



MANU, SANGH & I

Draft translation of Marathi Book -

Me, Manu Ani Sangh

by

RAMESH PATANGE

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"Manu, Sangh and I"

PREFACE

My article, 'Sangh, Manu & I' was published in the Diwali number of Vivek in 1994. Readers liked the article. Many of them met me personally to convey their appreciation and others did so by writing letters. The *Bouddhik* Chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Hariji (Shri Ranga Hari) met me in the Dadar office. Hariji is from Kerala. Still he went through my Marathi article. He said, "I read your article. I liked it very much. Such articles will go a long way in raising people's confidence in our work." His comments made me happy.

Initially I was hesitant to write a article for the Diwali issue of 'Vivek'. I had to tell the story of my perceptions and experiences. I am a Sangh swayamsevak; the majority of the readers of 'Vivek' are also swayamsevaks. The first person singulars, "I", "to me", "my views", "my opinion" are not used in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (The Sangh). Self-praise and boasting do not fit in the Sangh culture. I am nothing, Sangh is everything is the motto for all in the Sangh.

If I wrote about myself in my article, at times in a style, which might appear self-edifying, how would it be received? I had some doubts in my mind that it may not be appreciated. Fortunately nobody took any exception to my style of writing.

After its publication, many people suggested that the article should be expanded into a book. My respected friend Girish Prabhune, an RSS worker dedicated to the cause of Hindu backward and nomad tribes was very insistent. Some other *Sangh* workers also joined him. This book is an outcome of the friendly pressure they brought to bear on me.

This book is not my autobiography. My life is not great enough to lend itself to such a venture. In deed, this book traces the evolution of my intellect. It depicts only those incidents, which I felt are important in the intellectual context. Moreover, I have narrated my experiences in the Sangh in the context of social equality.

After reviewing the manuscript, a friend asked me, "You have consistently narrated only good experiences with the Sangh. Did you never face an insult in the Sangh arising from your caste?" I said to him, "I truly never had the type of experience you are referring to. Not even once." I further told him, "Never in the Sangh, that's why I have not written about it, but outside the Sangh, I once did have an experience like that." His curiosity was tickled. "What experience?" he asked.

I started narrating it. "In 1989, I went to Hyderabad for Ramesh Devle's marriage. From there I went to Shrisailam with my wife. When I left Hyderabad, a Sangh swayamsevak handed me a note at the instance of Sheshadri Chari, the Editor of an English Weekly 'Organiser'. There is a good *dharmashala* (Serai) at Shrisailam and he suggested that I could stay there. With that note, I went to the *dharmashala*, and they offered me a room.

The *dharmashala* was exclusively for *Brahmins*. At night I sat for dinner with them. Afterwards, however, the manager started inquiring about who I was and what was my *gotra*, to which Brahmin sub-caste did I belong, and he came to know that I was not a Brahmin.

"Next day, at lunch time the manager told me, 'You can't sit here with all these Y Brahmins. We will serve you lunch after they have finished eating.' I understood the meaning of what he said. I felt it was the worst insult I had encountered in my life. I felt I should not stay in the premises even for a moment. So I collected my luggage and bade farewell to the *dharmashala*."

That was the sole incident in my life when I was looked down upon because of my caste. Hence is deeply etched in my memory. At *Sangh* programmes, we and often said, "The '*pangat*' is full. You can take your lunch afterwards". The words are the same but there is a world of difference in the underlying sentiments. Unlike in the Sangh, caste pride came to the fore in the *dharmashala*.

In narrating my experiences in the Sangh, I will figure throughout in the narrative as without me, the story will not be able to move forward. I am a swayamsevak a worker of the Sangh, carrying out the assignment entrusted to me, and a volunteer practitioner of the RSS ideology and activities. I have made an attempt here to narrate through my life what I perceived about the Sangh. This book contains numerous references to the *Samajik Samarasta Manch* (the Manch). There are many workers whose contribution by way of thought, action and competence to the *Manch's* work is a great deal more than mine.

The contribution of many Sangh leaders like Arvindrao Harshe, a Senior leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Prof. Aniruddh Deshpande, Bouddhik Chief of Maharashtra Division of RSS and Principal of Commerce College, Pune, Namdeorao Ghadge, a lifelong *Pracharak* of RSS, Bhikuji Idate, *Karyavah* of RSS for Maharashtra Division, Sukhadev Navale, Sr RSS Worker, Mohanrao Govandi, Sr RSS and *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* (BMS) leader and last but not least, Damuanna Date is tremendous. Since I have not referred to their work in detail in this book, some readers may feel that I

have not done justice to them. But I am constrained by the fact that this book is not a history of the Manch. In writing about myself and the Sangh, I have chosen the first person singular. This format should be pardonable given the genre of the book.

I have not written this book to make myself feel elevated. My objective in writing the book is to convey to readers my social experiences in a sphere of activities in which I have an abiding faith and to which I have always given top priority in my life. The transformation which the RSS has brought about in person-to-person or even in a family-to-family relationships without making any fuss about social equality is unique. I feel in today's circumstances a worker like me should place before people his experiences of life. Of course it is the readers who should judge how much I succeeded in conveying the social vision of the Sangh in my book.

Many people have rendered valuable assistance in the making of the book in Marathi. My colleague Shivani Oak read the book twice to ensure that its grammar is faultless. Dilip Mahajan cheerfully accepted the responsibility of publishing the book. The cover was quickly prepared by D L Lele. My friend Sudhir Joglekar carefully went through the book and made valuable suggestions for improvement. I am grateful to them all.

Ramesh Patange

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Note on Translation :

The book in Marathi was applauded not merely for its contents, but its tremendous informality. In the first draft of translation, it became obvious that while the informality was maintained, the literary standard was average. After discussions, it was decided that there was merit in sacrificing good English to convey the mind of the author. This book is really one of experiences and not of philosophy. However, the philosophy of the Sangh is what is practiced and not what is written about it, particularly by their opponents. Maintaining the informality conveys not only the message of the Sangh, but the Sangh itself.

The English translation was undertaken by Shri Suresh Desai who did it with great devotion. Dr Vivekanand Phadke and Dr Neera Sohoni also made valuable contribution. I would like to thank them for making it possible for the book to come out in English.

Seeing the spontaneous response to the book, some of my friends and colleagues felt that there was a need to convey my views to a circle greater than the Marathi speaking world. So much confusion has been created by the progressives about the Sangh, that even unbiased persons get carried away by the propaganda. It was decided to translate in other languages as well. It is already being published in a serialized form in *Kannada Weekly "Vikram"* published from Bangalore.

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"Manu, Sangh and I"

Chapter I

Recollection of the episode of the Vicharwedh (Vichar = Thought; Wedh = Analysis) conference still gives me a fright. Some people in the progressive and transformationist movements in Maharashtra had decided to organise a meet of thinkers. The first *Vicharwedh* meet took place at Satara a district place in Maharashtra, on 19th and 20th February 1994 with 'Dharma' as its theme.

The Conference was widely publicized. To ensure free and unfettered deliberations, people belonging to diverse schools of thousands and viewpoints were invited to participate. Social Scientist Y. D. Phadke, Scholar and Educationist Prof. M. P. Rege, the President of Dr Ambedkar Academy Dr A. H. Salunkhe and the cinema and stage artiste Sreeram Lagu were some of the luminaries who graced the meet. Dr Arvind Lele, Sr leader and ex-Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Bharatiya Janata Party and I attended the Conference as RSS delegates. Both of us were to participate in a symposium and I was to read the background paper in it.

The Conference was taking place at a time of countrywide rethinking and introspection. The entire nation was shaken by the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Comprehensive discussions on Hindutva were taking place all around. An unprecedented wave of Hindu re-awakening was sweeping over all the land. Both Prime Ministers, Rajiv Gandhi and Viswanath Pratap Singh had received big blows from the wave their Governments had collapsed. The Hindutva party, BJP was gaining momentum and its canter had developed into an impressive gallop.

The '*Vicharwedh*' meeting emerged against the backdrop of Hindutva. Many thinkers in Maharashtra had misconceived and misinterpreted Hindutva as a religious movement and they were rather nervous that injecting religion in politics could take India back to medievalism. That was why a debate on religion was needed.

The topic of the symposium in which I was to participate was, "Do Religious sentiments of the people lead to fundamentalism or mobocracy?" In other words, the question raised was, are Hindus becoming religious fanatics or fundamentalists because of Hindutva. The time allotted for my speech was 10 to 12 minutes. I was well-versed in giving lectures at meetings and did not have any tension on that account. But speaking before the Swayamsevaks was one thing. The *Vicharwedh* audience was different. It was composed of people holding diverse and varied views. Their thinking did not run parallel to mine. It was obvious that the speech required meticulous planning and preparation.

I took pains to prepare my speech. I first made notes and then wrote down the speech. I read it out to Dr Arvind Lele. The gist of my speech was that Hinduism can never be fundamentalist because it does not have the three prerequisites of fundamentalism - the prophet, the book and the code. A society can be fundamentalist only if it is organised on the basis of religion. The Hindu society and civilization do not pass this test because religion is not the basis of their magnificent edifice. Therefore, Hinduism is incapable of leading Hindus to fundamentalism.

Then what is the reason for the present restlessness of the Hindu? Why has the Hindu become so aggressive? We must go a little deep into these questions. The Hindu aggressiveness and disquiet today are responses to the humiliating stimuli of appeasement of Muslims and the calumny and ridicule heaped on Hinduism. Hinduism is blamed for all its demerits but its merits are often ignored or are attributed to humanism. Harsh and critical blows are continuously showered on Hindutva. They, the Hindutva baiters, found in Manu a handy stick to beat Hindutva with, and this was bound to produce reaction. The reaction is perceptible in the atmosphere today.

After attentively listening to my speech, Dr Lele advised me to delete the reference to Manu. "We have already earned enough disrepute on this score. They will breathe fire and brimstone at you and subject you to ruthless attacks if you make any mention of Manu in your paper", he said. Dr Lele's advice was sound and precious, but I did not accept it, and retained the reference to Manu in my speech.

Dr A. H. Salunkhe had made the introductory speech to the Symposium. He was the President of Dr Ambedkar Academy which was the convener of the Vicharwedh Conference. During my speech, he broke all the etiquette of a public meeting and rose to intervene. He said, "Ramesh Patange's statement that attacks on Manu are producing volatile reactions is frightening. Those who defend the *Manusmriti* are the assassins of Hindutva. I am prepared to have a public debate anywhere with Patange on the *Manusmriti*, and if he convinces me of the greatness of *Manusmriti*, I will consign all my books to fire". Dr Salunkhe's speech caused tremendous excitement in the audience. Dr Lele had proved prophetic. All the progressives in the hall thought '*a Sanghishit*' had unwittingly walked into their hands. I was observing them from the dais. I sat quietly and did not feel any tension at all. Of course I was upset, but I was not afraid.

I replied to the challenge of Dr A. H. Salunkhe on the spot. I said, " I fully agree with Dr Salunkhe's statement that defendants of the *Manusmriti* are assassins of Hindutva. The *Manusmriti* has become outdated and today it has no relevance to the Hindu Society. Since I am in total agreement with Dr Salunkhe on this point, there is no scope for any debate between us. We, of course, can have debate with those who uphold the sanctity of the *Manusmriti* and defend it."

My explanation quietened the commotion in the audience. However, whenever I remember the occasion, I experience a tense feeling in the pit of my stomach. I was attending the Conference as a representative of the Sangh what if I were to commit a serious lapse? But I safely walked through the ordeal.

For me, the matter did not rest there. It spurred me to think deeper. Why was Manu associated with the Sangh, although the Sangh and Manu were not even remotely related? Was it all a part of evil propaganda? Or was it mere ignorance? The questions led me to some introspection. I started to continuously mull them over in my mind.

The process of introspection inevitably began with the question, "Who am I?" The reply was simple, "I am a Swayamsevak of the Sangh".

I started going to the RSS *shakha* (branch) since 1954, at the age of seven. We were then staying in Gudavali village at Andheri. Slums were recently springing up in Bombay and we lived in one of these new slums (Zopadatties). Our shakha was located in a mango-grove on the western side of Andheri. Today a huge shopping centre is situated there.

Very young kids in the Shakha are called *Shishus*. My Shakha had some boys of my age. We were grouped separately according to age, and played games appropriate to our age. The elder boys, who were called Baal Swayamsevaks, had different programmes.

During the Shishu age, the Sangh atmosphere produced deep and lasting impressions on my mind. Playing together, going for picnics twice a year, singing together - all these experiences stay with one for the rest of one's life. At that age, we did not understand the importance and meaning of what we experienced nor the thought that lay behind them. One's intellect is too young at that age, to fully grasp everything. But impressions on mind last long. The impressions made on my mind by the atmosphere in the Sangh in the childhood are still vivid.

Life in the Slum continued till education was over. Poverty was rampant. At an age when no child should remain hungry, I often went without meals. Having known in the past the pangs of hunger, a hungry person invariably evokes compassion in me. I feel an urge to do something for the person.

Memory of an incident lingers from those days. There was nothing to eat in the house, not a single grain. We-two brothers and two sisters-were acutely hungry. Our mother was anguished by our hungry looks. I found a two-rupee note while playing on the *Maidan* (Ground). I brought it home. My mother did not believe that I found the note while playing. "Tell me, from where have you stolen it?" she shouted. "I have not stolen it, I found it in the maidan. Come and ask Baban and Shankar, (my school friends) if you don't trust me", I pleaded. She accepted the 2-rupee note only after confirming that I had not stolen it.

Those days of appalling poverty have left a permanent impression on my mind. Why had I to suffer such frightful poverty, I often ask myself now. The answer is not pleasant. It was my father who was solely responsible for our poverty. My father had a tailoring shop. It is still there. We are Kshatriya Bhavsar by caste and tailoring is our traditional profession. The Patange community has tailoring shops at many places. It is not difficult to earn two square meals a day with tailoring. However my father ran his shop in a royal style. He used to go to the shop at ten in the morning. Cleaning, arranging the things, sipping tea and chewing tobacco took about two hours. Soon, it was time for lunch. We kids carried the tiffin to him. Then he had a nice, cosy nap till 3 p.m. and started his work leisurely by 3.30 p.m.

He never delivered clothes to his customers on schedule. The customer had to make at least 5 to 6 rounds. The delays in deliveries meant loss of customers. No customer came to my father's shop again, after experiencing his waywardness. Untimely deliveries also meant no timely payments and inadequate money for household expenses. I did not have textbooks and notebooks until 4 to 5 months after the schools reopened. It was an embarrassment to go to school without books. Teachers and students looked down upon a student who came to school without books. This in turn, bred an inferiority complex which kept one lifetime company. Such fruits of poverty are carried through on entire lifetime. I have preserved them.

If it was not for our mother, we would not have survived. She always tried to provide for us by cleaning vessels, washing clothes, doing other similar work and at times, by borrowing money. She killed all her personal needs for the sake of her family. My father was exactly the opposite. His personal needs, his meals, his clothes, occasional dose of liquor, and his comforts were of supreme importance. He did not permit any breach of his comforts. He was, in this respect, verily like the *Shitapradnya*, (a person who has transcended all passions described in detail in Geeta). I and my body. That is all. The rest does not count. I never saw him emotionally perturbed for any other reason.

So far as I was concerned, my father did two good things. He got me enrolled in the Sangh. He personally took me there and never interfered with my association with the Sangh. On the contrary, he encouraged it with some ardour. Secondly, he never put a brake on my education. He did not force me to earn. These are the two things which made me what I am the Sangh and education. Although I nourish profound anger for my father, I give him credit for my association with the Sangh and my education.

I had my primary education at the Suren Municipal School, Andheri. The standard of municipal education in those days was good and teachers too were competent. At least we had the good fortune of having competent teachers. From VIII standard onwards, I was a student of the *Parle Tilak Vidyalaya (High School)*. Parle Tilak Vidyalaya is a reputed High School. My four years in Parle Tilak from grades VIII to XI were however not joyful.

I never had any emotional rapport with the atmosphere there. The school's students came mostly from the middle class families in Vile Parle, a Mumbai suburb, and its vicinity. Teachers were trained and knowledgeable. But a student living in poverty in a Slum, often coming to school without footwear, overlooked. I too, pushed out of the keen educational competition among mainstream students was at the School. Why should any attention have been paid to a dunce of a boy who always failed English and Math and to be *promoted* to the higher standard? The teachers gave me derisive looks. In the ninth standard, we had a lady teacher called Borwankar. I had been *promoted* from Standard VIII to IX. On the very first day, in front of the entire class, Borwankar asked me, "Patange, how did you manage to pass the exam?"

Whenever I look back to the moments of humiliation I suffered, the episode in Parle Tilak Vidyalaya stands out.

My class teachers repeatedly advised me not to opt for English and Math at the S.S.C. Exam. Even in the preliminary examination, I had failed to score minimum marks for passing these two subjects. However, I was determined. I had a classmate friend, Prabhakar Vispute, who was a Swayamsevak in the same Shakha which I attended. For two months, he taught me English and Math. When the S.S.C. results were out, I showed my marksheet to my class teachers. The boy who for four years had consistently failed English and Math had scored first class marks in both subjects. My teachers could not believe their eyes! Doubtless, the entire credit for my success in S.S.C. belongs to Prabhakar Vispute. Without him, I would never have matriculated.

One pleasant memory from the Tilak Vidyalaya still lingers. At Secondary School Certificate Examination (S.S.C.Exam), I had opted for History as the eighth subject. I was the only student to opt for History in the entire school. Since there was no arrangement for teaching History in the school, I had to study it on my own. My answer book of the preliminary examination in his story went to N. R. Sahasrabudhe for evaluation. After reading it, he sent a message for me to see him. When I went to him, he said:

"You have written your history paper well. Study more. You will score excellent marks".

He also made some suggestions and recommended a few books. Later, N R Sahasrabudhe became the Principal of the school. During his tenure, the school became recognised for excellent results in the S.S.C Board examinations.

Sadly, the inferiority complex rooted in poverty and the dismal experience of life in a Slum were both augmented by my experiences at the Parle Tilak Vidyalaya. Naturally I feel no emotional attachment whatsoever, to my alma mater, the Parle Tilak.

Life in a Slum is a harrowing experience. It is devoid of even the most elementary amenities. All morning ablutions are performed in the open, in public view. While growing up I have seen men who were sexually intimate even with their own daughters or sisters. There was a peculiar person in our chawl (a building with a number of very small and cheap accommodation) called *Mestri* whose main business was to dupe people. He was a trickster. Once he hurled a choice abuse at our landlord, and although I did not understand what it meant at the time, till today it is etched on my mind, Later when I grew up, I understood its meaning. *Mestri* had called the landlord "family fucker, son of a bitch (*kutumbchod bakreki aulad*)". There were kidnapped girls living in the Slums, and many couples lived together, pretending they were brothers and sisters. There were many things, which were beyond my comprehension at that age.

When kids in slums grow up a little, they take to smoking cigarettes and *bidis*, consuming liquor and womanizing. I got involved with a group of boys who collected cigarette butts to smoke them. Another older boy briefed me on the pleasures of drinking, the various brands and kinds of liquor available, and the requisite quantities in which each could be consumed. He also described to me the pleasures of sexual intercourse. Boys in slums get this valuable knowledge even before they come of age. Of course my valour in these matters restricted itself to merely smoking discarded cigarette butts!

The reason for my limited progress in this direction was my shakha, and the teachers in the shakha. The atmosphere at home was not conducive to the cultivation of sound habits, or "sanskaras". However, all the drawbacks in my household were more than made up during my one hour in the shakha. That one hour gave us a sense of being special. Fortunately for me, I got guidance from good teachers from a very young age right upto my adolescence.

Appa Desai was the *Karyawah* of our shakha when I was a Baal Swayamsevak. He was employed with Premier Auto Limited and after his daily quota of work there, used to come to the shakha. During his tenure, attendance at the shakha was always heavy. He mixed with us and told us stories. He also paid visits to the homes of swayamsevaks. We learned from him how to build personal rapport with the swayamsevaks.

Another teacher who left impression was Chandrakant Diwakar. I personally benefited immensely from his guidance. He tried to appeal to the best in me. He taught me how to sing the *Sangha* Geet (song), and used to entrust me with small responsibilities of the shakha. He trained me in the tasks of running a shakha including how to tell stories, maintain house to house contacts, and other organizational matters.

Although Chandrakant Diwakar belonged to an average middle class family, he spent a good deal of money on us. I was not able to join any picnic organised by my school, since I could not afford to pay the required subscription. At such moments I found it very difficult not to cry. But I never harassed my mother for the money. As it is she was finding it tough to make the two ends meet. How much more could she be expected to bear alone? Yet I did not miss a single picnic or a camp organised by the shakha.

It was not that the attendance in the camp or joining the picnics of the shakha were free of charge. But Diwakar used to bear my expenses. I remember once I told him that I could not go to the camp because I did not have the money to pay the subscription. He laughed and said "Don't bother yourself about these petty things. We will take care of it. You get ready to go to the camp."

When I was in S.S.C, Arvind Joshi was the Karyawah of the Andheri shakha. Being a matriculation student, I was busy with my studies and rather irregular in my attendance at the shakha. Arvind Joshi, however, came to my place every week to enquire about me and my studies. By some coincidence later, I became very close to the Joshi family and a frequent visitor to their place.

My father disposed off his shop in 1962 and started running his tailoring business out of our home. In a 10'x10' slum of how could anybody work? Sangh workers observed this plight of ours. Arvind Joshi graciously gave a place under the staircase of his bungalow to my father. He did not take a single farthing in return. He even arranged supply of power from his electricity metre. The Joshis were not very affluent people. They were four brothers staying together and holding jobs. It was Arvind's attachment to the Sangh and its Swayamsevaks that prompted him to offer a place in his bungalow to my father.

I did all my college related studying at this shop. Which increased my association with the Joshi household. Joshi's mothers was called Tai, a fond appellation for sister in Marathi, by all. Tai was a deeply religious lady who meticulously observed all fasts, rituals, and abstinences on scheduled religious days.

At all religious ceremonies, I moved about as though I were a member of their family. Initially, I felt overwhelmed. I was apprehensive of unwittingly polluting the sanctity of the ceremonies. On many occasions, I had to enter their kitchen to get some drinking water. Tai would get up and give me water. Later one day she said, "See, Ramesh, when you need water, go to the kitchen and have it. Then wash the cup and keep it in its place. You are not a stranger to us now, so don't behave like one".

I did not realise then the social significance of what Tai said. May be Tai herself was unaware of it. She was, however, aware of one thing. I was a swayamsevak and hence I was one of them.

A swayamsevak called Prabhakar Khanagan came to stay in our neighborhood at Gudavali when I was studying for S.S.C. Khanagan a Brahmin from Nagpur, was recently married. He had an ordinary job in the Port Trust. We developed mutual affection. We called his wife "*wahini*" (brother's wife), and Prabhakar earned from us the epithet of mama (maternal uncle). We did not have a true maternal uncle, but Prabhakar, who was not of our caste, filled the gap. During my S.S.C days, I used to have my meals at the Khanagan's daily. The couple loved me as well as my brothers and sisters.

My being a student at one of the finest high schools in Bombay did not produce any social change in me or my thinking. On the other hand, shakha stimulated social awareness in me. The Hindu society should be unified, all Hindus are brothers, we are all one. No one is big or small. We should go to each other's homes, even their kitchens. We should eat together. We should have uninhibited contacts. We should develop good dispositions and cultivate virtues. A Swayamsevak should become a centre of gravity for others. He should be looked upon as an asset to the society. I had these thoughts firmly fixed in my mind by the time I matriculated.

Curiously the people who made me think this way were mostly Brahmins. At the time, I was not familiar with words like Brahmin, non-Brahmin and Bhatshahi (rule by Bhats i.e. Brahmins). I had not yet read any literature of progressive writers. I was therefore not conversant with their concept of Brahminism and did not know what made one a Brahmin. I only knew that I was a swayamsevak as were other member of the Shakha. And that was the cementing bond.

I was neither class nor caste-conscious until I passed my tenth grade. Although I grew up in poverty, it never occurred to me that my poverty was the handiwork of some people who exploited me because of my caste or class. My father's laziness and lack of initiative had made us poor. My father was responsible for our miseries. There was no point in saying that the caste system was responsible for our backwardness.

I studied in a reputed frontline school. Nobody there asked me "To which caste do you belong?" In the shakha, of course, caste was never mentioned.

Introduction is an important programme in the Sangha shakha. Each person is required to introduce himself in this programme. We had to reveal where we stayed and in which standard we studied. The introduction programme invariably took place whenever some important persons of the Sangh visited the shakha. One Shri Bhaskarrao Mundle, a Sr leader of RSS, VHP etc. visited our shakha. I still remember a dialogue which occurred when we introduced ourselves to him. Mundle asked us a question. "Who are you?". The answers were:

"I am a student".
 "I am a boy".
 "I am a Brahmin".
 "I am a Maratha".

"This is all wrong", Bhaskarrao said. "We are all *Hindus* and that should be our only introduction. A Hindu is one who loves this country".

Thereafter repeatedly I heard this refrain in the shakha. We were constantly reminded that we were Hindus. Even the songs and choruses in the Sangh had the same message: "The Hindu has reawakened".

"Hindusthan, with its saffron flag, belongs to Hindus".

"Why have you forgotten to say that you are a Hindu?"

"The Hindu has risen. With the saffron flag in his hand, he has risen to defend Hindutva".

The impact made by Hindutva in my childhood was deep and abiding. It made me forget all casteist feelings.

Gradually I too, became a Karyawah of a shakha. Situated at Gudavali, the shakha has a fair attendance. Boys who came there belonged to different castes. I started to share with them what I had imbibed. I told them stories. Soon, I earned a reputation as a good story teller. In the Sangh, the swayamsevak, while doing the shakha work, automatically develops his own faculties.

Telling a story presupposes preparing its format, and that some prior thought has gone into the impact intended from it. Soon I became accustomed with this narration process. Today if I am known as a reasonably good orator who is able to articulate thoughts and ideas, the entire credit goes to my story-telling drill in the Baal shakha.

While managing the shakha as the karyawah, I was hardly aware that some time in the future we will have to work for social transformation, organise service projects, or try to build a harmonious and integrated society. I was then neither capable of thinking about these things nor did any of the Sangh officers ever refer to these matters. The one thought incessantly inculcated in us was that we are all Hindus, the Hindu society is our society, and we have to organise it.

An episode which occurred when I was karyawah is deeply etched in my memory. A Dalit family lived in the neighborhood of the shakha. (The word "Dalit" had not yet come in vogue in 1965-66, when I was running the shakha. Dalits were then known as *Mahars*). The said family lived in poverty. They had a son, Gautam who attended the shakha. Once when I went to his place to inquire about his absence, I came to know that his Gautam's father had lost his job, and there was hardly anything in the house to eat.

Just about that time, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had come into existence and had launched a scheme called 'Handful of grain'. I arranged supply of some foodgrains to Gautam's family from one of VHP branches. I was not at all conscious of caste while doing so. It never occurred to me that the family was *Mahar* and therefore untouchable, or that it had suffered injustices and inequalities in the past which had to be corrected and compensated. That was not what the Sangh taught us. The only thought I had was that Gautam's family members were my Hindu brethren and I must do something to help them in their distress.

The three years I spent as a karyawah represent the golden period of my life. They were blessed moments. Being a karyawah gives real pleasure and thrill from performing the Sangh duty. The *shakha's* daily class lasts merely an hour. But that Sangh hour becomes the supreme hour of the day, with the other 23 hours subordinate to it. Shishus, Baals, youth form refreshing company. Each becomes a part of the emotional makeup of the entirety. Bonding in brotherhood with those who are not blood or even distant relations is a pleasurable experience.

Through the shakha, I came into close, cordial contacts with a number of families. Sabnis, an excise Inspector lived *Shakha's* vicinity, I vividly remember my first visit to his house. I had been told often in the Sangh meetings that it is one of the duties of the karyawah to visit swayamsevaks' homes and keep in constant touch with their families. I was doing this diligently. Each day, I scheduled my visits after the conclusion of the shakha hour. One day I went to Sabnis's place. His three sons were swayamsevaks in my shakha. They were also with me.

I was quite nervous to go there. Those were the days when the mere word inspector filled us with fright. Whether he was a police inspector or an excise inspector hardly mattered. How will I be received at the place of Sabnis? What question will he ask me? Will he enquire about the work of the Sangh? Will I be able to converse with him? These doubts troubled me.

Sabnis had just come home when I got there. Inspectorial toughness was writ large on his face. My stomach turned with fear. He rose quickly to greet me. "Welcome, teacher," he said. "Kids are full of praise for you."

The tension that had burdened my mind instantly vanished. I ensconced myself in a chair. Sabnis was extremely affectionate in his inquires about me. Where did live? What was my profession? How far was I educated? After I had answered his queries, he said, "Persuade my boys to study well and sincerely. They should excel in their exams."

How else could I respond to his request except to give him fervent assurance that I would do so. That was all the conversation we had. He never asked me about the work of the Sangh, what it was doing, was it owned by Brahmins? Nor did he ask me to explain what was meant by the Hindutva of the Sangh. Not only Sabnis, but of the literally hundreds of households I visited later, none asked me any of the above questions.

As I rose to go, Sabnis's mother came in and said, "Meals are ready. Have your meal with us today."

I felt shy and tried to offer various excuses. "Mother will be waiting for me, I have not informed her," and so on but ultimately yielded to the pressure of the kids and their parents. Thereafter, meals with Sabnis-at least once a week-became a routine. If I missed any meal, Sabnis's mother would send me a message "You are to come home".

In that way, I developed close and affectionate links with the *Swayamsevaks'* (volunteers') families, so much so that gradually I had my evening meal daily at some Swayamsevak's place. I got so accustomed to having my meals with them that it created a problem after my marriage! My wife was naturally keen that I should have my dinner with her everyday at home but it was very difficult for me to get out of my habit. Later, when the nature of my work with the Shakha changed, I was able to discontinue the practice of dining every evening in favour of a monthly lunch with Swayamsevaks. Invariably, after that lunch, I would tease my wife, "Today I feel I had a real meal!"

Steadily my responsibilities expanded and from *karyawah*, I rose to be *Mandal (circle) karyawah* and then *Nagar (city) karyawah*. The field of my activities widened. I had to move about a lot and in the process came into contact with *Sangha* workers at various levels. As a Nagar karyawah, I was in charge of the Sangh activities in Vile Parle, Andheri and Jogeshwari before the Emergency. I also had completed the Third Year Sangh training. To coordinate the functioning of shakhas in the expansive area, conduct programmes, organise training of workers, and give momentum to our work were some of my responsibilities.

By this time I had developed close emotional ties with numerous Sangh workers. Vimal Kedia, now *Sarkaryavah* (*Chief Karyavah*) of RSS - Mumbai District is perhaps the most noteworthy of them. Strangely there was nothing common between us which would be conducive to close friendship; Vimal hailed from an affluent Rajasthani family while I was mired in poverty. He was bright while I was average. He had no complex, could confidently meet anybody, was a good conversationalist, whereas I was shy, rather tongue-tied and came into my own only in some particular circles. Our worlds seemed wide apart.

But the style of work in the Sangh is such that differences in social circumstances, status, and disposition do not come in the way of meeting of the minds. The nature of our work was capable of bringing us close together, rarely despite our socially different perspectives. We hardly had a long dialogue with each other; one or two sentences were enough to articulate what was in our minds. Sangh teaches obedience to officers and modesty in our conduct to ward them. That is why even when socially superior more senior in age, and with greater experience, Sangha member's had no reservation in working under officers junior to them in all respects. In my case, I had personal experience of this.

The Sangh's work took me frequently to Vimal's place. Compared to my hutment, his house in Vile Parle was verily a palace! I used to feel embarrassed while entering his house. However, Vimal's attitude to me was so friendly and affectionate that all embarrassment melted away. He freely took me to all parts of the house and on many occasions, I had to have my meals with him.

I remember the occasion when I had a meal with him for the first time. There was a *thali* (plate) which contained *daal* (preparation of pulses), *subji* (spinach), *roti* (flat round thin wheat bread), curds and sweets.

Vimal said, "Start eating".

I asked him, "Where is your plate?"

He said, "This thali is yours as well as mine."

I felt embarrassed to eat in the same plate.

Vimal is clever. He said, "Ramesh, now you are one of our family. And we have a custom of eating in the same plate with those who are close to us. Please start eating".

At that time, I was unfamiliar with the concepts of equality, as with class distinctions and social status. Perhaps Vimal too was unacquainted with those concepts. We were aware of only one thing, "Hindu Hindu Bhai Bhai", The Sangh's believed is that all Hindus are one. While I was senior to Vimal in age, it was he who played the role of the elder brother. Without him, I would have remained only a swayamsevak and perhaps would never have been able to be an officer of the Sangh.

I had to go very often to Jogeshwari for our work. At times when I had to work till late at night, I would sleep there. In Jogeshwari, I came into contact with the Barsode family. They were four brothers of lower middle class staying together in a small one-room tenement.

Their house was small and usually crowded with Sangh workers like me. Among the Barsode brothers, Madhav and Sudhakar were very active Sangh workers. Many times after my work at Jogeshwari, I used to have my dinner with the Barsode family. Madhav used to personally attend to the needs of the touring Sangh workers.

Sudhakar's brother's wife was an embodiment of Annapoorna (Goddess of food). Her deportment and nature were her wealth and charm. She not only looked after her younger brothers-in-law, but also toiled a lot for the intruding Sangh workers like us. Today the Sangh is the talk of the town everywhere. Its reputation is owed to countless mothers like Barsode never inquire about anybody's caste or social status. Vahini served the same food to all. She would clean the table and wash the plates. And she did all this without ever having heard any lecture on the subject of *Samarasata*, social harmony or equality.

When Sudhakar married and brought home his wife who was not a Brahmin, Barsode vahini saw to it that she was absorbed in the family. Sudhakar's wife was a so-called "Shudra" but she mixed with the Barsode family as sugar does in milk.

There was a swayamsevak called Girkar. I often used to sleep at night at his place. He had a house in a chawl, a two-room tenement, with a loft. They had two daughters and a son. As the Sangh worker, I became the sixth family member. On many occasions, we all had our food together. The entire family used to sleep on the loft. I used to stretch out with them as one of the family.

The reason why I remember this today is that Barsodes and Girkars are Brahmin workers. I did not realise the revolutionary impact of their simple affectionate dealings with me. Nor did they realise it, I suppose. Caste considerations seemed irrelevant and ridiculous to us who felt bound together by the sole fact of being Swayamsevaks.

I was not introduced to Manu in the Sangh till 1975. The Sangh has its own style of functioning. When the Sangh worker gets involved in the Sangh's work, he has hardly any time to brood over any other thing but the Sangh. Usually he has no leisure to read and also, no need for such reading.

The "boudhikas" or discourses mean stereotyped lectures. Rarely do *boudhik* sessions stimulate thinking or shake the underlying assumptions, which are taken for granted. In the Sangh Training Courses, other ideologies are rarely discussed. Hence, the ordinary Sangh Swayamsevak is not widely informed. In fact, he is quite ignorant about many topics. Confronted with a point of view different from what is inculcated, his response may not always be logical or well-reasoned.

And 1967, an article was published with the title "Is the Sangh a workshop to pickle the youth?" The author of the article was Aniruddha Punarvasu (pen name of Shri Narayan Athavale, a bitter critic of RSS). The responses to this article were

bitter and many of them were worded in rude and vulgar language. Only a few persons made an attempt to logically counter Punarvasu's attack.

Why do we not try to give fitting replies to the criticism made against us? The Sangh officers' answer to this question was, "We should ignore criticism and continue to do our work. Our work itself is able to silence criticism. We should not fritter away our energies to replying to critics". Unquestionably, this stance was conducive to greater concentration on our work. At the same time, unanswered criticism, was likely to spread misunderstanding about the Sangh among more and more people.

When I was holding the charge of the Sangha shakhas, I also used to ignore critical references to the Sangh and advised others not to waste their time in responding to such criticism.

Till 1975, I was being shaped as a *Sangh Karyakarta* (activist). Emotional identification with the Hindu society, mutual cooperation, mutual complementarity, greatness of Hindu culture and civilization, and uniqueness of Hindu philosophy were getting embedded in my total awareness. I was also getting familiar with the aggressiveness of Islam and Christianity.

Paradoxically, I did not know much about the day-to-day material problems of the Hindu society. Absorbed in the Sangh duties, my commitment as the shakha Karyakarta was only to the growth in the attendance at the shakha. The questions which constantly occupied my mind were: how many new swayamsevak are enrolled? How many are uniformed? How many will go for the Sangh training class? Who will assume the responsibility of the new shakhas? And so on.

Why is there such appalling poverty in Hindu society? Why is illiteracy so widespread? Why are women treated so meanly? What is this conundrum of castes? Why and what is untouchability? Why is there so much cheating and hypocrisy in the name of religion? Why unemployment? These questions never occurred to me when I was running the shakhas. Our slate remained blank in those respects.

That our slate remained blank did not mean that the Sangh leadership at higher levels was insensitive to these problems. It might well be giving serious thought to these matters. Some very capable people in the Sangh were deputed to work in various fields. Deen Dayalji and Atalji entered politics, Dattopant Thengdi joined labour movements, Dadasaheb Apte, a senior leader of RSS, was sent to the sphere of religion. Many more Sangh workers worked in varied fields of social activity, giving concrete shape to projects in their respective areas of service. However, the need of educating the Sanghshakha workers about the numerous social problems must not have been acutely felt.

Due to such one sided intellectual development, we were unable to comprehend the import of a number of issues raised in the Sangh. In 1969, Shri Guruji Golwalkar, second Sarsanghchalak (Chief of RSS) gave an interview to a Marathi daily, "Nawakal" on the subject of "Chaturvarnya" (a system of 4 main castes by birth described Manusmriti, a code of conduct Hindus laid down in ancient times). This interview provoked quite a storm in Maharashtra and gave a handy weapon to leftists and socialists to beat the Sangh with. Meet were held to launch protests against Shri Guruji's view and abuses were hurled on the Sangh.

I had read Guruji's interview. I was at a loss to know why the socialists were making so much fuss over Guruji's view on the Chaturvarnya. Nobody in the Sangh believed that Guruji might have said anything improper. For the people associated with the Sangh, Guruji was a fountain of inspiration and they had unshakeable faith in this great man whose love for the Hindu society knew no bounds. All the socialists in Maharashtra were concertedly trying to spread their rancour against Guruji by trying to project him as the champion of inequalities. They were floating canards against Guruji who in 1948 had asked the swayamsevak to go home since he did not wish to see any Hindu blood being shed for the sake of his own protection, who had converted his life into a yajna (a ritualistic performance for purification) to bury all the differences among Hindus, and build up an integrated, unified Hindu society. What was the motive of this vile socialist propaganda? Why were they bent on raising enormous controversies on the subject of "Chaturvarnya"? Why were they creating a stir and so much noise? At that time, answers to these questions were not readily available to me.

Perhaps I could not get the answers because I did not know then that Chaturvarnya, caste system, inequality, social justice were terms with specific meanings and belonged to a specific political parlance.

A great social movement to eradicate the *Chaturvarnya* had taken shape in Maharashtra. Mahatma Phule and Dr Ambedkar, both renowned ardent social reformers from scheduled caste had unfurled the flag of revolt against *Chaturvarnya*. I was not aware of the intellectual content of their revolt. I knew about Mahatma Phule only from lessons in school textbooks. I had heard about Dr Ambedkar but was not yet aware of the revolutionary impact of his work.

Sangh shakas should have allotted some space in their time table to the introduction of the thought and work of these two great men to swayamsevak. But there was total darkness in this respect in my student days. Our galaxy of heroes and great men was composed of Chhatrapati Shivaji a great Maratha warrior and the founder of Maratha empire, Rana Pratap, a brave historical warrior who fought with emperor Akbar throughout his life for freedom, Guru Gobind Singh, tenth Guru of Sikhs and founder of Khalsa sect, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, a Congress leader and later founder of Indian National Army and valorous fighters in our history. My incomprehensibility of Guruji's interview on *Chaturvarnya*, and of the storm raised in its wake, was due to my own unawareness of social issues.

Later, the third Sarsanghchalak, Balasaheb Deoras delivered a lecture on the subject at the Vasant Vyakhyanmala, a yearly series of lectures by intellectuals arranged in the spring season, at Pune. Later, the speech was published in the form of a brochure. The speech was in a way simple but I could not at all grasp its essence at that time. This incomprehension was again due to my unfamiliarity with the thought currents in Maharashtra. I was interested in the speech primarily because the Sarsanghchalak of the Sangh was speaking and therefore, it was an article of faith with us.

It was in this way that my intellectual development was taking shape. I had completely identified myself with the work of the Sangh which was the same as the work of Hindu unification. I was yet to be intellectually aware of the obstacles to Hindu

unification posed by Chaturvarnya, the caste system, and by the philosophy that was built around them. I was also not yet acquainted with *Manusmriti* which championed *Chaturvarnya*.

In 1975 Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency on the country. A ban was clamped on the Sangh. In May that year, I had been to Nagpur to attend the third-year Sanghashakha training class. Nagpur is unbearably hot in May. Sultry winds blow during the day. People who are not accustomed to such terrible heat suffer a lot. In the third year of Sangh training, one really comes to know Hindustan in miniature. Swayamsevaks come from all parts of the country with their differences in food, dress and customs. Despite these differences, here we get the thrilling feeling that we are all Hindus and therefore, integral and indivisible part of the Hindu nation.

It had now become necessary to take away some time—a brief holiday—from the Sangh's work, and earn some livelihood. I had acquired adequate proficiency in tailoring and had also completed my M.A. Either to get employment somewhere or to start a tailoring shop were the options available to me and I was more inclined to start my own shop rather than take up a job. My sisters had grown up and I had to arrange for their marriage. My father was not in a state to discharge any family responsibility. The family was his, but the responsibility of running it was mine. That was the situation.

But destiny had chalked out a different path for me. I returned from the RSS training class in Nagpur in June. The Emergency was declared on 26th June, and immediately in its wake, a ban was clamped on the Sangh. All the leading workers of the Sangh were arrested under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). The workers belonging to the second line, like me, had to come forward to fill the gap created by the incarceration of the frontline leaders. I thought it was cowardice to think of earning money for self and family when the Sangh was in crisis. We have to confront the crisis, I resolved and went underground.

The Sangh was determined to fight the Emergency and towards that end, it organised the opposition and launched Satyagrahas. From my underground hideouts, I was busy training the Satyagrahis, organising their batches and sending them to launch the satyagraha, as well as collecting funds for the movement and keeping up and strengthening the morale of the swayamsevaks.

Senior officers of the Sangh also had gone underground. I was engaged in finding places for them in the area of my jurisdiction, and in arranging and organising meetings. The mere sight of a policeman used to fill me with fear. I was apprehensive that if they caught me, they would subject me to torture. I had read details of such harassment meted out to patriots during the British days. I had considerable information about the underground Sangh activities. For instance, I knew the hideouts of Madhavrao Mulay, Sarkaryawah of RSS as well as those of Moropant Pinglay, a prominent RSS leader and now Prachar Pramukh and Dattopant Thengdi. I also knew the venue of the meeting of the Central Committee of the Sangh in the area of my jurisdiction. I continually prayed for the spiritual stamina to withstand police harassment in case I was rounded up.

Sometimes the stress during the Emergency became unbearable. To relieve the tension, at times I saw two cinemas a day! During this period I came into close contact with Dattopant Thengdi, and was busy making arrangements for him. Dattopant was a great thinker, skilled and competent organizer, and one of the seniormost leaders of the Sangh. Therefore, it was inevitable that his personality induced awe. I was shy and did not talk much. Dattopantji, however, used to put me at ease by affectionately asking me to sit near him, making anxious inquiries about me, and patting me on the back to carry his approval for the work I was doing. His pat on the back always made me feel that my work was appreciated.

In those days, I never had any intellectual discussion with Dattopantji even though I stayed and worked with him. I did not dare open any intellectual dialogue with him nor did any intellectual subject come to mind while talking with him. Later, I became chief of the *Samarasata Manch* (a Unification forum) which was launched by him but during the Emergency period, not a word was exchanged between us on the subject of Samarasata.

I once asked him only one question in the context of the Emergency. How long would Emergency last, when it was likely to end, and what would happen to the Sangh if it lasted for a long period? The reply given to this question by Dattopant Thengdi made me think a lot. He said the Emergency would not last long, and the Sangh would emerge triumphant from it. There was no reason, he felt, for the workers to worry about what would happen to the Sangh. They should concentrate on discharging successfully the responsibilities entrusted to them. The workers were really worried about what would happen to them, he said, and their worry for themselves is projected as worry for the organization. Our work is divinely ordained. We need not be skeptical about its success. It would be more worthwhile if we thought about the work on hand. Thereafter, I stopped the meaningless worry about the future of the Sangh.

Finally, what I was most afraid of, did take place. I was trapped in the police net. It happened this way. I was entrusted with the work of taking Ravindra Verma, General Secretary of the undivided Congress, later of Congress (O) and also *Secretary of Janasangharsha Samiti (Committee of people's struggle)*, to the place of a Sangh meeting in Vile Parle. Ravindra Verma was to come from Ghatkopar, a Mumbai suburb. Manohar Pathak was to escort him. Manohar Pathak did not know the venue and therefore it was decided that along with Ravindra Verma he should come to the house of Prof. Bhalla, a lecturer and RSS sympathizer, near Sangam Cinema. Since Prof. Bhalla's house was situated on the main Andheri-Kurla Road, there was no problem in locating it. From there, I was to take Ravindra Verma to the place of the meeting. We had finalized these arrangements with Vasanttrao Kelkar, an RSS *Pracharak* for Western Zone, the then Prant *Pracharak* in a meeting with him the previous night.

As Manohar Pathak was late in bringing Ravindra Verma to the appointed place, I had to wait on the road. Once Ravindra Verma came, I was to take him by taxi to another place. While I was looking for a taxi, a posse of 15 to 16 policemen in plain cloths encircled us. Assistant Police Commissioner Mokashi said to Ravindra Verma, "Mr Verma, you are under arrest." Taking advantage of the commotion, Manohar Pathak disappeared.

To find out why I was late, Bhimsen Rane, a worker of Samarasata Manch, had come from Parle. He too was nabbed. Prof. Bhalla's house was thoroughly searched. The entry of the police in the house and the search flabbergasted Prof. Bhalla. We were first taken to the Intelligence Bureau Office at Andheri and from there, to the main police office situated opposite Crawford Market, a prominent Market in Mumbai City. Bhimsen Rane's statement was recorded. Ravindra Verma and Prof. Bhalla were seated separately.

I thought that the police would now subject me and Bhimsen Rane to third degree, to extract information from us. But surprisingly, police did not seem interested in making any inquiries. They did not even cross-check my statement they had recorded. Their behaviour with us was polite and affectionate. May be they were happy over a big catch like Ravindra Verma and they regarded us as very lowly workers. Or it might be that they sympathized with our struggle.

In the evening, the three of us, Ravindra Verma, Bhimsen and I, were taken to the Thane Jail. Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was applied to us. Prof. Bhalla was released as the police thought he was not involved in the affair. I had said so repeatedly in my statement. The episode upset Prof. Bhalla greatly. When I went to see him after the Emergency was lifted, he subjected me to a harsh harangue, though everything had ended happily. I took his rebuke as a normal human failing and ignored it.

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"Manu, Sangh and I"

Chapter II

I spent fourteen months in Thane (a district place near Mumbai) jail. This period proved to be momentous in my life.

Dr Balasaheb Ghatate, then *Prant Sanghchalak* (Divisional Chief) of Nagpur and I were in the same ward. Dr Hedgewar had breathed his last in Dr Ghatate's bungalow. His company and conversation both were a source of great inspiration for me. The chief of *Nagpur Prant karyalaya (office)*, Pandurang Kshirsagar was also with us. He died later in the Thane Prison. A great number of *Sangha* workers from *Vidarbha* (Eastern part of Maharashtra) were brought to the Thane Prison.

A large group of socialists was with us. Datta Tamhane, an eminent Socialist leader, too was among them. We came to know there the political orientation of socialists. Rancour about the Sangh was ingrained in their system. If *anti-Sanghism* is taken away the ground will slip from under their feet. Their rancour and hatred were noticeable even in ordinary events.

We all had come to the prison as the workers of the *Janasangharsha Samiti*. We had to fight together against the Emergency. Efforts were made to organise some joint programmes. Since the number of *swayamsevakas* in the prison was very large, we used to be in a stronger position. Once before a programme commenced, a song was to be chorused as per the routine in the Sangh. I was the singer. As I got up for the purpose, some socialists rose to take objection to the song and insisted that singing should have no place in the programme. The programme took place without a song. The socialists staged their protest as if they had rehearsed it in advance.

Every ward in the prison was equipped with a separate kitchen. We all used to have our meals together. We used to say the vedic prayer, *Saha nau Bhunaktu*, before we started eating. However, the socialists would start eating from the moment the salt was served on the plate. Perhaps they felt desecrated by the utterance of "saha nau bhunaktu" (meaning "we shall eat together"-part of a stanza regularly cited in RSS before meals). Such small incidents were frequently repeated and inevitably produced tensions between the two groups. Pandurang Kshirsagar, the Manager of RSS HQs and Confidant of Shri Guruji, Balasaheb Ghatate, Prant Sanghchalak (Director) of RSS, Datta Tamhane and Ravindra Verma tried their best to maintain amity, and promote a spirit of mutual understanding. Soon the joint programmes were discontinued, and the socialists and Sangh workers organised their respective programmes separately. The reason why the socialists broke up the Janata Party could have been found in the Thane Prison, (a famous prison in a Mumbai suburb - Thane) even before the Party came into existence.

Why socialists bear such excessive hatred for the Sangh can be the subject of an indepth study. At the philosophical level, the socialist is a humanist, respects all religions, and wants to conquer the world with love. However, for then Sangh is a fascist organisation, and they desperately want to finish off the Sangh. Why this contradiction in their attitude to the Sangh?

On my own, I have tried to find an explanation for this. Socialists in Maharashtra have great respect for Sane Guruji, a socialist leader and literateur. There is a whole generation which has grown on the teachings of Sane Guruji. His literature, life, and philosophy have made a tremendous impact on socialists. However, Sane Guruji did not have good things to say about the Sangh.

"The Sangh does not admit Muslims in its fold. Therefore it is anti-Muslim."

"Since the Sangh works only for Hindus, it is a communal organisation."

"The Sangh was a party to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination."

"The Sangh has fascist tendencies".

"The Sangh wants to capture power by resorting to intrigues and conspiracies."

"The Sangh is anti-democratic and anti-socialist."

"The Sangh does not believe in individual liberty."

"The Sangh teaches hatred to children".

"The Sangh projects a distorted version of Hinduism before the people."

These views of Sane Guruji are frequently found in his books. As examples, I reproduce here some paragraphs from his book, "*Kartavyachi Hank*" (Call of Duty). Sane Guruji edited and published an evening paper of that name from Bombay. The paragraphs appear in the political section of the book.

"Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is now functioning for over 25 years. The Sangh have never participated in politics. People therefore felt secure to join the Sangh. People in government service used to send their children to the Sangh only. Middle class white-collar people harbour distorted and perverse ideas about culture, and they cherish artificial pride about them. Hitler used to say 'We Germans are the greatest people in the world and therefore we alone are fit to rule the world'. The same is true of the RSS. Their main emphasis is on spreading rancour. All Muslims are bad, they say. They keep lists of misdeeds of Muslims and use it for their hateful propaganda. Organisations based on hatred and rancour grow very fast. They appeal to the beastliness in man. They ferociously seek to swallow and destroy other people. German Nazis nursed boundless hatred for the Czech people. 'Hang the Czechs. We don't want the Czechs,' they said. Thus extreme hatred was spread about whosoever are unwanted, whosoever is to be destroyed. Man still loves hatred and rancour.

"During the last 25-26 years, hate for Muslims as well as aloofness from politics earned for the Sangh the favours of the British. Government servants therefore not only felt secure in sending their sons in the Sangh but also could make a show of their pride in culture and religion. Those were the reasons why the Sangh grew up.

"Parents encouraged their kids to join the Sangh. Go to the *Samiti* (Rashtra Sevika Samiti, an organization of women on the lines of Sangh), go to the Sangh, they said. They hardly had any idea of the objectives which the Sangh had kept before itself. What would the people in villages know? They only had an idea that it has something to do with religion, there is the traditional saffron flag, there are physical exercises and *Bajrang Bali ki jay* (*Vive Le Bajrang i.e. Lord Maruti*). So why not the boys go there? That's how the parents thought.

"Sangh officers also used to say that the Sangh kept aloof from political activities. But eventually it came to the notice that they were trying to seize power by military type conspiracies and cabals. Our governments were blind. The warning signals given by socialists and Sevadals were ridiculed. Then came the martyrdom of the Mahatma. In great atonement for that martyrdom, the entire South Maharashtra today is subjected to small and big acts of atonement. I am sipping here my sweet lime juice. "Mothers, sisters and kids, you are atoning for the sins committed by our other brethren in the past. This is a rule of history that such sins have to be atoned for. It is our good fortune that such an ordeal is ordained for us. Go through that ordeal and give back to Maharashtra its stainless glory".

Sane Guruji's thoughts have made a deep impact on the socialists. Sane Guruji's literature produces confused impressions on mind. His love for India, compassion for fellow beings, steadfast attachment to principles, devotion to Gandhiji are attractive, magnetic features. However his opposition to the Congress, his dislike for a few Congress leaders, his hostility to communists despite his being a socialist and to add to these, his extreme opposition to protagonists of Hindutva, (a Sanskrit word coined for Hinduness which has acquired wide socio-political significance and identified with Hindu movements particularly RSS) are contradictions in his thinking which I have not been able to comprehend. The followers of Sane Guruji later joined the congress or worked with Communists but Guruji's dislike for the Hindutva protagonists never ebbed.

Sane Guruji has written a beautiful lyric "There is only one genuine religion". Whenever I hear the recital of this poem, I feel Sane Guruji is standing before me. This bitter opponent of the Sangh, this man who harboured endless animosity against the Sangh, had set out to preach universal love to mankind. Unfortunately, however, Sangh Swayamsevaks had no place whatever in his world.

Despite Sane Guruji's intense rancour against the Sangh, the Sangh never taught its Swayamsevaks to bear any malice towards him. I was astonished when I come to know that the poem, "*Balasagar Bharat Howo, Vishwant Shobhooni Raho*" (Let India be an ocean of strength and be an ornament to the world) which I had committed to memory was composed by Sane Guruji. Vasanttrao Kelkar himself once had advised me to go through Sane Guruji's book "*Bharatiya Sanskriti*" (Indian culture). Accordingly, I read that book.

Guruji Golwalkar never liked Swayamsevaks talking ill of Pandit Nehru (famous congress leader and first Prime Minister of India) and if they did so, he used to get angry with them. The comparison of the attitudes of the two Gurujis is inevitable. Sane Guruji's fascist reaction to the Sangh has passed away with him. We should only remember his literary contributions which will continue to be read for a long time.

Since there was little else to do, I had a lot of time on hand in the prison, which I utilised to expand my reading. I had read books about the French, the American, and the Russian Revolutions, in college. Now I started reading books about them afresh gave a close look to these historic events. I was also curious to know how they affected the thinking in India. I even encouraged myself to give speeches on these subjects in the jail. I was accustomed to telling stories in the *Shakha*. That experience stood me in good stead in delivering lectures. Soon I became well-versed in taking notes on a given subject and arranging my thoughts systematically. Elderly people were in plenty to give a pat on the back which strengthened my confidence and enthusiasm. It was not long before I began to be counted as an intellectual in the jail.

In the prison, I began my reading with a biography of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Till then, I had never felt drawn to this remarkable leader. Why would a blueblooded Hindutva protagonist feel any interest in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who had renounced his Hindu religion? Dhananjay Kheer's biography of Dr. Ambedkar, however, shook me to the core. It was the life story of Dr. Ambedkar which acquainted me with the Hindu society for whose integration I was working. The book awakened the thinker in me in the true sense of the word. I never before had a deep insight into the affairs of the Hindu Society. I was made conscious of this deficiency by the biography of Dr. Ambedkar.

I came to realise the frightful dimensions of untouchability in Dr. Ambedkar's life. I grew up in a slum. The struggle for mere survival there renders considerations like caste totally superfluous. I had a friend named Shankar Bhagwan Pawale. Pawale means 'blessed with his presence'. The complete name meant in Marathi "Lord Shankar blessed with his presence". My friend Shankar was a Mahar. We used to go to his house and many a time would eat there. We were never flogged for it, nor taunted or teased, let alone excommunicated from our caste.

I spent my public life in the Sangh. Where caste or untouchability are totally irrelevant. 'What is a *Swayamsevak's* Caste' is a meaningless question in the Sangh. Working together for several years Swayamsevaks hardly knew about each other's caste.

Disunity or lack of integration in the Hindu society is projected as a major weakness by the Sangh. This weakness was responsible for the domination of this country first by Muslims and then by the British. Our glory and affluence faded and poverty set in. Our compatriots were converted to other religions. That is why there is a great need for unity and cohesive organisation in the Hindu Society. Unity means strength. Strength helps us to win freedom and defend it after it is won. We can recapture the lost splendour. That is how the Sangh puts it.

Dr. Ambedkar's biography illumined me about the Hindu Society. Why Hindu Society became disorganised and fragmented into castes? What is the magnitude of the terrible loss inflicted on society by untouchability? How caste pride came in the way of resplendent nationalism? How are caste divisions conceptualized? How is that provisions were made in the *Dharmashastra* itself to safeguard the interests of the higher castes? It is difficult to get answers to these questions without reading Dr. Ambedkar's biography.

"Is untouchability still prevalent in our villages?" That was the question I put to Dr. Balasaheb Dixit, a *Sangh Pracharak* in Marathwada who was with us in the jail, after reading Dr. Ambedkar's life. He explained to me how untouchability still prevailed in our rural areas, how meticulously it is observed there, how even separate tea cups are kept in restaurants and so on. I asked him, then what was the Sangh doing for untouchables. Did we make special efforts to bring them to the Shakhhas? Does the Sangh do anything to change the society's attitude to them? We were really not doing anything to eradicate this social evil.

The reading of Dr. Ambedkar's biography made me restless on one more account. By the time I went to the prison, I had become a leading worker (Karyakarta) of the Sangh. I was the *Karyawah* of a big division. If a leading worker like me was not aware of Dr. Ambedkar's mission, what about the average Swayamsevak? This was a disquieting thought. The disquiet did not arise from not understanding the problem. But from the fact that the problem had not been referred to at all. When there are no problems, there is obviously no need to seek answers to them. Absence of problems creates complacency. Dr. Ambedkar's life inspired me to think about various social problems.

The biography also made me realise the significance of *Manusmriti*. I began to grasp the meaning of such words *Chaturvarnya*, inequality, social equality, social justice, and *Brahminism*. I could also sense the inseparable link between Hindu Society and Manusmriti. Similarly, the historical context of *Brahminism* began to dawn on me. I could not read the entire work of Dr. Ambedkar while in prison. I completed the task after I came out of jail. Only then could I understand the contextual meaning of these words.

I have a habit of comparing every biography I read with the life of Dr. Hedgewar, founder and first Sarsanghchalak of RSS. Dr. Hedgewar's life is the ultimate source of inspiration for the Sangh followers. Needless to say, the same is true for me also. I continually think of his life and mission. In the words of the great saint of Maharashtra, Tukaram - "You keep me company wherever I go and you guide me along the path holding my hand in yours".

Dr. Ambedkar's biography gave me deep insight in to the meaning of Dr. Hedgewar's life what he stood for. The lives of Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Hedgewar reflect an important stage in the process of Hindu social renaissance. They reveal how destiny shapes history. Dr. Hedgewar founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1925, with the primary objective of organising and unifying the Hindu Society. The most important episode in Dr. Ambedkar's public life was the Satyagrah at the 'Chawdar' lake at Mahad (a place in West Maharashtra where he had offered a Satyagraha against untouchability) in 1927. It was there that he first announced the manifesto of the birthright of every Hindu. Dr. Hedgewar opted to reawaken Hindus to their duty towards their society. Dr. Ambedkar aimed at reawakening Hindus to their birthright.

The objective of both these great men was identical - that of creating a healthy, flawless, egalitarian and integrated Hindu Society. Their ways were different. Dr. Hedgewar opted for the traditional road for the transformation of the society. Our work is ancient and time honoured. I have really nothing new to say. We should take pride in our traditions, our history and our culture," Dr. Hedgewar insisted. However, programmes that he initiated in the Sangh had a touch of novelty.

To live in unity is not in the nature of Hindus. Nor is it their tradition. The Hindu is born in a caste, lives in the caste and finally dies in the caste. The precondition of unification of the Hindu society is to "decaste" the minds of the Hindus, and eliminate caste from their mental make-up. The Hindus total thinking in respect of need caste needs reorientation. Dr. Hedgewar initiated that process. The uniform of the Sangh Swayamsevaks, their band, drill in the Shakhhas, were entirely modern devices, not traceable to the Indian tradition. It was Dr. Hedgewar who introduced them in the Sangh.

Dr. Hedgewar never discussed or denounced religion in public. He never brought into the Sangh religious rituals based on inequality. Nor did he ever claim that the Sangh's objective is to revive the religion based on Chaturvarnyashram. He never brought such ideology to the Sangh. I have also not found in his writings any reference to the *Manusmriti*. "We are all brothers. We have to build up an integrated and united society. We have to become strong", he used to say, and he shaped the organisation of the Sangh accordingly. I had not realised the real meaning and essence of Dr. Hedgewar's *mantra* of Hindu unification till I read Dr. Ambedkar's biography.

Dr. Ambedkar too, wanted a Hindu society based on one *varna*. His approach was, however, different. His thoughts are woven round the concept of the free individual, with an autonomous existence and the right to self-development, along with a constitutional guarantee and protection of the individual's rights. Dr. Ambedkar subjected the Hindu religion to the most

stringent scrutiny. He ruthlessly analysed the Hindu scriptures. He unfurled a flag of revolt against the philosophy of inequity which sought to concentrate all power and privileges in coteries of a minuscule section of the society and to impose misery, injustice, poverty and denial of basic rights upon the teeming majority. Dr. Ambedkar's was an ideological revolt of tremendous social dimensions.

Dr. Hedgewar "activised" the Hindu, sought to make him action-oriented. Dr. Ambedkar sought to stimulate and expand his critical faculties. He taught him to think and articulate his thoughts ably. These are only my contentions. I do not expect everybody to subscribe to them. Some people may counter me with the question "How do you say Dr. Hedgewar did not teach us to think?" Others may ask "Has Dr. Ambedkar done nothing to activate the Hindu?"

While my mind was caught up in the fascinating complexities about the numerous social issues and contradictions, it was also ruminating over the problems of the Sangh. Why did the discourses (*bouddhikas*) in the Sangh did not take cognizance of the thoughts and deeds of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar? Why do we not embellish our discussions with examples from their statements? Why do we not acquaint the Swayamsevak with their life and mission? Why do we turn a blind eye on them? In jail, these questions remained confined to me. Although I was not senior in age, I was a senior officer of the Sangh, and wielded important responsibilities. It would not have been proper for me to openly raise these questions. As a senior officer, I was expected to find the right answers on my own.

The Sangh has its own particular style of thinking and operating. The Sangh means 'us'. No Sangh member can think critically about the Sangh by disassociating himself from it. While no individual is held responsible for any deficiency in the work of the Sangh, any one who perceives a deficiency or flaw is expected to make efforts to remove it.

Although I felt that the questions in my mind were confined to me, I found that many other workers too, were seized with similar doubts. Sukhadev Navale and Bhiku Idate were conspicuous among them. Before going to prison I had not come into close contact with them. The jail brought us close. Afterwards, the deficiency in the Sangh Organisation was removed, but that was yet to come.

Before going to prison, I had become familiar with such assertions as 'the Sangh belongs to Brahmins', 'The Sangh is against social equality, it champions the Chaturvarnya' etc. But I had never realised the intensity and the venom of these comments. I came to comprehend them through discussions with socialists and their writings.

Brahmin-non-Brahmin difference form one of the darkest chapters in the history of Maharashtra. The controversy has a long historical background. At the time of Shivaji's coronation, contemporary Brahmins in Maharashtra raised an objection to Shivaji being anointed on the basis that Shivaji Maharaj was a shudra. This prompted the Chhatrapati to call Gagabhata from Kashi to preside over the religious ceremonies of the coronation. Brahmins also plotted against Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and later Chhatrapatis became only titular heads, and the Peshwas became the real masters. The Peshwas were brahmins. Brahmins were spiritual gurus. Now they also became political supremos. In the later period of the Peshwas, Brahmins misused their power. It was Mahatma Phule who first raised a revolt against this misuse.

Mahatma Phule's writings against Brahmins are full of venom. Brahmins came from outside the country, they subjected the shudras and atishudras to abject slavery, Brahmins are crooks and deceitful, they ruthlessly exploited the shudras and atishudras by fabricating fraudulent religious scriptures. These are the arguments against Brahmins which we come across in Mahatma Phule's writings. Mahatma Phule was a great man who was a seeker of truth, a rationalist, an extremely critical analyst of religious scriptures, champion of equalities, firm believer in true religion, and an ardent advocate of brotherhood. He did not want to create mutual hatred among castes. He yearned to see that even the lowest man in the Hindu society stood with an erect spine and lived with self-respect.

It was a grave misfortune for Maharashtra that his followers relegated to the background the Mahatma's philosophy of *Sarvajanik Satyadharma* (true religion of the society), and promoted hatred of Brahmins in its stead. To call these people his followers is an affront to Mahatma Phule. His noble philosophy was exploited for Brahmin-baiting to justify and sustain the Brahmin-non-Brahmin controversy, and to promote the politics of caste hatred.

Followers of the socialist thought were at the forefront in promoting policies of caste hatred. Generally speaking, the Hindutva politics started gathering strength from the time of Tilak, a great Congress leader and whom the British used to call as "The father of Indian unrest". Gandhiji, too, organised his politics according to the tents of Hindutva. But his constant appeasement of Muslims was inimical to the followers of Hindutva. His constant courting of Muslims earned him the epithet "secularist". Lokmanya Tilak who had never indulged in appeasement of Muslims at the cost of national interest, was stigmatized as "communist". On top of it all, Tilak was a Brahmin, not an ordinary one, but a *Chitpavan* of the caste of the Peshwas (Peshwa was a post of the Prime Minister in the Cabinet of Maratha Kings, which was always given to a Brahmin). Even today socialists and other continue to hark on these points for their attacks on Tilak.

Tilak was on the side of orthodox Brahmins in the famous 'Vedokta'(quoted in Vedas) affair. He had accepted the religious verdict that Shahu Maharaj (King) of Kolhapur did not have the right of "Vedokta" (recital of vedic mantras). The Lokmanya was not willing to ignore the scriptural prescription that the shudras had no right to the Vedas. Shivaji Maharaj was a shudra and therefore, had no right to the Vedas. A shudra cannot be anointed a king. After 300 years, the same situation had cropped up, albeit in a different context. A Sthitapradnya, learned national leader like Lokmanya Tilak did not view the problem in the light of the changed perspective of the times. A lapse committed by a common man remains limited to him, but the lapse committed by a great leader results in unpleasant consequences for the entire society. Generation after generation is affected by him and by miseries wrought by him.

Dr Hedgewar had tremendous respect for the Lokmanya. He had great faith in his leadership. Whatever politics he pursued he did so as the Lokmanya's disciple. But when he started the Sangh, he rejected Tilak's social thought lock, stock and barrel. He gave recognition to the *Chhaatra Jagadguru Shankaracharya*, one of the Chief Priests of Four Hindu Monasteries established by first Shankaracharya and with whom he was closely associated at the Hindu Unity Conference. Dr Hedgewar

declined to accept the rule that the shudras had no right to the Vedas. Today, we see Dr Hedgewar's followers teaching Sanskrit to the shudras (lowest caste in Hindus as laid down in *Manusmriti*) and *atishudras* (*atishudras* - still lower caste). They also offer them lessons in recitals of the vedas. They convey to the society through their conduct that all Hindus irrespective of caste have a right to the chanting of the Vedic hymns.

I was now getting well acquainted with the genesis of the Brahmin-non-Brahmin controversy. I also came to grips with the thinking of the people who called themselves socialists. The people who believed in the philosophy of socialism and drew inspiration from it also called themselves progressives. They claim to be leftist thinkers. It is said that progressives are humanists who do not think in terms of casteism and communalism, and materialists, who lay emphasis on mundane things, and rationalists who regard religion as a private and personal affair, and hold the view that all religions are equal.

As per the reasoning of socialists, all Hindutva protagonists are communalists, harbouring fascist tendencies. According to the socialists, they have medieval mentalities, seek to provoke religious hysteria, believe in violence, and therefore are the enemies of the society and mankind. Moreover, they charge that Brahmins are in the majority and occupy all senior positions in the Sangh. To them, *Brahminism* is horrendous! As Brahmins are against equality, and they dominate the Sangh, it follows that the Sangh too, believes in inequality. Also, Brahmins seek to perpetuate their elitist position and since they are in the Sangh, the Sangh is communalist, against the interests of the shudras and atishudras, and seeks to keep them in serfdom. This leftist logic can effectively dazzle dunces and dunderheads.

The leftists are dexterously using the names of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar to prop up their perverse logic. Whether it is Mahatma Phule or Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, both have ferociously attacked Brahminism. I started becoming aware that leftists were exploiting the names of these two great men to malign Hindutva and to bring about disintegration of the Hindu society. As I became more and more familiar with the writings of Phule and Ambedkar, I was convinced that the progressives have confined these two towering personalities in the progressive prison. Socialists have distorted their teachings and view points to use them as ammunition against the Sangh. We in the Sangh have not reacted to this calumny at all. We have been tolerating all their antics passively.

The socialists and leftists did another clever thing as part of their policy to malign the Sangh. They foisted Manu on the Sangh. They exhumed his ghost and released it on the Sangh. The *Manusmriti* is one of the religious books of the Hindus and an important one too. I read the *Manusmriti* for the first time in the Thane jail. I was shocked and stunned at the social thought of the *Manusmriti*. The special rights and privileges Manu conferred on Brahmins, and his denial of rights to women and shudras, made painful reading. It was after reading the *Manusmriti* that I came to realise why Dr. Ambedkar burnt it in the Mahad satyagraha. Manu strengthened the differences in our society and prescribed social and economic enslavement for millions of people. And he destroyed the drive, initiative and creativity of the common man. On top of everything, he gave religious sanction to social injustice. That was too bad.

Anybody who wants to bring about social renaissance in the Hindu society will not accept the social discourse in the Manusmriti. When Dr. Ambedkar burnt the *Manusmriti* in 1927, he must have been prompted to do so by these or similar thoughts.

I remember an incident concerning the *Manusmriti* which occurred in the prison. Bhimsen Rane was with me in the jail. We read the *Manusmriti* together. The memories of the controversies created by Shri Guruji's interview in 'Nawakal' were still fresh. Some people had burnt copies of the Manusmriti while reacting to the interview.

Bhimsen Rane had prepared a speech on the *Manusmriti* explaining that many of the thoughts in the *Manusmriti* were commendable. He wanted to say in his speech that *Manusmriti* does not lay stress on social inequality. Every day in the prison, speech programmes were held in the evening. A pracharak from Vidarbha, eastern part of Maharashtra, Rambhau Bondale, RSS Pracharak for a very long time, was in charge of these programmes. He read Bhimsen Rane's speech and told him, "You can not deliver a speech on the *Manusmriti* from the platform of the Sangh." His refusal to allow the speech incensed Bhimsen Rane. He argued a lot but Rambhau remained firm in his decision.

As a matter of fact, the Sangh was under a ban during those days, and therefore, the Sangh platform simply did not exist. Still, a Sangh Pracharak declared in no uncertain terms, 'No *Manusmriti* from the Sangh platform.'

It is an indisputable fact that the *Manusmriti* is never referred to in the Sangh. As mentioned earlier, I have been a shishu swayamsevak and completed my training in the Sangh. In the Sangh parlance, I am a third year trained swayamsevak. I heard hundreds of *Bouddhikas* (lectures) before I went to the jail. I heard *Bouddhikas* from frontline Sangh leaders like Shri Guruji Golwalkar, Madhavraoji Muley, Bhayyaji Dani, All India Karvah of RSS, Babasaheb Apte, a close associate of Dr Hedgewar who dedicated his life to RSS work and Eknathji Ranade, then Sarkaryavah of RSS who successfully created the Vivekanand Rock Memorial at Kanya Kumari. None of them ever said in any of their lectures that the *Manusmriti* is "the" religious book and we have to organise the Hindu society on the basis of this book.

The *Bouddhika* sessions of the Sangh are held in a specific style. The essence of the discourses is "This is our Hindu society. It is very ancient. There are numerous differences and divisions which make the Hindu society disunited. Disunity has made it weak. Because of this weakness, it became a victim of foreign aggression, not only political but also, cultural and economic. The Hindu society should be made strong and affluent. Every Hindu should dutifully contribute his energies and time towards this end. Self centredness and thinking only about selfish ends should be kept out." Every speaker put this message across in his speech in the light of his own reading, thinking and experiences.

Besides, *Bouddhikas* are continuously held on the methodology of work, and organising programmes to promote efficiency in the Sangh activities. Nearly 80 per cent of the Sangh energy is spent on moulding efficient workers. Therefore there is hardly any time left to think about the *Manusmriti*.

Every swayamsevak has to take an oath in respect of the work of the Sangh. This oath is:

"I swear by Almighty God and by my forefathers that I will defend the Hindu religion, the Hindu culture and the Hindu society. I am joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh towards this end and with the objective of strengthening the Hindu nation. I will do the work of the Sangh sincerely, devotedly and with selfless dedication, of body, mind and wealth. I will continue to do so throughout my life. Bharat Mata ki jai! (Viva la Mother India)

This oath nowhere says that I am becoming a swayamsevak to produce a social structure as expounded by Manu. The text of the oath nowhere contains any reference to Manu.

The Sangh has a printed constitution. The objectives of the Sangh are clearly indicated in this constitution. The objectives four stated in the preamble are:

In the present state of disintegration -

a) To remove the differences and divisions wrought among Hindus by sects, viewpoints and movements and to eliminate the divisive forces which are produced by economic, linguistic and regional diversity.

b) To remind them (the Hindus) of their splendid and glorious past.

c) To promote among Hindus a spirit of service, sacrifice and selfless devotion.

d) In this way, to promote a spirit of commitment to a well organised and well governed social life.

e) A need was felt for an organisation to work for the total uplift and prosperity of the Hindu society and accordingly, Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded the illustrious, well-known organisation called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh on the auspicious day of Vijayadashami (tenth day of month Ashwin according to Hindu Calendar and considered to be a great festival) in 1925.

Article (3) The objective of the Sangh is to eliminate the differences in class from the Hindu society and to strengthen it on the basis of its culture and religion and to bring about its rejuvenation so that the Hindu society may be able to achieve all round prosperity of Bharat.

In short, Manu has no place whatever in the structure, the oath or the constitution of the Sangh. It is therefore most surprising that the Sangh is called 'Manuist'. We don't see Manu, i.e. social inequality, anywhere in the Sangh. Whatever glimpses of Manu we get, are outside the Sangh. When we step into the social life outside the Sangh, we are reminded of our caste at every moment.

In 1995, I have completed 42 years in the Sangh. During this long period of my Sangh life, nobody in the Sangh has ever asked me about my caste. I have, however, met any number of socialists and Congressmen who inquired about my caste. Once in 1978 or 1979, I had been to Gargoti to attend a Sangh programme. Since the programme was to take place in the evening, the daytime was spent for meeting some local people. Among them was a prominent Congressman. When the Sangh workers took me to his place, his darbar was already crowded. The swayamsevaks introduced me to him. "He is Ramesh Patange, a prominent Sangh worker in Bombay". Then we all joined his *Darbar* (Court).

I do not remember the name of this Congressman, but I vividly remember his comments. He said "Our society is stricken with the terrible disease of communalism and casteism. We all should forget our castes. We should change our surnames too. Mr Patange, are you a Bhavsar Shimpi or Namdeo Shimpi (another caste in tailor community - *Shimpi* = Tailor)?"

I replied, "I am a Bhavsar Shimpi."

Thereupon he said, "Pawar, who is seated here, is a Maratha, (A powerful caste considered next only to Brahmins), Patankar is a Brahmin, Kamble is a Matang (a caste of executioners). All of them should change their surnames to Bharatiya".

He talked about many other things, but my attention had flagged. I was thinking about only one thing. How could this gentleman know a person's caste from his surname? The question lingered in my mind for quite a few months. Later, I got myself acquainted with this charade of connecting castes and surnames. However, ironically, I had my first lesson of this technique from a 'progressive'.

I was extremely annoyed over the fact that the progressives who think of society in terms of castes describe the Sangh as "Manuist". It was the height of hypocrisy to deny Hindutva to Hindus, encourage caste egos, and let loose harangues on social equality all in the same breath. I used to feel that a revolt should be staged against such crooked postures. But in the Sangh, it was not enough that I alone should feel that way. Other workers too, needed to think in the same way.

The Emergency was over and we were released from prison. But as soon as I came out, I was involved in the Sangh's work again. It was imperative that I earn some money. My two sisters were to be married. Arranging their marriages would require money. My father was beyond all these worries. He was not bothered about his daughters' marriages. If any family responsibility presented itself before him, his stock, reply used to be "You look after it yourself. I have no money". While it is true that he had no money, it is equally true that he lacked the will to raise money.

Domestic anxieties plagued me while I was engaged heart and soul in the Sangh's work. One day, while I was engrossed in these thoughts, Vimal Kedia asked me, "Why are you looking so worried today?"

"My two sisters are to be married, and even if I decided to minimize the expenditure, I would not be able to raise the requisite money. I am worried."

"Why do you unnecessarily brood over that, my dear friend? Your sisters are my sisters. I will foot the expenses of one of your sisters' marriage."

Vimal Kedia's assurance removed a heavy load from my mind. Younger to me in age, Vimal now had to play the role of the elder brother. But for Vimal Kedia, I would never have attained the position I hold today as the Sangh karyakarta.

Eventually my sisters were married. So was I. All this while, my responsibilities in the Sangh grew. During 1980-81, I became assistant (*saha*) *karyawah* of Greater Mumbai. The responsibility of Sangh work in the vast region of the Mumbai devolved on me. I was always busy visiting the various shakhas, meeting with workers, organising festivals, study classes and other countless activities. Mukundrao Panshikar, now the Chief *Pracharak* of Maharashtra Vibhag, was then the *Pracharak* of the metropolis. Vasanttrao Marathe was its *karyawah*. The team of our workers was considerably senior to me in age and experience. I carried out my duties as *saha karyawah* of Mumbai for five years.

Mukundrao Panshikar or Vasanttrao Marathe never interfered in my work. Nor did they ever oppose the schemes worked out by me. In a way they gave me a free hand. At the time our team had some talented workers like Sheshadri Chari and Sharad Kulkarni, now BJP State General Secretary of Maharashtra. Sheshadri later became the editor of *Organiser* and Sharad Kulkarni rose to be the *Pradesh Sanghatan Mantri* (Divisional Organising Secretary) of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The regional camp (*shibir*) of Talajai, a small place close to Pune city, near took place when I was *Sahkaryawah*. The plan was to organise a camp of 30,000 to 40,000 fully uniformed swayamsevaks. Vigorous preparations were launched for this camp. Swayamsevaks belonging to all castes and socio- economic strata were expected to attend this camp. It was an unprecedented manifestation of Hindu unity. At least I thought so.

The publicity for the camp gained momentum. On my initiative, we organised the publication of "Shibir Varta" (camp news) to ensure that the message of the shibir reached all swayamsevaks. Five or six four-page issues of the journal were issued. All of us wrote small features in it on various aspects such as, preparations for the camp, swayamsevaks who would attend it, the social message of the camp etc. The publication helped generate an enthusiastic response. Five thousand swayamsevaks from Mumbai attended the camp at Talajai.

The expected social impact of the camp was felt at all levels in Maharashtra. The reaction of the socialists and progressives, however, was full of hatred, venom, and sarcasm. N G Goray said, "The swayamsevaks have gathered there in large numbers. What is surprising about it? When water stagnates in a pool, worms are bound to writhe in it."

After seeing a parade of 35,000 swayamsevaks, he said, "Let not the lathis of these 35,000 swayamsevaks fall on the head of dalits". That a senior, elderly, learned socialist leader could react this way, sent my blood boiling. Swayamsevaks like me (in the socialist parlance, a shudra), bit their lips in anger. Only a man with a stagnant, closed mind could speak as N. G. Goray had done.

Nanasaheb Goray carved a permanent place for himself in my mind for one more reason. 1988 was the birth centenary year of Dr Hedgewar. A committee called Hedgewar Birth Centenary Committee was set up in Maharashtra. Dr Shivajirao Bhosale, chancellor of the Marathwada University (now Dr Ambedkar Marathwada University), gladly agreed to be the chairman of the committee. Socialists are adept at creating obstacles in any big programme organised by the Sangh, and naturally, Nanasaheb Goray, was the high priest of socialists in this respect. He opened a front against Shivajirao Bhosale. A meeting of the birth centenary committee was to take place in Pune. Dr Bhide, Vice-Chancellor of the Pune University agreed to chair the meeting. This incensed Nanasaheb Goray. According to him it was not proper for the vice-chancellor to accept the chairmanship of a committee of the Sangh, since the Sangh is wedded to the concept of Hindu Rashtra, which is against the spirit and ideology of our constitution, which is secular and socialist. Since the Sangh work is unconstitutional, those in government positions should not be chairmen of the committees of the Sangh. Prof. Bhide did not come to the meeting. Prof. Navalgundakar, now Pune Zone Sanghchalak, spoke in his place. In his speech, Prof. Shivajirao Bhosale said that Hindutva and nationalism are the two sides of the same coin.

The socialist front started the controversy in Maharashtra. Madhav Gadkari, editor of *Loksatta*, a Marathi daily wrote a long article supporting Nanasaheb Goray. Hundreds of letters were received by *Loksatta* in response to this article. Gadkari, who day in and day out gives harangues on freedom of expression, did not publish one single letter from the protesters. Even a letter written by Dr Ashok Modak, Sr RSS leader and ABVP ideologue, was 'killed.' I call this tendency 'secular Khomeinism'. Although socialists are small in number, their nuisance value is great. They started harassing Dr Shivajirao Bhosale and create obstacles in his programmes. Dr Bhosale was fed up. He was in a quandary whether to keep the Vice-Chancellorship or the chairmanship of Dr Hedgewar Birth Centenary Committee. Finally, he renounced his position with the Dr Hedgewar Birth Centenary Committee of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh which was trying to realise the dream of Shivaji and Shahaji Bhosale. Nanasaheb Goray's destructive rancour and hatred won the day. Dr Shivajirao Bhosale's courage deserted him.

When Janata Party government (a party which was combine of 4 main opposition parties largest among being the Jan Sangh) was in power at the centre, there were 93 MPs committed to the Hindu Rashtra (nation). Leaders like L K Advani were holding Cabinet Ministership. Nanasaheb Goray was India's High Commissioner in London as representative of this Cabinet. He was well aware that he became the High Commissioner with the backing of those who were committed to Hindu Rashtra. But he was holding a position of power, and was not prepared to give it up for the sake of principle. I was getting acquainted with this type of shameless hypocrisy in our public life.

I was the executive editor of the weekly 'Vivek' when Nanasaheb Goray died. I had to do the utterly unpleasant task of writing the obituary editorial on him. I had carefully gone through his writings and speeches since 1976-77. Nanasaheb nursed more rancour in his heart for the Sangh than Shishupal, brother of Shri Krishna's wife - Rukmini and his self-proclaimed enemy, did for Shri Krishna (Krishna is considered to be the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu and greatly worshipped among Hindus). I am not aware even now of what transformation he has brought about in the society. It was

very difficult to write anything positive about him. But as per the professional journalistic norm, I did write in his favour. Obviously, I was not being honest to myself. Compared to mine, the editorial in 'Saamana', a Marathi daily and mouth piece of a political party *Shiv Sena*, was scathingly forthright. 'No homage to a hypocrite', it said. I still remember the title. I was glad that 'Saamna' did what I did not dare to do.

While I was the *Sahakaryawah* of the *Mumbai Mahanagar* (Greater Mumbai), I used to meditate over the social and political situation around me as much as I could. Mumbai has a large number of fishermen. Why were so few in the Sangh? There are large Slums in Mumbai, I myself had grown up in a Slum. How far are the middle-class workers in the Sangh acquainted with the plight of the slum-dwellers? The Sangh means the Shakha (branch), and the Shakha means the programme that was the lesson given to us by Babarao Bhide. What is the social significance of the work of the Sangh? How are we related to the life around us? How are we linked to the life around us? What is being done to change the social environment around us? Why is the number of dalits in the Sangh so negligible? Hundreds of such questions used to crop up in my mind, and I used to place them before my colleagues.

The Sangh holds Diwali classes for imparting primary training to promising workers. In Mumbai, we used to plan these classes very carefully. The classes were conducted in a stereotyped framework with stereotyped programmes. I often felt that the framework and content of the programme deserved change. However, it is difficult to bring about alterations in the routine programmes of the Sangh. It involves persuading colleagues as well as the elderly, devoted and selfless workers to develop all aptitude for change. I placed before them my plea for educating the swayamsevaks, coming for the Diwali primary class, in the social environment instead of involving them only in the physical facets of the *Boudhik* programmes. My suggestion, and its pros and cons, were discussed at length. What should the revised class be called? Primary or something else? That was a key issue to resolve.

In the Sangh methodology, specific words bear specific meanings and connote specific programmes. Therefore, the stalwarts of the Sangh exercise extreme caution and vigilance in respect of the words they choose and the concepts which go with the words. New experiments are not taboo, but a lot of rope-walking is inescapable when attaching new experiments to old concepts.

The first such class ever was organised in Mumbai in October 1984. The swayamsevaks participating in the class were sent after 4 p.m. to the localities those of the dalits, backward class people and the Slums, all of them hitherto uncontacted by the Sangh. The objective was to convene Sangh Shakhas and build up relations with the people in those localities. At 9.30 p.m. there used to be a programme where the Swayamsevaks used to narrate their experiences. The Swayamsevaks were advised to eat their meals in the localities they visited.

Every thing went smoothly according to the plans. The programmes however had to be stopped because of the assassination of Smt. Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984. The number of Sangh Shakhas in these areas went up as a consequence of these programmes.

After Emergency was over, the lives and mission of Mahatma Phule and D. Ambedkar began to find a place in the Sangh programmes. *Bouddhika* classes were held on the life and work of Mahatma Phule, Dr. Ambedkar and Shahu Maharaj. Starting in 1978, I too, started giving talks on these great men. My reading, thinking and study of the subjects I began to grow. Hitherto I had not given too deep a thought to them, particularly in the context of the Sangh. Now I started doing it, and gradually, it became a habit.

I can give an instance of how limited was the social awareness of the Sangh worker. In 1978, the Maharashtra Assembly passed a resolution approving the change in the name of the Marathwada University. The approval produced sharp and bitter reactions in Marathawada. Dalit localities were set on fire. The issue of the changing the name of the University soon turned into an issue about the very identity of dalits. In those days, I used to read about these reactions in newspapers but they did not produce any specific response. I would not be very wrong if I said that I had not realised the social significance of the issue. The Sangh had also not taken any particular stand on it. When a problem tends to create divisions in society, it is very difficult to take a side.

Later, I found that many Sangh activists in the Marathawada region wanted to support the change in the university's name. When I too became active in the change-of-name issue from the *Samajik Samarasata Manch* platform, Damu Anna told me a story. In 1978, Balasaheb Deoras was touring the Maharashtra Province. He had a programme in Sambhaji Nagar. In his discussion of the name issue, he said "I think the change in the name should be endorsed. Those who oppose it are not right in their thinking." Some workers in Marathawada, however, did not think that way. They were of the view that the Sangh should keep away from the controversy, for the time being.

While I was engrossed in the work of the Sangh, my reading, thinking, and the social circumstances and events around me made me introspective. Working as the *Sahakaryawah* of the Mumbai Metropolis, a thought often came to my mind, "Am I a worker of the Sangh or of the Sangh methodology? Is not my commitment as the Sangh Karyakarta to the entire Hindu society? Or is it limited to the style of work of the Sangh? I did not put this question to anybody because I knew it was not easy to get a reply. I had to find out the answer on my own.

I wrote down my thoughts on a paper and showed it to Mukundrao Panshikar. He told me, "Make copies of this and send them to our workers at the All India level and also to Sakharyawahs." I followed his advice. A serious note was taken of my suggestions, as I could gather from the dialogue generated at various levels.



"Manu, Sangh and I"

Chapter III

I wrote my first newspaper article in 1982. The title was "Untouchability: *Dr. Hedgewar, Dr. Ambedkar*". Before I wrote the article, I was ruminating a great deal about its structure. Both these great men thought a lot about equality and their thoughts on the subject appealed to me immensely. Their obsession with ending untouchability had led me to do a lot of thinking. The urge to write something did not allow me to remain quiet. I therefore started writing to the best of my ability.

I showed my article to Shivrai Telang, a Sr RSS leader. Shivrai is a very senior and talented *Pracharak* in the Sangh. A man of mature social awareness, he reads a lot and that too, keenly and critically. I therefore gave my article to him rather nervously. He went through the article, gave me that characteristic Shivrai look and said, "Surprising that such thoughts occur to you. Please make only one alteration in the article. Change its title to 'Two doctors and one disease'." Needless to say, I carried out the suggestion.

Chittaranjan Pandit was then the Editor of *Mumbai Tarun Bharat*, a Marathi daily. I took the article to him. We had known each other long. He accepted the article for publication, and also gave it a competent editorial touch. The article appeared not only in the *Mumbai Tarun Bharat* but also in the Pune and Nagpur Tarun Bharat editions, editions of "*Tarun Bharat*". My very first article made me a writer and thinker! It was heartily welcomed in the Sangh circle. It was also translated into Hindi. The credit for making me a writer belongs to Shivrai Telang and Chittaranjan Pandit.

In a way, the article gave a definite direction to my reading, and also defined my role in the work of the Sangh. It was also accepted as the guiding principle for the *Samarasata* work.

The *Samarasata Manch* was founded in Pune in April 1983. In that year, the birth anniversaries of Dr. Hedgewar and Dr. Ambedkar occurred on the same day according to both English and Hindu calendars. Dattopant Thengdi spoke on the occasion. Later, the speech was published under the title "Social equality is impossible without social harmony (Samarasata)". This speech is regarded as the main thesis of the *Samarasata* work.

From 1980 my visits to Sambhajnagar (Aurangabad) became frequent. There I used to meet Sukhadev Navale, a senior RSS worker. We used to have lengthy discussions which mainly centered around the current status of the work of the Sangh, social awareness among Sangh workers, the image of the Sangh in Maharashtra, the disaffection for the Sangh among dalits. Between Sukhadev and me, I felt there was a great deal of similarity in our thinking. Not only did Sukhadev think about these things but also sought to translate his thoughts into action. He had very affectionate contacts with hundreds of dalit workers. He paid personal attention to the dalit brothers, and took pains to fulfill their material needs. He used to inculcate in his colleagues that 'the Sangh work encompasses the entire society and is not confined to middle classes. The Sangh should reflect all sections of our society.' The social orientation which the Sangh activities in Sambhajnagar had acquired was indeed a rewarding experience.

Navale had made intensive study of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule. He had good diction, could deal with a subject systematically, and was adept in quoting appropriate references. My friendship with him, both at the emotional and intellectual levels, started growing apace. Later, we became very close.

At this time, I came into contact also with Bhikuji Idate. We used to come together in provincial meetings. Bhikuji hails from Dapoli, a Taluka place in Konkan region. Like me, he was a *Shudra* by caste, *Atishudra* to put it correctly in the parlance of the progressives. He belonged to one of the nomadic tribes which move about from place to place without a fixed house or property anywhere. In the "communal" language of the Sangh, however, he was a Hindu. Emotional and intellectual bonds of friendship developed quickly between us. The Sangh had brought about a radical change in our life and outlook. That was one basis for our friendship, and the other was that we had the same respect and reverence for Dr. Ambedkar.

Whenever Navale, Idate and I came together, we talked a lot about the problems of dalits, exchanged our experiences, and discussed new books and articles we had read. We also discussed the venomous propaganda against the Sangh launched by the leftists. We were now becoming sharply aware of the need for the Sangh to take a firm and definite stand on the subject of dalits.

All three of us were 'influential' officers in the Sangh. Influential in the sense that we held important positions in the Sangh. While I was *Sahakaryawah* of Mumbai metropolis, Idate was the *Karyawah* of Ratnagiri, a District Place in Konkan region, and Navale the *Karyawah* of Marathawada. Our understanding of the Sangh was also thorough. That is why our views carried weight in the Sangh.

During this period I came into closer contact with Damuanna Date, a senior *Pracharak* of the Sangh. He has been a *Pracharak* since 1950. After his graduation in Engineering, he set out to promote the work of the Sangh. Damuanna is endowed with a

pleasant and attractive personality. Of course, external appearance is of no importance to the Sangh. Besides a handsome personality, Damuanna has many other magnetic qualities. He is a patient listener, tries to understand everything that is being said, and never poses as the wisest and most experienced. There are very few *Pracharaks* of the Sangh to equal Damuanna in these qualities. Invariably he sent the workers fully satisfied after a meeting with him. Some people command respect because of their age, others are honoured because of their experience. I value Damuanna most as a friend, philosopher, and guide.

Although not its office bearer, Damuanna is responsible for the functioning of the *Samarasta Manch*. Workers like me who are office bearers, work under his guidance. He is our guardian angel.

"Dalit" was one subject on which Damuanna had made abundant scholarly reading. Well versed in dalit literature, he had read the autobiographies of dalits, and writings literature about them. Some activists of the Sangh were continuously urging Damuanna that the Sangh should start work in the field of dalits. Damuanna himself had realised the need for it. Damuanna had precise, well defined views on reservations for Dalit, their problems, and Hindutva and his thoughts were clearly reflected in his speeches.

While outlining our approach to and mode of thinking about Dalit problems, he used to say, "Medical students are required to dissect dead bodies to understand the functioning of human organism. They have to do the dissection to understand how the different parts of the body like liver, heart, eyes, ears function. None of them has any attachment to the body which is dissected.

"Suppose among them, there is a student who is a close relative of the dead person whose body is being dissected. It may well be a mother, uncle or brother. What will the student feel about the whole thing? Dissection for analysis may be acceptable but the student will certainly feel unbearable anguish. The same is of social problems. A great deal of post mortem has taken place in respect of untouchability, inequality, and social customs.

"We should not forget that we are organically related to this society. Our relationship with it is one of blood. A keen awareness of this relationship will enable us to find out means for elimination of social distortions". He used to give the example of Shri Guruji. In the wake of his interview to '*Navakaal*', Shri Guruji was subjected to a lot of mud-slinging. Yet he had never said that the *Chaturvarnya* was needed today for the sustenance of the society. Instead, Shri Guruji had suggested an effective way of eradicating untouchability. In a simple but powerful religious gesture, the Shankaracharya should garland the untouchables, and announce that untouchability has ended. The socialists in Pune criticized this suggestion. "Who is this Shankaracharya to end the untouchability in this way? We don't recognize him", the socialists said.

Some socialists like Shirubhau Limaye and Vaidya met the Guruji at Pune. They asked the Guruji the same question. The Guruji replied, "The question is not whether you recognize the Shankaracharya or not. Chores of Hindus respect him. And what is untouchability? It is another name of the narrow-mindedness of the Savarnas, the higher castes. That should be cured".

Such conversations used to highlight the meaning of social unity and integrity and what precisely is the eradication of untouchability.

Although the *Samajik Samarasata Manch* was set up in 1983, its work was still to commence. In Maharashtra, it was difficult for the Manch to push its programme ahead unless the Sangh took its charge. In 1984, I was Karyawah in the Second year Sangh Training class. It was the first time that the class of the three regions viz., Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Vidarbha, was held together. Dattopant Thengdi was with the class for three days. I discussed with him for the first time, issues like equality and social harmony. Initially, I was not happy with the word Samarasata. My friends, Navale and Idate too, had reservations about the word. There was a reason for that.

For equality '*Samata*' has been the word in vogue in Maharashtra. People quickly understand its meaning. Then why replace it with "*Samarasata*" which was rather difficult to pronounce as compared to "*Samata*"? If the word "*Samata*" was replaced with the word "*Samarasata*", there might be problems. It may be interpreted that we are rejecting "*Samata*" (equality). Neither Dr. Ambedkar nor Mahatma Phule used the word "*Samarasata*". Then why should we do it?

Dattopant Thengdi's reply to this question was a gem. He said "The movement for equality (*Samata*), is a movement of the leftists. If we started our movement with their shibboleth, people will not realise the uniqueness of our movement. Moreover, the leftists will start claiming that 'the Sangh is borrowing their words because the Sangh philosophy does not have room for equality'. We must have our own concept of equality, he continued. Of course we want equality but more than that, we want Samarasata which alone can bring equality on a durable footing. Whatever we do, will be subjected to criticism. To criticise us has become a profession of some people. Do not bother about them. Do your work with patience and diligence. Do not be hasty. Keep in mind Shri Guruji's saying- "Hasten slowly" and you will have few difficulties," said Dattopant Thengdi.

As said earlier, the Samarasata Manch was inaugurated on April 14, 1983 at Pune. Honourable Dattopant Thengdi spoke on the occasion. His speech became famous under the title 'Equality Impossible Without Harmony'. Dattopant is known as a great thinker in the Sangh. His presentation is usually accepted as that of the Sangh. In the said speech, he had traced the common points in the social ideology of Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Hegewar. He had shown how the orientation of a worker engaged in Samarasata should occur. The third Sarsanghchalak, revered Shri Balasaheb Deoras, had made the Sangh stand clear on 'Hindu organisation and social equality' in 1974. He said that the Varna (in Sanskrit it means colour but here it is used in the context of Chaturvarnya i.e. four caste system and means caste only) and the caste system should be thrown out lock, stock and barrel as they had no relevance today. Since we had firm direction from the Sangh, and from Sanghchalak like Balasaheb Deoras, our task was made easy. We did not have to inject any new thinking in the Swayamsevaks. Our work was limited to conveying the thoughts of Balasaheb Deoras and Dattopant Thengdi to Swayamsevaks in our own language.

In 1985, the Sangh activists decided to spread the work of the Samarasata Manch all over Maharashtra. Meetings were called and names of activists finalized. Later, a meeting of all the leading activists was held at Sambhajinagar (a new name for

Aurangabad). As the *Sahapracharak*, Damuanna Date was to take charge of the Manch. A lot of discussion in respect of the structure of the manch took place in this very first meeting. Dattopant Thengdi was of the view that the Manch should remain a movement and no constitution should be thought of for the time being. As per his advice an ad hoc committee was set up.

Mohanrao Gawandi was appointed the chairman of the Manch. Bhikuji Idate became the Executive President. In the meeting it was decided to publish a bulletin to disseminate our ideas and give directions to the workers. The bulletin was entitled *Samajik Samarasata Patrika (bulletin)*. I was appointed the Editor of this Bulletin. Namdeorao Ghadge, a senior Sangh Pracharak, was entrusted with the organizational work of the Manch. Sukhdev Navale and Arvindrao Harshe were included in the executive committee.

The nature of work of the Manch was also discussed at this meeting. It was not possible for us to fully understand the complexity of our undertaking at the very first meeting. We could only comprehend its broad outline. Strictly speaking, Sangh workers do not need any training in the Samarasata brotherhood theory as it is. They live it every moment in their Sangh work. However in the first meeting itself, we realised that we had to work for the Manch at two levels.

Whatever the name given to it, the Samarasata work was going to be looked upon by others as a '*Sanghist*' programme in so far as would be operated by the Sangh workers and Swayamsevaks. Sangh Swayamsevaks and Sangh Karyakartas do not believe in caste nor do they harbour inequality in their minds and therefore their actions too are never tainted with it. Even then, the average Swayamsevak regards Mahatma Phule and Dr Ambedkar as strangers. He bears anger and animus against Dalits not because they are Dalits or Mahars. He does not feel Dalits in the Ambedkar movement are his own because of the policy of Reservation, the language of revolt in Dalit literature, the tenor of speeches of leaders in the Ambedkar movement and their hostility to Hindutva. It was necessary to change this attitude of Swayamsevaks. Doubtless, It was an extremely difficult task. It remains so even today.

To change the outlook of the Swayamsevaks it was necessary to familiarize them and also the people around them, with the thoughts and actions of Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar. Socialist, progressives, and transformationists were freely using the names of these two great leaders to malign Hindutva. No pro-Hindutva writer had taken any serious cognizance of Phule and Ambedkar in his writings. The *Samarasata Manch* started projecting the Phule-Ambedkar philosophy in a different context.

A number of Sangh workers took the lead in interpreting Phule-Ambedkar in the context of Hindutva. Dr Ashok Modak, Dr Babu Kendurkar, *Sahasanghchhalak* of Mulund Zone, Prof. Aniruddha Deshpande, and Arvindrao Harshe are senior and respectable leaders of the Sangh. They are well-versed in the work of the Sangh. They made a thorough study of the Phule-Ambedkar philosophy, reflected deeply on it, and took great pains over its interpretation. Workers like me who held responsible positions but were not particularly studious, were immensely benefited by it.

The regional leadership of the Sangh also seemed determined to push forward the Samarasata programmes. In one of the early meetings, Vasanttrao Kelkar gave us valuable guidance on "Samarasata in the Sangh work". Kelkar's experience of the Sangh's work since the pre-ban days of 1948 is substantial. He gave many examples to illustrate how all castes were well represented in the Sangh, and how, right from its commencement, those in the Sangh live in a spirit of harmony and togetherness. There is an acute need, he said, of explaining the equality and togetherness inherent in the Sangh to the people who are moving away from Hindutva and whom we have to take with us. We have to give social expression to our thoughts, he said.

Thereafter, we started trying to harmonize the Phule-Ambedkar thought with the Hindutva philosophy. That was not difficult. Balasaheb Deoras had often said from public platforms that both Phule and Ambedkar were concerned with the problems of the Hindu society. The problems they took in hand belonged to the entire Hindu society and therefore, it would be quite appropriate to call them Hindu reformers.

I studied Dr Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule on my own, in the light of the viewpoint expressed by Balasaheb Deoras. Sukhadev Navale, and Bhikhu Idate also studied them. Damuanna Date too is well-versed in the subject. Our studies prompted us to find out what were the timeless thoughts in the writings of Phule and Ambedkar, what were purely topical issues, and to analyze their thoughts in the context of time. Along with others, I developed a habit of reflecting on these questions.

Samarasata Manch workers had frequent meetings to discuss the ways and means of organising the Manch programmes. Social problems also figured in the talks. To start with, simple programmes that were easy to organise were undertaken. Damuanna Date issued a guideline that since saints and social reformers belong to the entire society, their commemoration should not be confined to specific castes. Their birth or death anniversaries should be celebrated in the central part of towns and villages, with all people participating. Thereafter, the birth anniversaries of *Sena Maharaj*, a poet saint of Maharashtra from barber community, *Valmiki*, a great poet saint of ancient times who became a *Rishi* (sage) and wrote Ramayana in Sanskrit but originally who hailed from a lower caste of fishermen, *Rohidas*, another great saint of Maharashtra from cobbler community, and *Lahuji Salve* a freedom fighter from low caste, began to be celebrated in which people belonging to all castes participated. The Ambedkar Jayanti (birth anniversary) too started being celebrated at a central place in the town, with people of all social hues joining in the celebrations. The practice was started in Bombay, Pune, and Nashik by the Samarasata Manch. Every where, the programmes were organised on a big scale, and we took that opportunity to explain our viewpoint on Phule and Ambedkar.

A number of funny incidents occurred in the early stages of the Manch activities. My booklet 'Samajik Samarasata Dr Hedgewar and Dr Ambedkar' was published in 1988. The cover of the book featured colour photographs of Dr Hedgewar and Dr Ambedkar. In the picture, Dr Hedgewar was capless (Dr Ambedkar, of course, never wore any cap). The copies of the book went to all parts of the state including Vidarbha. Swayamsevaks in Vidarbha got hold of the book. In Vidarbha, where the Sangh has been around virtually from the beginning, there were any number of Swayamsevaks who had seen Dr

Hedgewar from close quarters. Sukhdev Navale was on a tour of Vidarbha. When he returned, he told me, "Ramesh, Swayamsevaks in Vidarbha are greatly annoyed over your book".

"What for?", I queried.

"First, you have printed a joint photograph of Dr Hedgewar and Dr Ambedkar. Secondly, Dr Hedgewar's photo is capless".

"I used the photograph that was available to me. I did not decap Dr Hedgewar", I said.

"Your explanation is all right, but they feel you are doing all this to please Dalits. They asked me, 'Who is this Patange? What does he think about himself?' You may be in trouble, Ramesh", Navale said.

Amusing situations also arose when we started looking for workers to carry the Manch activities. As the Manch work would cover Dalit localities, we wanted workers who were willing to go and work there. Not every worker in the Sangh was favourably disposed to do so. Many workers thought that only Dalit workers should work among Dalits. This assumption was dangerous from the Sangh's stand point. The Sangh was striving to de-caste the Hindu mind and was poised to achieve astonishing success in it. At such a juncture, picking up only Dalit workers among us might be extremely hazardous. The matter therefore called for very tactful handling. I remember a dialogue a prominent worker had with Idate.

"Who among you is the Samarasata Manch worker for your district?" Idate asked.

"We don't have a worker of that type" was the reply.

"That type means what type?" asked Idate.

"We mean we don't have an active Dalit worker".

"Who told you that we want a Dalit worker for the Manch? From when have we started thinking in terms of caste?"

"There is nothing like that", said the worker, "But I was under the impression that as the Manch work is among Dalits, workers from that section will be preferred".

It took us two years to remove these misunderstandings. Many people did not like our working among Dalits in this way. Their dislike was theoretical. They felt that since we did not believe in castes and untouchability in the Sangh, where was the need for separate work for Dalits? Would it not lead to separation of sentiments? The only way to counter their objection was through our work.

As the Samarasata programmes gained momentum, the number of those who took notice of them also grew. The Manch work was initially described as a stunt by the RSS to attract Dalits. "How is Dr. Ambedkar related to these Manuists?", it was asked, "The Sangh's samarasata game is chicanery of counter-revolutionaries", said others. We were taken note of in the choicest epithets. By this time, I had made a great deal of progress in comprehending the progressive parlance. It was not difficult for me to give them a dose of their own medicine.

I had established myself as a regular writer in "Vivek" and "Tarun Bharat". Undoubtedly the Sangh, was the inspiration behind my penmanship. I felt that the Sangh philosophy should find expression in different contexts consistent with its backdrop. I therefore took to writing although nobody specifically asked me to do so. Shivrai Telang had always a word of encouragement for the writer in me. Damuanna used to describe my writings as 'outstanding'. Later, in 1988, I was appointed as assistant Editor of Vivek, and after a year became its Executive Editor. Thus a paper came in my charge. Besides, the Samarasata Manch Patrika was already there.

The Manch work had hardly reached its second year, when a highly sensitive and provocative problem confronted Maharashtra. The Congress government had decided to publish Dr. Ambedkar's entire works and some volumes had started appearing every year. The fourth volume of Dr. Babasaheb's writing appeared in 1987. This volume contained a chapter entitled 'Riddles of Rama and Krishna'. In this article, Dr. Ambedkar has severely criticized Rama and Krishna and taken exception to their characters. Even Sita is not spared.

After the volume was published, Madhav Gadkari, the then editor of Loksatta wrote about it in his column '*Chaufer*' (literal meaning "all around"). The government, by publishing literature maligning Rama and Krishna, has hurt the feelings of Hindus, he said. Gadkari talking of Hindu feelings was a big joke, as he is not known for his love of Hindutva. He moves about in progressive circles and is generally known as Sharad Pawar's drumbeater. However, his criticism of the fourth volume of Dr. Ambedkar's work had a distinctly political purpose.

When the government of India had banned Salman Rushdie's book, when "Satanic Verses". The Ramjanmabhoomi (a place in town Ayodhya where Lord Rama is believed to have been born and considered to be a great holy place by Hindus and yet on which a structure resembling a mosque was imposed by an invader and hence was called Babri Masjid) movement had commenced in 1986. The temple in Ayodhya was unlocked. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad had assumed leadership of the campaign for the liberation of Janmabhoomi. Earlier, in 1985, the Shiv Sena a political party in Maharashtra had adopted Hindutva as its political ideology. The emotional atmosphere was charged in favour of Hindutva. Rajiv Gandhi superseded the Supreme Court verdict in the Shah Bano case (a case of grant of alimony in which Supreme Court's verdict was against the provisions of Shariat of Muslims) by enacting a new law taking the issue of alimony out of the purview of court. This act of Rajiv Gandhi produced a sharp reaction among Hindus.

In Maharashtra, Sharad Pawar and Shankarrao Chavan, were locked in an intensive power struggle in those days. Shankarrao was the Chief Minister at the time of the Riddles controversy. Political manoeuvres were afoot to incite conflict between the Dalits and non-Dalit Hindus, to create problems and embarrassment for the Chief Minister.

Gadkari used the Riddles chapter toward this end. Shiv Sena by then had become a Hindutva organisation, adopting Hindutva ideology as a political ploy with an eye on votes. To maximize political advantage from the Hindutva ploy, the Sena added to it a rabid anti-Muslim stand, and an equally rabid anti-Ambedkarism. Ambedkarites any way did not command much sympathy in the minds of other large sections of non-Dalits in Maharashtra. Gadkari's write up was indeed a God-send for the Shiv Sena.

The Shiv Sena Pramukh (Chief) demanded that the controversial chapter should be deleted from the fourth volume of Ambedkar's writings. His stand was that the calumny of Rama and Krishna had hurt the sentiments of Hindus, and we would no longer tolerate anybody at will coming and kicking us this way. He naively walked into the trap set by Sharad Pawar and Gadkari, and got enmeshed in it. The declaration of the Shiv Sena policy awakened the Dalits. Their leaders like Ramdas Athavale, Prakash Ambedkar, and Gangadhar Gadhe joined hands, and the socialist bands gathered around them. They did not obviously want to let go the opportunity to attack Hindutva through Dalits.

Dalits took out a huge procession on the issue of the Riddles chapter. Highly provocative speeches were made by their leaders. The Shiv Sena too, organised a huge procession, and inflammatory harangues were duly delivered. There was already a wide social gulf between Dalits and non-dalits (*savarnas*). The processions and counter-processions widened the gulf. The rancour spread to far off villages too. Tremendous social tensions ensued. A single untoward incident might have resulted in our own people cutting each other's throat. Once it is decided to politicize an issue, the question of social stability and solidarity becomes superfluous.

I myself felt very uneasy and restless in these circumstances. My outlook was not the same as before. I no longer thought that the Sangh was only shakha, and the shakha was the be-all and end-all of my Sangh life. I was of the view that the Sangh should take a decisive stand in the context of the Riddles controversy. The Shiv Sena was not the sole spokesman of Hindus. We too, were there. I proposed to the main workers that our viewpoint should be explained to the people. This was followed by a meeting. The issue was discussed with Damuanna Date, Shripati Shastri, Vasantrao Kelkar, Navale, and Idate. It was decided that I should write an article explaining the viewpoint of the Sangh, and the article should have a credit line in the name of "Karyawah, Samajik Samarasata Manch." I accordingly wrote in the 'Vivek' weekly an article entitled "Ram versus Ambedkar a controversy gnawing at the vitals of social unity". The viewpoint of the Samarasata Manch and therefore, of the Sangh was clearly reflected in this article.

In a forthright manner the article made the following suggestions:

- 1) The Riddles chapter should not be deleted.
- 2) Dr Ambedkar is not an enemy of Hindu society.
- 3) In case this controversy is stretched too far, it will cause tremendous loss to the Hindus, and Muslims will take advantage of it.
- 4) Madhav Gadkari and Sharad Pawar are driving a wedge in society by inciting conflicts to achieve their selfish ends.

It was not easy to take a stand against pro-Hindutva Shiv Sena. Ambedkarites (followers of Ambedkar's dogmas and hence mostly Dalits) were not friends of the Sangh. From the ideological point of view, the Shiv Sena was closer to us than the Ambedkarites. The question before us was whether to look for a temporary advantage or to think of the long-term future and well being of the society. Dr Hegdegar and Shri Guruji had never given a thought to temporary advantages. We decided to follow them.

My article was appreciated. Our viewpoint was conveyed to the people. It was not that this viewpoint was approved by all the seniors of the Sangh. There was a large group which felt that the Sangh should keep aloof from the controversy. We, the Manch workers, were rather worried about it. Although we held positions of responsibility in the Sangh, at that time, we were still second rank workers. Our grasp of social problems and our scholastic ability were yet to be prove. An incident which took place helped the credibility of my article.

A senior and elderly Sangh worker asked Dattopant Thengdi in Pune, "What is our stand on the Riddles issue?" Dattopant replied, "Please read Patange's article in Vivek. The article explains our stand". The senior worker held me close to him, patted me approvingly on the back, and said, "Henceforth, we will have to take your writings quite seriously." The incident overwhelmed me. I was having a direct personal experience of how a worker in the Sangh is moulded and how his importance is built up. After this, I started wielding my pen with greater caution and responsibility.

In the course of the Riddles controversy, a time came when it was felt that the Sangh should take a lead in the matter. There appeared to be a need for release of a statement by the regional *Sanghchalak* or the regional (prantik) *Karyawah*. Progressives are always in the forefront in issuing statements. The Sangh, however, does not have this type of statement mentality. *Prant Sanghchalak* represents *Sanghchalak*, and *Karyawah* is a representative of *Sahakaryawah*. Their views consequently are the Sangh's views in its entirety in the sense that all organisations affiliated to RSS hold the same views. No institution of the Sangh will counter it. This is not the case with progressives and socialists. Most hold personal views without any commitment to any organisation. How then was the Sangh to issue its statement?

I discussed the matter with Idate and Sukhadev Navale. I also met Damuanna Datey. It is normally not difficult to place a matter before Damuanna. He immediately accorded his consent. Shripati Shastri was the prant karyawah at that time. It was decided to issue the statement with his signature. It was also decided to organise a seminar on "Stop the Riddles Controversy" in Bombay.

While the proposal for the seminar was on the anvil, the then editor of "Tarun Bharat" (Bombay), Sudhir Joglekar wrote an editorial entitled "Stop this Riddles controversy". Going against the current of popularism and publicity, he put forward a

plea in favour of the larger and long-term interests of the society. The editorial earned kudos at that time. It also won him the Dr. Kakasaheb Khadilkar Best Editorial Award of the Bombay Union of Journalists.

In Mumbai, Dilip Karambelkar, then editor of Marathi Weekly "Vivek", Sudhir Joglekar, then editor of Marathi daily, Mumbai Tarun Bharat and I called on Prakash Ambedkar, and 'Navakal' editor, Neelkanth Khadilkar, to request them to participate in the seminar. Prof. Ram Kapse and Wamanrao Parab were undoubtedly our own people. Meanwhile, a statement on the speech of Shripati Shastri Prant Karyawah, RSS was released. I took copies of the statement to Pune and had it distributed to leading newspapers. 'Navakal' featured it on the front page with a heading in bold letters. The statement read like this :

**"Dr Ambedkar was a friend of the Hindu society, never an enemy"
- Shripati Shastri 18-1-1988**

A noisy controversy has been raised in Maharashtra on the chapter, 'Riddles of Rama and Krishna' written by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. It would be a great blunder to regard Dr Ambedkar as the enemy of Hinduism by misinterpreting his controversial writings. To resort to this type of propaganda in respect of Dr Ambedkar is tantamount to distortion of his work and message. Dr Ambedkar's lifetime mission was to reconstruct and reorganize the Hindu society on the basis of equality, freedom and fraternity. A thorough study of his entire life and literature should therefore be made before making any comments on him in the present context. Instead of doing so, to conduct disinformation campaigns about him by using his writings, which he kept unpublished, would be the height of myopia", said Shripati Shastri, Karyawah, RSS, Maharashtra Prant. He was speaking on the occasion of the publication of the journal "Samarasata" brought out by the Samajik Samarasata Manch at Pune.

He further said in his speech that to create a gulf between Dalits and non-Dalits would be against the interests of our country. Mahatma Gandhi staked his life to prevent such rifts in the society. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar too, while working for the uplift of Dalits, did not resort to any step which might cause cleavage in society or would lead to unnecessary conflicts. In today's difficult times, it is exceedingly necessary to maintain social harmony and solidarity, to promote fraternity and friendliness in the society, and to ensure amity and cordiality. Efforts in this direction will be conducive to the interests and happiness of all of us.

Unfortunately, many politicians have been misusing Dr Ambedkar's writings to serve their selfish party ends to strengthen their leadership. Crores of people in this country have faith in Shri Rama and Shri Krishna. Dalit leaders should bear this in mind while projecting their views on them. Dalit brothers would not like this type of strong language being used in respect of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar whom they hold in faithful reverence. Similarly, unnecessary use of harsh words about Ram and Krishna would disturb social peace and harmony.

The show of strength against each other by Dalits and non-Dalits would benefit the enemies of society. Christian missionaries, Muslims and Communists are waiting for such an opportunity. The Hindu society, therefore, should not sentimentalize the Riddles issue and should look at it in the perspective of reason. Heavens are not going to fall if the chapter 'Riddles of Rama and Krishna' remains in the fourth volume published by the State Government.

Finally in his speech, Shripati Shastri appealed to the wise and mature people in the society to come together to evolve a common platform. "That was the need of the hour", he said.

The statement of the Sangh and the proposed seminar worked like a magic wand. On the previous night itself, Chief Minister Chavan had called a meeting of Dalits and the Shiv Sena leaders. In the meeting it was decided not to remove the 'Riddles' chapter from the fourth volume. The controversy was over.

The 'Riddles' affair considerably enhanced the stature of the Samajik Samarasata Manch in the Sangh circles. The Manch had played a highly decisive role in defusing a terrible social storm. This was recognised by all. Personally speaking, it was now well established that Idate, Navale and I had some insight into social problems and there was substance in what we said. This recognition proved immensely helpful in subsequent efforts.

The Riddles controversy was viewed as a golden opportunity to lash at the RSS. The entire lobby of progressive prophets, however, must have felt disappointed. They had probably thought that the Sangh would not take any stand in the controversy, and the passivity of the Sangh will enable them to put the entire blame for the opposition to Dalits at the door of the Sangh. They had tried the same thing at the time of the movement for change in the name of the Marathwada University. The change in the name was opposed by socialists. The frontline socialist leaders were Govindbhai Shroff, Prof. Narahar Kurundkar, and Anantrao Bhalerao. They cooked up a theoretical background for their opposition to the change in the name. They tried the same experiment in respect of Dalits. They were so smart that they opposed the change in the name of the University but passed on the blame dexterously to the portals of the Sangh, and cleverly projecting the Sangh as hostile to Dalits. They thought the Riddles affair too, offered a similar opportunity. But their hopes were dashed. We, in their parlance, Manuists, opposed the opposition to 'Riddles'. We took a stand against Hindutva protagonists and therefore, socialists could not call it sham or hypocrisy.

This success gave a fillip to the work of the Manch as well. A need had now arisen to speedily propagate our thoughts at the social level. We all wanted to organise programmes which would be widely discussed in the social circles in Maharashtra. After a great deal of deliberations, we scheduled a programme in 1987.

We had detailed discussions about the message we wanted to put across through the programme. The Dalit movement appeared to be one-sided. It was synonymous the Ambedkarite movement. The impression was that the Dalit movement stood only for revolt, and was devoid of any constructive outlook. The reality, however, was different. There are countless workers in the Dalit movement doing constructive work. We should seek them out, and felicitate and honour them, I proposed. The proposal was duly discussed, and we all decided to go ahead with the programme.

Once a programme is agreed upon, the entire Sangh machinery starts working to make it successful. We started looking out for constructive workers in the Dalit movement who deserved to be honoured. Our workers met them and requested them to accept our felicitations. They agreed. Eighteen individuals belonging to different castes were to be thus honoured.

The venue for the programme posed a problem. Damuanna held the view that the programme should be staged at a central place in Pune, not in the Dalit localities outside the city, nor in the schools run by Dalits. Accordingly, the place of the programme was fixed at the Bharat Natyamandir, a premier theater in Sadashiv Peth at Pune.

Sadashiv Peth has an exceptional historical context. A lot of propaganda has been made that the Peth is a stronghold of traditionalists, and the orthodox in the Hindu society. The felicitation function of Dalit workers was being organised at a place with such exceptional reputation. All manch workers were very happy with the venue and also because they felt that such programmes would go a long way in reaching the true image of the RSS to the people.

The programme will have to be called unique. The hall was filled to capacity. Socialist comrades were also seen in the audience perhaps with the hope of disrupting the proceedings. The felicitation was truly an event organised by the society in that the Government had nothing to do with it. Moreover, the felicitation function was being held under the aegis of people who were hitherto maligned as Manuists, communalists, and anti-egalitarian. Those who were going to be honoured carried a huge baggage of misunderstanding about us. Not that all of us were equally well acquainted with leaders like Chandram Guruji, Gotad Guruji, Smt Salunkhe, M D Shewale (of the Depressed Class Mission) and Laxmanrao Kelkar. The event offered a pleasant glimpse of 'Samarasata'. Those who were felicitated were moved by the unprecedented experience of being respectfully invited and honoured. Many felt that now that the Sangh had concerned itself with the problem of social inequality, it would not be long before social inequality became a thing of the past.

The programme thoroughly confused the so-called socialists in Maharashtra. They could neither commend nor condemn it. The Sangh could not be called Manuist nor could it be called egalitarian. The big guns among socialists in Pune kept mum. To use the progressive parlance, the majority of the planners, organizers, financiers and volunteers were "Brahmins". "Non-Brahmins" were comparatively small in number. But neither in our mind nor in our conduct even a trace of caste feelings exists. This was of course natural since the Sangh swayamsevaks work with only one consciousness the consciousness, of being a Hindu. The consciousness class and caste has been we have gifted away by us to the socialists.

The problem of reservations had become a delicate and sensitive issue. Gujarat, a Western state of India witnessed a big agitation against the Reservation policy in 1981. A meeting of the All India Delegates of the RSS took place in March that year. The issue of agitations in Gujarat inevitably came up in the meeting. The workers from Gujarat had become high strung on the issue. When Resolution justifying reservations came up for discussion at the meeting, every word of it was subjected to minute scrutiny. Many representatives opined that the Resolution was hasty, and likely to evoke adverse reaction in a large section of the people. Swayamsevaks from Gujarat understandably were naturally were unhappy. I was intently listening to the discussions. In view of so much opposition from workers, I was worried and felt the resolution would not go through. But it did.

Sarsanghachalak Balasaheb Deoras was calm but attentive at the meeting. After debate was over, the meeting broke for tea. When the meeting resumed, Balasaheb Deoras said, "I have heard the discussion in the meeting. I have understood that Many amongst us are not in favour the of Resolution. I request you all to imagine yourself in the place of those for whom the Reservations are meant. Try to enter their minds and see the present condition of those of our brethren, who have been neglected for hundreds of years. Understand their feelings. Then only take your decision." After his speech, there was hardly any discussion and the Resolution was passed. The Sangh had officially endorsed the Reservations.

The wily progressives did not take any cognizance of this Resolution of the Sangh. The Resolution was rather inconvenient to them. They continued their propaganda that the Sangh was against Reservations. The workers of the *Samrasata Manch* started explaining the Sangh's stand on Reservation in clear and forthright language. To enable the workers to speak on the subject effectively, Bhikuji Idate wrote a booklet on 'The Need for Reservations' in Marathi. Twenty thousand copies of the booklet were sold out. This booklet, served as our official literature.

Navale used to tell a succinct story in the context of Reservations. "I have some farmland," he said, "However, I don't do any farming, my cousins do it. But on record, the land is in my name. Once I received a notice from the Land Development Bank asking me to repay the loan which it said I had taken against this land. I was surprised as I had not taken any loan. Enquiries revealed that there indeed was a loan outstanding in my name, because the entry was based on the *Saat-baara* extract and which showed my name as the holder of the land. I had therefore to repay the loan which I had never taken." (*Saat-baara* is an authenticated document with correct names of the owners of all plots of land duly defined.)

After this story, Navale used to say, "In the same way, we should take out the *Saat-baara* document in respect of Mother India. Our forefathers have taken a massive loan on our account, we are under obligation to repay it. We can't say that our own generation has not perpetrated any injustice on Dalits. We can't claim inheritance in respect of only good things. We would have to accept our heritage along with the debt. There is no escape from it." Navale's story was so relevant to the issue that it went home, making the audience think over it seriously.

When we, who were branded as Manuists, began to speak in support of reservations, Dalit problems and Dr. Ambedkar's thought, there was a stir in the society. The Sangh opponents were at their wits end. Why are the Sangh swayamsevaks, quiet about Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts for so long, speaking out, now of all times? They drew the conclusion that having found Hindutva inadequate to link all special sections together, the Sangh is now taking resort to Dr. Ambedkar. It is just a ploy, they said, to woo the Dalit voter on BJP's behalf.

Those who sympathized with the Sangh felt that the Sangh was going through an ideological transformation, which was long overdue. But better late than never. They were happy that the Sangh has accepted social commitment, relinquishing orthodoxy. I find both these attitudes rather amusing. As per its ideology, the Sangh is concerned with each and every

problem of the Hindu society. The Sangh will take them up as and when it thinks doing so is consistent with its strength and the society's needs. No ideological transformation takes place in the Sangh. The Sangh only charts out the truth. The truth is eternal. It is manifest in a variety of ways. Although we project Hindutva, we do so in a dynamic social context.

Thus Samarasata Manch commenced its work. While Manch was new, could the same be said of its philosophy? Dr. Hedgewar had expressed it in two words, "Hindu Sanghatan (Unification)". In Maharashtra, Dr. Hedgewar is not counted as a thinker and philosopher. According to me, he was the greatest philosopher of this century. The impact of his thought is enhancing every day. The workers draw inspiration from it. It is his philosophy which they project through their work in the context of the changing times.

In 1988, we organised a programme which triggered off quite a commotion in the social life of Maharashtra. Prior to 1988, a social conference was held under the sponsorship of Madhav Gadkari, editor of Loksatta. The conference was a revival of the original idea of the Nineteenth Century reformer, Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade. The conference was held at Niphad, a place in eastern Maharashtra, with the usual fanfare and publicity which an Editor of an influential daily normally commands. Gadkari was successful in collecting all progressives in Maharashtra for the Conference. The Sangh as of course, is never invited to such social conventions since progressives regard it as socially untouchable. Any contact with it pollutes the sanctity of socialist Brahmins!

After the social "connection" conference at Niphad, an Equality (samata) conference took place in Pune. Baba Adhav, a prominent socialist had taken a lead in organising the conference, and Dr. Sharadchandra Gokhale, an eminent Sociologist, and writer presided over it.

A Sangh Swayamsevak and prominent BJP activist in Pune, Dr. Arvind Lele was invited to participate in the conference. When his name was announced from the dais, Dr. Baba Adhav stood up and took exception to Dr. Lele making a speech in the conference. "I will walk out of the meeting if Lele is allowed to speak," he said. The atmosphere in the auditorium became tense and explosive. The conference was on the verge of disruption. Dr. Lele behaved like a mature Sangh Swayamsevak and relinquished his right to speak. That was an insult which he swallowed, quietly, with dignity.

The news of that incident stung me with the force of a hundred scorpion bites. Dr. Lele and I were in no way closely connected. We had met in the Sangh's meetings and programmes. I did not view the Samata episode as an insult to his person alone. I felt that the entire Sangh was the target of the insult. I was aware about Dr Baba Adhav, his ideological bias, and the roots of his hatred for the Sangh. Bhiku Idate had told me many anecdotes about him in the Yerwada prison in Pune. This person who claimed heritage to the thoughts of Mahatma Phule and Dr Ambedkar had a rancorous mind. Even after being submerged in the Ganga-like stream of the philosophy of these two great souls, he had remained unaffected by them. Subsequently I have often quoted this incident to explain the rotten nature of the socialist and progressive psyche.

Against the above setting, the *Samarasata Manch* decided to hold a social conference in Pune. Prof. Aniruddha Deshpande took great pains to make the convention a success. This was the first time we were organising a social conference of this type. Hitherto our experience was limited to holding of shibirs (camps), social meets, and joint lunches or dinners (*sahbhajan*), and arranging functions and programmes. Convening a conference was something new for us. It was also incumbent on us to explain the *raison-d'etre* of the conference.

Social conferences and social meets in Maharashtra are normally 'social' only in name. Most of them are purely political ploys. They serve for many as stepping stones to the political arena. Also, they are found most handy and useful in providing a platform to give vent to anti-RSS sentiments. Speeches against the Sangh are delivered at these conventions, freely using such expressions as communalists, Manuists, counter-revolutionaries, fascists, Hitlerites, inegalitarians, enemies of the oppressed, Dalits and the exploited, Brahminists, champions of social injustice, and so on. Nanasahab Goray and Tarkateerth Laxmanrao Joshi were invariably chairmen of such conferences, which invariably ended after passing verbose resolutions in favour of agitation to turn the society upside down. We did not want to hold a sham conference of this type.

In stead, we wished to evolve some guidelines and place them before the society through the conference. First of all, social problems pertain to the entire society, and they should not be associated with particular castes. Secondly, society as a whole should come together to discuss the problems confronting it. It should seek the solutions to social problems through dialogue among its different groups. Thirdly, the social platform should be unfettered, autonomous, and above politics. It should not be allowed to be used for political demagoguery. We wrote articles expounding these guidelines. Prof Aniruddha Deshpande's contribution in this respect was impressive. It helped build an ideological background for the conference.

We invited Dr Gangadhar Pantavane, an editor of a Marathi periodical and writer from backward class, to inaugurate the conference. Sukhadev Navale was friendly with Dr Pantavane who accepted the invitation. Before his acceptance, it was almost a certainty that he would be appointed the chairman of the Maharashtra State Sahitya and Sanskriti Mandal (Literature and Cultural Committee). The Government led by Sharad Pawar, the then Chief Minister, had already taken a decision, and a report to that effect had appeared in Maharashtra Times. Dr Pantavane had scarcely any idea what storm he was brewing by accepting the invitation, He had yet to have experience of the hate-filled mentality of the progressives.

The Samarasata conference took place in December 1988 at the Saraswati Mandir in Pune. It was attended by 2500 delegates from all over Maharashtra. This was the first convention of its type where the Hindu fraternity belonging to all castes was present. Eminent people like the literary writer Prof. Keshav Meshram and poet Shantaram Nandgaonkar attended the meet. Dr Pantavane was escorted to the conference venue by Vivek Deshpande and Balaram Yerme both RSS workers from Sambhajinagar.

Dr Panatavane's speech at the conference showed maturity of content, was polite in language and diction, and revealed influences of Dr Ambedkar's thought. He appreciated the Sangh's efforts to hold the conference, but did not utter a single word about "Hindu" or "Hindutva". He had definitely some bitter things to tell us, but he told them with utmost courtesy and grace.

Within a few days following Dr Pantavane's speech, his rival in the Dalit movement raised a hue and cry against him. Dr Yashwant Manohar, former Dalit writer and literary critic and the Marathi gazalist poet Suresh Bhat led the campaign. Suresh Bhat called Dr Pantavane, "Gangadharshastri Pantavane" (the suffix Shastri is used to ridicule him as a Brahminic fellow). He accused the doctor of getting desecrated by appearing on the platform of the RSS. It was suggested that by staying in the company of social untouchables like the RSS people, he had polluted himself. Dr Yeshwant Manohar used extremely vulgar and ribald language to condemn Dr Pantavane for this great sin. Dr Pantavane was subjected to severe calumny and criticism by Dalit journals and organisations. Attempts were made to exile him from public life in Marathwada.

To top it all, the high priest of progressives, Sharad Pawar awarded the chairmanship of the Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal to Dr Yeshwant Manohar. Punishment was thus inflicted on Dr Pantavane for his appearance on the RSS platform. He was deliberately humiliated. Dr Pantavane was shocked. He openly started proclaiming, "I am not a Sanghist, I am a bitter critic of Hindutva. The RSS concept of Hindu Rashtra is a horrible thing. I have not made any compromise with my commitment to the teachings of Mahatma Phule and Dr Ambedkar", and so on. He also started propagating that the RSS people were "Hindutvising" Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

I was quietly watching the entire show. I felt I was largely responsible for the social storm that was raging around me. The Pantavane episode exposed the groupism in the Dalit movement, the mutual jealousies and rivalries among the groups, the vulgar language used by self-styled learned people, and not the least, Sharad Pawar's progressive politics. As a responsible officer of the Sangh, I have often been on the same platform as the Sangh's inveterate opponents. But I was never considered a pariah in the Sangh for doing that. On the contrary, Damuanna Date, Vasantrao Kelkar and Bhikuji Idate always insisted that we should continue to be present at different platforms. I could not but help compare the attitude of the 'communalist' Sangh with that of the people who called themselves egalitarian, progressive, and humanist.

I still retain a great deal of respect for Dr Pantavane. His speech at our conference in no way reflected the Sangh's way of thinking. He projected only Dr Ambedkar's thoughts in his speech. This being the case, he should have taken a firm and determined stand. "Who are you", he should have asked his critics, "to observe untouchability on social platforms? What right have you to tell me where I should go and what I should speak? I enjoy the right to personal liberty and this right is very dear to me. It is an article of faith with me, I will defend it at any cost." Had he done so, his image in my mind would have been of one who acts - not only speaks - in conformity with Dr Ambedkar's philosophy. Dr Pantavane did not show this courage.

In 1995, a shift of power occurred in Maharashtra. I felt that it would now be possible to right the wrong inflicted on Dr. Pantavane. By offering the position of chairman of the State Sahitya and Sanskriti Mandal to him he could be suitably compensated for the past injustice. Damuanna Date and Bhikuji Idate felt the same way. Senior journalist D. V. Gokhale too, made a telephonic suggestion on these lines. Now that the BJP was a partner in power in the state, it was not difficult to appoint Dr Pantavane as chairman of the Mandal. We conveyed this proposal to the decision makers of BJP and they agreed. When we contacted Dr Pantavane to acquaint him with the offer, he politely declined. He was in no mood to face yet another controversy.

In comparison to Dr Pantavane, the courage shown by the poet Shantaram Nandgaonkar deserves kudos. It enhances one's respect for Nandgaonkar. He started associating himself with the programmes of the Manch from 1987-88, mainly owing to the efforts of Ravindra Pawar. When I heard his speech for the first time, I was delighted. In a frank and forthright manner, he affirmed that he used to attend a Sangh shakha as a kid. There he received lessons in love and fraternity. He felt he owed a great deal to the teachings of the Sangh for everything that is good in him. Dr Ambedkar had advised us to throw away the Dalithood. Why do we hold it tight to our bosoms in defiance of his advice, he asked. He has often pleaded from the Manch platform that Samarasata was the only way to achieve social equality.

Shantaram Nandgaonkar is an eminent person in his own right. He is influential. He could easily have joined the progressive hordes and maligned the Sangh. In that case, Sharad Pawar would have rewarded him handsomely. But Shantaram Nandgaonkar did not succumb to any of these temptations. He did not make any compromise with his principles. Therein lies his greatness.

Even as the Samarasata conference was just ending, an article on Mahatma Phule by Dr. Bal Gangal, a writer advocating Hindutva, published in the December issue of the 'Sobat' weekly, once more created a kind of upheaval in Maharashtra. "What sort of Mahatma is he? He is a stench called Phule", was the heading of the article. Dr Gangal had taken strong exception to Mahatma Phule's abusive language and his statements culled from his writings. The 'Sobat' weekly was in no way related to the RSS. Though Bal Gangal was a swayamsevak, he was not a spokesman of the Sangh. Even then, a violent commotion was created, needless to say by progressives, with a view to maligning the Sangh.

The progressive gangs who called themselves champions of the freedom of writers, freedom of expression, freedom of the individual concertedly stood up to gag the mouths of Editor G V Beherey, the Editor of a famous Marathi weekly "Sobat" and Dr Bal Gangal. I too, was encountering the ferocity of intellectual terrorism, cunning, and double-dealing. The jealous and the rancorous hypocrite had ganged up. They were blessed by the high priest of progressives, Sharad Pawar. Copies of 'Sobat' were consigned to flames at various places. Threats were hurled at Bal Gangal. It was made difficult for him to move in public places. Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini had issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie. Progressives did not believe in religious edicts as Khomeini did, but in all other aspects the mentality of both appeared identical to me. Mahatma Phule can criticise our religious scriptures, he can interpret them as he likes. In the same way, if somebody criticizes Phule, why should he be subjected to intellectual terrorism? Why is an intellectual answer not given to him?

Hari Narke, an activist and writer from backward class made an attempt to provide a strictly intellectual response. His book "Mahatma Phule: Seeking Truth" was a scholarly text. Logical arguments were carefully pitted against each other. While the controversy raged, I too, toed the line in my writings in 'Vivek' suggesting that it is not proper to project Mahatma Phule in a bad light, and that doing so would be damaging to Hindutva. Mahatma Phule was a satyashodhak (seeker of truth). Hari

Narke gave an excellent reply to the criticism of Phule from the *Satyashodhak's* (Literal meaning: Seeker of Truth perspective).

At about this time, I came in closer contact with Hari Narke. Sukhadev Navale, an astute judge of men, had developed a friendship with Hari Narke. Gradually, Narke started coming to the Manch platform. In the wake of the Samarasata conference, similar meets were organised at some other places in Maharashtra. Hari Narke, Uttam Bandu Tupe, a writer and erstwhile activist of Shiv Sena and I attended the conference at Sambhajnagar. It came to our notice there that Hari Narke was a well-read orator. Narke had liked our stand on Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. He was highly impressed by Navale's allegorical reference to the "Saat-baara" document of *Bharatmata* (Mata = Mother). He did not entertain any doubt about our motives and sincerity.

In July, 1989, a seminar on the life and mission of Mahatma Phule was held in Bombay. Hari Narke also read a paper in the seminar. The entire proceedings of this seminar were published by the Samarasata Manch. Thereafter the relationship between the Manch and Hari Narke started cooling down. What were the underlying reasons for this sudden change?

Probably it was because of the pressure exercised on Hari Narke by progressive gangs. He was appointed on a number of government committees. The admirer of the ideology of the Samarasata Manch suddenly turned into its bitter opponent. He started calling us fundamentalists, communalists, and enemies of Phule-Ambedkar in the context of the Ayodhya movement. He got entangled in Sharad Pawar's trap. We in the Sangh are never bothered by such flimsy comments and criticism. The painful part is that there are any number of intelligent people in Maharashtra who sell themselves to run us down. Their egalitarianism and ideals of liberation from oppression and exploitation are closely linked to governmental positions and appointment on governmental committees.

1990 was the centenary year of Dr. Ambedkar's birth and also Mahatma Phule's remembrance. In the light of the tradition of progressives in Maharashtra, it was fairly obvious how these two centenaries would be celebrated. Dr. Hedgewar's birth centenary had been celebrated in 1988-89 on an unprecedented scale all over the country. It was felt that at least in Maharashtra, we should pay a fitting homage to the memory of these two great men. But how to bring it about was a problem. That was the time when the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi liberation movement of Vishwa Hindu Parishad was in full swing. The 'Shilanyaasa' (ceremony of laying foundation stone for the intended Temple on the site of Babri Masjid which had also created a controversy) was over in 1989 in Ayodhya. The *kar-seva* (voluntarily working for the building of the Ram Temple at the site of Babri Masjid site) programme was fixed for 1990. That was the topmost programme on the Sangh agenda.

The Sangh works systematically. It never takes for implementation more than one major programme at a time. Enormous organizational strength was necessary to ensure that the *kar-seva* would take place at the fixed time according to a plan. The entire atmosphere was charged with making preparations for the *kar-seva* programme. This programme was of phenomenal significance from the point of Hindu renaissance and emotional reawakening. As swayamsevaks, it was also our first and foremost duty to participate in the *kar-seva*.

Another organizational tenet followed by the Sangh leadership is that it expects every worker to focus only on the work entrusted to him. Who will take care of politics? What will happen to *kar-seva* programmes of the Sangh? A worker is not expected to worry about all these problems. We were holding charge of the work of the *Samarasata Manch*. The *kar-seva* was not something which was essential to our work. What was essential was to organise celebration of the centenaries of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule, and to pay homage to their sacred memory. This issue was discussed at a meeting of the *Samarasata Manch*. The matter had already been discussed with the *Prant Pracharak* Vasantao Kelkar, Asst. (*sah*) Prant Pracharak Damuanna Date, and with the karyawah and the sahkaryawah. Damuanna was to give the final decision. At the beginning of the meeting, a proposal was mooted for conducting "Vichar Yatra", i.e. "Think Pilgrimage". Prof. Aniruddha suggested that it might be called Sandesh Yatra, (Message Pilgrimage). It was decided to have the yatra on the basis of the message of 'Brotherly Social Life' of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule. The programme of the Samarasata Manch was finalized. Damuanna gave a decision that the Sangh should offer all possible cooperation for this programme.

It was planned that the yatra would start from Mahatma Phule's house in Pune, and winding its way through all the districts of Maharashtra, it would end at the *Deekshabhoomi* (place where Dr Ambedkar publicly became a Boudhdha) in Nagpur. Navale was assigned the task of the organisation of the yatra, and Bhiku Idate was advised to be with the yatra for a long stretch. The yatra would last from September 28 to December 6, and cover a distance of 7000 to 8000 kilometers. Organising a yatra of this magnitude was not a bed of roses. Sukhadev Navale toiled literally round the clock. Once in his frustration, he did not spare even me! "You get all these crazy ideas and I have to suffer. I wanted to go to the *kar-seva* in Ayodhya but because of you, I could not go" he said.

Bhiku Idate would also say, "I am a karyawah of the Sangh. I advise the swayamsevaks to go to Ayodhya. However, myself I will go with the yatra and not to Ayodhya".

The workers participating in the yatra were subject to a similar dilemma. But they had faith that the work they were poised to do was in the interest of society. Only we could take the message of Phule and Ambedkar to the people, they felt. It was necessary to release Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar from the progressive jail. Had the programmes of the yatra not taken place, distortions of the teachings of these luminaries would have continued even on a larger scale by the progressives and socialists. In the name of their teachings, they would have continued to fan the fires of inter-caste hatred, and spread discord and dissensions among them. They would have exhumed the ghosts of Manuism and Brahminism. Therefore, a counterattack on them was the need of the hour.

Sukhadev Navale was fully aware of the prevailing social environment. He knew that some social literature would be required at the time of the yatra, and therefore got thirteen books and brochures printed. This published literature included books on the *Mandal Ayog* (Commission), Reservations, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's life, Mahatma Phule, and his thoughts, Samarasata, Dr. Ambedkar, and Dr. Hedgewar. The books proved useful in the yatra. Their sale too was handsome.

Bhaurao Deoras graced the yatra's inauguration. He made a two-minute speech there. He also joined the Shobha Yatra (general procession) which was taken out on the occasion. We had invited Prakash Ambedkar, R. S. Gawai and Texas Gaikawad both senior leaders from backward class to join the yatra.

Ambedkarites in the Dalit movement were astonished at our yatra. Why are these Sanghists taking out a Sandesh Yatra when the *kar-seva* (voluntary services offered for building of temples etc.) is in full momentum at Ayodhya, was the question for which they were trying to find an answer. Progressives were thoroughly confused by our programme. They regarded us as Manuists, and propagated that the Ayodhya movement was a movement launched by Manuists to perpetuate *Manuwaad*. Revitalisation of Hindutva means revitalisation of social inequality, they said. They were, however, at their wits end in explaining the Sandesh yatra. They could not call the yatra 'Manuist'. That would be tantamount to calling Phule and Ambedkar Manuists. That would have incensed the Dalits. Still, it is not as though there was no opposition to the yatra. There was opposition, and I was rather amused by it.

During the time of the yatra, leaflets were distributed in Dalit localities asking the Dalits not to join the yatra. Samarasata is a poisonous word, the Sangh means slow poisoning it was charged. Since they have lost all support in society, they are trying to prop themselves up by resorting to the names of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. They have Phule and Ambedkar on their lips but Manu in their heart. Those and other such assertions were made. I had collected all the leaflets. Ironically, these leaflets helped us a lot by publicizing our yatra. Even before the yatra reached a destined place, its information reached there, and many people would join the yatra out of sheer curiosity.

We had evolved some strict do's and don'ts for the yatra. Speakers were advised to confine their speeches only to the subjects relating to Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. Other subjects like Ayodhya and the *kar-seva* were to be eschewed. If somebody asked any question about them, the reply would be, "The subject does not pertain to this yatra." No political leaders should be allowed to make political speeches. Meetings should be held at central places in the towns and villages. They should not be organised intentionally in Dalit localities. The speeches should be addressed to the entire society, and not only to the Dalits.

The speeches made during the course of the yatra were of different tenor altogether. Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar were interested in the uplift of Hindus. Their ideas revolved around the reconstruction of the Hindu Society. They advocated social nationalism. They were well aware of the dangers from Islam, Christianity, and the missionaries. Both of them were religious souls. Anti-Brahminism was not the basis of their thought. They worked to finish the mindsets which believed in inequality. These points were put forth with numerous examples from their lives and thought. Bhiku Idate's speeches in the yatra held the audiences spellbound. They spurred people to think, to introspect. I met many people who said "We have never found anybody projecting Dr. Babasaheb's teaching in this light. You are giving us a new insight into their teachings".

I vividly remember 30th October 1990. I was in Mahad with the yatra. A meeting was fixed in the evening. The *kar-seva* was to take place at Ayodhya on that day. While lakhs of swayamsevaks had gathered in Ayodhya, we were at Mahad. What might have happened in Ayodhya? Had the *kar-seva* taken place? Was there firing on the swayamsevaks? Mulayam seemed the very reincarnation of Aurangzeb. We could not sit glued to radio or television, though we very much wanted to do so. Only late in the night, after the programme was over, we came to know about the successful *Kar-seva* at Ayodhya. We rejoiced greatly.

I was not able to keep accompany the yatra throughout its course. The work of the weekly, Vivek, awaited me in Bombay, and I could not stay away from it for long. I went with the yatra upto Dapoli and from there, I returned. The yatra offered happy glimpses of the Dalit life and society. Their faith in Dr. Ambedkar, their devotion to him, was dazzling. There is tremendous power in faith and devotion. I had glimpses of that power while I was in the yatra. I could also observe how shrewd Dalit politicians exploit Dalits at different levels. They collect funds in the name of Dr. Ambedkar, but misappropriation of these funds is rampant. They raise the bogey of the RSS and speak hysterically about it. It was therefore necessary for us to have a dialogue with common Dalit people, without any biased mediator. The yatra gave us an opportunity to do so.

The yatra made the Samarasata Manch famous in all Ambedkarite localities in Maharashtra. Many funny anecdotes came to our knowledge. In all localities, Dalits were giving fitting replies to exhortations not to participate in the yatra, and to allegations that the yatra is a Sangh trap. "What is your programme for this very big occasion of Dr. Babasaheb's centenary? If they are organising some programme, why should you feel jealous?" They asked. "Dr. Ambedkar belongs to the entire country!" They asserted their devotion to Dr. Ambedkar manifested itself in this way.

Even as the yatra was in progress, we made efforts to persuade Prakash Ambedkar to join it. Prakash Ambedkar lacked courage to do so. He was probably afraid of the monstrous progressive tendencies in Maharashtra. Also, he might have feared that the progressive would make another Dr. Gangadhar Pantavane of him. It was not that his joining would have enhanced our prestige or the popular appeal of our yatra. While the yatra was on, Bhiku Idate once happened to meet Prakash Ambedkar. Idate once again invited him to join the yatra. "Is your yatra still on?", asked Prakash Ambedkar. "Yes, it is going on". "Surprising! When such a colossal movement is on in Ayodhya, you are taking out yatras on social themes! Only you can do it" said Prakash Ambedkar.

It is worth knowing how the progressives, socialists, and radicals in Maharashtra reacted to our yatra. These people are in the media in large numbers. But none of them took any cognizance of the yatra by writing articles, editorials, or special newsletters. The brave pen-pushers who had talked about setting Maharashtra on fire at the time of the *chaturvarnya* interview suddenly cooled down. I was closely watching them. Perhaps they were nervous as the yatra in no way offered them a chance to spread fires of casteist hatred. Besides, the Ayodhya movement of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was in full swing. This movement had brought before the people problems like pseudo-secularism, anti-Hindutva, and appeasement of Muslims, in their true dimensions. The movement was getting tremendous popular support. While on one hand, intellectuals were wrestling with the problem of how to analyze the Ayodhya phenomenon, what to do with secularism, and how to stop

the growing prestige, power and influence of the RSS, the poor socialists had lost sight of common sense. On the other hand, we were causing upheavals with our yatra.

Even while planning and implementing these programmes, I never ceased to mull over the key issues. We are the Hindutva people. The contemporary social problems are the problems of the Hindu society. Being the Hindutva people, the responsibility for all these problems devolves on us. I observed that in Maharashtra, the spokesmen of Hindu culture were also those who abused Hindutva day in and day out, spurned Hindutva, and even refused to accept that something akin to a Hindu Society existed all through in this country. These self-appointed interpreters of Hindu problems parodied the very word 'Hindu'. And yet, they were trusted to speak about the Hindu society's social problems. Why should the names of Hindutva protagonists not come forward as the spokesmen for Hinduism and commentators on several of its problems? Why does nobody from among us project himself as our authoritative spokesman on social problems? These question harassed my mind continually.

It is not ray for the Hindutva protagonist to come forward to comment on social issues. It came to my notice that, in fact we always strike a defensive posture on social problems. The heavy historical burden of constant criticism of Hindutva retards our ventures in this sphere. An ideological campaign has been conducted for four to five decades to brand the Sangh as 'reactionary'. The social, ideological, and intellectual atmosphere is charged with tones, undertones, and overtones, of this campaign. The pre-conditions for attainment of success in the fields of art and literature is rejection of Hindutva. Those who aspire for eminence in social fields or want to build up political careers have to prove their anti-Hindutva bonafides. May be, as consequence of this, no Hindutva protagonist shines in social fields.

Madhu Mangesh Karnik is a name in Marathi literature. He was the president of the Marathi Literary convention (Sahitya Sammelan) held at Ratnagiri. I was not aware that he was a Sangh swayamsevak. Both of us were residents of Bombay but I had never seen his name in any list of swayamsevaks. I do not, of course, hold the naive view that he is a great writer because he is a Sangh swayamsevak. I was introduced to him when he had come for the publication function of a book by Shivrai Telang. Had he revealed his relationship with the Sangh during the prime of his literary career, the progressives undoubtedly might have given him a run for his life.

In this context, Purshottam Bhaskar Bhave, an eminent and brilliant original writer in Marathi comes inevitably to mind. He was an inveterate Hindutva protagonist and a devotee of Savarkar. He presided over the Marathi literary convention in 1974. He was duly elected to this position through the normal democratic procedure. 1974 was a prosperous period for progressives. The socialists, particularly the followers of Sane Guruji, grudged the fact of a pro-Hindutva writer being asked to preside over the convention. They conspired to disrupt the convention. They created a lot of noise and disturbances to thwart the Presidential address delivered by Bhave. P. L. Deshpande, (a socialist and popular humourous playwright with bias against Hindutva) was one of those who led this hullabaloo.

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"Manu, Sangh and I"

Chapter IV

In 1974, I was in no way connected with any social or literary movement in Maharashtra. I did not think beyond 'The Sangh is Shakha and the Shakha means the programme'. It was difficult for me to fathom the reasons behind the disruption of P. B. Bhave's literary convention. I was not able to comprehend what happened there, what was the social context of the disruption. Why was there so much social and literary opposition to Hindutva? These questions did not so much as occur to me. I first became aware of them only in 1980. By that time, I had read the autobiographical book "*Athvaninchya Gandharesha*" (fragrant lines of memories) by Gangadhar Gadgil, a famous writer in Marathi, become familiar with P. B. Bhave's writings, and had grown conversant with the socialist ideology or at least I had some inkling of it. I could now understand the bases for the disruption of the 1974 Marathi literary convention. Intellectual and ideological intolerance, rancour and hatred of opponents, blinkered intellect, and phony superiority complex together make up *Manuism*. Today, I realised that this Manuism is ingrained in progressives. I find it difficult to control my ire against their efforts to suppress P. B. Bhave's right to air his views.

During this period, I was also becoming acquainted with the conceptual framework of the blinkered Outlook, which besieged us to muffle our voices. Leftist thinkers along with the progressives had evolved an ideology, a philosophy of anti-hindutva. Their technique is to draw the inference first, and then search for arguments to prove it. Their hypotheses are:-

- There cannot be social justice in Hindutva.
- Hindutva means inequality, the hierarchy or the *Chaturvarnya*, and vindication of untouchability. In short, Manuism.
- Hindutva means domination based on *Varna*, and domination by Brahmins over others.
- Hindutva means reactionary fundamentalism and intolerance.
- Hindutva means fascist mentality
- Hindutva means hating people of other religions, especially Muslims and Christians.
- Hindutva means a theocratic state
- Hindutva means something which is against the Constitution and its social, political and economic ideology.

This list can be easily enlarged. So called scholars have written books on these points. '*Sanghachi Dhongbaji*' (The Sangh's Hypocrisy) by Baba Adhav, '*Zoat*' (Flashlight) by Raosaheb Kasbe, a leftist thinker and bitter opponent of RSS, '*Khaki Shorts And the Saffron Flag*' by Tapan Basu and others are some of the books which come to mind.

Progressives have also made a grand effort to devalue *Hindutva's* protagonists. According to them, Lokmanya Tilak was a reactionary political leader, and Veer Savarkar, an eminent freedom fighter, Hindu ideologue and social reformer came next. Guruji Golwalkar of course, was the Chief of the reactionaries who were "gone cases". The true social reformists and thinkers were Agarkar, (a great social reformer in the early part of 20th century), Sane Guruji, Acharya Javdekar, a Congress leader of high repute and an editor of Congress newspaper, *Lokmanya*, Acharya Narendra Deo, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, both eminent socialist leader and Madhu Limaye, also a socialist political leader. Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar were not leftist thinkers. These two great men were social saints in the real sense of the term. Saint would be their most appropriate description as they possessed, and clearly manifested in their lives, all the criteria of sainthood. Their compassion for and identification with their co-religionists, were absolutely authentic. They both lived the immortal commandment put forth by Saint Tukaram, "He alone should be identified with God and treated as a Saint who calls the oppressed and miserable people his own" (*Je ka ranjale Ganjale, tyaaasi mhanne jo apule; tochi sadhu olakhava, Deva tethechi Janava*).

Progressives have conveniently hijacked Phule and Ambedkar. These very people who parodied and pooh-poohed religion, and fomented communal hatred, became spokesmen of Phule and Ambedkar. And why should they have not been? No Hindutva protagonist had felt it necessary to analyse and interpret the teachings of Phule and Ambedkar from the Hindutva point of view before the commencement of the activities of the *Samarasata Manch*. The people took into account only the vitriolic language of Phule, and the renunciation of Hinduism by Dr. Ambedkar. What was required was to accept these two great visionaries from the Hindutva point of view. If someone were to ask me as to what is the biggest achievement of the *Sandesh* yatra of the Manch, I would unhesitatingly reply that an emphatic declaration of the acceptance of Phule and Ambedkar by the Hindutva protagonists from the depth of their hearts was the most glittering success and achievement of the yatra.

The celebrations of the birth centenary of Dr. Ambedkar started in Bombay on April 12, 1991. The idea of the programme was mooted in our meeting by Mukundrao Panshikar (*Prant Pracharak* of the Sangh). This was indicative of the decision that the Sangh alone should organise the programme of the centenary. Rajju Bhaiyya was then the Sarkaryawah. He and Atal Behari Vajpayee were both present at the programme. This mammoth meeting took place at Shivaji Park.

Shantaram Nandgaokar's lyric "Ghe Mantra Nawa" - create a new slogan, was set to tune by the Maestro Sudhir Phadke and he sang it too. More than a lakh of people attended the meeting. The occasion has historic significance in the social history of Maharashtra. The tradition of rejection of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was buried here. The Hindu society acknowledged its debt to the great man. He was greeted, he was saluted. The day brought immeasurable joy to me, Bhiku Idate, Damuanna Date, and hundreds of other workers were extremely happy. Bhikhu Idate made a beautiful speech at the meeting. I experienced a vision of Dr. Ambedkar performing Satyagraha at the *Chawdar* Lake of Mahad and in front of the Kalaram Temple (a temple of Lord Rama the idol being black) at Nasik. At that time, there was no power which could articulate the voice of the disorganized Hindu society. Whatever power there was belonged to the orthodox sections of Hindus. In 1991, the thinking power of the Hindu society was finding an outlet through the medium of the Sangh. This social change came rather late. But it did come. And it was brought about by the RSS. This was a fitting tribute to the religious soul who had burnt the Manusmriti in 1927.

During 1990, I happened to read the book "Christie Mahar", a Marathi book on treatment by Christians particularly priests to converted Hindus from the backward community of Mahar) written by Advocate Balasaheb Gaikwad. I did a cover story on that book for "Vivek". Balasaheb Gaikwad's book is based on his personal experiences and it tells us very effectively that even after a *Mahar's* conversion to Christianity, he remains a Mahar. The conversion to Christianity does not bring him any relief or solace. His caste does not change, nor does his social status. His economic conditions also remain the same. Balasaheb Gaikwad has had a first hand, personal experience of all this. He belongs to the district of Ahmednagar, and he has given detailed information of the misdeeds of Christian clergy of Ahmednagar in his books.

The feature on the book in "Vivek" and introduction to Balasaheb Gaikwad offered a new topic to the '*Hindutava*' people. Political Hindutva protagonists too were happy. A good stick was now available to thrash the Christians.

Later, I met Balasaheb Gaikwad at Pune. Sangh Pracharak (Full time worker), Shirish Bhedasgaokar had brought him to Pune. He met Balasaheb Gaikwad while he was on a Sangh tour. I had a talk with him. Balasaheb Gaikwad was fed up with the Christian religion. He wanted to be reconverted to Hinduism. Balasaheb Gaikwad declared that he was going to become a Hindu after giving up Christianity. It was his guess that thousands of Christians would like to be reconverted with him.

From the information I gathered from Shirish Bhadasgaokar and Girish Prabhune, it was clear that Balasaheb Gaikwad had no place whatever in the Christian society of Ahmednagar. He did not have a single soul following him, and we came to realise sadly that no one would join him in reconversion.

The Hindutva protagonists were happy that a Mahar was getting reconverted to Hinduism. Many Hindus harbour latent anger in their minds against Dr. Ambedkar for his renunciation of Hinduism and the conversion of *Mahars*. At least one Mahar now was turning the wheel the other way round by coming back to Hinduism, with the likelihood of thousands of Mahars following him. This was the revenge of time on Dr. Ambedkar, they felt.

What to do about Balasaheb Gaikwad was a problem before us. We had seen that conversion does not end untouchability. It only means a change in one's name. The problem would not be over by Balasaheb reconverting to Hinduism. Instead of being a Christian Mahar, he would be a Hindu Mahar. That would create many other social difficulties.

In Maharashtra, the number of Hindu Mahars is negligible. Most of them have embraced Buddhism. If Gaikwad were to be reconverted, where would he find a place in the Hindu social structure? Buddhists would not only not accept him but regard him as an enemy of Dr. Ambedkar's thought. The Hindu society will not immediately accept a convert. The Hindutava protagonists, who were eager to bring Gaikwad back to the Hindu fold, did not feel themselves concerned with these social questions. They yearned for publicity for themselves, and for the credit of the conversion.

After taking into account all pros and cons, we decided that Balasaheb Gaikwad may give up the Christian faith and be converted to Buddhism instead of getting reconverted to Hinduism. I spoke about it to Balasaheb as did a few other Sangh workers.

Gaikwad did not appreciate my decision. "Why are you telling me to be a Buddhist" he asked. "What is the point in my going to Buddhism?" "I will be a Hindu only". He stuck to his stand. He also started announcing that though he wanted to be a Hindu, the Sangh people asked him to be a Buddhist.

Once a senior Swayamsevak of the Sangh called on me at the Vivek Office. He was older to me in age. He was annoyed at our advice to Balasaheb Gaikwad to be a Buddhist. He asked "I have come to know that you have been telling Gaikwad not to be a Hindu". "Yes", I said. "But why? When he craves to be a Hindu, why are you pushing him to Buddhism?"

"You attend *Prabhat* (morning) Shakha daily, isn't it?" I asked. "Yes" he replied. He did not understand the thrust of my question.

"Then you are conversant with the Ekatmata Mantra (unity hymn) which we recite in the morning Shakha. A line in that hymn describing the criteria of Hindu says, '*Bhuddhastatha arhant, boudhdha jainaha.*' You know it, I suppose."

"Yes, I recite it." he answered.

"It means Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Vedics, Vaishnavs all are one, all are Hindus. We also hear in the Sangh that Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism are not alien religions. They are all branches of the Sanatana Dharma (oldest religion). If someone becomes a Jain or a Buddhist or a Sikh, he does not become a non-Hindu" I said.

I further told him that even if Balasaheb became a Buddhist, he by our tenets would be deemed Hindu.

Slowly he understood what I was saying. Still, he asked, "Hindu or Buddhist if it is only a nominal difference why not allow him to be a Hindu? At least that will not create any confusion."

In response, I said, "Balasaheb Gaikwad is a Dalit. His social and economic problems are extensive. They pertain to the Dalit movement in Maharashtra which is not a pro-Hindu affair. Gaikwad's problems would best be tackled by the Dalit movement. While recognizing that his problems are also ours, the Hindu society may not be in a situation to really help.

I told him other similar things, and he appeared convinced. But we could not convince Balasaheb Gaikwad of our viewpoint. Perhaps he had decided not to be convinced.

Balasaheb expected his conversion to be a grand affair like Dr. Ambedkar's conversion. He would get wide publicity and monetary benefits. He would get awards as well as social prestige, and embellished with these, he would spend the rest of his life in comfort and happiness. Some people might have cajoled him to believe that. He met Balasaheb Thackeray, the supreme leader of Shiv Sena. Dr. Vijay Bedekar of Thane, an eminent scholar of Indian archeology and history invited him to stay with him for a few days. All of them insisted that Balasaheb Gaikwad should again be a Hindu.

Even as we in the Samarasata Manch were trying to dissuade him from doing so, Balasaheb Gaikwad made a public announcement of his conversion programme. The conversion was to take place under the leadership of Balasaheb Thackeray. The conversion programme was well publicised. We all kept aloof from the programme.

Balasaheb Gaikwad alone was re-converted. No other Christian Mahar joined him. His dream of being another Dr. Ambedkar was shattered. From the point of view of Shiv Sena and other Hindutva protagonists, Gaikwad was no longer of any use. They left him high and dry. He did not have a job nor any social status. Being shy and diffident, he could not have the will and ability to stand on his own feet. He felt that since he had obliged the Hindu society by his reconversion, he should be looked after by it.

We took care of him for a long time out of humanitarian considerations. We secured for him a job in *Dnyan-Prabodhini*, an institute for understanding of knowledge, at Pune, and an opportunity to work with Prof. S. H. Deshpande, a famous professor on politic. Earlier we had also tried to place him in the office of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, an organization of workers led by RSS people and now number 1 in India, from where he could pursue his legal practice. Gaikwad, however, could not settle down anywhere. Even after the reconversion, he could never forget his Dalithood. He regarded his Dalithood as the legacy of his life.

Balasaheb Gaikwad's story makes a good case study. I had carefully watched the entire course of conversion. I wonder how Girish Prabhune looked after him, and gave him shelter in his house. This is most surprising considering Gaikwad's disposition. Prabhune did it from his sense of duty as a Sangh Swayamsevak.

Another development is worth recalling here. Maharashtra is divided into three provinces for the Sangh activities (1) Nagpur city, (2) the rest of Vidarbha (except Nagpur), and (3) the rest of Maharashtra with Goa. The activities of the Samarasata Manch started in the Maharashtra Prant. There was a proposal to start these activities in the other two Prants as well. Laxmanrao Bhide, now in charge of World RSS organizations was very keen on it. Laxmanrao Bhide is a senior Sangh Pracharak. He was then *Kshetra Pracharak* for the four *Prants*, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Nagpur. He is a man of few words, quiet disposition, slenderly built, and with a pleasant personality. He would carefully read whatever I wrote. Every time we met, he had a word of appreciation for my writings. He felt strongly that someone from among us should make a tour of Vidarbha to place before Vidarbha's *Swayamsevaks* the social content of our activities, and appoint workers for the Samarasata Manch. Vidarbha needed the Manch activities very much, he said.

I was unanimously selected to go to Vidarbha. I completed the tour in two phases. The Sangh activities in Vidarbha date back to the late twenties. There are a large number of Swayamsevaks fortunate enough to have had personal guidance from Dr. Hedgewar and Guruji Golwalkar. I had to place before them my subject in the form of a *bouddhika* (intellectual discourse). This presentation was to be different from the traditional one.

I felt challenged, I was expected to convey the Sangh philosophy, in a region from where the Sangh had first blossomed, to spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. Naturally, I was apprehensive whether I would prove equal to the task. Though the Sangh *bouddhikas* are not public speeches, Swayamsevaks listen to them as the official line of thought. Precisely for this reason the responsibility of the speaker grows manifold. He has to be highly balanced and circumspect in his discourse. I doubted my ability to do it.

An incident soon dispelled my doubts. The venue of the *bouddhik* classes was located near the Sangh Office in Nagpur. The first ever Sangh Shakha took place in the open compound of the dilapidated mansion of the Mohites. The *Maidan*, ground was sanctified by the touch of the footsteps of venerable Dr. Hedgewar. A person like me, belonging to a very common family, *Shudra* by caste, with no tradition of education in the family, and without any monetary power, was going to give a discourse in the Maidan of the mansion of the Mohite (an old important family from Nagpur). According to the logic of the progressive high priests in Maharashtra, I should have been a very negligible entity in the Sangh. According to what they called 'Manuism' of the Sangh, I should have been positioned below the lowest rung. And here I was to expound the social ideology of the Sangh from the very birthplace of the Sangh.

There were senior Swayamsevaks in the audience. *Pracharaks* and *Sarsanghachalak* Balasaheb Deoras also graced the event. He knew me by name since 1975. The man who is often described as the second Hedgewar, from whom we learnt the Sangh ideology, who taught us to think along the right liners, and in whose life we perceived Hindutva - that great man was present to listen to what I had to say! This was the most crucial, testing time in my life.

On that occasion, I remembered my highest deity, Dr. Hedgewar, and prayed to him to give my tongue his intellect, to give me the wisdom to express his thoughts alone. I spoke for an hour or so. What is Samarasata? What was the social content of Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy? What is the logical conclusion of Dr. Ambedkar's thought? What is social nationalism? These were the points I dealt with in my discourse. We said the prayer after my speech was over and the Shakra closed for the day.

That day, I experienced a different type of atmosphere. Mama Muthal, an old Sangh Pracharak, said, "Ramesh, the Sarsanghchalak told me he liked your lecture." He said, "This boy writes well and also speaks well!" He paused for a moment and then said, "We have been with him for a long time. But he never said these words about us. You have won this accolade from him."

I said to him, "Mama, it is the small people like me who need a pat on the back." Mama laughed heartily. If viewed only from the Sangh Swayamsevak's perspective, the incident did not have any special significance. In the Sangh, we do not make much fuss over such incidents. To be treated fairly with equity is looked upon as a matter of course and natural. But when, after the fashion of the progressives, I think of what transpired from the casteist angle, I realise the magnitude of the social transformation inherent in such incidents. And the Sangh which brings about this wonderful transformation is called "*Manuist*". Only a man stricken with mental complexes can think this way.

One of the resolutions passed in the social conference held under the aegis of the Samarasata Manch in 1988, related to the change in the name of the Marathwada University. The Resolution regarding the change in the name, which is generally referred to as "Namaantar", was passed by the Maharashtra Assembly in 1978 and was followed by agitations. I had not given a serious thought to the *Naamaantar* issue in those days. It was not so with Bhiku Idate, Sukhadev Navale, and Damuanna Date, some of the prominent Sangh workers in Marathwada. Sukhadev Navale was involved in the *Naamaantar* agitation for a long time even before 1978. He was also well versed in the social environment in Marathwada. In contrast, I was a novice. But gradually I started reading about the subject, and began to see the issue in a clear perspective.

The anti-*Naamaantar* people had developed a careful rationale their opposition to the change in the name of the Marathwada University. I have referred to it earlier in this book. Dalits had quite a different stand on the issue. What should be our stand vis-a-vis the *Naamaantar* problem? What should be the points for the justification for the change in the name? I set my thinking apparatus in motion.

Shiv Sena had started growing very fast after the *Sambhajinagar* elections of 1985. Anti-*Ambedkar* policy was a big weapon in their hands. The non-Dalit people in Marathwada were not in favour of the *Naamaantar*. There would be considerable political advantage if the *Naamaantar* were to be opposed. Purely with a view to reaping political advantage, Shiv Sena adopted a rabid anti-*Naamaantar* posture. Under no circumstances will we allow the change in the name to take place, declared Thackeray. The statement that "Dr. Ambedkar was Nizam's agent" was also attributed to the Sena Supremo (Shiv Sena Chief Shri Balasaheb Thackeray). This statement enraged the Ambedkarite people and once more, processions, threats and counter processions became the order of the day. The atmosphere was heated up in the same way as was witnessed at the time of the Riddles affair. This happened in July/August, 1992.

We were holding our meeting during that period, and realized that the time had come when a decisive stand on the *Naamaantar* issue was inescapable.

Socialist comrades had already asked Marathwada to oppose the *Naamaantar* on the grounds that a change in name would compromise its honour and autonomy. They termed our Hindu identity communalist and fundamentalist and at the same time viewed the regional ego of Marathwada as a progressive affair. Shiv Sena too had taken up this issue of egoism. We had already decided to support the change in the name of the university from the Hindutva point of view. I now started writing on the subject. I wrote a number of articles supporting the *Naamaantar* in the various journals I was associated with. I made efforts to propel the need to support the *Naamaantar* from the Hindutva standpoint on the basis of cogency and logic. Although I did the writing, I always had prior consultations with Bhiku Idate, Sukhadev Navale, and Damuanna Date. Whenever I wrote from the policy standpoint, these consultations gave appropriate direction to my thought and writings.

Some thing occurred to me at that time. The Sangh had not been able to do anything at the time of the Satyagraha of the Chawdar lake at Mahad in 1927, and or the Satyagraha for opening to untouchables the Kalaram Temple of Nasik. In 1927, the RSS was two years old, with no shakra in Mahad. The Sangh was a negligible entity. More or less, the same was the case in 1930 when the Sangh was viewed as a kid's affair. Their leader was Dr. Hedgewar, whose influence on the Hindu society was as good as nil then. The Sangh therefore was not in a position to do much. In 1992, however the situation was altogether different. The Sangh was now a centre of power. It had tremendous influence in the Hindu society. Its political, social and religious power was enormous. Our stand would have great significance. I put forward this thought in my writings and also in my discourses to the workers.

There are many *Karyakartas* in the Sangh who hail from the Ambedkarite people. They felt keenly that the Sangh should join the Marathwada *Naamaantar* agitation, and its efforts should be organised on the pattern of the 1992 Kar-seva in Ayodhya. Madhu Jadhav was one such worker. I remember a dialogue with him. "Why are we not launching Kar-seva for the Namaantar?" he asked.

"I feel it is difficult to stage Kar-seva in today's circumstances", I replied. "Why?" he questioned. "Because Rama is recognised by the entire Hindu society, whereas Dr. Ambedkar has influence only among Dalits", I explained.

"Will we never espouse the Namantar problem?" Jadhav queried. "That's not true. We will join the issue when we are well prepared for it. The preparations are afoot", I replied. Thanks to the continuous writings and speeches of workers, particularly Navale and Damuanna, the opposition to the Namantar among Sangh people was fading away. In Marathwada itself, Sukhadev Navale changed the outlook of the RSS workers in favour of changing University's name. The workers decided to oppose the opponents of the *Naamaantar*.

Many Sangh workers did not favour a stand in opposition to the Shiv Sena. Workers in the political arena of course, were particularly cautious. According to them, it was rather risky to take up the *Naamaantar* issue when elections were round the corner. The Shiv Sena and the Sangh were with Hindutva protagonists. Confrontation between the two would be politically harmful, they felt. Considered politically, there was nothing amiss in this view. It is very natural for a political party to keep an eye on votes, and to indulge in political calculation about how many votes were Ambedkarite and how many would supply Hindutva.

We did not agree with this political calculation. The social angle is more important to the Sangh than the political one. It was particularly so in the case of the *Naamaantar* issue. I was of the view that the *Naamaantar* problem had raised an important question before the Hindu society. What place does Dr. Ambedkar occupy in the emotive world of the Hindu society? Does the Hindu society regard the Ambedkarite people as its own people? A time had come now when it was required to respond to these questions in the form of action. This time a big section of the RSS people had grasped the nuances of the subject. The Sangh had decided firmly to support the change in the name of the University.

The final phase of the *Naamaantar* problem commenced in the latter half of 1993. The Maharashtra Assembly elections were to take place in 1995. The Ambedkarite people had decided to thrash out the *Naamaantar* issue before the election. Extreme actions like self-immolation were being resorted to. Supporters of Sharad Pawar like Ramdas Athavale were caught on the horns of a dilemma. They had offered support to the Congress on the basis of the assurance that the *Naamaantar* would take place. Mr. Athavale was appointed a Minister in the State Cabinet. The Ambedkarite people now started asking them, "What are you doing about the *Naamaantar*?". Sharad Pawar wanted Ambedkarite votes, but not in exchange for the change in the name of the University. It would have affected the traditional voter of the Congress. Sharad Pawar was not prepared to take that risk. At such a juncture, a clever politician plays for time. Pawar decided to do the same.

Pawar counted on Ambedkarite votes without conceding the *Naamaantar*. Shiv Sena's opposition could be denounced as Hindutva opposition to the *Naamaantar*, he calculated. On the basis of that calculation, he thought of raising the Hindutva bogey to overawe the Dalits. The RSS would not oppose the Shiv Sena, and the Sangh could then be made a sacrificial goat. The verbal ammunition to attack the Sangh was handy - *Manuists*, communalists, Brahminists, *Peshwaists*, enemies of equality, and so on. However, Pawar's judgment about the Sangh attitude to the *Naamaantar* was totally wrong. The RSS had decided to give steadfast support to the *Naamaantar*. Pawar was not aware of the decision. We, however, knew since we were part of the process which had taken us to that decision.

Although it was finalized, the Sangh cannot foist its decision on the constituent organisations. An impression is harbored by many that only two or three people take the RSS decisions, and the rest mutely accept it. This impression is utterly wrong. Though the *Naamaantar* decision had been taken, there was need to muster support for it. The Sangh has systems and procedures to make its decision acceptable to all. The Development Council meeting is one such method. Development Council (Vikas Mandal) is the co-ordinating body for activities in different fields. A meeting was held of decision-makers in the different spheres of activities of the Sangh. The important issue of *Naamaantar* came up for discussion at one of its meetings. I was present at the meeting.

This meeting took place sometime in September, 1993. I don't remember the exact date. The main agenda before the meeting was the *Naamaantar* issue. Some workers in the meeting opposed the proposal which said that we should join the *Naamaantar* agitation on the side of the Pro-*Naamaantar* people. They felt that we should not take a decision like that, it would be too hasty, and would lead to political disadvantage. The workers present at the meeting were state level officers, and senior decision makers. Bhiku Idate conducted the meeting. He was to give the decision after hearing all the views expressed in the meeting. Concluding the meeting, he said, "For the present, we will leave the subject here. No decision will be taken right now. The Maharashtra tour of Sarkaryawah (the Chief Executive of RSS) Sheshadri is starting soon. A meeting of all workers in Marathwada with him is to take place at Jalna. A decision will be taken after a thorough discussion with them."

The meeting was over. The *Karyakartas* left. I was still there. Idate took me aside, and said, "I am sure my decision today must have saddened you. I too was extremely unhappy while giving this ruling. But we just can't impose our views on such leading activists." After a moment's pause he said, "We have, however, no option but to support the *Naamaantar*. We will take the final decision in the Jalna meeting."

What could I say? I was sorely disappointed. But I continued to have faith in the RSS leadership. I was also sure that Damuanna would not leave the subject halfway.

In the context of the *Naamaantar* issue, the Jalna meeting in October proved to be of historic importance. A worker asked Sheshadriji to spell out the Sangh standpoint on the *Naamaantar* issue. Sheshadri replied in clear and unambiguous terms, "The Sangh is not opposed to the change in the name of the university. The *Naamaantar* should be made, and the Marathwada University should be named after Dr B R Ambedkar." This clear stand on the part of the central Sangh leadership clarified the future course for us.

That night, a meeting of all workers was held at Jalna. The meeting lasted a long time. District *karyawahs*, *sarkaryawahs*, *pracharaks*, and activists from various RSS fields attended the marathon meeting. In the meeting some argued that "the *Naamaantar* was an imposition; it is a demand from leaders from Pune and Bombay; it is an appeasement of Dalits, politically, we will be finished." The objections were forcefully presented. The counter-arguments were "the *Naamaantar* is a must for social reasons, the Ambedkarite people should develop confidence in us and supporting *Naamaantar* is a way to win their trust; we should give a rejoinder to the Shiv Sena's arguments: support to the *Naamaantar* will not lead to political damage" were also vigorously put forward. Concluding the meeting, Damuanna propounded the Sangh standpoint to support the *Naamaantar*. The debate was over. The RSS had taken a historic decision. Designated as the *Manuists* in the progressive parlance, the RSS had taken one more step forward.

In implementing this decision, we were certain to encounter difficulties, though not entirely insurmountable. Sukhdev Navale and Sharad Kulkarni, the organising secretary of the BJP in Marathwada, had already undertaken a joint tour of Marathwada. All local workers were expected to be present at their meetings. Navale would pose a question to them, "Is there anybody here who is opposed to the *Namaantar*?" A few workers, influenced by the Shiv Sena, would say that they were opposed. To them, Sharad Kulkarni would say, "You are free to oppose the *Naamaantar* but not from the party platform. Those who want to oppose the *Naamaantar* should tender their resignations from the party here and now." The Sangh had completed the democratic process before arriving at the decision, but once the decision was finalized, it was enforced stringently.

On December 10, 1993, Bhiku Idate, the prant karyawah of the Sangh released a statement explaining the RSS stand on the *Namaantar* issue. The statement read as follows :

RSS (Maharashtra)
Moti Baug, 309, Shanwar Peth
Pune 411 030. Tel: 458080

"Namantar should be effected urgently"

The problem of the change in the name of the Marathwada University has taken a decisive turn. The Amberkarite people have become emotionally high-strung on the issue. It is very unfortunate that Gautam Waghmare had to resort to self-immolation on the issue of the Namaantar. The resolution passed unanimously in the legislature should have been implemented promptly. Now I suggest that the Maharashtra Government should take a decision to change the name of the University without any further delay.

The RSS extends total and unconditional support to the Namaantar. The problem is one of national pride. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was a great patriot. He served the nation to the best of his ability and with total dedication. Crores of people in the country revere and adore him. The RSS holds the view that the Maharashtra Government and the entire society should pay respects to him.

The Namaantar issue should not be made a bone of social conflict and contention. Rather, the issue should be used as an opportunity to promote social unity. It should not be viewed in terms of victory of one class and defeat of another. That would be too dangerous.

We appeal to the Shiv Sena Pramukh Balasaheb Thackeray that he should not oppose the Namaantar in the overall interest of the entire Hindu society. Amberkarite people are our blood relations. We should not adopt an attitude of hostility towards them.

I appeal to all Hindus to stand firm in favour of the Namaantar and to ensure that there will be no social conflagration on the issue. Swayamsevaks in Marathwada also are advised to be extremely alert and firm in their support to the Namantar, and take all care that there will be no social conflict on the issue.

(B.R.Idate]

Prant Karyawah
19th December 1993

(Published in Navakal, Sakal, Maharashtra Times, Loksatta and Tarun Bharat, Bombay) (Leading dailies in Marathi).

It did not take much time for the people to realise that the RSS and BJP workers actively supported the *Naamaantar*. Devgiri "Tarun Bharat" opened a journalistic front in support of the *Naamaantar*. My articles on the theme, "The *Naamaantar* issue should be socialized" was published at about this time. The RSS support to the *Naamaantar* cautioned the intellectual class in our society. People have always known that any RSS action can not but be in the interest of, and for the welfare of, the society, and the Sangh would never do anything to jeopardize the interests of the Hindu society. This limited the Shiv Sena opposition only to verbal fireworks. They did not resort to riots and burning the houses of Dalits.

The Sharad Pawar Government was obliged to take a decision in favour of the *Naamaantar* on January 14, 1994. They had no option. In the context of the *Naamaantar* a situation had arisen when there was nobody except the Shiv Sena to oppose the *Naamaantar*. The failure to change the name of the University would have deprived the Congress of all political advantages. Whether he liked it or not, Sharad Pawar had to decide in favour of the *Naamaantar*. A very small action on the part of the RSS went a long way in amicably settling the issue which was hanging fire for fourteen long years.

After the *Naamaantar* took place, the Dalits took cognizance of the role played by the RSS. Prof. Jogendra Kawade a flamboyant backward class leader, organised a felicitation function in the honour of Gopinath Munde at Shivaji Park. R S Gawai came to Sambhaji Nagar for the publication ceremony of the book on the *Naamaantar*. This brochure was brought out by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (a student organization led by RSS workers). Progressive luminaries however kept mum. They could not show even the simple courtesy of taking cognizance of the RSS role in the *Naamaantar*. They felt completely outwitted at the intellectual level. Their opposition to the *Naamaantar* cost them considerable ideological prestige, and since the *Naamaantar* ultimately occurred, they suffered loss of face too. Even before the *Naamaantar* took place, we had published a 100-page book on "*Naamaantar*, Sangh and the *Samarasata Manch*". I sent a copy of the book to all leading newspapers in Bombay. Predictably, they did not take any notice of it.

Today the *Naamaantar* has become a historic event. The response, of the Hindu society leaders in 1927 and in 1994 showed striking difference. The transformation in the social psyche was brought about by the RSS only on the basis of Hindutva. In 1927, the resolution that 'all places of water supply be open to all people' was being put into action. The orthodox and the conservatives did not like the resolution. In 1978, the resolution for the change in the name of the Marathwada University was passed in the Legislative Assembly. The socialists had now taken the place of the orthodox of 1927. The same arguments, the same craftiness, continued to prevail.

The main difference was that while equally committed to Hindu unity and welfare, the RSS in 1927 was small. But by 1994 it had grown into a powerful organisation. It was now capable of giving a decisive turn to a situation. Making a comparative study of 1927 and 1994, the visible enhancement in the RSS stature made me very happy.

While the *Naamaantar* movement was in full swing, a world-shaking event occurred in Ayodhya on 6 December, 92. The Babri structure (a mosque like structure imposed on the destroyed temple of Lord Rama) standing on the site of Rama's birth was demolished after 400 years. This occurrence was so sudden and unexpected that we were thoroughly shaken by it. Even in his wildest imagination, no one had dreamt of it. In 1990 Bhiku Idate was not able to join the Kar-Seva. In 1992, however, he had gone to Ayodhya. He was the Sangh Sahkaryawah from Maharashtra at that time. On his return from Ayodhya, I asked him,

"Was there any plan on our part to destroy the Babri Structure?"

"Not at all", he asserted.

"Then, without instructions, how could the Karsevaks topple the structure?"

"The whole episode was so sudden and incomprehensible that no single explanation would suffice. The *Karsevaks* were so enraged that they smashed the structure to smithereens in four hours. Ordinarily, it should have taken at least four days to destroy it."

The Ayodhya episode attracted my attention to an altogether different line of thought. The Hindu society had reawakened through a cultural medium. Rama had become the cultural symbol of our nationalism. It was clear that social nationalism was as important as cultural nationalism. Hindu nationalism would not be complete without social nationalism. The combination of social and cultural nationalism would alone take nationalism across to the people.

A question arose, what could be the symbol of our social nationalism? Rama was fittingly the symbol of our cultural nationalism. Who could be his counterpart in social nationalism? So far as I was concerned the answer was obvious Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. I felt that we should take up the subject of Babasaheb Ambedkar with the same passionate intensity with which we had taken up the issue of Rama's birthplace. I expressed my thoughts in my article 'Social significance of the Rama Revolution'. The article was highly appreciated in the Sangh circles. The article was also published in the *Organiser* weekly of Delhi. That was proof of the acceptability of my thinking at more general level.

In the wake of the Ayodhya episode the Marathi daily, *Navakal*, wrote an editorial on the subject of Hindutva. A number of readers responded to the editorial. Socialist P.B. Samant's and the BJP's Prakash Javadekar's responses too appeared in the paper. Many Sangh workers also wrote on the subject. The *Navakal*'s editor, Nilubhau Khadilkar sent a word to us to send the official reaction of the Sangh to the editorial. Bhiku Idate sent an article covering the entire discussion. *Navakal* published it in the format of news featuring it on the front page, with an eight-column heading. Which stated, "Dr. Ambedkar has a venerable place in the Sangh Bhiku Idate, *Sahakaryawah*". The theme of the article was that Dr. Ambedkar has a very respectable position in Hindutva, and his trio of principles, social equality, liberty, and fraternity are totally acceptable to us.

The Sangh's opponents were taken aback by our declaration. Sharad Pawar who is a clever politician, stated in a public speech that the happenings in Ayodhya were pre-planned by the RSS, and further, that the RSS had selected 6 December as its action date deliberately, to insult Dr. Ambedkar. In Maharashtra, Pawar was the chief spokesman of the progressives, and they merely parroted what he said. Now that they had some ammunition to fire at the Sangh, Sharad Pawar's followers launched a massive propaganda campaign to malign it. They went to each and every Ambedkarite locality to make propaganda about the selection of December 6, which was Dr. Ambedkar's *Nirvana* (demise) day. That date a holy, sacred day for the Ambedkarite people, who have a deep and abiding faith in Dr. Ambedkar. An ugly social conspiracy was now hatched to exploit their sensitivity to their faith.

We took a serious note of this propaganda. December 6, 1992, was selected because it was the Gita Jayanti Day (the day the holy book of Hindus Geeta was told to Arjuna by Lord Krishna). It was the first day of the Mahabharata war. According to Hindu religious custom, a death anniversary is not regarded as an auspicious day. Not that the progressive propagandists did not know this. But many of them had spent their entire life in spreading canards about the RSS. Why should they feel any shame in spreading one more untruth about the Sangh? I wrote on the subject. This time it was not liked by all workers. One of my friends who is also a Sangh worker in Mumbai, called on me and said, "Rameshji, we do not agree with your bringing Dr. Ambedkar unnecessarily in to the context of the happenings of December 6".

I told him, "That is not right. Kindly take a round of the Dalit localities. That will help you appreciate my viewpoint". But my friend was not prepared to see the social aspect of the Ayodhya issue.

On one occasion, I referred the issue to Damuanna Date, Mukundrao Panashikar, and Bhiku Idate. I stressed the need to give a tough rejoinder. They favoured my line of thinking. Panashikar suggested a course of action. Let us prepare an eight page folder, he said, on the events of December 6, Dr. Ambedkar, and the constitution of Hindutva and distribute it widely. "On April 14, which is Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary, let us call a meeting at every nook and corner, and circulate these folders. Maximum contacts should be made with the Dalit localities," he continued. The programme of action suggested by him was agreed to. I took an interview of Bhiku Idate on the subject which was published in the *Vivek*, and all the editions of *Tarun Bharat*. The interview was also published in the form of a folder, with 1.5 lakh copies. On April 14, the RSS programme was organised in all districts of Maharashtra on an unprecedented scale. The worker of whom I spoke earlier, met me again in Bombay. He said "Rameshji, I have now realised the truth of what you said. In whatever Dalit localities we visited, we were asked the same questions which you put to Bhiku Idate. Had the folder not been handy with us, we would have been utterly confounded to answer the questions raised".

A Sangh worker is like that. He may not agree with something. Still, he gets on with it, on all cylinders, because it is a Sangh programme. After the programme is over, he understands that the Sangh's decision was right. And readily, he appreciates it.

After the events of December 6, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) Governments ruling in four states were dismissed. Fresh elections were a certainty. A lot of thoughts were going through in my mind at this time. Like others, I know the meaning of such terms as social equality and social justice. These words, however, should not be interpreted only literally. The meanings of words keep changing according to circumstances. For instance the social and sentimental meaning of "social equality" which was current in 1927 or even earlier, was not the same as in 1992. Earlier, it meant co-education, equal treatment at public places, permission to learn Sanskrit, end of untouchability. Now, social equality meant equal participation in economic and political processes. Now it expressed the aspirations of Dalits and the oppressed in the Hindu society to participate in the country's political and economic life on an equal footing.

Whatever the reasons, I was doubtful if we, Hindutva people, were paying adequate attention to this fact of change in the meanings of some of these words. In 1989, when V. P. Singh announced acceptance of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, it was followed by a communal and casteist upheaval all over the country. Higher castes were opposed to the Mandal Commission. The majority was of course of the people recommended by Mandal Commission. Based on the arithmetic of votes, all political parties would support the Mandal commission for obvious reasons. Predictably, all, including the BJP, turned pro-Mandalists. The RSS had no reason whatever to oppose the social content of the Mandal recommendations. The very objective and ideal of the Sangh is that the standard of life of the common man should grow, he should actively participate in the task of national reconstruction, and he should draw self-respect from being an architect of this country. Therefore, we welcomed the social content of the Mandal Commission report promptly.

But we were well aware of the difference between supporting Mandal Commission purely for political advantages, and accepting its recommendations for their social import. The latter meant inviting Dalits to share in economic and political power. What was our concrete programme in this respect, was the question before me. Doubtless, it was the BJP's responsibility to chalk out such a programme. I am not even a primary member of the BJP; nor am I close to its policy-makers.

Still, in August, 1993, I wrote down my thoughts. "Hindutva and participation of castes in power" was the heading of my article. The thoughts expressed in the article were not routine, they were of different fiber. The structure and content of the article would have shaken the currently held beliefs. The sum and substance of the article was Forgetting caste identities, the Hindu society will come forward to participate in such emotional struggles as the liberation of the Ramjanmabhoomi. But we can not take for granted that all sections of the society will be with us in the political arena. The reason being that various castes are now awakened, and alive to their rights. They want a share in economic and political power. From the RSS and the Hindutva point of view, we can not accept caste identities and caste pride. But at the practical political level, we will have to accept caste identities as valid. Eradication of castes can not be a political ideology. It is a socio-cultural ideology. We have to find a way out of this labyrinth. We cannot deny the realities of caste consciousness in the Hindu society. How are we going to convince the submerged castes that they have equal place and status in the Hindu society? What action can we initiate in this regard? To whom should we trust our political leadership? These were the points which I felt deserve a serious thought.

Though the article questioned many current assumptions, I did not feel it proper to publish it straightaway. I was after all not a socialist who published what he wanted. I therefore showed the write up to Damuanna Date and Bhiku Idade. A discussion followed and it was decided to send the article to some leading workers for deliberation. Nobody suggested that my thoughts were garbage, out of line, against the spirit of the RSS ideology, or in proper from the standpoint of caste. The reason was that nobody doubted my Hindutva bonafides. I made about 60 copies of the article which were sent to leading workers for their comments.

A few workers did send their response. Many did not agree with what I had said in my article. It would not be proper to mention names here as the entire affair was a private one. However, I deem it fit to mention one reaction received from Shivrai Telang. The reasons being that he will not be annoyed at my mentioning his name, and the Sangh workers of my generation are highly influenced by Shivrai. Our relationship with him is that of sons with their father. Shivrai did not accept my views. He said "The entire society is Hindu, harmonized, and integrated. This feeling, this awareness, this experience, and this realisation alone will help us achieve *Samarasata*. Merely launching a Sangh shakha called the Manch will lead us nowhere. It will mean pretension, hypocrisy, or a platform from which to last out or give lectures only to pass time."

Later at the end of 1993, elections occurred in four states. The BJP lost power in three of the four-states Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. The defeat was shocking as it was utterly unexpected. Probes began into the reasons for the defeat. Why did the Hindus reject the BJP? The analyses revealed that the backward classes, Dalits, and Muslims had voted *en masse* against the BJP.

One day, the telephone rang. Shivrai Telang was on the line. He said,

"Ramesh, you had written an article some six months ago ."

"Yes, " I said.

"Today I gave your article to Dattopant Thengdi for his perusal. You had made some predictions in it about what has happened in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. You have proved prophetic. Hearty congratulations! How did that occur to you?"

I said , "I have been in your company for a long time. That has made my mind keen!"

"Tell that to others." Shivrai said.

Shivrai's personality is like that. He is never miserly or reserved in his appreciation and compliments. That is why I could not resist the temptation of quoting his views above.

In what way should the Sangh take cognizance of caste identities was a question which figured in all our discussions. Neither in the Sangh activities nor in the RSS programmes or thinking is there any place for caste considerations and caste identities. But the situation outside the Sangh was speedily taking a different turn. Just as it was necessary to tell the people that the Sangh programmes belong to all Hindus, it was also necessary for the Sangh, to be perceived that way. This was extremely difficult for the Sangh. But the process had begun.

An extensive meeting of the Maharashtra Prant's co-ordination committee was held at Pune in January 1994. Between four to five hundred workers attended the meeting. On the first day, Damuanna said to me "Ramesh, we have fixed your discourse tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock."

I was stunned and simply stared at him. I was not such a senior worker as could give a discourse in an important meeting of leading Sangh workers. At least that is how I felt. Damuanna, however, felt otherwise. He said, "Atalji was to be with us full time for this meeting but because of some tragic event in his family, he would not be able to come. You have to deal with his subject."

I was developing cold feet by now. How could I deal with a subject on which, Atalji was to speak? For a moment, I thought Damuanna was making fun of me. But that is not, in his nature.

"What is the subject?", I enquired. He said, "You have to speak on the social content of Hindutva. That is the subject of your discourse." Slowly I recovered from the shock. After all, the subject given was not new to me. In fact, it was my favourite subject and I used to think over it a lot.

"All right", I said to Damuanna. "But tell me one thing. What should be my standpoint while delivering this discourse? Should I speak as the Karyawah of *Samarasata Manch* or as a responsible swayamsevak of the Sangh?"

Damuanna replied, "You have to give the discourse as a worker of the Sangh. But why are you putting this question to me?"

"There will be some difference in the scope of the speech, depending on whether I speak as the Sangh representative or the Manch Karyawah. Let me do this. I will make a draft of my speech today, and will read it out to you. Then you tell me what to add or delete."

I wrote down the speech that night and read it out to Damuanna Date, Bhikuji Idate and Mukundrao Panshikar. There were some sentences which were unclear. I explained their meaning along with how they could be interpreted. Finally, the speech was approved by all.

As per the schedule, my discourse took place the following day. Bhikuji Idate introduced me to the audience. While introducing me, he singled out two things. First, Ramesh Patange is our spokesman on social matters, and secondly, he is going to speak today on the social meaning and content of Hindutva. My discourse was duly delivered. In a nutshell it said:

"The social content of Hindutva is not new to us. Caste differences, social inequality, and untouchability have no place in our activities. We live the social content. But our image is not true to what we are. Our image is that we believe in the Chaturvarnya, in social inequality, and in untouchability. We must change this image.

It is necessary for us to take clear and unambiguous stand on social issues. We can not say that we have no standpoint in this regard. While it is true that social equality and social justice could be brought about only on the basis of Hindutva, we will have to acquire an in-depth understanding of the problems of those who demand social justice. One hundred years ago, Swami Vivekanand said that the shudras will rule this country. That means the common man will stand up and demand his rights. Today we see that happening around us. It is necessary that the social content of Hindutva should be manifest at the level of both thought and action.

The social content of Hindutva cannot be complete without Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts are not opposed to Hindutva. We will have to accept his social thinking.

There are thousands of castes in the Hindu Society. We must see all these castes in the Sangh and the Sangh-sponsored associations. Representatives of various castes should be seen occupying important positions in Hindu organisations. They should be part of the decision-making processes.

It is difficult to find such people. We can not agree with the assumption that caste is quality. We must search for competent people and bring them forward."

After the discourse was over, Chittaranjan Pandit, then editor of Marathi daily Tarun Bharat, came to me and said "Your discourse today was excellent". Almost all the reactions were of this nature. Many seniors and elderly workers, however, did not like my speech. Some of them wrote to me conveying their displeasure, while a few of them did so on the spot. I apprised Damuanna of all these reactions. Damuanna was very pleased with my discourse. I was happy that I could justify his confidence in me.

That was not my first discourse in the Sangh. Nor was it the last. Then why its elaboration here, readers might ask. The explanation lies in the social context. Casteism, inequality, feelings of being high and low and the Manuism that is reflected through them is a social reality in the Hindu society, which we can not deny. The Sangh desires to put an end to this state of affairs in the Hindu society. However, the Sangh's style is not to burn the Manusmriti, or raise the ghost of Manu. The Sangh

way is to bind all sections of the society by a feeling of brotherhood, of togetherness. The psyche of the Sangh swayamsevaks is consciously, and as a result of in-depth study, sought to be shaped towards this end.

This type of thinking occurs in the Sangh at different levels. No two workers of the Sangh necessarily think alike about the same subject. I have had this experience many times. And it is not only mine but a universal experience of Sangh workers. In 1994, All India Seva Karyapramukh (Chief of Service Projects) Shri Suryanarayan Rao was on a tour of Maharashtra. He delivered a discourse at Dombivli, a Mumbai suburb. The subject of his speech was identical to my discourse at Pune. Suryanarayan said, "Our activities and work should not be confined to specific class, say the middle class. Those backward class people, who are pushed aside as untouchables, should be brought into the fold of the RSS. Without their participation, our work should be deemed incomplete".

This line of thought and perception now became manifest in all spheres of the RSS activity. When the Maharashtra BJP leadership issue came up, everybody insisted on the name of Gopinath Munde, (now Dy Chief Minister of Maharashtra). In Uttar Pradesh also, when there was a question of choosing between Mulayam Singh, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh belonging to Samajwadi Party and Mayawati, leader of Bahujan Samajwadi Party, Mayawati was chosen. The Sangh Swayamsevaks made Mayawati, a Dalit, chamar woman, the Chief Minister in the largest state of Uttar Pradesh. Manu should not be rejected only at the verbal or theoretical level. He should also be rejected at the level of practical action. And only the Sangh can accomplish this task.

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"Manu, Sangh and I"

Chapter V

In this book I have mentioned Sukhadev Navale wherever the context has called for it. His contribution to the projection of the social content of the Sangh's work is massive. He lives at *Sambhajinagar*, which is one of the main centres of the Dalit movement. There are a large number of workers there who can be called Dalit intellectuals. The Milind Mahavidyalaya, a College started by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, is situated there. Sukhadev Navale has close links with the activists of the Dalit movement.

My in-laws also belong to Sambhajinagar. When I married Miss Mangal of the Vadnagare family, my visits to Sambhajinagar became frequent. My friendship with Sukhadev thickened. His immense ability and competence, and his in-depth understanding of the Sangh work, had a magnetic impact on me.

One day, Sukhadev told me, "Ramesh I want to set up a *Pratishthan* (a Trust) here."

"What Pratishthan?", I asked.

"A Medical Trust", he said, "in the name of Dr. Ambedkar".

"O.K., What next?", I asked.

"What I am contemplating is to start a clinic and dispensary and name it after Dr. Hedgewar", said Sukhadev. "People will be able to comprehend the significance of the thinking and service to the society of both these great doctors through a project like this". He mused.

Then, in a lighter vein, he said, "You are a thinker and give lectures. But all that goes over the heads of village farmers like us. Without some concrete action, or activity, we can not understand your intellectual stuff."

"But how is all this to be organised? We will need doctors to work on the project. They will have to work in accordance with you ideology. Basically that is a difficult task. Moreover, no big money can be expected through such service. That being so, will we be able to get a doctor to join us?" I put my practical doubts before him.

But Sukhadev had already thought about all these issues. He said, "Are you free tonight? Then do one thing. A meeting of Dr. Ambedkar Medical Pratishthan is being held at Dr. Ashtaputre's place. Please come there".

I attended the meeting that night. Dr. Satish Kulkarni, Dr. Bharat Deshmukh, Dr. Ashtaputre, Dr. Tupkari, and some other doctors were there. After many such meetings, Dr. Hedgewar Hospital came up in Sambhajinagar, under the aegis of Dr. Ambedkar Medical Trust. An action platform, manifesting Hindutva through service, came to life in Sambhajinagar. I must reveal here, for the information of my progressive friends, that most of the doctors who have given up the lure of money to work in this clinic on meager salaries are RSS Swayamsevaks, and are mostly Brahmins. Even their spouses have gladly involved themselves in this service.

I have not mentioned Girish Prabhune in this book. Girish started participating in the Samarasata Manch activities from 1989. Before joining us in the Manch, he was working with the Nimgaon Mhalungi Project of the Gramayan of Pune. He gradually got himself freed from there. The Nimgaon Mhalungi Project is an unusual project. Dalits who live there, had migrated to Mumbai after mortgaging their lands to the moneylenders. They had come to Mumbai in search of employment. The project aimed at bringing them back to their village, and rehabilitating them there. Some eight to ten Dalit families were brought back and their lands were restored to them. Farming and its ancillary activities were undertaken at Nimgaon. Girish had contributed significantly to the project. We gradually came closer, and I grew more familiar with his personality traits.

Girish is neither a Dalit nor a backward class worker. He belongs to an orthodox and conservative Brahmin family. In the progressive parlance, he should have been a hardcore Manuist. Instead, he came to the RSS, and became a hardcore *samarasatawadi*. He became a dedicated worker, exerting his body, mind, and wealth for the welfare of his Dalit brothers. Once I heard about his past from his own mouth. When a mere schoolboy, he ran away from home with a nomadic family. He wandered with them from village to village for one whole year. That nomadic family was rounded up by the police at some place and charged with theft. Girish too was arrested. The nomads however told the police that Girish was not one of them but was a Brahmin boy. The police launched a search for his parents, and brought him back to Chinchwad. Thus at an early age, Girish commenced the work which he was destined later on a different but grander scale.

In 1989, a conference for the development of nomadic and gypsy tribes was held at Solapur, a District place in South of Maharashtra, at the initiative of Girish Prabhune and Bhikuji Idate. We started working in a new field. I had known these tribes only through reading about them. I was conversant with their problems. On Gandhi Jayanti Day (birthday) in 1990, we

organised a get-together of the Nomadic Tribes Development Parishad at Pune. Bhimrao Gasti, an eminent leader of a nomadic tribe viz., *Beraad* and a doctor in Metallurgy had come to inaugurate the meeting. About 200 to 250 nomads were present. I was on the dais as an activist of the Samarasata manch. My speech was scheduled for the evening. Throughout the day, I was listening to the problems and hardships of the tribes, injustices meted out to them, and police brutalities perpetrated on them. This facet of our society was new to me. What to speak before them was a problem. There was no use telling them the philosophy of *Hindu Rashtra*, *Hindutva*, and *Samarasata*. They were all Hindus, many even orthodox Hindus, and they were also proud of their Hindutva. Their agony was of a different kind. Their agony was that they were kicked away by the Hindu society itself. I had no answer to this conundrum. The problems of the nomadic and tribal Hindus, truly speaking, are problems of the entire Hindu community. Integrating them presupposes a change in the psyche of the Hindu society. Our real task is to take up the problems of nomadic and gypsy tribes and place them before the Hindu society, is what I was thinking. But that day, I did not make a speech along those lines. Girish, however, was well versed in the difficulties and hardships of the tribes. He had seen their style of life from close quarters. He had a clear idea of the nature of work to be done among them.

Although by coincidence, the work among the nomads took a definite direction in 1991. There was a raid by dacoits on the Minaar Express (train from Mumbai to Hyderabad) near Kurduwadi, a place near Solapur. It was reported that two Pardhis, a nomadic backward tribe stamped as criminals were killed in the raid. The Sangha's Training class was going on at Solapur at that time. Gaikwad came to the class. The news of the raid and the killings reached us. However, we did not feel concerned as the Pardhis were known to resort to raids and the related mishaps were not rare. But this raid was different from the usual.

It turned out that the two Pardhis who were killed had not joined the dacoity. They were at their homes on the night the raid took place, and were asleep when the dacoity occurred. A number of people corroborated the story. This meant that the two Pardhis were murdered by the police. That was shocking. Girish Prabhune, Teksas Gaikwad, Chandrakant Gadekar, Secretary of Nomadic Development Conference, and Madhukar Vatkar immediately proceeded to Kurduwadi and conducted investigative inquiries into the incident. The information which had come to us was true. The police had killed the two Pardhis in cold blood. Later, we published details of the story in *Vivek*.

After a few days, when I met Girish Prabhune, he told me some anecdotes about the Pardhis. I was stunned to hear the atrocities perpetrated on them. We deliberated further at our next meeting, and decided to go to the root of the murder of the two Pardhis. Sudhakar Naik was the Chief Minister at that time. A delegation of the Development Council for Nomads called on him. The entire episode was conveyed to him. He promised an inquiry into the matter. We hoped the inquiry would take place, and the guilty punished. Nothing of the kind took place.

The issue was not limited only to the two Pardhis. Anguish and affliction affected the entire Paradhi tribe. One incident of atrocity led to another, and yet another, in an endless chain of oppression. Each of the stories which surfaced were factual, real, authentic, and mercilessly exposed our social and political system in all its frightening nakedness. It was necessary to do something urgently to mitigate the torments and tortures of the Paradhi community. The Yamgarwadi project came into being to meet this need.

According to a Sanskrit saying, the success of any work is dependent on the inherent merit of that work, not because of the means used. The will and yearning of us all, particularly the urge on the part of Girish Prabhune to do something, along with the Sangh tradition of service because the inspiration underlying this work. One day, a message came from Sukhadev Navale that Ramesh Chatuphale, an RSS activist, was prepared to donate 18 acres of land at Yamgarwadi near Tuljapur. What would we like to do with it? We took a prompt decision to accept the land on behalf of the Nomadic tribes. After due legal proceedings, the land was transferred to us, and we had a hostel built there for nomadic students.

Mahadevrao Gaikwad, an RSS worker, is a resident of Kakrumba, near Tuljapur. His contribution to the work of the Development Council for Nomads was substantial. He himself belongs to one of these tribes. He is highly educated and works as a teacher in a local school. He has dedicated himself to working for the uplift of nomads and tribals. He took great pains to execute the project. It was mainly due to his efforts that the hostel was built within a few months, and the children of the Pardhis came to stay there.

It was difficult to run the hostel without assistance from the Government. We were in a quandary as to how to raise the funds required for the hostel. We placed the problem before the Prant workers of the Sangh. They decided to raise the requisite monetary assistance for the hostel. Through '*Vivek*', I appealed to the readers of the weekly for donations. I made an appeal for donation of Rs.12 a year, at the rate of Rs.1 per month. The response from the readers was unprecedented. Individual donations ranged from Rs.12 to Rs.40,000. The Sangh tradition, once again, came to our help. In the initial stage we received about Rs. 3,50,000.

Who were the donors? As Sangh Swayamsevaks, we do not believe in caste. We do not even think of it. But, for the kind information of our socialist friends, I must reveal that 99 percent of the donors were Brahmins. Aptes, Kelkars, Joshis, Gokhales, Kulkarnis, Khares were prominent in the list of donors. Most of them were middle class people. Majority of them were employees. They gave us one fistful of their food for their brethren. Some of the stories about donors deserve need to be mentioned here.

There is a village called Phanasu near Dapoli. Dattopant Pethe is a *swayamasevak* in that village. He is 82. One day, he telephoned me in my office. He had come to Mahim to stay with his daughter. "Ramesh, are you free today any time?" he asked. "Can you come over here?" I knew him since long. I said, "Yes, I will come."

By a coincidence, that day, Girish Prabhune too, was in Mumbai. Both of us went to Mahim to meet Dattopant Pethe. Dattopant handed over to us a cheque for Rs. 10,000. He had obtained that cheque from Mangalatai Abhyankar, permanent Director of HICO Products Ltd. His youthful enthusiasm at the age of 82 amazed me.

Govindrao Phadnis, an RSS worker looks after the work of "Vivek" in Vile Parle. He is nearing 70. He has a defective foot. Nevertheless, he moved from house to house in Parle to collect donations for Paradhi boys.

A Rajasthani Swayamsevak, Arun Kankani rang me up in my office. His marriage was about to take place and he warmly invited me to attend the function. He said, "Rameshji, please come also to my place at Goregaon, a Mumbai Suburb. I wish to make a donation of Rs. 25,000 for the work of nomads and gypsies on the occasion of my wedding."

"I will definitely come", I said.

"But there is a condition", he said. You will have to join me for lunch that day." I gladly accepted. When I was the *karyawah* at Goregaon, Arun was a Bal swayamsevak. He used to conduct the shakha very competently.

Girish Prahune and I went to Arun's place and accepted his donation. Each of the donations has its own story to tell. These transactions are easily made by the swayamsevaks spurred by the love for the entire society which the Sangh has inculcated in them. They can well ask, who are these Paradhis? Thieves and pendharies? Why should we give money for their boys? But the impact of the Sangh ideology is so great that such morbid thinking is not possible for the *swayamsevaks*.

Within three to four years, the work for the pardhis gained good momentum in Maharashtra. One day, news appeared that Paradhis of Sheshnagar in Nagpur had decided to convert to Christianity. Promptly, Girish Prahune went there, with some Paradhis from our project. The conversion plans went haywire because of his efforts.

Girish then planned a programme whereby some girls from *Swaroopwardhini*, an educational institution in Pune, would stay among Paradhis for eight days. During this time, they would organise adult literacy classes, make prohibition propaganda, hold anti-superstition meets, and help in other ways. The girls who were selected, belonged to middle-class families in Pune, and with a few exceptions, were Brahmins. Before going on their project, they met some people at Pune, who included social workers and a woman scholar who had specialized in folk literature. Having heard that these young girls were going to stay alone, among Paradhis, for eight days, the lady scholar commented, "Paradhi is a horrible caste. They live like brutes. It is extremely dangerous to stay among them alone in this manner." These comments frightened the girls. Girish then neatly explained to them the real nature of the Paradhis. And as was planned, the girl went to the Paradhi settlements, and stayed there for eight days.

When I heard of this incident, it invariably drove me to make a comparison between the attitude of our average Swayamsevak, who has not made any specialized studies of the Paradhis and that of progressive scholars who have made such specialized studies. On one side, there is affection and sympathy, while on the other, there is only dry, dehumanized analysis.

Our work was affecting the world of progressives in Maharashtra. The work of the *Samarasata Manch* incensed some Ambedkarite thinkers. They started sermonising that the Sangh is *Hinduising* Dr Ambedkar. The Sugaawa publication of Pune brought out a Diwali special number on "Hindutva people in the Ambedkarite movement." This issue featured articles from eminent progressive thinkers like Dr Raosaheb Kasbe, Dr Yeshwant Manohar, Dr Smt. Neelam Gorhe, Prof Vasant Waghmare, and Dr Sharad Patil. The synopsis of all these articles was that the Sangh, using cunning and hypocrisy, has been *Hindutvising* Dr Ambedkar's philosophy to kill it. The premise they put forth can be demolished only by writing whole lot of books. Dr. Kasbe's treatise on the Hindu-Muslim problem, Dalit Writer Shantaram Pandere's "*Bhagwa Tukoba*: Brahmin cunning of the Sangh" are books which deserve rejoinders in the form of counter books.

I read all such literature avidly. Their weird logic often stuns one. If there is a literary award for purveying blatant lies, the progressive literature on the Sangh will make the topmost grade.

The high priests of progressives became quite restless in the wake of the commencement of our work for nomads. Laxman Mane described us as parasites. He also commented that we did not have any knowledge about nomads, and were treading into unknown pastures. We have discovered a criterion to judge the success or failure of our work. When our opponents start crying wolf, we take it for granted that our work is proceeding in the right and effective direction.

1994 dawned. It was decided to convene the first state level session of the Samarasata Manch in that year. Who would preside over the session? I suggested the name of Bhikuji Idate. The suggestion was unanimously accepted. The session was fixed for April 30, 1994 at Pimpri, a locality near Pune.

We did a lot of thinking on what should be the theme of the session. It was strongly felt that a definite thesis should be projected before the society. Structuring the society on the basis of harmony and togetherness was a thesis which was appropriate to our times, and social environment. It was decided that in his presidential address, Bhikuji Idate should expound this thesis. I was advised to write a brochure on "The Social Content of Hindutva" on the eve of the session.

The session took place as scheduled. It should be described as historic, especially by those who take the Sangh's social outlook seriously. Bhikuji Idate gave a masterly exposition of the comprehensive philosophy of Hindutva in his presidential address. I cannot resist reproducing here a few paragraphs from his speech:

"I feel it is necessary to explain a couple of factors which have caused tremendous commotion in our social life. Goebbelsian propaganda having been made that Hindutva wants to revive the Chaturvarnya and Manuism. There is a great deal of confusion about these concepts. There is, however, no ground absolutely to have any illusions in this matter.

These concepts of Chaturvarnya and Manuism, which gave rise to inequality and the caste system, have now become obsolete and dated, and anybody who wants to organise people cannot accept these thoughts and concepts. An organisation is possible if its basis is equality. Hindu unification is impossible on the basis of Chaturvarnya. The third Sarsanghanchalak Balasaheb Deoras once very clearly said that though the Varna

order has not remained, it has survived as a disorder. It should be eliminated in toto. All should join hands to drive it out. It must go lock, stock and barrel. This means that the Chaturvarnya system should be rejected in its entirety.

As regards the point that the Hindutva people want to bring back Manuism, we must note that our country is run according to the Constitution. Because Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar gave us this Constitution, we call him its architect. Can a situation arise in which the Constitution will be demolished, and the country will be run on some other basis? This eventuality is possible only in two sets of situations, the first being a foreign invasion and conquest of our country and the second, if there is a bloody, violent revolution followed by dictatorship in the country. This means that there should be no doubt in anybody's mind that our country will always be governed on the basis of the Constitution, because either of the eventualities of a foreign conquest or a bloody revolution does not appear to be in the realm of possibility so far as our country is concerned. Of course some amendments in the Constitution could be affected as per the needs of time only in a way prescribed by the Constitution itself. More than 80 such constitutional amendments have taken place till now. There is therefore no reason to take any exception to this. We should avoid interpreting the Constitution by letter as this again leads to the danger of distortion. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar himself once said that "if necessary, I would consign the Constitution to flames. Many of the clauses in the Constitution have been inserted against my will. For instance, the clause 31, [Compulsory acquisition of property] I am in no way related to this clause".

I therefore make an humble appeal to those thinkers, who clamour from the housetops, to put a stop to their incessant and baseless propaganda that these are efforts to revive Manuism, and with an open mind comprehend the changes of times."

The Pimpri session was attended by Senior Sangh leaders like Dattopant Thengdi, Moropant Pingle and Vasanttrao Kelkar. Devdatta Dabholkar, (ex-Vice Chancellor of University of Pune) had come from Satara specially to attend the session. Prof. Ram Shevkar inaugurated this session. It will remain a permanent feature in my memory because of an utterly mischievous speech made by Teksas Gaikwad. He was chairing a symposium. The Chairman had to conclude the discussion in an appropriate manner. Teksas did not do this. Instead, he read out a speech in which, he used abusive language in respect of Lord Shriram. He compared Lord Shriram to Dawood Ibrahim, a well known smuggler and criminal now leading luxurious life outside India. I was listening to the speech from the dais. It is not in my nature to tolerate meaningless harangues from anybody. I was caught in an ugly trap where I felt somebody was spitting on me in a public place, and I was not able to offer any resistance.

Gaikwad's unkindly and improper speech puzzled everybody. Why should he make a speech like this? They wondered. On innumerable occasions during the last four to five years, we had dialogues with him. He was a frequent visitor to the Sangh office at Moti Baug, Pune. He had participated in various activities of the *Samarasata Manch*, and made appropriate speeches on those occasions. He had also declared in the Dr. Ambedkar Salutation Rally held at Shivaji Park, Mumbai that Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Hedgewar together were the harbingers of bright and prosperous times. Suddenly, why did he feel that we all were fundamentalists, and the concept of Hindu Rashtra (nation) was a morbid one?

I feel it was the influence of Kanshi Ram (leader of scheduled castes particularly in North). The elections were round the corner. For this purpose, Kanshi Ram started making the rounds of Maharashtra. He had said that he was on the lookout for a Mulayam in Maharashtra. He was confident of changing the power equation in this state. There were many candidates for the position of Kanshi Ram's Mulayam in Maharashtra. Is it not possible that Teksas Gaikwad too, wanted to announce his candidature by making an ugly speech in the *Samarasata Manch* session?

The Swayamsevak's reacted very strongly to Teksas Gaikwad's provocative speech. They had great expectations from Teksas, which were reduced to dust by his speech. For months I to come, found it a tough job to explain away Gaikwad's conduct.

My brochure, 'Social Content Of Hindutva', was published at this same session. I preferred to speak on that subject whenever I was invited to give a lecture. 'The casteless, integrated and harmonious Hindu society is the social philosophy of Hindutva', used to be the theme of my speeches. The audience invariably had the satisfaction of having heard something new.

Elections took place in 1995 and there was change of power in Maharashtra. None had expected that the Congress would be defeated in Maharashtra, and Shiv Sena-BJP would form the government. The conversations we had with the BJP leaders before the election did not at all indicate that they were confident of coming to power. The Congress had a firm grip on political power in the state and it was not easy to loosen it.

Sharad Pawar was shouting day in and day out that Maharashtra was a state of progressive ideology, of Phule and Ambedkar. He was haranguing the people that Hindutva forces are not only reactionary, but if they came to power, they would bring back the Peshwa Raj meaning a rule by Peshwas i.e. Brahmins. There is no dearth of so-called scholars and thinkers in Maharashtra who make merry on Sharad Pawar's money. They also parroted this propaganda through their speeches and articles. It was inevitable that all this tom-tom should have impact on Dalits too. Sharad Pawar had thought that the Dalit votes would come to him as a matter of right.

BJP's attitude to Dalits was the same as that of the Sangh. The party believed that the ties with Dalits should be closer, and their political aspirations should be respected and encouraged. But that was not the case with the Shiv-Sena. The Sena could not give up its estrangement with Dalits. I therefore had a feeling that the alliance with the Sena was not socially advantageous. I held this view at that time and today too I hold the same view. BJP, however, is a political party and it is only in the fitness of things that it should think in political terms. For them an alliance with the Shiv Sena was not only necessary, but there was no alternative to it.

The social factor inevitably influenced the results of elections. But the social climate was not so much in favour of Hindutva as to catapult it to power. This was the view generally held, and it seemed to be grounded in reality. Then how could the

social mindset be actively turned in favour of Hindutva? That was the real problem before us. The social philosophy of Hindutva was effectively explained at the Samarasata Manch session at Pimpri. Similarly, on the Namaantar issue, our thoughts were manifest in our actions.

The question as to what BJP would do was not confined only to Sangh related organisations. Individuals are not important in organizational approach, the collective is more important than the individual. The social psychology however, is different. People will assess the situation on the basis of leadership. Fortunately, the name of Gopinath Munde was coming forward by virtue of his competence. Gopinath Munde had staked his life to launch a fight against the Sharad Pawar Dawood Ibrahim axis. People had taken cognizance of his spirited attitude.

We wrote profusely on Gopinath Munde in the Vivek weekly. Vivek's support to Munde signified that his leadership was acceptable to RSS *Swayamsewaks*. Vivek has definitely a share, however small, in pushing forward the name of Gopinath Munde to the position he came to occupy in the wake of the change in the Government.

Predictably, the change of power in Maharashtra started a debate on whether the Phule-Ambedkar ideals had suffered defeat in Maharashtra. The egoistic Ambedkarites were stunned. They were confused and unprepared to react intelligently. At such a juncture, there was particular need to prepare and project an appropriate interpretation of recent events.

I never once felt that the change in power in Maharashtra was a defeat of Phule-Ambedkar philosophy. I also do not accept that the Sharad Pawar Government was a Government of Phule-Ambedkar ideology. Dawood Ibrahim's remote control was running the Government of Sharad Pawar. To relate such a Government to Dr. Ambedkar's teachings is an insult to Dr. Ambedkar. The Pawar gang was defeated in Maharashtra. Some Ambedkarites had jumped on the bandwagon of this gang, and they too, were defeated.

The BJP's triumph in Maharashtra is the defeat of Manuism. A big political transformation was brought about by getting 27 backward class M.L.A.'s elected to the Assembly. All castes and tribes are treated as equals in Hindutva. Because of this change in power, this message went down to the grassroots of our society. Personally, I was elated. All those who called us Manuists were given a fitting rejoinder in a practical, visible way.

Those of us who were indifferent to social problems were awakened from their social slumber. An awareness of the acute need for working in the neglected localities dawned on us. Service became the Sangh programme. The Sangh started thinking of Dalits, backward class people, tribals, women, and their problems. The Sangh workers were now repeatedly advised that henceforth our work would be in the social direction. In a village where there is a Shakha, if Dalits have no entry in any temple or they are not allowed to draw water from the common reservoirs, that should be a matter of shame for us, the senior Sangh leaders started saying.

Why was this advice not given thirty to forty years ago? Why has the RSS suddenly developed a stake in the social field? Those who specialize in twisting logic may ask us these questions. When a grand building is to be constructed, it has to be built brick by brick. First the foundation has to be laid, then the platform, then the walls. That is also scientific. The Hindu nation is to be reconstructed in the same way. The prerequisite for this achieving was that the RSS work cover the whole country. This expansion took some years to accomplish. A group of dedicated workers also had to be created. That is how, the Sangh works, and goes ahead, in achieving its objectives-step by step. The Sangh has now built up strength to take on social tasks.

The process by which the workers of the Sangh are moulded is worth studying. A worker like me who had not read Dr. Ambedkar till 1975, is now a social worker of some stature. The guidance of the Sangh leadership, and the individual's own efforts, bring about this transformation. It is not that this process is successful or perceptible in my case alone. I have written here about myself because I am telling only my story. Hundreds of RSS workers go to ever new spheres of activity. What information did those workers have about the lifestyles and customs of tribal people, before going to live and work amongst them? They acquired it. Many Sangh Pracharaks go to foreign countries. When they go, they may be blank about life in the respective countries but they acquire the requisite knowledge.

How does this process take place in the Sangh? How has it happened in my case? The Sangh has given definite direction to our thinking. Dattopant Thengdi once advised us that while thinking or contemplating an action, we should bring before our mind's eye the Hindu Rastra personified, and we should ask ourselves whether our thinking and action are in its interest. In other words, we have to test every thought and action of ours on the anvil of national interest. I think of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule, and view their thoughts and deeds from the above angle and find that they further of the interests of the Hindu Rashtra, and hence, should be followed by us.

In the march of the Sangh, I too am a traveller. However, at times, several questions crowd my mind. There is no inequality in the Sangh. There is no Manuism either. But that does not mean that it is not there in the society outside the RSS. Untouchability may not be observed now as rigidly as in the past but untouchability is not entirely eradicated. The sentiment that "he is of another caste" still persists. There is a picture of Dr. Ambedkar in my house. A maidservant who worked for my neighbour, once asked my wife:

"Do you belong to our community?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked my wife

"I mean are you a Buddhist?"

My wife conveyed to me this dialogue when I returned home. My non-Buddhist neighbour used to say, "Why are you keeping Ambedkar's picture in your house? In what way is he related to us?" The man who asks these questions is a Hindu. The sense of social inequality persists in his mind. He thrives on the same, traditional values, under the garb of modernity.

How to change his outlook? How to train him to think correctly? The Hindu society outside the RSS is vast. To transform the mindset of this vast human concourse is as difficult as lifting the Himalayas.

The present socio-political environment is also not highly favourable for bringing the sort of transformation of which I am speaking. Most of the people talk of finishing Manuism. Most of the time their behaviour contradicts what they say. And now we see that organisations of different castes are coming up in the name of Dr. Ambedkar's legacy. Dr. Ambedkar used to say that castes are inimical to nationhood. Because of castes the Hindu society is not able to develop common values. Castes create and widen the cleavages among people, between man and man. Castewise claims are made even on great people. This prevents emergence of common ideals and common aspirations in the Hindu society. Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts and teachings are forgotten for momentary political benefit.

One naive question arises in my mind. If all people want to eradicate castes, why do they not work together, at least on this one task, of de-casting the society? Why is there this division of people among Hindu protagonists, socialists, radicals and so on. Why are all of them so emphatic and assertive of their own group? Why is political capital sought to be made out of social issues?

Not to work together collectively seems to be in the nature of Hindu society. When four Hindus come together, arguments and counter-arguments are inevitable. These arguments are called theoretical discussions. Now that people have branded me as a thinker, I am called to read papers in some seminars. I have noticed that Hindus are incapable of reaching unanimity on any issue. Hindus have reached unanimity on this point alone - that Hindus cannot be unanimous on anything.

Whatever limited insight I have been lucky to gain through my public activities, has brought to my notice conspicuously that what our thinkers are most worried about is the Muslim. Many among us hold the view that the Muslim problem should be settled on a top priority basis. Non-Hindutva people feel that we should try to understand Muslims; we should not provoke them or annoy them. This type of talk goes on endlessly. There is very little awareness that the problem of social inequality in the Hindu society is more burning than the Muslim problem, and should be settled first.

It is very easy to talk against Muslims. It is not so easy to wage a struggle against caste differences and social inequalities. Because this struggle is our conflict with ourselves alone. When we sit down to seek solutions to social problems, we really are standing in the dock. Then the ancestral burden devolves on our shoulders, and we are reluctant to accept or bear it.

In the desert of such a social milieu, the families who live the Sangh ideology appear to be the oases. The family is the unit of social transformation. Social respectability is perceptible in such families. I have seen many Sangh families living happily even after inter-caste marriages. I have also seen a Swayamsevak like Ramesh Pandav who has named his house 'Lahuji Smriti'. I have met people like Raosaheb Kale who, after returning from a holy pilgrimage, respectfully hosted Dalits and honoured them. I have seen a daughter of the Sonavanes coming as a daughter-in-law in the Damle household. The number of such families might be small, compared to the magnitude of the problem. But these are the brave earthen lamps shimmering in the social darkness. Their number is bound to grow steadily, till the entire darkness is dispelled by their light.

I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that the social road of Hindutva will widen into a national highway in future. It is only in Hindutva that the strength to impart equality, fraternity and justice lies. No other ideology has this strength. I do not have the slightest doubt about this. This is neither blind faith nor a blinkered vision.

When I think why Hindutva has this power for change, I remember Dr. Hedgewar and his life. He is the inspiration behind my Hindutva. In the film 'Sant Tukaram', there is a lyric of Shantaram Athavale which says that a little seed contains in it the germ of crores of trees. The social ideology of Hindutva is inherent in the form of a seed in Dr Hedgewar's life. Initially, when the seed starts growing, it attracts no attention. Momentary beauty of foliage, creepers, flowers attracts admirers. Their life is however very short. In contrast, the banyan plant, grows steadily but vigorously until one day, it becomes a sprawling, giant tree; and under its shade, thousands of travellers get cool comfort. Dr Hedgewar's life will also be a banyan tree. Under the vast canopy of its branches, the Hindu society will enjoy harmonious and integrated life, forgetting all its internal differences and divisions. This is not a mere poetic ideal, it is a realistic image of the future.

The concept of Hindu unification is the seed of thought Dr Hedgewar has given us. Hindu unification (sanghathan) means to organise Hindus on the basis of common faith, common loyalties, and common values of life, eliminating all inequality from this society. Unification and inequality are contradictory terms. Any one who wants to achieve unification of the Hindu society will be unable to accept the caste system which is the mother of social inequality. And those who believe in caste differences and caste egos will never be able to achieve Hindu unification.

"*Jaat nahi ti jaat*" (that which cannot be cast away is caste), is one of the definitions of caste. Many great men in our country tried to eradicate caste. Unfortunately none of them could drive away caste from the Hindu mind. This failure is frustrating. We have to measure Dr Hedgewar's work in this context against the backdrop of a panoramic canvas. We have only witnessed the effort made for caste eradication by different people. But so far, no book has been written which can give us a comparative analysis of the greater efficacy of one or the other method. At least I am not aware of any.

Dr Hedgewar wiped out caste feelings from lakhs of Hindus like us. When I think how he could have wrought such a miracle, I come to the conclusion that it was because he never criticized caste or the *Varnashram* system. He avoided even any reference to the subject. Why waste energy and time on a subject which is not at all relevant to one's thoughts and actions? Why does the Hindu love his caste? Because the caste gives identity and security, both social and economic. Dr Hedgewar gave us the broader 'Hindu' identity, Hindu pride. At the same time, he raised a security posse of Sangh Swayamsevaks around the Hindus in the RSS. As a result, the Sangh Swayamsevak never feels lonely while working in society. He does not feel that the Swayamsevak who speaks a different language, eats different staple food in any part of the country, is a stranger to him. Doctor Hedgewar created this bond of Hindu brotherhood among all de-casted Hindus.

According to me, he could accomplish this for two reasons. First, he had realised the inner vitality of Hindutva. He was convinced that Hindutva had the power to bury all differences and divisions. That led him to awaken, with consummate skill,

the force of Hindutva which is inherent in the mind of every Hindu. The Hindutva philosophy of course, is not his invention. Hindutva is eternal, endless. Realizing this Dr Hedgewar sought to give us a Hindu identity. Naturally, he was successful in his endeavour.

His real success is the integration of thought and action, which was manifest in his life. To release thoughts which are imprisoned in books and lectures, action must accompany thought. Dr Hedgewar's life was a 'yajna' of action.

People who accuse the Sangh of being "Manuist" have never made a thoughtful study of Dr Hedgewar's life. This is indicative of the intellectual bankruptcy of thinkers in Maharashtra, and their blinkered outlook. It is highly unfortunate that in Maharashtra, which calls itself intellectually oriented, the life of a great man, who mesmerized and motivated lakhs of young men in our country should be overlooked, and no efforts made to comprehend his philosophy.

I do not think really that to blame others will serve any useful purpose. It is now 70 years since the RSS was founded. Except the biography, written by eminent Sangh Pracharak and leader, Nana Palkar, no one else has ventured to write an analytical biography of the Dr Hedgewar. In 1988-89, even when his birth centenary was celebrated all over the country on an unprecedented scale no annotated biography of Dr Hedgewar came out. Hopefully, somebody will write it in the future, I hope.

Time has now come to bid adieu to the readers as this story is coming to an end. I will conclude it with an incident which spurred me to write this story. I had just delivered my speech at the *Vicharwedh* conference, and presented my thoughts on Manu when a communist leader in the vicinity of Satara met me. He said, "Patange, if you hold this view about Manu, you will be driven out of the RSS. You will have to resign your editorship of the '*Vivek*'. He said this very sincerely. There was no socialist hypocrisy in his comments. I failed to give him a reply at that time. "Nobody will drive me out of the RSS, nor will anybody remove me from the editorship of the '*Vivek*', I should have told him. But I found it difficult to say so. Mainly because he looked upon the RSS as a Manuist organisation.

I became keenly aware that to break such hard rocks was a tremendous challenge for us, Sangh Swayamsevaks. The Sangh today has acquired an excellent reputation, but Dr Hedgewar's Sangh has yet to reach crores of families. When and how it will be accomplished is a question.

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