Dr. BR Ambedkar. 22

8.2 Early Influences

The life and time of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar and the nature of their impact on the formation of his ideas can be found to have its root years behind from the day when he was born. The social and cultural context in which his immediate blood-relations and people who dented impression in his mind and thought- making processes, were born and grew up has a significant influence. It is those people who influenced him culturally and helped him to develop his mind and- personality. The cognitive process of thinking and shaping ideas in his mind can be considered a long drawn process that had its beginning much ahead of 14th April. 1891 when BR Ambedkar was born at Military Headquarters of War (MHOW), near Indore in the present state of Madhya Pradesh. He was the fourteenth child of Ratilji Sakpal, a Subedar in British Army posted at MHO W. Ramji Sakpal (1848-1913), was born in the village named 'Ambadave. It was situated near 'Dapoli' in the adjoining Mandangad Subdivision of the Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra. Ramji, like his father Maloji Sakpal, joined British Army in 1866 and in course of time was promoted as a Subedar and served as 'Head Master of an Army school'2. The disciplined and upright nature of his father's life in British Army and thereafter influenced the upbringing of his children in a distinguished manner than a normal villager and it can be stated that it had profound influence for admiration for

'Rationality' 'and 'Rule of Law and Justice' in the mind of young Ambedkar. In 1892, the British government abandoned its century old policy of indiscrimination of castes in recruitment and banned the recruitment of "untouchables" in their armies. The policy, known as "Kitchener's Policy" upsurge a wave of protests in both inside and outside British Armies. As a friend and admirer of Mahatma Phoolley, Subedar Ramji, father of BR Ambedkar, always took great interest the social problems of his time which concerned fate of his community³. He also took a leading role in protesting against the 'Kitchener's policy'⁴. 23 As Ambedkar himself said: "Once I was examining some bundles of old paper belonging to my father, when I found in them a paper which purported to be a petition sent by the commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the Mahar Community to the Government of India, against the order issued in 1892, banning recruitment of the Mahars in the A. 5 nny. This discovery can be considered as one of the corner stones that shaped the thinking process of Ambedkar. The influence of his father, Ramji Sakpal needs a special mention in discussing the events that shaped the thoughts of Ambedkar. He used to read and recite to his children the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two unfailing sources of motive forces and great inspiration that have nurtured and molded the lives of great men in India in generations together. Subedar Ramji Sakpal was a follower DiKabir. He was a hardworking man and enforced discipline to his children. He lived a very industrious and intensely religious life and it may be stated that the strong discipline and the religious atmosphere which Ambedkar imbibed early in his childhood made him to dedicate and fight for a just cause later in his life with sincerity and devoutness⁶. Although, Ramji was earning a meager pension amount of Rupees fifty, which was inadequate to, support his family, he managed to purchase new books for Ambedkar borrowing money from his married daughters and even pawning their ornaments. It was his ardent desire that his son would one day become a scholarly person, helped Ambedkar to inculcate the zeal of becoming a well-educated person⁷ The way Ramji influenced the daily life of Ambedkar when he was studying at Elphinstone High School; Bombay is worth noticing. While the family stayed in one room chawl at Parel and there were difficulties to provide necessary space and time for study, Ramji solved the problem of Ambedkar's studies by adjusting daily routines of himself and his son ⁸. 24 Ramji Sakpal died on 2nd February 1913. Dhananjay Keer (1971), the biographer of Ambedkar described his personality as: "Thus passed away an untouchable, Subedar Ramji Malogi who was to end of his life industrious, devotional and aspiring. He died in ripe age, but poor in wealth, for he had ran into debt but was exemplary in character and unconscious of his great legacy to his class, country and humanity. Having infused in his son strength of will to resist worldly temptations and a depth of spirituality very seldom found in his son's contemporaries, he left him behind to fight the battle of fire and break the world to his way. The life of Ramji Sakpal and his son B R Ambedkar is a rare case of Depressed Class devoting father Who sacrificed everything to a son and the devoted son then dedicating himself to a divine cause of uplifting the oppressed humanity 10- Ambedkar derived from his father painstaking spirit, his forceful mental energy and the intense interest in the welfare of his society 11

8.3 Childhood Events The victory

British over last Peshwa Baji Rao II in the decisive battle of Khadki, in 1818 was seen by the people of Backward and Depressed Classes as death-nail to Brahmin orthodoxy and release of common people from the tyranny of Peshwas. Women rejoiced and people became happy that the rule of Bajirao II came to an end. With the beginning of British Rule in Western India and establishment of Bombay Province in 1818, the region came under growing influence of Western Education and thoughts. People, especially the educated segments, admired the British concepts of 'Rule of Law', liberty and fairness in justice. The demand for fairness in law-makings without favor to any caste, religion or creed became more and more as decades passed by. The protest lodged by Ramji Sakpal, father of Ambedkar and belonging to untouchable 'Mahar' community, on 'Kitchener's Policy' is a prime example of how the undercurrents in the society demanding fairness in justice was becoming stronger. Many scholars such as Baba Walangkar, Shivram Janba Kamble and others followed the suit of Ramji Sakpal. It is imperative to refer to the 'Kitchener's Policy' incidence for two specific reasons. Firstly, it is an example of the ongoing changes in the society where Ambedkar grew, secondly how Ambedkar himself was influenced by the discovery of documents that portrayed his father as a man seeking fairness of justice. Later on Ambedkar observed that: "... to the codes of law promulgated by these authorities (Governors-in- Councils of Bengal, Madras and Bombay) must be added to the whole body of English Statute law introduced in India so far as it was applicable, by the Charter of George I in 1726 and such as were expressly extended to particular parts of the country. The growing concern for untouchables among a segment of people and especially people of British Army was also evident through the effort of Gopal Krishna (alias Gopal Baba) Walangkar was born in 1840. Gopal Krishna was born at Ravdal (near Mahad, Raigad District of Chhattisgarh) and was related to Ramabai (1896-1935), who subsequently became wife of Bhimrao Ambedkar. He was an army man and having retired from the army as Havaldar in 1886, he settled down at Dapoli. Gopal Baba was a pioneer of the movement for the emancipation of the 'Untouchables' and he founded the "Anarya Dosh-Parihar Samaj (Society for removal of evils among non-Aryans) in the same year. In 1888, he published his monthly Vittal-Vidhansak (Destroyer of Ceremonial Pollution) which was the first ever journal of the 'Untouchables'. Subsequently, in 1889, he published his book in the same title. Gopal Baba died at Ravadal in 1909 and he was considered (Kadam, 1991) as the link between Jotiba Phooley and Ambedkar in the crusade against social inequality and injustice. Jotiba Phooley (1827-1890) was considered as the mentor of BR Ambedkar and in various writings. He was profoundly influenced by the ideas of Jyotiba Phooley' who inspired him to strive against Brahmanism as Phooley's focus on social reform was the education of women and Shudras. He cited ignorance as the main reason behind their low condition. Ambedkar did not forget to bring the testimony to the profound impact Jotiba Phooley had on his mind and activities. He inscribed his "Who were the Shudras" to the memory of Jotiba Phooley in order to show his respect to this great personality. Jotiba Phooley was a pillar of strength and a source of inspiration to thousands of people in Maharashtra. In 1893, when Ambedkar was only 2 years old, his father Subedar Ramji Sakpal retired from British Army and

shifted his family from MHOW to Dapoli, Maharashtra. The early childhood years of Ambedkar was not immune from shocks that he received being an untouchable child: The incidence of his elder brother, nephew and himself driving a bullock cart by themselves on a summer day to visit their father who was posted at Goregaon (in Khatav Taluka in the Satara District), where they were forced to stay thirsty from evening to midnight during the journey was 'the first fragile and shattering shock to the budding mind of Bhima(Ambedkar), that day he knew that he belonged to a family that was untouchable degraded to drink and eat on filthy things' 17 Ambedkar himself described this event to have a very important place in his life. "I was a boy of nine when it happened but it has left an indelible impression in my mind. It gave me a shock such as I never received before, and it made me think about untouchability which, before this incident happened, was with me a matter of course as it is with many touchable as well as untouchables... to However, this was only one of the many events that he faced due to his location in the social strata. Ambedkar as a child had another great shock when he came to know that the barber would prefer to shave a bullock than cutting his hair because he was an untouchable. It was his sister who used to cut his hair and wash his clothes as no washer man would wash the clothes of an untouchable. 19 Thus in his boyhood he experienced 'at the hand of his co-religionists the galling humiliations and the inhuman treatment under which his whole community had been laboring for untold ages' 20. The formal education of Ambedkar began in 1896 at Dapoli when he was sent to a Marathi School at the age of five. In the year 1900, 11th November, he was 27 admitted to a Government School at Satara in the first standard. He continued his primary and middle school studies at this school (now renamed -s Pratap Singh High School, Satara). It was at this school; his surname was changed to 'Arnbedkar' from 'Arnbadevekar' by an affectionate Brahmin teacher bearing the same surname. In his early days in the entire school, Teacher Arnbedkar and Pendse were the only ones who were kind and affectionate to him. Arnbedkar faced shameful experience in his school life also. He and his elder brother were usually made to squat Inacore- (: fifth class on a piece of gunny cloth which they had to carry themselves to the school. The teacher would not touch their note books nor did any one ask them to do anything related to class room study.