

# Namantar Struggle: A Non-religious Political Movement of Ambedkarites in Maharashtra

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**Abstract:** *The Namantar Andolan was a non-religious political agitation by Dalits aimed at the renaming of Marathwada University. Namantar is the Marathi term for Renaming or Name-Change. This study introduces the Namantar Andolan as a gradually evolved mass movement and its subversion by the state and the ruling classes into Naamvistar or Name-Extension. This paper is divided into three sections; the first section deals with the background of Namantar Andolan and the history of Marathwada region; the second section deals with the methodology of the study and the third section deals with the discussion on the outcome of the movement and its implications on the aspects of emancipatory movements that focus on claiming the public sphere by the marginalized. This study is distinct in its reconstruction of Namantar Andolan from primary sources gathered through activist networks and the extensive examination of material produced in Marathi language during and since the period of Namantar movement.*

## Introduction

The state of Maharashtra is known to be a fertile ground for the rise and growth of modern Dalit movement in India.<sup>1</sup> It builds from many anti-caste movements in the region addressing the questions of inequality and injustice. The ‘political mobilization’ of Dalits in Maharashtra is instrumental in delineating the meaning of emancipation of the most oppressed in the caste society, shaping and influencing the emancipation struggles for ‘dignified identity’ in all other parts of India.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Dalit-The interpretation of the word varies; in this context, it is referred as an assertive term for the people of lower caste who are struggling for self-respect and dignity.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of ‘Political Mobilization’ has been used here to refer to the process of awakening among the marginalized, Dalits, about their plight, and their quest to bring an end to their conditions by collective efforts.

During the British period, with the introduction of modern values and a little access to education, the struggles for emancipation by the oppressed communities gained an impetus and the structures of oppression were challenged with renewed energy and force as compared to earlier periods.<sup>3</sup>

The history of Dalit movement in Maharashtra is extensively documented. Dalits in the past have undertaken radical steps to question inequality; their agitations against injustices were strong even in the pre-Ambedkar times. The quest for attaining equality transformed into a larger movement for social justice aimed at ‘Annihilation of Caste’ under the unquestionable leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the crusader of the cause of the oppressed. With the direction Dalits had obtained from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, their battle was clearly oriented against the tyranny of the caste system and it continues in the post-Ambedkar era.

In post-independent India, the Dalit movement in Marathwada region occupies a significant place. After the Mahaparinirvan of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the first self-organized and mass movement was born in this region, i.e., the “Namantar Andolan” or the movement demanding Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s name be given to the former Marathwada University.<sup>4,5</sup> The movement for renaming lasted twenty years, from 1974 to 1994 with the persistent efforts of Dalits to achieve their demand. Namantar’s very demand made it difficult to be co-opted by categories like religion; it remained a non-religious political movement. It was led from the front by the young and old, with women participating at all levels of mobilization and agitations. During this period, the important aspects such as consciousness-building among the Dalits, a process of social awakening, articulating the meaning of a dignified living, and expressing the vision of their agitation defined the movement. The history of Namantar also comprises of the events of mass level atrocities against the Dalits by the savarnas.<sup>6</sup> The movement for renaming ended on 14 January 1994; a change in the name of Marathwada University was announced by the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra Sharad Pawar. The change in the name was called as Naamvistar as the original demand of the movement was of completely changing university’s former name from “Marathwada University” to “Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University” and omitting the word “Marathwada.”<sup>7</sup> However, the name change was done without omission of “Marathwada” as “Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University.”<sup>8</sup> The proponents of the Namantar did not consider this renaming as the actual realisation of the original demand. The movement for renaming agitated the core of the savarnas’ power and they openly expressed their age-old anger against Dalits by various means. Their hatred for the proposed name of Dr. Ambedkar found expression in continued attacks even after the official

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<sup>3</sup> For details see, S.K. Gupta, *The Scheduled Caste in Modern Indian Politics*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publications and Pvt.Ltd.,1985

<sup>4</sup> *Mahaparinirvana* is a Pali word, here referred to the death of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

<sup>5</sup> *Namantar* is a Marathi word which means the renaming. A massive agitation was called by Dalits aiming at renaming the Marathwada University.

<sup>6</sup> Savarnas are referred here as people of dominant/upper castes/Caste Hindus.

<sup>7</sup> *Naamvistar* is a Marathi word-which means expansion of the previous name.

<sup>8</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarache Visthapit* Aurangabad: Chinmay Prakashan., 2008p.92

announcement of the Naamvistar. The day when the Naamvistar was announced is celebrated each year on 14 January as Namantar or Naamvistar din.

### **The history of education in Marathwada region**

Historically, Marathwada was in the state of Hyderabad and under the rule of Nizam, the colleges in this region were affiliated to Osmania University. There was an insufficiency of colleges and the source of higher education was Osmania University. Even before the establishment of the Osmania University, the only degree college in Hyderabad was linked with Madras University. The University of Osmania was established in 1918 along with four other degree colleges. In these colleges the medium of instruction was essentially Urdu. Thus, a large section of potential students remained outside the flow of college education, due to the language barrier.

In the consequent years of 1918, 1919 and 1920, the Hyderabad Social Service league had organised three social conferences. In these conferences, various demands essential for the development of educational status were put forth such as the demand for compulsory education, education in the Mother tongue, women's education, higher technical and vocational training. However, the Nizam rejected all these demands.<sup>9</sup>

The status of education in Marathwada was precarious, especially in the period of Nizam. In the entire Marathwada region, until 1950, there was no degree level college. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1950 established Milind College of Science and Arts in Aurangabad district through People's Education Society. Swami Ramanand Tirth, a freedom fighter in 'Hyderabad Mukti Sangram,' had established a college in Nanded during the time of agitation against Nizam.<sup>10</sup> After 1950, few steps about raising the educational status of Marathwada were taken up through which colleges were started in the Marathwada region. In Aurangabad, College for Education Science was started in 1954. In 1956, through the initiative of Jogeshwari Education Society, a college was started at Ambejogai block in Beed district. The School of Agriculture at Parbhani district was converted into an Agricultural University. A law college known as Manikchand Pahade Law College was started in 1956 at Aurangabad after which a medical college was also established in Aurangabad.<sup>11</sup>

On the grounds of historic marginalisation of the educational sector in Marathwada, a demand for establishing a separate university for the Marathwada region started gaining momentum after the 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

### **Establishment of Marathwada University and the Namantar Andolan**

Considering this history of Marathwada, the establishment of an independent university became inevitable. Since the colleges in Marathwada were operating under the affiliation of Osmania

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<sup>9</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarche Visthapit*, Op.Cit., pp. 13-89

<sup>10</sup> Hyderabad Mukti Sangram was aimed at bringing down the rule of Nizam in the states of Hyderabad and Marathwada.

<sup>11</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarche Visthapit*, Op.Cit., pp. 55-57

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp.56 -57

University, it was a crisis. The closest university was in Hyderabad, located hundreds of kilometres away. The medium of instruction was Urdu, hence, for students with minimal resources, reaching the university was the biggest challenge. The backward socio-economic condition of Marathwada was the foremost challenge in accessing higher education, especially for the marginalised communities. Unless Marathwada had its own university, the large section of Marathwada's population would have remained deprived of access to higher education. Thus, the need for a university for the Marathwada region was expressed with intensity by its people.<sup>13</sup>

The growing assertion for a separate university was responded to by the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Yashwantrao Chavan. The Justice Palnitkar committee was constituted on 27 April 1956 to pursue the demand for a separate university for Marathwada region. The committee presented its report to the government of Bombay in December 1957. This report included signatures of 186 people from Marathwada and outside who supported the demand. According to the report of Justice Palnitkar Committee, Marathwada University was set up on 23 August 1958. The committee had suggested few names for the university which can be grouped into two categories. The first category reflected the names of places and the second category, the names of personalities or individuals. The first category of the names included Aurangabad, Paithan Pratishtan, Deogiri, Ajintha, and Shaliwahan and the second category included names such as Shivaji and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. However, the committee decided upon naming the university as Marathwada University. The committee cited the reason that since the inception of demand for a separate university, people had always referred to it as "Marathwada" University. Further, the committee also stated that the name should be close to everyone and represent the people of this region.<sup>14</sup>

Marathwada was comprised of five districts then, and out of the total five districts Aurangabad had only one intermediate college. Based on this huge disparity, Dr. Ambedkar decided to set up degree colleges and this measure proved to be the foremost steps to bring thousands into the flow of education. In fact, this very step was the foundation of setting up Marathwada University. Dr. Ambedkar's contribution in establishing the educational institutions sets the foundation of raising the status of education in this region. Dr. Ambedkar had been demanding a separate university ever since he intervened in the Marathwada region to make access to education easier for everyone.<sup>15</sup>

After the establishment of the university in 1958, in the initial phase, merely 9 colleges were affiliated to the university; the number of students studying in those colleges was 3069. There was no provision for postgraduate education. Towards the end of 1978, a total of 83 colleges were affiliated to Marathwada University.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarche Visthapit*, Op.Cit., pp. 53-57

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 55-57

<sup>15</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarche Visthapit*, Op.Cit., p. 57

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 56

The renaming of the Marathwada University after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was first publicly demanded by the Dalit leaders in Mahad, on March 27, 1977. The resolution for the same was passed in Mahad. The memorandum demanding the renaming was submitted to the then Chief Minister Vasantdada Patil. Dalit leaders started protests for the demand of renaming. Simultaneously, there were other groups protesting the fee hike in education and addressing other educational problems for which a committee of students was formed. This committee later started making the demand for Namantar along with their other demands. The Dalit Panthers organised a huge march and the struggle for renaming started to become a burning issue. This was a first of its kind in the region and this movement was the biggest threat to the savarnas and they started to attack the Dalits using various means. The battle for Namantar transformed into a larger movement for self-respect and dignity. When the resolution for Namantar was passed in the state assembly, riots against Dalits started taking place from the very night of July 27, 1978.<sup>17</sup>

The premise of Namantar Andolan lay in commemorating the ideology of Dr. Ambedkar. It is an ideology that believes in equality and uplifting the lives of ex-untouchables, the marginalised. The educational institution started by Dr. Ambedkar had allowed a significant number of students in Marathwada the access to education. Moreover, an entry into educational institution was not restricted to the Dalits as such. Students across caste and class benefited from the college started by Dr. Ambedkar. This step taken by Dr. Ambedkar laid a foundation for establishing a separate university for the Marathwada region. This was the foremost reason for Dalits demanding the university to be named after Dr. Ambedkar. It was not just to claim a separate space but as a gesture of gratitude towards Dr. Ambedkar.

It is vital to understand why the movement for renaming lasted two decades. What was the nature of the demand that it took twenty years to achieve it and that too only partially, since the Namantar (renaming) ended in Naamvistar (name extension)? In doing so, what political positioning proved to be influential? The year 1979 witnessed the highest number of atrocities against Dalits. Thus, it is necessary to understand what sparked the atrocities against Dalits in Marathwada during the Namantar struggle. Were there no atrocities against Dalits before these incidents? What were the sites of opposition in which savarnas expressed their opposition to the Namantar? What was the role of the State machinery in responding to the demands of supporters as well the opponents of Namantar? And what are the implications of the name expansion on Dalits as well as the savarnas?

### **How did the demand for Namantar emerge?**

In 1958, the Justice Palnitkar committee which was constituted to pursue the demand for setting up a separate university for the Marathwada region had proposed Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's name out of several other names to consider while naming the university. However, no efforts were taken to ensure that the university was named after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.<sup>18</sup> The justification given for choosing the name "Marathwada" was that it is close to everyone. Principal M.B. Chitnis and other Dalit organisations demanded that the university should be renamed after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. There were two universities in Marathwada of which one was the Agricultural

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 58-60

<sup>18</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarche Visthapit*, Op.Cit., p.56 -57

University located in Parbhani district. Both these universities were named as Marathwada. On June 24, 1974 Marathwada Republican Vidyarthi Sangh, in a letter to the Chief Minister demanded that out of the two universities in Marathwada, one university should be given Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's name.<sup>19,20</sup>

The emergence and development of the Namantar Andolan can be seen in two different stages: the first phase from 1974 to 1978 and second phase from 1978 to 1994. In the first phase of the agitation, the demand was made using various means. Due to the constant follow-up by the Namantar supporters, the renaming of the university was approved in principle in the state assembly of Maharashtra and was announced on the radio. This announcement invoked violence against Dalits in various villages of Marathwada mainly in three districts: Aurangabad, Parbhani, and Nanded. In the history of Namantar agitation, the year 1978 was a turning point, with organised mass violence against Dalits by savarnas.

Savarnas took this as an opportunity to hurt the dignity of Dalits. The violence against Dalits after the first announcement of approval of Namantar demand was called as 'riots,' but these were organised mass level crimes aimed at killing Dalits. In this violence, the savarnas were the only attackers and no counter attacks were reported, raising the question: how could they be called riots?<sup>21</sup> After this spate of violence, the Namantar agitation achieved a distinct status. It became a matter of existence for the Dalits. With several ups and downs, the agitation continued till the demand for Namantar was approved officially in 1994. It is thus a matter of debate whether Namantar achieved the actual goal since what was achieved was Naamvistar and not Namantar.<sup>22</sup>

### **The grounds for opposition**

The opponents of the Namantar always claimed that they did not oppose the name of Dr. Ambedkar and that they were only conserving the regional identity. Moreover, they also said that the name is less important, and that name of an institution does not make any difference. If that were true, the opponents should have answered these fundamental questions: if the name was not important, then

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<sup>19</sup> Avinash Dolas, Manohar Jhiltke (ed.), Marathwada Hinsachar Visheshank, *Astitva*, Op.Cit.,78 for details see, E.B. Kamble, *Samajik Ekatmatechi Watchal*, Op.Cit, P. 64 For details see, Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarache Visthapit*, Op.Cit.

<sup>20</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarache Visthapit*, Op.Cit., p.56 -57

<sup>21</sup> For details see, Omvedt, G. (1979). Marathwada: Reply to Dipankar Gupta. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 8, No.2, pp. 51-58.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Prof. Arun Kamble, dated 12<sup>th</sup> October 1980, published in "Namantarache Diwas"*Dainik Navshakti*, (Marathi Daily) Naamvistar- in this context, means expansion of the previous name, or a partial change in the original name. Whereas the demand for Namantar was of complete renaming of the university, through Naamvistar- it was merely an addition of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's name to the original name of the university.

why did they resist its change for 20 years? Whose regional identity were they protecting? Whose interests were being secured by opposing the name of Dr. Ambedkar?<sup>23, 24</sup>

The arguments used by the opponents of Namantar to evade the renaming of Marathwada University, and the responses to it from various quarters are as follows:<sup>25</sup>

### **Propagation of pride in Marathwada's regional identity**

The demand for Namantar was not exclusively placed by the Dalits, it was a demand supported by many progressive thinkers, activists, and luminaries. The savarna opponents claimed that the omission of the word "Marathwada" would cause extreme damage to the regional identity of Marathwada.<sup>26</sup> If that was the case, then to whom did the Marathwada region belong? Did it not belong to Dalits who formed a significant section of the society?<sup>27</sup>

### **Establishing a separate memorial of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

Among the number of alternate propositions made by the opponents of Namantar was the proposal for establishing a separate memorial of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar instead of renaming the university after his name. This proposition was a straightforward dismissal of Namantar demand and was aimed at diverting the issue. However, the Dalits and other proponents of Namantar had consistently rejected the proposal of establishing the memorial as it was never a part of their agitation. Their demand was focussed only upon changing the name of the Marathwada University as a commemoration of the extremely important role played by Dr. Ambedkar towards raising the educational status of Marathwada region.<sup>28</sup>

This appeasement proposition of savarnas was evidence that their opposition was not only aimed at disallowing change in the university's name but also prohibiting Dalits from social intercourse. Asking Dalits to establish separate memorial was their deliberate aim to segregate Dalits from the mainstream. Why this separation?<sup>29</sup>

This exclusion of Dalits has a long history in the caste system and Marathwada was no exception as noted here: 'Even in 1991, as the observations of some voluntary organisations show, the social conditions of Dalits in Marathwada have not improved. On the contrary, it had worsened. Dalits from this region do not have common drinking water facilities, they are not allowed entry into

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<sup>23</sup> Bhadant K. Ashwaji, *Namantar Shahid Granth*, Op.Cit., p. 97

<sup>24</sup> Sudhir Gavhane, *Namantar Ladha: EkShodhyatra* Op. Cit., P. 99

<sup>25</sup> The arguments of the opponents of Namantar Andolan are presented here by deriving it from several news reports and books. For details see, Sudhir Gavhane, *Namantar Ladha: Ek Shodhyatra*, Mumbai: 1996, Pariwartan Prakashan

<sup>26</sup> Prakash Sirsath, *Dalit Chalwal: Aklanachyadishene*, Pune: 2016, Hariti Prakashan, p. 37-48

<sup>27</sup> Bhadant K. Ashwaji, *Namanta rShahid Granth*, Op.Cit., p. 263

<sup>28</sup> Bhadant K. Ashwaji, *Namantar Shahid Granth* ,Op.Cit., p. 267

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

upper caste houses and Hindu temples (The Times of India, September 7, 1991) Dalits are prohibited from taking part in village cultural festivals and in some villages, they must celebrate Ambedkar's birth anniversary under tight police security. Even today in some villages of Marathwada they are forced to do certain defiling tasks.<sup>30</sup>

The discrimination against Dalits is the stark reality of the region. Hence, the suggestion to build a separate memorial was no different than forbidding Dalits from public spaces, prohibiting them from using public amenities such as common wells in the village, etc.<sup>31</sup> While refusing the hegemony of savarnas, Dalits asserted that their battle was for claiming equal rights. The Namantar Andolan had aimed at a broader vision of liberation from the bondage originated from the Ambedkarite framework of self-determination.<sup>32</sup>

### **Demand for Namantar is invalid without the support of the majority**

The opponents of Namantar argued that the demand to rename should have majority support. They claimed that it was the demand put forward only by Dalits. This argument also showed that only the savarnas could decide the validity of any concerns raised by anybody other than them. Whose interests were protected by the proponents of Marathwada's regional pride? This explanation given by the savarna opponents was evidence exhibiting their intense discomfort for the renaming, and denial of the rights of Dalits.<sup>33</sup>

### **Marathwada would become Dalitsthan<sup>34</sup>**

The opponents of Namantar said that if the renaming of Marathwada University took place, then the whole of Marathwada would become a Dalitsthan. At a time when the civil life was denied to Dalits, be it the matter of using public water bodies or temple entry, they had to claim it with all their energy. In this scenario, the fears and justifications given by savarnas to suppress the demand of Namantar were defective. For instance, how would Marathwada have become the land of Dalits based merely on the renaming of one university? Marathwada was once ruled by the Nizam, a Muslim ruler, under whose rule forced conversion to Islam used to occur. Yet, it would be highly inappropriate to state that Marathwada had become a land of Muslims. Then, how would it have happened in the case of Dalits? This fear expressed by the savarna opponents was completely unjustified.<sup>35</sup>

### **Why the name 'Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar?'**

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<sup>30</sup> Gopal Guru, (1991), "Dalit Killings in Marathwada", Op.Cit., p.2927

<sup>31</sup> Bhadant K. Ashwaji, *Namantar Shahid Granth*, Op.Cit., p. 267

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Bhadant K. Ashwaji, *Namantar Shahid Granth*, Op.Cit., p. 267

<sup>34</sup> Dalitsthan- an exclusive place for Dalits. For details see Prakash Sirsath, *Dalit Chalwal: Aklanachyadishene*, Op.Cit., p. 37-40

<sup>35</sup> Ibid



Since this paper outlines the significance of Namantar Andolan and the struggle to rename the university after Dr. Ambedkar, it is inevitable that some attention is paid to his contributions and the role he played in the Marathwada region.

Dr. Ambedkar had proposed the following central ideas regarding the development of Marathwada region. First, Aurangabad district must be treated as the capital of Marathwada and it should become a divisional administrative part of the region. Second, a separate university for the Marathwada region should be set up, and third, to construct broad-gauge railway lines in the region. The efforts of Dr. Ambedkar in the realm of education benefitted a large section of people irrespective of their castes. The institution established by Dr. Ambedkar had opened doors of higher education to the students of all castes, and not just the Dalits.<sup>36</sup>

Vidarbha, Marathwada and Western Maharashtra were divided into three different states; it was the demand of the “Sanyukta Maharashtra” movement to integrate these three along with Mumbai as a linguistic state.<sup>37</sup> In this movement, Dr. Ambedkar proposed to start working from the most excluded Marathwada region; he did the pioneering work of bringing Marathwada into the flow of education.<sup>38</sup> From the point of educational advancement, it was an astonishing act that an organisation based in the State of Mumbai establishes a college in a district like Aurangabad, facing the discouragement from local savarna forces.

Under the Nizam’s rule, there were restrictions on holding public meetings. However, in 1939, a public gathering was conducted for Dr. Ambedkar by the efforts of B.S. More, who was a prominent Dalit leader who was also working as a Propaganda Officer in the Nizam’s state. This meeting was the first ever public address by Dr. Ambedkar in Marathwada. Due to the restrictions, this meeting was organised in Makranpur village in Jalgaon district which was adjacent to Kannad, a block in Aurangabad. In this meeting, Dr. Ambedkar had called out Nizam for his exploitative rule and warned him about meeting with harsh consequences. The police action in 1948 brought down the Nizam’s rule and ended his control over Marathwada.<sup>39</sup>

Aurangabad had an army cantonment, which was supposed to be removed after the police action. Dr. Ambedkar opposed it and insisted that the Cantonment should remain as it was. This cantonment in contemporary times became a key center for the military training.<sup>40</sup> At the time of state formation in Maharashtra, Dr. Ambedkar proposed before the Fazal Ali Commission for Aurangabad to be declared as the capital of Marathwada and divisional quarter for administrative processes. Due to the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar, a concrete road from Aurangabad to Phulambri (a block in Aurangabad district) was constructed. Dr. Ambedkar also recommended to the

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<sup>36</sup> Avinash Dolas, Manohar Jhilthe (ed.), *Marathawada Hinsachar Visheshank, Astitva* (Marathi Journal), March-June 1978 for details see, E.B. Kamble, *Samajik Ekatmatechi Watchal*, Op.Cit., P. 64.

<sup>37</sup> Sanyukta Maharashtra movement was about integrating the bilingual states.

<sup>38</sup> E.B. Kamble, *Samajik Ekatmatechi Watchal*, Op.Cit., P. 64

<sup>39</sup> R K Kshirsagar, *Dalit movement in India and its leaders*, New Delhi: 1994 MD Publications PVT LTD

<sup>40</sup> Ibid P. 64-66

government that a bridge on Godavari River at Kaygaontoka (Gangapur block) should be constructed. A grand bridge could be constructed only because of his recommendation.<sup>41</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar's contribution towards the development of Marathwada region was not limited to education alone. His contribution was multifaceted and way beyond the efforts of the proponents of regional development of Marathwada. Thus, renaming the Marathwada University after Dr. Ambedkar would have been a revolutionary move, but achieving this demand was not an easy task in this context.<sup>42</sup>

### **Modes of Namantar Andolan**

It is important to note the modes of Namantar Andolan through which it endured for twenty years. The demand gradually took the form of a mass movement. This section describes the different modes of protest and assertions.

#### **Memorandum, letters, and signature campaign**

The Namantar Andolan began with sending letters to the state government to demand the renaming of the Marathwada University. This was initiated by sending letters addressed to the Chief Minister.<sup>43</sup> On 24 June 1974, the first letter was sent by Marathwada Republican Vidyarthi Sangh to the Chief Minister demanding the renaming of the university. Followed by several other letters.<sup>44</sup> The official letters sent to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra included the signatures of several people who were supporting the demand for Namantar. This was the most peaceful way adopted by the Dalits to demand the renaming. Indeed, this method proved to be the foundation for commencing the agitation. However, it was a communication between two parties, that is, the State and the activists of Namantar, and remained as official communication without drawing any response.

#### **Public meetings, processions, and strikes**

Public meetings and processions were used as effective methods of making a public demand for Namantar. Several processions were taken out in support of Namantar by various groups, Dalit Panthers, various Dalit students' groups, Yuvak Kranti Dal, a socialist group from Bihar called Chhatra Yuva Sangharsha Wahini, Lal Nishan, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) organized processions in different places gathering support for Namantar.<sup>45</sup> Public meetings were another method through which the upcoming plans were discussed.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Snehalata Mankar, *Namantarache Visthapit*, Aurangabad: 2008, Chinmay Prakashan. P. 45

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Prakash Sirsath, (2016). *Dalit Chalwal: Aklanachyadishene*, Op.Cit., p. 42-45

The first long-march in the history of Namantar was taken out in Nagpur on 11 November 1979 under the leadership of Jogendra Kawade. The second long-march was held in Aurangabad, on December 6, 1979. A large number of pro-Namantar activists and communities took part in this procession, irrespective of the obstacles thrown in their way. Prior to this long-march, Dalit Youth front had organised a three-day workshop on collective farming at Mangvadgaon, in Beed district. At the end of this workshop, a symposium on Namantar was organized to discuss the strategy to exhibit the public position of pro-Namantar forces. Many protesters were supposed to reach Aurangabad, and the state government tried to disrupt the long-march by blockading the roads entering the city. Thousands of arrests were made before the long-march; in fact, lakhs of protesters courted jails. Jails and schools where the pro-Namantar protesters were put in were overflowing, the open spaces where people had gathered were declared as jails and people assembled there were considered to be under arrest. Supporters of Namantar went on hunger strike to protest the arrests.<sup>46</sup>

The struggle for Namantar continued despite the opposition by the state. Rallies, protest marches and 'Jail Bharo Andolan' (Fill the Jail Movement) were organised to sustain the demand of Namantar.<sup>47</sup>

### **Conferences, literary festivals, and postcard campaign**

As the struggle for Namantar intensified due to the efforts of Namantar Action Committee, many students joined the struggle. At the time, barring a few, most students were from outside the city. They regularly received letters and money orders from their relatives and family. One campaign was to ask the relatives and family to postmark these letters to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University instead of addressing it to Marathwada University. Every day, hundreds of letters arrived for Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University. This greatly encouraged the students.

Every year the university used to hold its convocation. This event was also creatively used. On the day of the convocation, a parallel degree awarding ceremony of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University was also held. On this occasion, people gathered at the Milind College one year and on the university campus on some other. People discussed Namantar along with dialogues and talks on education. The Vice-Chancellor of the university would invite senior Namantar activists and celebrate them during the convocation. Slowly, it became customary for most Namantar activists to attend the alternative convocation and use it to popularize Namantar. This program was also besieged by police surveillance and arrests preceded the day of the program. The activists ensured that alternate arrangements were made so that the arrests would not put a stop to the program.

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<sup>46</sup> Prakash Sirsath (2016). *Dalit Chalwal: Aklanachyadishene*, Op.Cit., p. 42-45

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

Activists learned how to deal with the police and skillfully ensure that the programs went on as planned<sup>48,49</sup>

The anti-Namantar violence was a moral set back to the movement; the Satyagraha brought a new spark to the struggle. After the Satyagraha, nomadic tribes, adivasis, and other backward communities supported the Dalits.

### **Suicide and Self-Destruction**

It is incongruous to state self-destruction as a method. However, few pro-Namantar activists chose this way to demand Namantar. 'By the time of the appointment of Ramdas Athavale as the Minister for Social Welfare, the struggle had also lost momentum. The prospects for Namantar were dim. Disheartened, many activists committed suicide. None of the Namantar groups had approached suicide as an organized strategy for the struggle. The suicides also cut across regional, caste, ideological and organizational lines. It included the Panther Gautam Waghmare from Nanded and Vilas Dhone of Western Maharashtra. Waghmare announced his intentions and immolated himself. Dhone carried a suicide note in his pocket and walked in front of a running train. There can be no doubts that as individual acts these suicides were tragic. However, within the broad time and space of the Namantar struggle, they were episodic events. They are not the defining feature of the struggle. Pratibha Tayde from Akola, Suhasini Bansode from Bhandara and Police-constable Narayan Gaikwad from Solapur immolated themselves for the demand of Namantar<sup>50, 51</sup>

On 14 January 1994, with the announcement of name expansion one part of the Namantar Andolan was over. It is necessary in this context to understand the features of Namantar Andolan with which it continued. The main feature that defines the premise of Namantar is as follows:

### **The role of Ambedkarite ideology**

The overall Dalit movement in Maharashtra and the Namantar Andolan manifests Dr. Ambedkar as an ideologue, a scholar whose vision led to the emergence of Dalits as a conscientised mass. Ambedkarite ideology has prepared the masses to articulate the meaning of their existence, their political mobilisation, and consciousness building. The ideology of Dr. Ambedkar has proved its utility in all the spheres of the Dalit liberation movement.

The Namantar Andolan emerged as the ground for the emergence of Dalit movement in the region; it highlighted the presence of Dalit groups operating in Marathwada. Dalit Youth Front (Dalit Yuva Aghadi) was distinct: they were active in the rural Marathwada taking up the issues of distribution of Gayran to the Dalits, addressing the issues related to the practice of untouchability.

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<sup>48</sup> <http://sanhati.com/excerpted/12585/> accessed 22 March 2016

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p. 44

<sup>50</sup> Prakash Sirsath (2016) *Dalit Chalwal: Aklanachyadishene*, Op.Cit., p. 45

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

The first ever Satyagraha for access to water was initiated by the activists of Dalit Youth Front in Khalwat-Nimgaon, in Majalgaon Block of Beed district. After the Satyagraha, they were boycotted in the village by the savarnas, however, the Dalits stood firm. Namantar was not the main demand of Dalit Youth Front, it was one of their concerns. The activists of this front did remarkable work in the post-violence situation in 1978, by visiting the violence affected villages, conducting fact-finding reports and helping the victims to shift to safe places.<sup>52</sup>

In the post-violence following the riots in the second phase of Namantar, the state government announced certain decisions to appease the violence affected Dalits. This included establishing Mahatma Phule Backward Class Finances and Development Corporation. The idea behind setting up this corporation was to provide financial support to Dalits for self-employment initiatives. However, this initiative gave a fatal blow to the assertive nature of the movement. It was a tactical move of the Government to silence the anger of the Dalits by giving monetary benefits and not implementing the name change.

### **Concluding remarks**

This study provides multiple vantage points to understand the Namantar Andolan through the author's familiarity with the Marathwada region, Marathi language, access to Namantar activist networks, materials and institutions engaged in memorializing the movement. The extensive examination of material produced in the Marathi language during and since the period of Namantar movement opens several interesting frameworks to study similar emancipatory movements.

The process of naming entities is one of the oldest human activities. Names of people, places, and things orient us to our realities, provide contexts and direction. In the book 'The means of names: a social history,' Stephen Wilson (1998) posits: "Names of all kinds have associations, flavours; they are evocative, and carry messages and they are powerful."

A clear hegemonic way of life is to ensure that naming rights are withheld from the marginalized, particularly the naming of entities in the public sphere. Namantar Andolan is a struggle that played out for 20 long years to claim the Dalits' right to name a university in Marathwada region after Dr. Ambedkar.

Namantar as an agitation has been discussed at length by the Dalits writing on Namantar and the savarnas documenting Namantar. It is important to understand the political and ideological affiliations of those who wrote on Namantar, as their writings and approach appeared in accordance with their ideological base. Dalit Panther alone had a separate rally for Namantar, so did a few other Dalit groups such as Dalit Yuvak Aghadi (Dalit Youth Front). There were other groups of Humanists, Socialists, Left progressives, and liberals such as Yuvak Kranti Dal, CPI, CPM and CPI (ML). Each group expressed their version of the story and claimed their participation. In the process of unravelling the realities of Namantar, it is important to understand the extent to which these groups contributed and their position in the Post Namantar era for the Dalits. Available literature gives us a picture of the state impunity in the cases of atrocities against Dalits as no laws were strictly implemented and no justice was ensured.

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<sup>52</sup> Prakash Sirsath, 'Dalit Chalwal: Aklanachyadishene' Pune: 2016, Hariti Prakashan, p. 37-48

In the aftermath of the violence, there was a proposition of setting up a technical university in the Konkan region. The supporters of Namantar wanted to represent the interests of the whole population of Marathwada, but that never happened. Instead, another sub-centre of the Marathwada University was set up in Osmanabad district. In Nanded, a separate university was formed for four districts: Nanded, Parbhani, Hingoli, and Latur. This university was named after the opponent leader of Namantar, Swami Ramanand Tirth. It is hence necessary to answer the question if the struggle for Namantar was a victory or a failure? And there is a need to understand its impact on the Dalits in Marathwada region.

The omission of some historical events by those who documented Namantar requires closer inspection, for it appears that the sacrifice by Gautam Waghmare and Vilas Dhone and others have been hardly documented by the few savarna writers. Raising the fundamental question – who does this exclusion, and why? As a researcher and a part of the community, I realised that we need to ask these questions while we celebrate their sacrifices. We also need to think for a while about their family members. And think about to whom should this complaint about the erasure of their sacrifice be addressed?

The riots and sacrifices of Dalit activists are black spots in the history of Namantar struggle. The first concern was to address the rehabilitation issues of those dispossessed during the violence. The number far exceeded the official figures. Secondly, a failure of the justice delivery system which let the attackers go free needed to be addressed. The registration of crimes against Dalits was almost negligible, as if they were only a natural part of the lives of Dalits.

In the global context, several movements have engaged with the decolonizing of history and creating a better present, often by renaming and replacing the symbols of racism. It is evident in the case of Argentina where the statue of Christopher Columbus was replaced with the monument of the Bolivian War of Independence heroine Juana Azurduy. Namantar Andolan in the global narrative is one of the many renaming movements for the rightful claiming of the public sphere, by correcting distorted historical narratives and memorializing progressive actors from marginalized communities. It was a movement to claim the educational institution as the public space, and thereby renaming the Marathwada University with arguments that were not sentimental but factual. This was the historic assertion against the fundamental feature of the caste society: excluding the marginalised communities from the public sphere. Although it is difficult to conclude about the struggle for Namantar in terms of victory or failure, it did provoke a critical engagement on an ideological basis for anti-caste movements. Several unasked questions linger, such as can there be ethics to the way movements are remembered? If yes, then why is there hardly any mention of the family members of those who committed suicide for the demand of Namantar. The Namantar demand was supported by lakhs, but what happened to the families of the dead? Where have they disappeared?

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