

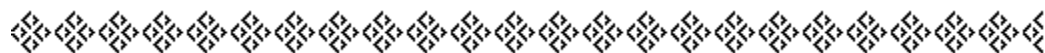
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

***who tried to turn the Wheel of the Law
toward social justice for all***

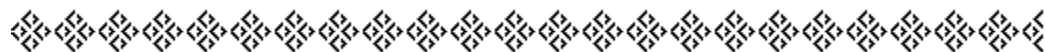
***earlier
times****

ENTWINED IN THE COILS OF CASTE

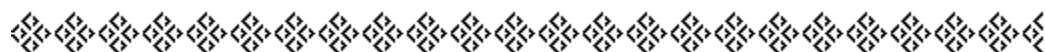
There are many theories about the caste system--about its origins, and its nature, and its varying degrees of rigor in different times, places, and circumstances. It seems safe to say that life has rarely been easy for those born into its lowest levels.



==The Purusha Sukta== The Rig Veda, the earliest Hindu text, contains a famous hymn that describes the different origins of the four castes (Book 10, Hymn 90, verses 11-12): here it is in the [**Ralph Griffith translation**](#) (1896).

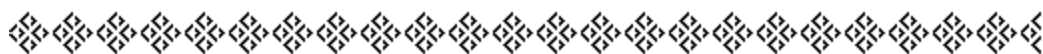


==Kautilya's Arthashastra== This well-known and influential early text (c.300's BCE and onward) is notoriously hard to date, but makes fascinating reading. Take a look for example at Book 3; many of the penalties for various crimes are carefully graded according to caste. The Shamasastri translation (1923) is the standard one: [**one site**](#); [**another site**](#).



==The Laws of Manu== This is the text (c.1st c. CE?) that Dr. Ambedkar loved to hate; he and other Dalit protesters were later to burn it. The **Laws of Manu** explains that in the beginning of the universe the great abstract principle of Brahman created all things, including the four Varnas or ranked caste-groups: 'for the sake of the prosperity of the worlds, he caused the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, and the Shudra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet' (I,31).... 'But in order to protect this universe He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate (duties and) occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet' (I,87). At the top of this fourfold system is the Brahmin: 'As the Brahmin sprang from (Brahman's) mouth, as he was the first-born, and as he possesses the **Veda**, he is by right the lord of this whole creation' (I,93). At the bottom is the Shudra: 'One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Shudra: to serve meekly even these (other) three castes [varnas]' (I,91). Above all, the contrast between the two extremes of the hierarchy is made clear: 'But a Shudra, whether bought or unbought, he [=a Brahmin] may compel to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent (Svayambhu) to be the slave of a Brahmin' (VIII,413).

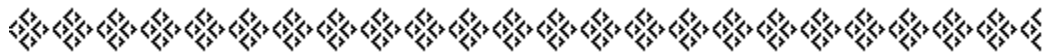
Outside the system entirely were the 'slaves' [dasyus]: 'All those tribes in this world, which are excluded from (the community of) those born from the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet (of Brahman), are called Dasyus, whether they speak the language of the Mlechchhas (barbarians) or that of the Aryans' (X,45). Among those outside the system are groups produced by illicit unions among the different varnas, who 'shall subsist by occupations reprehended by the twice-born [=the three upper varnas]' (X,46). Among these occupations are 'catching and killing (animals) living in holes', 'working in leather' (X,49), 'carry[ing] out the corpses (of persons) who have no relatives' (X,55), and 'execut[ing] criminals' (X,56). These impure groups are to live in remote, wild areas or 'near well-known trees and burial grounds' (X,50). 'Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place' (X,52). 'A man who fulfils a religious duty, shall not seek intercourse with them; their transactions (shall be) among themselves, and their marriages with their equals' (X,53). 'Their food shall be given to them by others (than an Aryan giver) in a broken dish; at night they shall not walk about in villages and in towns' (X,54). The translation here is Buehler's (1886), the one that Dr. Ambedkar himself used: *one site*; *another site*.



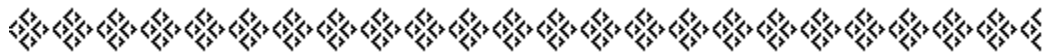
==by c.300's== By this time, specific caste groups (*jati*) of "untouchables" could be seen to exist. Discussion: Eleanor Zelliot, *Encyclopedia of Asian History* (New York: Scribner, 1988).



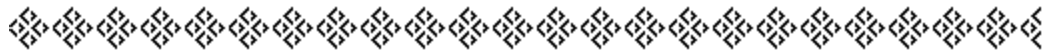
==1852== The Maharashtrian caste reformer "Mahatma" Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) ([*site*](#); [*site*](#)) started, in Poona, the first school for Untouchable children. ([*Kadam*](#), p. 63.)



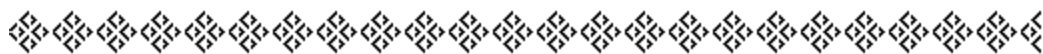
==1867== Subehdar Ramji Maloji Sanpal married Bhimabai Murbadkar. Both families belonged to the untouchable Mahar caste, and both were connected with the British Army. ([*Kadam*](#), p. 64.)



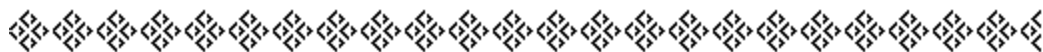
==1873== Jotirao Phule founded the Satya-Shodhak Samaj, or "Society in Search of Truth," an organization dedicated to liberating the low castes from Brahminical oppression. ([*Kadam*](#), p.65.)



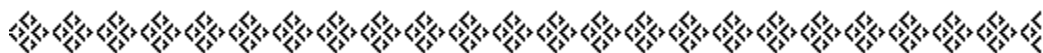
==1884== Col. Henry S. Olcott started four schools in Madras for Untouchable children. In 1880, in Ceylon, he and Madame Blavatsky ([*site*](#)) had become Buddhists. ([*Kadam*](#), p. 66.)



==1886== Gopal Baba Walangkar, another Mahar with a military background, retired from the army and settled at Dapoli, in Ratnagiri district. There he established the anti-caste organization "Anarya Dosh-Parihar Samaj." ([*Kadam*](#), pp. 66-67.)



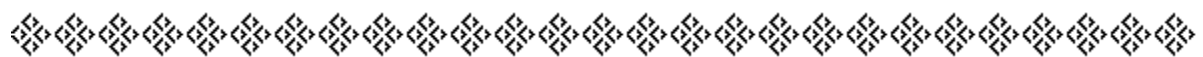
==1888== Gopal Baba Walangkar established the first Untouchable newspaper, *Vital Vidhvansak*. ([*Zelliot 1*](#), pp. 42-44.)



in the 1890's

THE STRUGGLE FOR AN EDUCATION

Born in 1891, the young Ambedkar had (for his caste, for his time and place) a relatively comfortable upbringing. But his mother died when he was only five, and his early childhood brought other painful experiences as well, as he began to experience the full degradation of his place in the sub-basement of the caste system.



==1891, April 14== Bhimrao Ramji Ambavadekar was born in the British-founded town of Mhow ([*Imperial Gazetteer*](#); [*Imperial Gazetteer map*](#)), an important military center near Indore, Madhya Pradesh ([*site*](#)). He was the fourteenth and last child of Ramji Sankpal and Bhimabai Murbadkar Sankpal. The family's ancestral town was Ambavade (in the Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra).



==1894== Gopal Baba Walangkar, retired and living in Dapoli, created the first public petition of the Untouchable movement: it asked the British colonial army to resume its recruitment of from the Untouchable castes. ([*Zelliot 1*](#), pp. 42-44.)



==1894-1896== When Bhimrao's father retired from his career with the British Army in 1894, he settled for a time in Dapoli (in Ratnagiri District: [*Imperial Gazetteer*](#); [*Imperial Gazetteer map*](#)). The young Bhimrao had his earliest education there:
"At Dapoli in Bombay Presidency, however, there was a government-aided school, and the elder Ambedkar insisted his boys be allowed to attend on the ground that he was an army officer. It was finally arranged that they and four other "untouchables" might go to the school on the condition that they stay in a room by themselves and never come in contact with the caste children, and above all that they never take a drink from the school water supply. Those terms were accepted, and the future Doctor of Philosophy of

Morningside Heights had his first conscious experience in ostracism and in learning at the same time. He was then 6 years old.

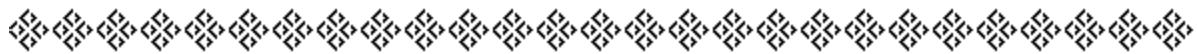
The Hindu teacher at the school never entered the room in which the outcast children were struggling with their lessons. But occasionally he went to the door, whereupon the six small boys placed their slates on the ground, where he could see them, and then retreated to a far corner to listen to any comment the teacher might have to make. They could ask no questions. If they did not understand the lesson, there was no help from the teacher.... he was the only one of the group who got beyond the first school." ([*Selden*](#).)



==1896== The family moved to Satara ([*Imperial Gazetteer*](#); [*Imperial Gazetteer map*](#)), where Ramji Sakpal found a job with the Public Works Department in Goregaon; Bhimrao was enrolled in school in Satara.



==1896== Bhimabai Sakpal died; of her fourteen children, only three sons (Balaram, Anandrao, Bhimrao) and two daughters (Manjula, Tulasa) survived her. The children were cared for by their paternal aunt Mira, who had a disabling hunchback but did her best to look after them.

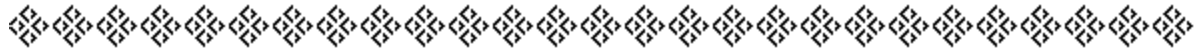


== "Our family came originally from Dapoli Taluka of the Ratnagiri District of the Bombay Presidency. From the very commencement of the rule of the East India Company, my fore-fathers had left their hereditary occupation for service in the Army of the Company. My father also followed the family tradition and sought service in the Army. He rose to the rank of an officer, and was a Subhedar when he retired. On his retirement my father took the family to Dapoli with a view to settling down there. But for some reason my father changed his mind. The family left Dapoli for Satara, where we lived till 1904." Source: [*Waiting for a Visa*](#).



== "My father was a military officer, but at the same time a very religious person. He brought me up under a strict discipline. From my early age I found certain contradictions in my father's religious way of life. He was a Kabirpanthi, though his father was Ramanandi. As such, he did not believe in Murti Puja (Idol Worship), and yet

he performed Ganapati Puja--of course for our sake, but I did not like it. He read the books of his Panth. At the same time, he compelled me and my elder brother to read every day before going to bed a portion of [the] Mahabharata and Ramayana to my sisters and other persons who assembled at my father's house to hear the Katha. This went on for a long number of years." Source: **unpublished preface to The Buddha and his Dhamma**.



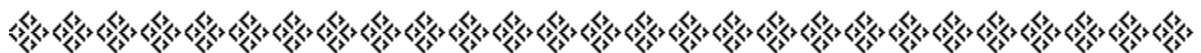
== on to the 1900's ==

-- [TIMELINE page](#) -- [Dr. Ambedkar index page](#) -- [FWP's main page](#) -
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****in the*** ***1900's****

A GUARDED GATEWAY, BUT WITH A GAP

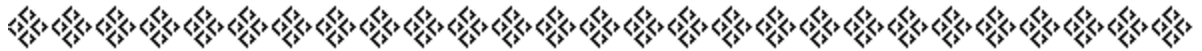
Bhimrao studied at Satara and then in Bombay, where he did so well on his exams that he was admitted to Bombay University--a unique feat for a member of the Mahar caste in his time and place. His marriage was arranged; amidst any amount of turmoil, he focused firmly on his studies.



==**1900**== Bhimrao entered the Government Middle School at Satara: "His second experience was at Satara, where he was the only untouchable pupil. He was allowed to sit in the same room with other boys, but always on the floor by himself in a remote corner. None could play with him or speak to him." (**Selden**)

"There was another Brahmin teacher in the High School. His surname was

Ambedkar. Obliging and humane, he was a very irregular teacher. He loved Bhim very much. He dropped daily a part of his meal--boiled rice, bread and vegetables--into the hands of Bhim during recess. This teacher has left his impress on the life of his pupil. The original surname of Bhim's father was Sakpal. It was a family name. Bhim drew his surname Ambavadekar from his native village of Ambavade, as Maharashtrian surnames are often derived from the names of the ancestral villages. The teacher took so much fancy to the boy that he even changed his surname from Ambavadekar to his own surname Ambedkar in the school records.... Ambedkar gratefully remembered this teacher." (*[Keer](#)*, p.14.)



== "This incident gave me a shock such as I had 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 touchables as well as the untouchables.".... "The incident, which I am recording as well as I can remember, occurred in about 1901, when we were at Satara. My mother was then dead. My father was away on service..." (*[...the story is continued in Part One of Waiting for a Visa](#)*)

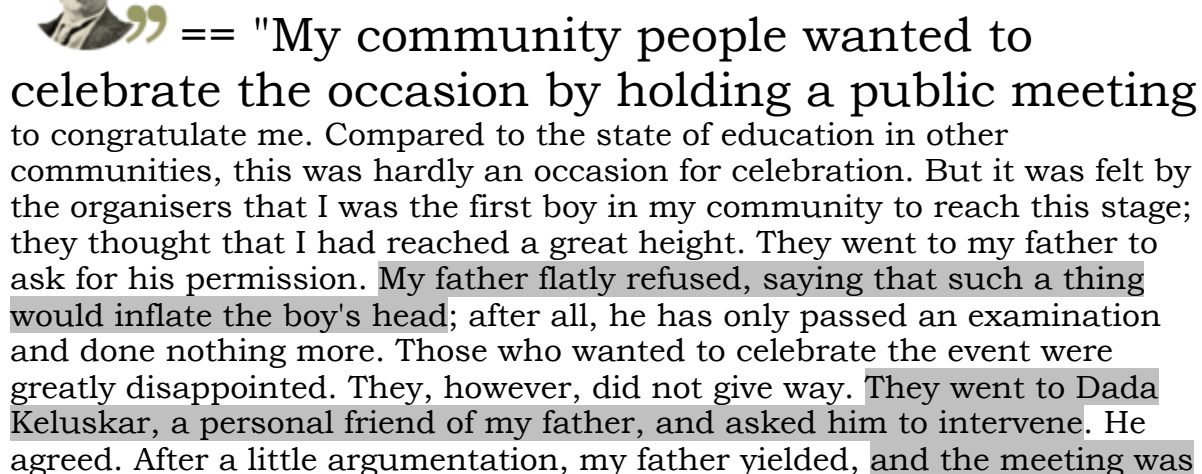
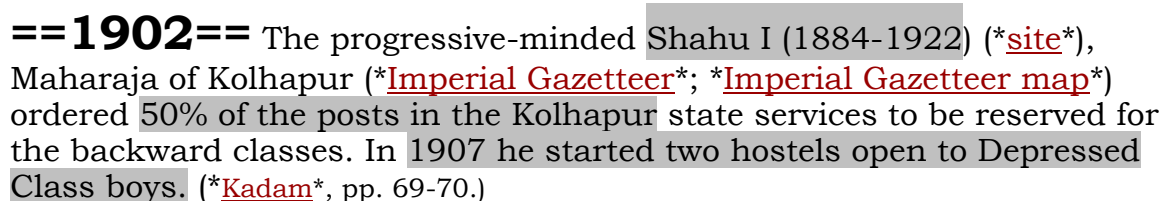


==**1901**== Ramji Sakpal, who had remarried in 1898, moved his family from Satara to Bombay, the capital city of Bombay Presidency (*[Imperial Gazetteer](#)*; *[Imperial Gazetteer map](#)*). They found housing in the Dabak Chawl, Lower Parel. Bhimrao soon entered Elphinstone High School (*[site](#)*) in Bombay:

"At the age of 13 he went to the government high school at [sic] Elphinstone, becoming its [one] untouchable student. Here also he was ostracized, but was allowed to sit alone on a back bench. By this time his abilities with his lessons began to attract attention." (*[Selden](#)*)

"One day it so happened that the class teacher called upon Bhim to come to the black board to solve an example. Instantaneously there was an uproar in the class. The caste Hindu children used to keep their tiffin-boxes behind the blackboard. Since they feared that their food would be polluted by Bhim's presence near the board, they dashed to the blackboard and hurled their tiffin-boxes aside before Bhim could reach and touch the blackboard.

During his high school days both Bhim's elder brother and he were not allowed to take up Sanskrit as the second language. It was the key to the study of the Vedas which were neither to be heard nor to be read by the Shudras and the Atishudras--the Untouchables." (*[Keer](#)*, pp.17-18.)



held. Dada Keluskar presided. He was a literary person of his time. At the end of his address he gave me as a gift a **copy of his book on the life of the Buddha**, which he had written for the Baroda Sayajirao Oriental Series. I read the book with great interest, and was greatly impressed and moved by it." Source: **unpublished preface to The Buddha and his Dhamma**.




==1908== Bhimrao entered Elphinstone College (**site**), a college affiliated with Bombay University.



==1910== Shivram Janba Kamble, another early caste reformer, organized a second Mahar conference at Jejuri; this resulted in a memorandum sent to the British government. Young Bhimrao met the reform-minded Gaikwar of Baroda, Sayaji Rao III (r.1875-1939) (**site**), who then approved a scholarship of Rs. 25 a month for his education. (**Kadam**, p. 71.)



“” == "I asked my father why he insisted upon our reading the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which recounted the greatness of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and repeated the stories of the degradation of the Shudras and the Untouchables... [the whole story is told in the unpublished preface to The Buddha and his Dhamma]."



== on to the 1910's ==

in the** **1910's

OFF TO COLUMBIA, AND ON TO LONDON

The great escape! At the age of 22, the young Ambedkar came to Columbia, and began to make the intellectual and personal connections that shaped the rest of his life. He experienced what it was to be free--for a time--from the stigma of untouchability.



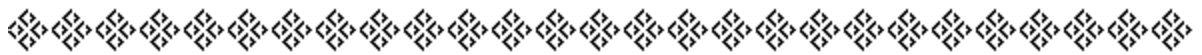
==1912== Bhimrao ([*an early photo*](#)) passed the B.A. Examination (special subjects: Economics and Politics) from Bombay University, and prepared to take a position in the administration of Baroda State ([*Imperial Gazetteer*](#); [*Imperial Gazetteer map*](#)). His oldest son, Yashwant, was born. ([*Kadam*](#), p.71.)



==1913== He had barely begun at his new post when he learned by telegram that his father was gravely ill; he rushed home just in time for a last farewell. "It was February 2, 1913, the saddest day in Bhimrao Ambedkar's life." ([*Keer*](#), p. 24.)

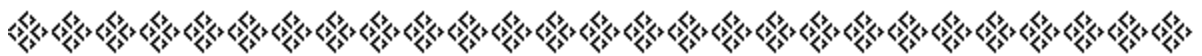


==1913== The Gaekwar of Baroda announced his decision to offer scholarships to send students for higher education at Columbia University. A scholarship of 11.50 British pounds a month, for three years, was awarded to the young Ambedkar. ([*Kadam*](#), p.72.)

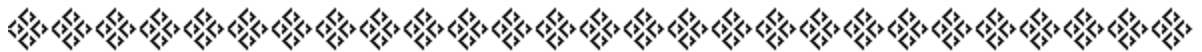


== "1913: Receives Baroda State Scholarship

to join the Political Science Department of the Columbia University as a Post Graduate Student where he worked under Professors Seligman, Clark, Seager, Moore, Mitchell, Chadwick, Simkovitch, Giddings, Dewey and Goldenweiser." (Source: a curriculum vitae from the 1920's, preserved in the Columbia University archives, that was almost certainly prepared by Dr. Ambedkar himself.) NOTE: he was in fact admitted to the Graduate School in general (things were less compartmentalized in those days) and not formally to a "political science department."



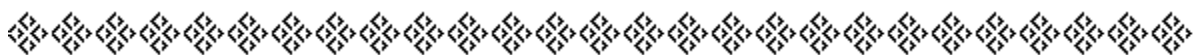
==1913== Arriving in New York during the third week in July, Bhimrao was housed in Hartley Hall (*[site](#)*). But he didn't care for the food, and only stayed for a week. In August he moved from Hartley Hall to "Cosmopolitan Club" (554 West 114th Street) (*[photo](#)*; *[New York Times article](#)*), a housing club maintained by a group of Indian students. He finally settled in a dormitory, Livingston Hall (since renamed Wallach Hall (*[photo](#)*), with his friend Naval Bhathena, a Parsi; the two remained friends for life. (*[Keer](#)*, pp. 26-27.)



== "'The best friends I have had in life,' Dr. Ambedkar says, 'were some of my classmates at Columbia and my great professors, John Dewey, James Shotwell, Edwin Seligman, and James Harvey Robinson.'" (Source: "'Untouchables' Represented by Ambedkar, '15AM, '28PhD," *Columbia Alumni News*, Dec. 19, 1930, page 12; from the Columbia University archives.)



==At Columbia: Prof. John Dewey: One of the major philosophers of education of the twentieth century, John Dewey (1859-1952) (*[site](#)*) became one of the young Ambedkar's heroes. Writing in 1936, Ambedkar referred to the work of "Prof. John Dewey, who was my teacher and to whom I owe so much." (--*[Annihilation of Caste, Section 25](#)*)

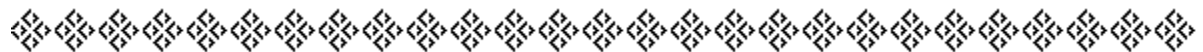


==At Columbia: Profs. Shotwell and Robinson:

Another of the young Ambedkar's mentors, Prof. James Shotwell (1874-1965) (*[site](#)*) was a Barnard historian who specialized in international relations, and a former student of Prof. James Harvey Robinson (1863-1936) (*[site](#)*), Barnard's first historian-- who himself was another of the mentors named by Dr. Ambedkar.



==At Columbia: Prof. Edwin Seligman: A friend of Lala Lajpat Rai (*[site](#)*), the well-known economist Edwin R. A. Seligman (1861-1939) (*[site](#)*) became a particularly sympathetic mentor to the young Ambedkar, who continued to correspond with him for years.



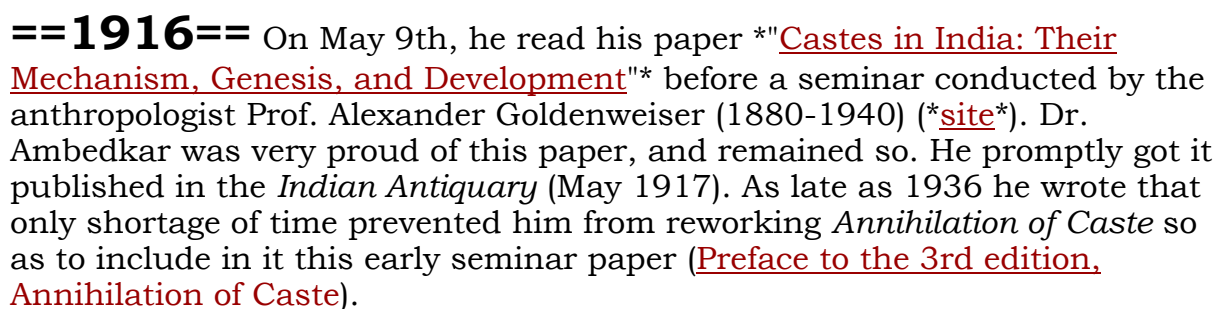
==At Columbia: coursework: During Ambedkar's time at Columbia he would sit for hours studying in *[Low Library](#)*; the rotunda then housed the main reading room. His *[coursework](#)* during his three years (including summers) at Columbia consisted of: 29 courses in economics, 11 in history, 6 in sociology, 5 in philosophy, 4 in anthropology, 3 in politics, and 1 each in elementary French and German. (Source: Office of the Registrar, Columbia University.)



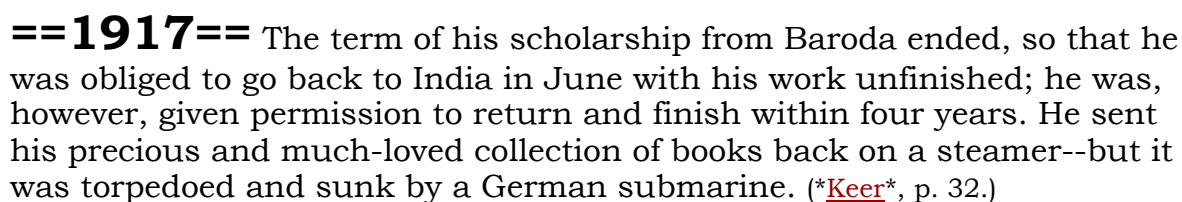
== "[Parents] can mold the destiny of children, and if we but follow this principle, be sure that we shall soon see better days; and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is pursued side by side with female education, the fruits of which you can very well see verified in your own daughter," Ambedkar wrote from New York in a Marathi letter to a friend of his father. "Let your mission therefore be to educate and preach the idea of education to those at least who are near to and in close contact with you." (*[Keer](#)*, pp. 26-27.)



==1915== The young graduate student passed his M.A. exam in June, majoring in Economics, with Sociology, History, Philosophy, and Anthropology as other subjects of study; he presented a thesis, *"[Ancient Indian Commerce](#)"*. For his outstanding achievement, he was honored by students and professors of the Faculty of Arts at a special dinner. In 1916 he offered another M.A. thesis, "National Dividend of India--A Historic and Analytical Study"; it was this one that later became the nucleus of his Ph.D. dissertation. (*[Keer](#)*, p. 29.)




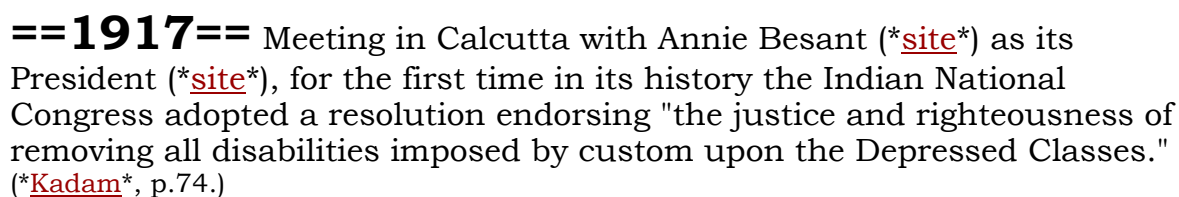
==1916== In June he went to London, and in October he was admitted to Gray's Inn (**site**) for Law, and to the London School of Economics and Political Science (**site**) for Economics, where he was allowed to start work on a doctoral thesis. He often worked in the British Library Reading Room (**site**).



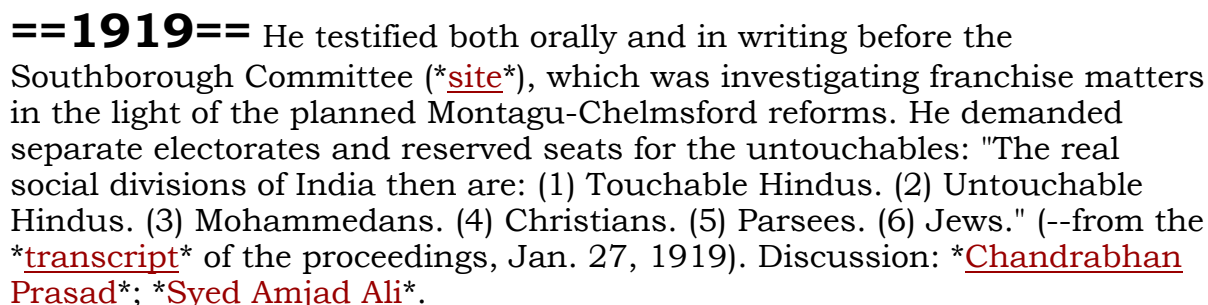
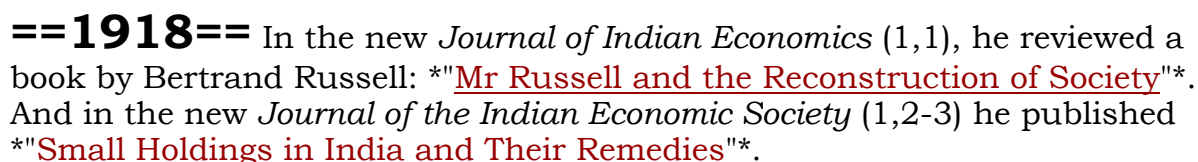
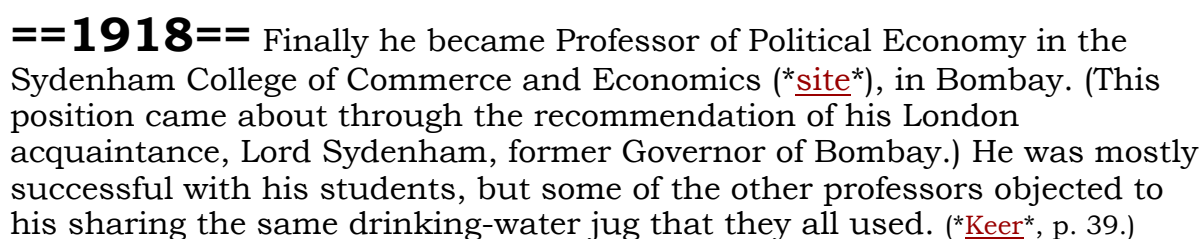
==1917== He was appointed Military Secretary to the Gaikwar of Baroda; he had agreed to join the Baroda service as a condition of his scholarship. But this experience was not a happy one. Even to reach Baroda, he had to pay his own expenses; he used the damages paid by Thomas Cook and Company for his torpedoed luggage. And when he arrived in Baroda, things went from bad to worse:



 == "My five years of staying in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable, and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem to himself and to others. But when I came out of the station, my mind was considerably disturbed by a question, 'Where to go? Who will take me?'[the story is continued in Part Two of *Waiting for a Visa*)



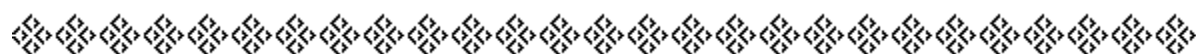
==1918== After the Baroda fiasco, he tried to find ways to make a living for his growing family. With the help of Parsi friends, he became a private tutor, and found some work as an accountant. He also started an investment consulting business, but it failed when his clients learned that he was an untouchable. (***Keer***, pp. 37-38.)



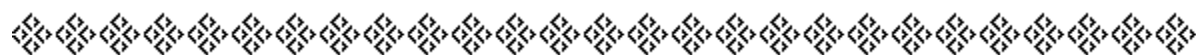
****in the*** ***1920's****

HOW TO ORGANIZE THE DOWNTRODDEN?

Dr. Ambedkar completed his academic work, and began in earnest his lifelong struggle for political rights and social justice for the downtrodden, and especially for the untouchables; his activities started to bring him into conflict with the views and plans of the Congress Party.



==1920== Dr. Ambedkar started a weekly paper, "Mooknayak" ("Leader of the Voiceless"), in Marathi, with the help of the reform-minded Shahu I (1884-1922) ([*site*](#)), Maharaja of Kolhapur ([*Imperial Gazetteer*](#); [*Imperial Gazetteer map*](#)). In the first issue he called India a "home of inequality," and described Hindu society as "a tower which had several storeys without a ladder or an entrance. One was to die in the storey in which one was born." The Depressed Classes must be saved "from perpetual slavery, poverty, and ignorance"; herculean efforts must be made "to awaken them to their disabilities." ([*Keer*](#), pp.41-42.)



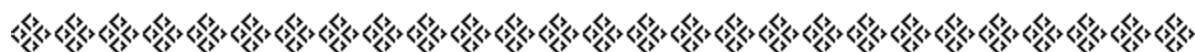
==1920== In March, he spoke at a Depressed Classes conference in Mangaon in Kolhapur State; it was attended by the Maharaja of Kolhapur, who publicly praised him as a future national leader. At the end of the conference the Maharaja and his courtiers shocked the tradition-minded by actually dining with Ambedkar and his caste members. ([*Keer*](#), p. 42.)



==1920== In May, the Maharajah of Kolhapur convened another such conference, in Nagpur ([*Imperial Gazetteer*](#); [*Imperial Gazetteer map*](#)), a town later to acquire a major symbolic significance in Dr. Ambedkar's life. "At the conclusion of the conference, Ambedkar made an attempt in the direction of consolidating the forces of the Depressed Classes. In the Central Provinces the Mahar community had eighteen sub-castes. He called the leaders of the community together and gave a dinner in which they all participated. It should be noted that with great persuasion Ambedkar could get all the sub-castes of the Mahar community, and not all the Untouchable communities, to dine together. It was not possible yet to make all the communities belonging to the Untouchables participate in an intercaste dinner!" ([*Keer*](#), p. 43.)



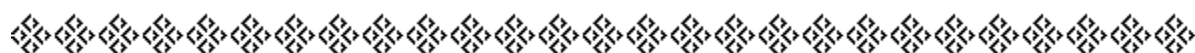
==1920== Having resigned from his teaching position, in July he returned to London, relying on his own savings, supplemented by loans from the Maharaja of Kolhapur and his friend Naval Bhathena. He returned to the London School of Economics, and to Gray's Inn to read for the Bar. He lived in poverty, and studied constantly in the British Museum ([*site*](#)). ([*Keer*](#), pp. 44-46.)



== "My dear Prof. Seligman,
You will probably be surprized to see me back in London. I am on my way to New York but I am halting in London for about two years to finish a piece or two of research work which I have undertaken. Of course I long to be with you again for it was when I was thrown into academic life by reason of my being a professor at the Sydenham College of Commerce & Economics in Bombay, that I realized the huge debt of gratitude I owe to the Political Science Faculty of the Columbia University in general and to you in particular.

While I am in London I wish to utilize certain research facilities and I should be extremely obliged if you can send me a letter of introduction to Prof. Sidney Webb, Profs. Marshall, Nicholson and Foxwell. I am sure you know them and will not withhold this much kindness from your loving student,
B. R. Ambedkar
London, 3/8/20"

(Source: letter of August 3, 1920, Seligman papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University)



==1922== Through unremitting hard work, Ambedkar once again overfulfilled all expectations: he completed a thesis for a M.Sc. (Economics)

degree at London School of Economics, and was called to the bar ([*photo*](#)), and submitted a Ph.D. thesis in economics to the University of London. ([*Keer*](#), pp. 48-49.)



== "My dear Prof. Seligman, Having lost my manuscript of the original thesis when the steamer was torpedoed on my way back to India in 1917 I have written out a new thesis... [[...from the letter of Feb. 16, 1922, Seligman papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University](#)]"



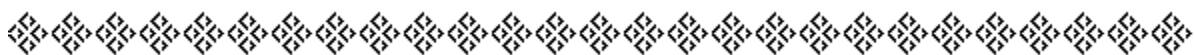
==**1922**== He planned to do further research in economics at the University of Bonn (and also toyed with the idea of studying Sanskrit there). He sent to the university [*a handwritten letter and CV in German*](#), but the whole project didn't work out ([*source*](#)). He soon had to return to London to deal with challenges to his thesis.



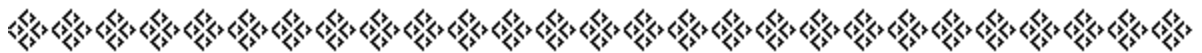
==**1923**== His Ph.D. thesis at the University of London, [*"The Problem of the Rupee"](#), was challenged on political grounds (for its allegedly subversive, anti-British implications), but was resubmitted and finally accepted; it was at once published in London (by P. S. King and Son, Ltd.), and was "dedicated to the memory of my father and mother, as a token of my abiding gratitude for the sacrifices they made and the enlightenment they showed in the matter of my education." ([*Keer*](#), pp. 49-50.)



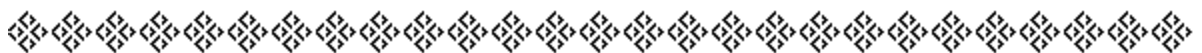
==**1924**== Back in India, Dr. Ambedkar began to practice as a barrister in Bombay, and also began to lecture part-time at Batliboi's Accountancy Training Institute. He founded the "Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha" (Group for the Wellbeing of the Excluded), to help the Depressed Classes mobilize. Its motto was "Educate, Agitate, Organise." ([*Kadam*](#), pp. 80-81.)



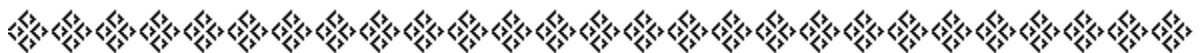
==**1925**== He published his London School of Economics M.A. thesis as [*"The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India"](#); it was dedicated to the Gaikwar of Baroda ("for his help in the matter of my education"), and had an introduction by Prof. Seligman. He also gave [*testimony before the Royal Commission on Indian Currency and Finance*](#). ([*Kadam*](#), p. 81.)



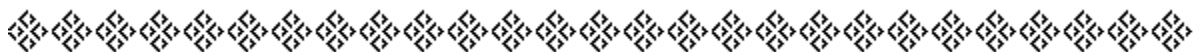
== "There is no use pretending that I and my wife have recovered from the shock of our son's death, and I do not think that we ever shall. We have in all buried four precious children, three sons and a daughter, all lively, auspicious, and handsome children. The thought of this is sufficiently crushing, let alone the future which would have been theirs if they had lived....My last boy was a wonderful boy, the like of whom I have seldom seen. With his passing away life to me is a garden full of weeds. But enough of this, I am too overcome to write any more." (--A letter to a friend, Aug. 16, 1926, quoted in [*Keer*](#), p. 66.)



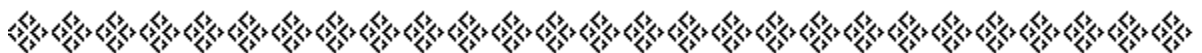
==**1926**== The Governor of Bombay nominated him as a member of the Bombay Legislative Council; he took his duties seriously, and often delivered speeches on economic matters. Here are some of his [*important speeches, 1927-28*](#).



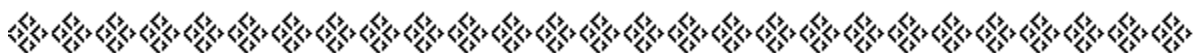
==**1926**== He led the satyagraha at Mahad to exercise the right of Untouchables to draw water from the Chavdar Tank. He ceremonially took a drink of water from the tank, after which local caste Hindus rioted, and Brahmins took elaborate measure for the ritual purification of the tank. ([*Kadam*](#), p. 83.)



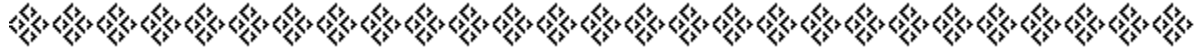
==**1927**== On January 1st, he held a meeting at the Koregaon Victory Memorial, 17 miles from Poona, which commemorates the defeat of the Peshwa's forces and the inauguration of British rule. The names of Mahar soldiers who fought with the British are inscribed there on a marble tablet. Such meetings still take place annually there on that day. ([*Kadam*](#), pp. 82-83; Eleanor Zelliot, personal communication, Feb. 2005)



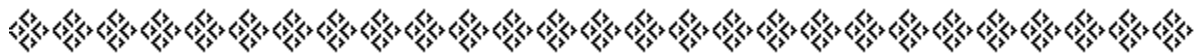
==**1927**== On June 8, he was formally awarded the Ph.D. degree from Columbia University. His Ph.D. thesis was [*"The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India"](#). (Note: different dates are given in different sources for this event, but this is the one given on his own official transcript, preserved in the Registrar's Office, Columbia University.)



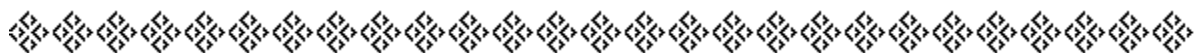
==1927== On December 24th, he addressed a second Depressed Classes Conference in Mahad; he attacked the **Laws of Manu** ([*one site*](#); [*another site*](#)), and then a copy of this ancient text was publicly burned, to the shock and horror of many caste Hindus. ([*Kadam*](#), p. 87.)



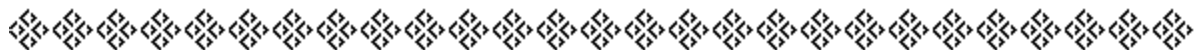
==1928== Dr. Ambedkar was appointed Professor at the Government Law College, Bombay; his term of appointment ended in 1929. ([*Kadam*](#), p. 89.)



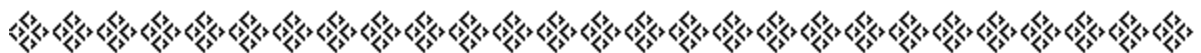
==1928== Dr. Ambedkar was selected as a member of the Bombay Presidency Committee to work with the Simon Commission, drafting guidelines for political change in India. Congress decided to boycott the Simon Commission because it had no Indians on it. Discussion: [*Syed Amjad Ali*](#); [*Banglapedia*](#). Dissenting from the views of many of his colleagues, Dr. Ambedkar prepared [*a detailed report*](#) setting out his own recommendations.



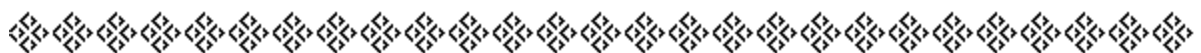
==1929== Dr. Ambedkar closed his second journal, "Bahiskrit Bharat" ("Excluded India"), which he had started in 1927, and replaced it with the "Janata" ("The People"), which was published until 1956, when it took on the name "Prabuddha Bharata" (after his conversion). ([*Kadam*](#), p. 93; Eleanor Zelliot, private communication, Jan. 2005.)



==1929== On Oct. 23, during a visit to Chalisgaon, he had a bad accident, and was confined to bed until the last week of December:



== "At Chalisgaon I got down to go to a village on the Dhulia line, to investigate a case of social boycott which had been declared by the caste Hindus against the untouchables of that village. The untouchables of Chalisgaon came to the station and requested me to stay for the night with them.... [\[the story is continued in Part Three of Waiting for a Visa\]](#)



== on to the 1930's ==

-- [TIMELINE page](#) -- [Dr. Ambedkar index page](#) -- [FWP's main page](#) -

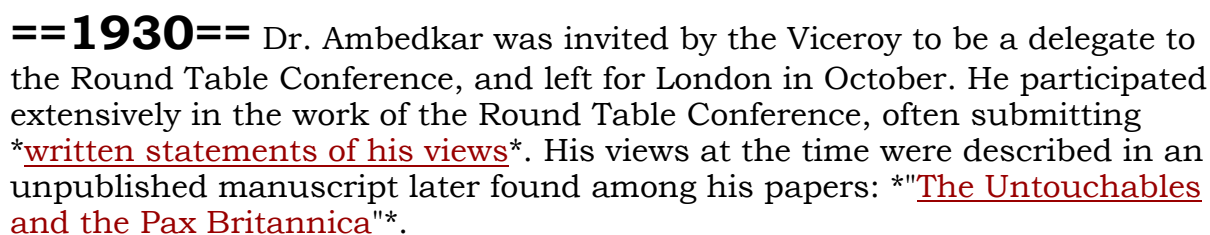
****in the***
1930's*

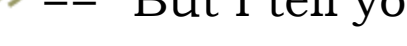
**CONFLICT,
CONTROVERSY, AND
CONGRESS**

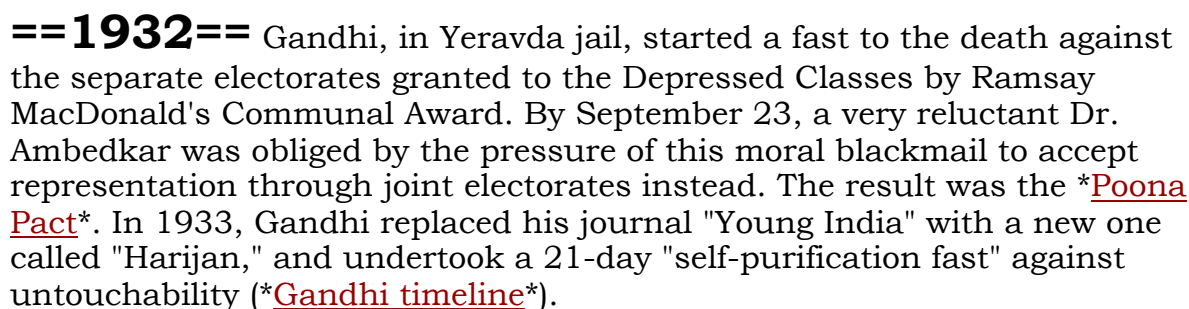
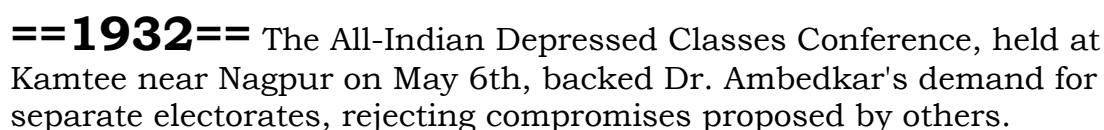
Dr. Ambedkar was now in the midst of his career; this was the central and perhaps most controversy-filled decade of his whole complex life. He was often at odds with Congress, and was attacked by the nationalist press as a traitor. But as always, through all difficulties and frustrations, he persevered.



==1930== On Aug. 8, Dr. Ambedkar presided over the Depressed Classes Congress at Nagpur, and made a major speech: he endorsed Dominion status, and criticized Gandhi's Salt March and civil disobedience movement as inopportune; but he also criticized British colonial misgovernment, with its famines and immiseration. He argued that the "safety of the Depressed Classes" hinged on their "being independent of the Government and the Congress" both: "We must shape our course ourselves and by ourselves." His conclusion emphasized self-help: "Political power cannot be a panacea for the ills of the Depressed Classes. Their salvation lies in their social elevation. They must cleanse their evil habits. They must improve their bad ways of living.... They must be educated.... There is a great necessity to disturb their pathetic contentment and to instil into them that divine discontent which is the spring of all elevation." (-- [*Keer*](#), pp. 141-143.)



 == "But I tell you that the Congress is not sincere about its professions. Had it been sincere, it would have surely made the removal of untouchability a condition, like the wearing of khaddar, for becoming a member of the Congress." On August 14th, 1931, Dr. Ambedkar met with Gandhi for the first time. From Gandhi's side, *their discussion* was an absent-minded rebuke that seemed to be more in sorrow than in anger; from Ambedkar's side, it was an outburst of passionate reproach.

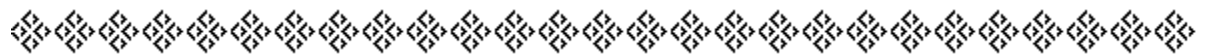




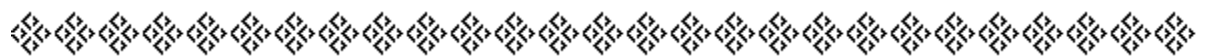
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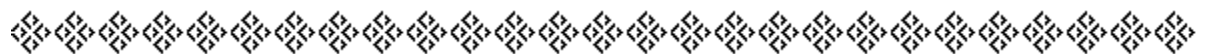
==1935== In December, Dr. Ambedkar was invited by the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore (**Imperial Gazetteer**; **Imperial Gazetteer map**), a caste-reform organization, to preside over its annual conference in the spring of 1936.



==1935/6== He composed (or began to compose?), but did not publish, a brief, moving, and largely autobiographical memoir called **Waiting for a Visa**.



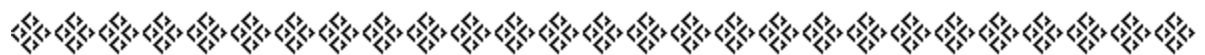
==1936== On April 13-14th, he addressed the Sikh Mission Conference in Amritsar (**Imperial Gazetteer**; **Imperial Gazetteer map**), and reiterated his intention of renouncing Hinduism.



==1936== In late April, the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal realized the radical nature of its guest's planned speech, and withdrew its earlier invitation. On May 15th, Dr. Ambedkar published the speech he would have given, with an introductory account of the whole controversy. The result, a slim little book called **The Annihilation of Caste**, became (in)famous at once.



==1936== On May 31st, Dr. Ambedkar addressed the Mumbai Elaka Mahar Parishad (Bombay Mahar Society), during a meeting at Naigaum (Dadar), in Bombay. He spoke in Marathi, to his own people, with vividness and poignancy: **"What Path to Salvation?"**. This was the only time he addressed an audience expressly limited to Mahars. [--Eleanor Zelliot, personal communication, Jan. 2005]



==1936== In August, he founded his first political party, the Independent Labour Party, which contested 17 seats in the 1937 General Elections, and won 15. (--**Kadam**, pp.109-10)

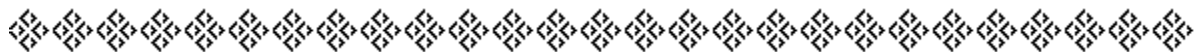


==1936== The Maharaja of Travancore (**Imperial Gazetteer**; **Gazetteer map**) issued a proclamation allowing temple entry to the

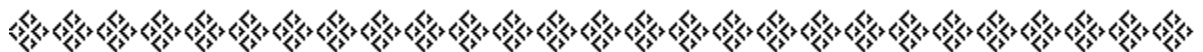
Depressed Classes; this was the first such event in modern India. (--*[Kadam](#)*, p.110)



==1937== Dr. [Ambedkar published the second edition](#) of *"[The Annihilation of Caste](#)"*, adding a concluding appendix that featured a debate with Gandhi over the speech. This work remained a bestseller, going through many editions in the coming years--and exciting much controversy. "It was logic on fire, pinching and pungent, piercing and fiery, provocative and explosive." (--*[Keer](#)*, p. 269.)



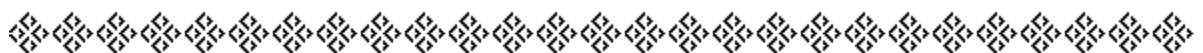
==1938== Over Dr. Ambedkar's vigorous protests, in January Congress adopted Gandhi's own term "Harijans" ("Children of God") as the official name for the "scheduled castes." In protest against a term that he considered condescending and meaningless, Dr. Ambedkar and his party staged a walkout from the Bombay Legislative Assembly. Dr Ambedkar made a number of significant *[speeches to the Assembly, 1938-39](#)*. (--*[Kadam](#)*, p.111)



==1939== In January, he delivered to the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics a lecture called *"[Federation versus Freedom](#)"*.



==1939== During the debate over Congress's plan to leave the government in protest at not having been consulted about the declaration of war on Germany, Dr. Ambedkar made his own loyalties very clear: "Wherever there is any conflict of interests between the country and the Untouchables, so far as I am concerned, the Untouchables' interests will take precedence over the interests of the country. I am not going to support a tyrannising majority simply because it happens to speak in the name of the country.... As between the country and myself, the country will have precedence; as between the country and the Depressed Classes, the Depressed Classes will have precedence." (--*[Keer](#)*, p. 329.)



==1939== In November, Congress left the government. Jinnah arranged the celebration of a "Day of Deliverance," and Dr. Ambedkar enthusiastically joined him. Dr. Ambedkar was careful to emphasize, however, that this was an anti-Congress rather than an anti-Hindu move; if Congress interpreted it as anti-Hindu, the reason could only be, he said,

that Congress was a Hindu body after all. (--*[Keer](#)*, p. 330.)



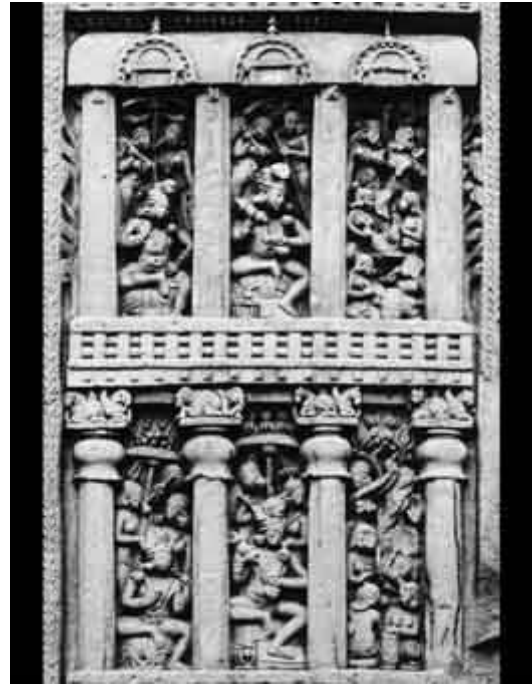
== on to the 1940's ==

****in the*** ***1940's****

CORRIDORS OF POWER, AND THE CONSTITUTION

Dr. Ambedkar was now lecturing and writing constantly, and was heavily involved in politics. With Independence (and Partition), he joined Nehru's cabinet as India's first Minister of Law, and became the Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Constitution.

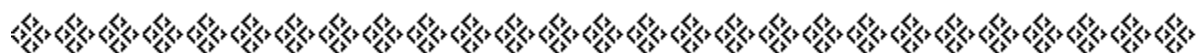
Framing the Constitution and guiding it through to adoption was his greatest political achievement.



==**1940**== In December, Dr. Ambedkar published the first edition of his *"[Thoughts on Pakistan](#)"*. In this work he argued that though partition would be an unfortunate thing, it wouldn't be the worst possible outcome, and if the Muslims wanted it they had a perfect right to claim it.



==**1942**== He founded his second political party, the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation, which didn't do so well in the elections of 1946. (--*[Kadam](#)*, p.115)



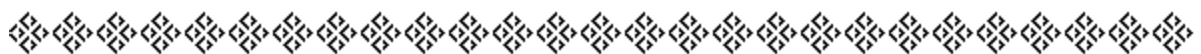
==1942== Dr. Ambedkar was inducted into the Viceroy's Executive Council as Labour Member, a position which he held until his resignation in June 1946. His thoughtful comments in that forum cover *various topics* (see #6.). (--*Kadam*, p.115)



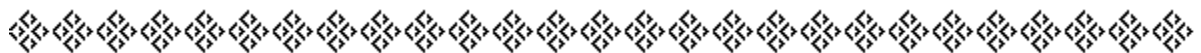
==1942== Congress started the "Quit India" movement (discussion: *Abul Kalam Azad*; *Gandhi's original draft resolution*; *Sir Stafford Cripps's reply*; *The Hindu, August 1942*; *Manas*). Dr. Ambedkar severely criticized this move. He described it as "both irresponsible and insane, a bankruptcy of statesmanship and a measure to retrieve the Congress prestige that had gone down since the war started. It would be madness, he said, to weaken law and order at a time when the barbarians were at the gates." (--*Keer*, p. 354.)



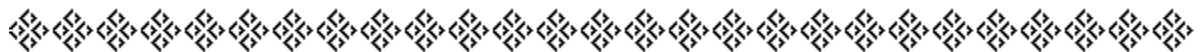
==1943== On January 19th he delivered the Presidential Address on the occasion of the 101st birth anniversary of Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade. It was published in book form in April, under the title *"Ranade, Gandhi, and Jinnah"*.



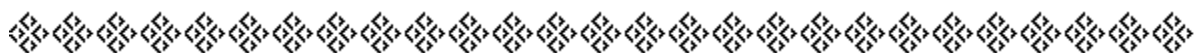
==1943== In September he also prepared and published the vigorous memorandum, *"Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables"*.



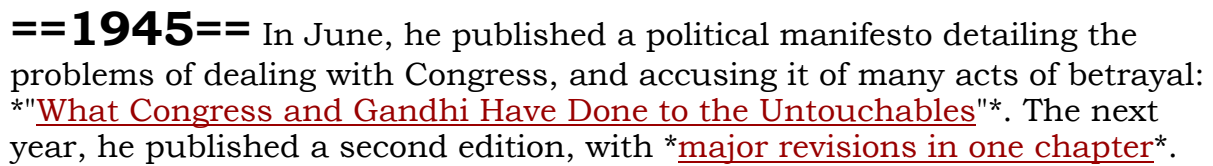
==1944== On January 29th, he presided over the second meeting of the Scheduled Caste Federation, in Kanpur; here is a report, sixty years later, by *Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp*.



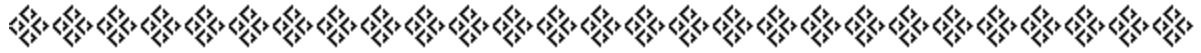
==1945== In February, he published a revised version of "Thoughts on Pakistan"; this second, expanded edition was called *"Pakistan; or Partition of India"*. A third edition of this book was published in 1946.



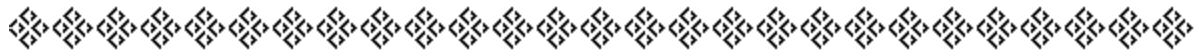
==1945== On May 6th he addressed the Annual Conference of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, held at Parel, Bombay. This speech was soon published as *"The Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve It"*.



==1948== In October, he prepared a memorandum on *"[Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province](#)"*, expressing his views for submission to the Linguistic Provinces Commission.



==1948== He published *"[The Untouchables: a Thesis on the Origin of Untouchability](#)"* (New Delhi: Amrit Book Company), as a sequel to his book on the Shudras. As always on this subject, he wrote with passion. In the Preface he said, "The Hindu Civilisation.... is a diabolical contrivance to suppress and enslave humanity. Its proper name would be infamy. What else can be said of a civilisation which has produced a mass of people... who are treated as an entity beyond human intercourse and whose mere touch is enough to cause pollution?"



==1948== In November, the Draft *"[Constitution](#)"* with its 315 articles and 8 schedules was formally introduced to the Constituent Assembly. Dr. Ambedkar concluded his speech: "I feel that the Constitution is workable; it is flexible and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peace time and in war time. Indeed, if I may say so, if things go wrong under the new Constitution the reason will not be that we had a bad Constitution. What we will have to say is that Man was vile." (--*[Keer](#)*, p.410.)



==1949== In November, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution, including Article 17, which formally abolished untouchability.



in the** **1950's

EMBRACING THE WHEEL OF THE LAW

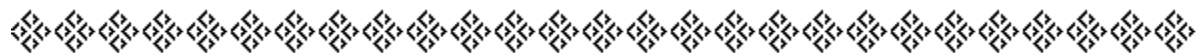
Increasingly ill with diabetes, and bitterly disappointed by the political behavior of Nehru and Congress, Dr. Ambedkar resigned from the Cabinet, and then left political life. In a huge ceremony at Nagpur, he became a convert to Buddhism; and within a few months he was dead.



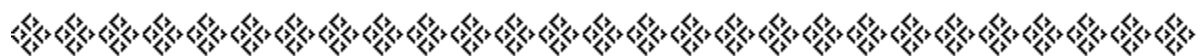
==1950== Dr. Ambedkar gave several addresses about Buddhism; in May, he flew to Colombo ([*site*](#)), in Sri Lanka, to pursue further Buddhist connections.



==1951== In February, he introduced in Parliament the "Hindu Code Bill" that he had drafted, which included greatly expanded rights for women; it proved very controversial, and consideration of it was postponed: [*on the Hindu Code Bill*](#) (see #8). (--[*Kadam*](#), pp. 121-22)

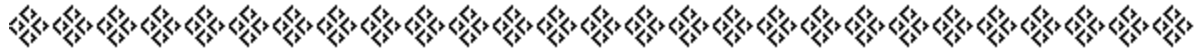


==1951== In September, Dr. Ambedkar resigned from the Cabinet, embittered over the failure of Nehru and the Congress to back the Hindu Code Bill as they had earlier pledged to do. He became the [*Leader of the Opposition*](#) (see #9.) Discussion: [*The Hindu*](#); [*Time Magazine*](#). (--[*Kadam*](#), pp. 121-22)



==1952== Dr. Ambedkar received an honorary L.L.D. degree from Columbia University as part of its Bicentennial Special Convocation. The

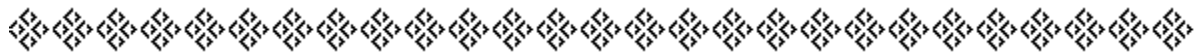
President described him as "one of India's leading citizens--a great social reformer and a valiant upholder of human rights."



==1953== His political thinking included analysis of the issue of linguistic states; he published *"[Need for Checks and Balances](#)"* (*Times of India*, April 23, 1953) on this question. In 1955, he was still working on the subject, as the preface (dated Dec. 23, 1955) to *"[Thoughts on Linguistic States](#)"* testified.



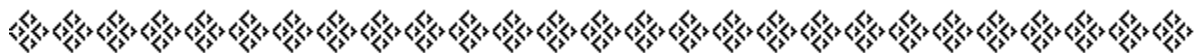
==1954== In the midst of his round of (increasingly embittered) Parliamentary and other activity, his health gave way; he was confined to bed for two months.



==1954== While dedicating a new Buddhist vihara near Poona, Dr. Ambedkar announced that he was writing a book on Buddhism, and that as soon as it was finished, he planned to make a formal conversion to Buddhism. He also claimed that the image of Vithoba at Pandharpur (*[site](#)*) was in reality an image of the Buddha, and said that he would write a thesis to prove this claim. (--*[Keer](#)*, p. 482.)



==1956== Dr. Ambedkar brought the manuscript of *"[The Buddha and His Dhamma](#)"* to completion. "In February 1956 two new chapters are added to it: 'There is no god'; 'There is no soul'.... On March 15, 1956, Ambedkar wrote the Preface to his book in his own handwriting and dictated it to Rattu [his secretary]. Printing began in May, but was slowed by constant last-minute revisions of the proofs. (--*[Keer](#)*, pp. 488-489, 491.)

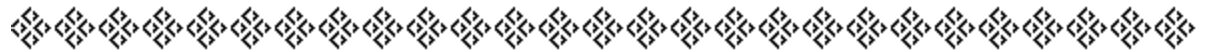


==1956== From June to October, he was bedridden in his Delhi residence. His eyes were failing, he suffered from side effects of the drugs he was given for his diabetes, he felt deeply depressed.



==1956== His formal conversion took place on Oct. 14th in Nagpur, a town selected for reasons he explained in his moving speech, *"[Why Was Nagpur Chosen?](#)"*. Many thousands of Mahars and other Dalits accepted

Buddhism along with him.



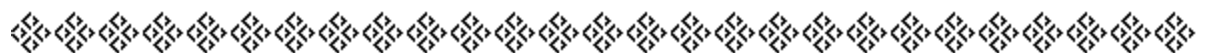
==1956== In November, he flew to Kathmandu to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference.



==1956== On Dec. 2, he completed the manuscript of *"[The Buddha or Karl Marx](#)"*, his last finished work, and gave it for typing.



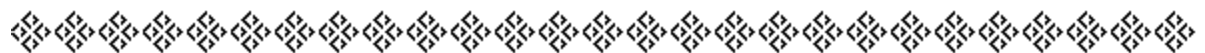
==1956== On the night of Dec. 5 or the early morning of Dec. 6, he died quietly in his sleep; on Dec. 7 there was a huge Buddhist-style funeral procession in Bombay, and he was cremated on the seashore.



==1957== *"[The Buddha and His Dhamma](#)"*, Dr. Ambedkar's own version of a Buddhist scripture for his people, was posthumously published, by Siddharth College Publications, Bombay.



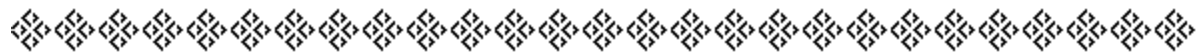
==1957 and beyond== A number of unfinished typescripts and handwritten drafts were found among his notes and papers and gradually made available. Among these were *"[Waiting for a Visa](#)"*, which probably dates from 1935-36, and *"[Untouchables, or the Children of India's Ghetto](#)"*, which refers to the census of 1951 and so must be quite late; other unpublished fragments as well will be found on the *ambedkar.org* website.



since then

BECOMING A BODHISATTVA

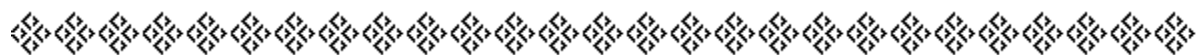
Dr. Ambedkar remains a symbolic presence and rallying point for Dalits, both those who have converted to Buddhism and those who have not. Statues of him are built in towns and cities all over India, and become sites of political struggle. His birthday is celebrated with huge processions, and his tomb in Bombay is a place of pilgrimage.



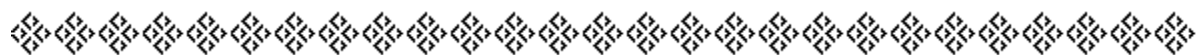
==1991== At Columbia University's Ambedkar Centenary Celebration, Prof. David Lelyveld gives a talk about his achievements: [*"Burning up the Dharmasastras: Group Identity and Social Justice in the Thought of B. R. Ambedkar"*](#). And Prof. Eleanor Zelliot gives a talk called [*"Dr. Ambedkar in America"*](#).



==1995== [*"Mrs. Savita Ambedkar visits Columbia"*](#), on the occasion of the installation of a bust of Dr. Ambedkar.



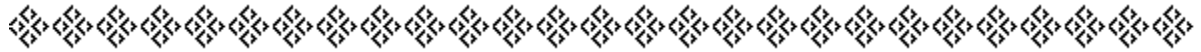
==2004== Columbia University honors Dr. Ambedkar in the course of its [*"250th birthday celebration"*](#).



==2009== Columbia University honors Dr. Ambedkar with a conference on [*"Caste, Ambedkar, and Contemporary India"*](#). Associated with the conference is an online [*"area studies exhibit"*](#) by the Columbia University Libraries.



== MUCH MORE TO COME ! ==



SOME FURTHER REFLECTIONS:

"Ambedkar.org," news reports of Dalit activism and atrocities: [*site*](#)

Ambedkar Mission of Canada, **One Hundred Years For Freedom**, a centennial celebration, 1991: [*site*](#)

CNN documentary on untouchability with Christianne Amanpour, March 21, 1999, 15 minutes long, [*available for downloading*](#)

Deliege, Robert, and Simon Charsley, panel convenors: "Low-caste, 'Untouchable', and Anti-caste Movements." 16th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Edinburgh, Sept. 6-9th, 2000: [*abstracts and papers*](#).

Hancock, Virginia, "New Buddhism for New Aspirations: Navayana Buddhism of Ambedkar and His Followers," **Manushi** 145 (Nov.-Dec. 2004): [*site*](#)

Hart, George, "Early Evidence for Caste in South India" (in PDF form): [*site*](#)

"How the Other Half Lives," an interesting group blog site about caste: [*site*](#)

Immerwahr, Daniel, "Caste or Colony? Indianizing Race in the United States," **Modern Intellectual History** 4,2 (2007): [*on this site*](#) (with the generous permission of the author)

Immerwahr, Daniel, "An informal memo on B. R. Ambedkar and U.S. Blacks, May 2008": [*on this site*](#)

Joseph, Manu, "What If Ambedkar Had Converted Earlier?" [interview with Jabbar Patel], **Outlook India**, Aug. 23, 2004: [*site*](#)

Kapoor, S. D. "B. R. Ambedkar, W. E. B. Dubois, and the Process of Liberation," **Economic and Political Weekly**, Dec. 27, 2003: [*on this site*](#)

Kishwar, Madhu, "From *Manusmriti* to *Madhusmriti*: Flagellating a Mythical Enemy," **Manushi** 117 (March-April 2000): [*site*](#)

Kunda, Pramilani, "Liberating Womanhood," **Countercurrents**, Dec. 30, 2003: [*site*](#)

Muir, Hugh, "Caste Divide is Blighting UK Communities, Claims Report," **The Guardian**, July 4, 2006: [*site*](#)

Omvedt, Gail, "Ambedkar's New Buddhism," **The Hindu**, Feb. 25, 1999: [*site*](#)

Omvedt, Gail, "Still no tryst with destiny," **Hindustan Times**, Dec. 5, 2006: [*site*](#)

O'Neill, Tom, "Untouchable," **National Geographic**, June 2003: [*site*](#)

Oommen, George, "The Emerging Dalit Theology: A Historical Appraisal": [*site*](#)

Pawar, Urmila, "Chauthi Bhint," with an introduction by Eleanor Zelliot, **Manushi** 122: [*site*](#)

Racine, Jean-Luc, ed., "Untouchability and Beyond," a special issue of **Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East**, 18,1 (1998): [*site*](#)

Rasool, G. Javed, "Violence Against Dalits: the Case of Tajopur" [Lucknow, 2002]: [*site*](#)

Sreedhar, M. V., "Reaching the Unreached: Enabling Dalit Girls to Get Schooling," **Manushi** 111 (March-April 1999): [*site*](#)

Vij, Shivam, "Why Gandhi Lost and Ambedkar Won," **Countercurrents**, Dec. 6, 2004: [*site*](#)



I thank Dr. Eleanor Zelliot for her very substantial help in preparing this timeline.

