

A Counter-Aesthetic: The Art of Vikrant Bhise

Kamayani Sharma



Ramabai Nagar: Vilas Ghogare. Oil on canvas, 2023.

In a fulgent oil painting, a man with an iktara, shaded by vegetation, is midway through his shahiri, lamenting for the many funerals occurring across the picture plane behind him. This work by artist Vikrant Bhise is called *Ramabai Nagar: Vilas Ghogare*, named for its protagonist. Vilas Ghogare was a Dalit activist and anti-caste balladeer – or shahir – who committed suicide in the wake of the state killings of ten Dalit citizens of Mumbai's Ramabai Nagar in 1997 for protesting the degradation of a statue of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, chairman of the drafting committee of India's Constitution and a pioneering leader of the modern Dalit movement towards annihilating caste in Indian society.

When Vikrant Bhise was a child, he witnessed the infamous Ramabai massacre from his uncle's terrace. Twenty-six years later, he paid homage to this incident, which encapsulates the character of his artistic practice, combining documentation and interpretation. Engaging with archives of Dalit history and memory and narratives of lived experience, Bhise's paintings play with scale and monumentality, feature expressionist figuration and foregrounding Ambedkarite and Navayana Buddhist elements and icons. The recipient of a National Award by the Lalit Kala Akademi for a 2018 series called *Impressions*, it was during the COVID-19 lockdown that Bhise's practice ripened into its present vocabulary, exemplifying what art historian Y.S. Alone describes in an interview titled 'Perspectives on Ambedkarian Aesthetics and Social Movements' as an Ambedkarian aesthetic, 'free from prejudices, inhibitions, and the metanarrative of hegemonic/brahminical modernity... producing a critique through visual means, which is deeply rooted in the ethos of Ambedkarian thinking, through a commitment to constitutional democracy and inclusivity'.

Ambedkar as figure and discourse permeates Bhise's work. In the former case, it is in the sense of a literal, iconic manifestation or by invoking him iconographically, for instance, through the colour blue: the shade of the suit he wore and the colour he

chose for the Scheduled Caste Federation of India (1942) and the Republican Party of India (1956). The anti-caste vision of Ambedkar (precluding antecedents such as Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule) frames Bhise's sightlines, bringing into view ever-oppressed communities that Ambedkar 'reinstitutionalized', in the words of the late literary scholar Aniket Jaaware in his book *Practising Caste*, through the law in the modern age.

Ambedkar's career as a labour rights activist and legislator working through the critique of the chaturvarna system (the four-tier system of caste stratification) and Marxian class theory is a strand that runs through Bhise's work in relation to his working-class Dalit protagonists. In fact, at a panel at New Delhi's Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in 2024, Bhise cited his work titled *Labour Leader* (2021) – showing a worker in a yellow hard hat cleaning a statue of Ambedkar, his hand covering the statue's eyes in a gesture connoting criticism of the sights it might behold today – as marking the move towards an explicit engagement with Ambedkarite ideology and visuality. He emphasized: '*Ambedkar ko logon tak pahunchana hai*, through the visual medium.' (I want to take Ambedkar to people through the visual medium.)

Apart from Ambedkar's literal presence, Bhise's art seeks to record and reflect on the narratives and experiences of Dalit communities, making visible marginalized lifeworlds and chronicles. Alone surveys his practice from an Ambedkarian lens: 'Labour, caste, gender and oppression of the masses are important concerns addressed through his narratives with specific symbols drawn from everyday life.' His canvas and paper works span sizes and mediums – from gouache works such as abstract renderings of Ambedkar's statues and engagements with Dalit Panther imagery, to large, kinetic oil and acrylic urban scenes of protesters, pilgrims, migrants and labourers, to smaller, darker pen-and-ink drawings of the skeletal, caste-marked body.

Bhise retrieves histories excluded from or misrepresented in the brahminical canon, such as



Installation view of *Archival Historicity/Dalit Panthers*. Gouache on paper, 2024.

caste atrocities like the massacres at Ramabai Nagar and Khairlanji (2006) and anti-Dalit crackdowns such as those which characterized the 1972 Worli riots. His work speaks to what feminist theorist Sharmila Rege defined as the 'Ambedkarite counterpublic' – an 'alternative' public sphere 'in keeping with the fundamental stratification of society' wherein a Dalit imaginary contested the brahminical monopoly on modernity through various media (booklets, music, performance, plastic and visual forms, etc.). It reflects the rich postcolonial legacy of Ambedkarite radicalism in dialogue with historical labour struggles – through both its themes and content, as well as its formal language. Situated thus, Bhise's work, against the grain of caste society, reads as a 'counter' – to publics, narratives, archives, memories – a counter-aesthetic to brahminical visuality.

Bhise's defiant approach is not surprising. He was born into a Dalit Panther family, seven years after the official group was disbanded in 1977. The Dalit Panthers were a militant anti-caste organization modelled after the USA's Black Panthers and founded in 1972 by Namdeo Dhasal, Raja

Dhale and J.V. Pawar. With his father a part of the organization, its co-founder, the artist, writer and activist Raja Dhale his relative, and a family that at one time lived in Mumbai's Sewri neighbourhood of millworkers, Bhise was raised with the awareness of the Panthers' revolutionary vision and values.

In a 100-part gouache series called *Archival Historicity/Dalit Panthers*, Bhise quotes the iconography of the Dalit Panthers' visual material, most prominently the logo of a panther either leaping or preparing to do so, which the organization adopted from the African American radicals, the Black Panthers. The series cites motifs that illuminate an Ambedkarian visual grammar which we encounter repeatedly in Bhise's practice: the iconic presence of Ambedkar and the Navayana Buddha he imagined, the blue flag with the Dhammachakra, the march of migrants, the cloth produced by millworkers, the disjointed limbs and transparent bodies of labourers. We also see specific moments from Panther history: for instance, one work pays homage to Raja Dhale's incendiary 1972 essay 'Kala Swatantrata Divas'

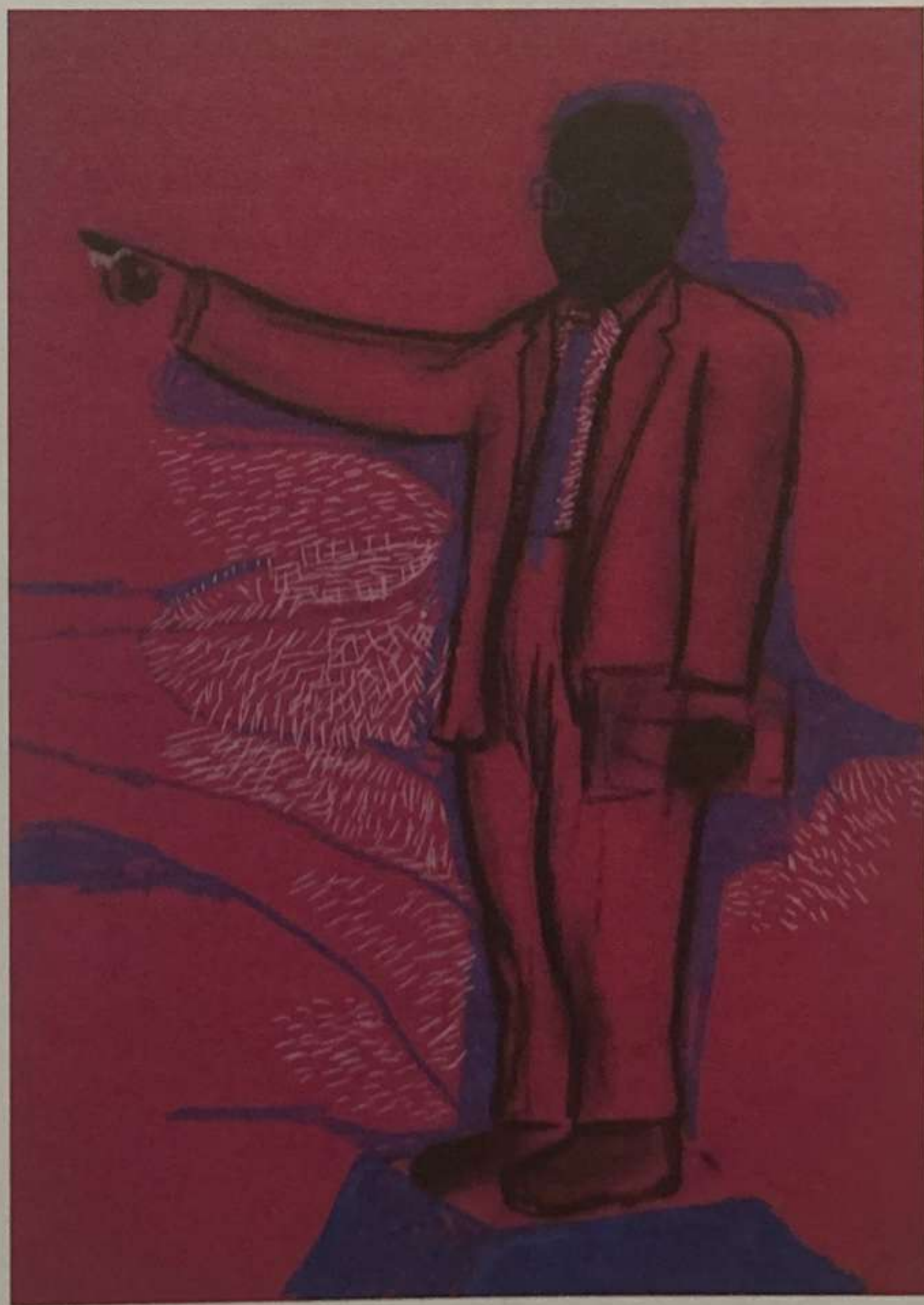
(Black Independence Day) in the magazine *Sadhana*. The feline affronté appears across the works, lending a literal charge to the vignettes and designs, reanimating the repository of marginalized annals.

In other works, too, there is a strong graphic quality, a fluorescent colour palette and an iconicity reminiscent of posters and paraphernalia for mass distribution. A particularly striking gouache series called *Portraits of Dr B.R. Ambedkar* shows him in his famous directive pose against a fluorescent pink background, at times painted solidly, at other times composed through villous white dashes, resembling a print meant to be disseminated than a painting for exhibition. The unusual fluorescence of the background questions the hierarchy of colour and the caste politics of aesthetic taste. The property of fluorescence itself becomes a frame through which to read this series. The violence of caste, unregistered by the brahminical optical regime, is transmuted into a pervasive glow, irradiated by the form and figure of Ambedkar.

As befits the Ambedkarian counter-aesthetic described earlier, Bhise intervenes in the hitherto brahminical canons of modernist and postmodernist Indian art through his treatment of three subjects: the civic, the corporeal and the cultural.

Dalit Mumbai is a major protagonist in Bhise's paintings, with multiple series referencing its evolution and production through contemporary political and economic processes. The first public rally of the Dalit Panthers was held on Ambedkar's death anniversary, 6 December 1972, at Chaityabhoomi, a year after it was inaugurated. Chaityabhoomi is Ambedkar's cremation site in the Mumbai neighbourhood of Dadar, where his remains are enshrined. The complex resembles a stupa and comprises the titular chaitya or shrine, topped with a white cupola which hosts a rest hall for monks. Today, it is India's most visited samadhi. Ambedkar's death anniversary – called the Mahaparinibbana – draws hundreds of thousands of pilgrims journeying there to pay their tribute to the leader.

In a quasi-topographical oil painting of Chaityabhoomi by Bhise called *Chaityabhoomi: Assembly of Parinibbana of Great Being* (2023), the depth of field encompasses a plurality of timescales. In his catalogue essay for a show of Bhise's work that he curated at Noida's Anant Art Gallery in 2024 (*Sense and Sensibilities: A Reflective Realization*) titled 'Subversion of Narrative: Constructing Social through Pictorial Space in the Art of Vikrant Bhise', Alone observes that its 'construction of pictorial narrative uses a single-point perspective where space is divided into several angular and frontal rectangles making complex arrangements by maintaining a central vanishing point'. Amidst the multiple planes on the picture surface, the parallel vertical sections of the picture plane featuring Ambedkar, the Buddha, Dalit Panthers and ordinary participants in the Mahaparinibbana celebrations represent various temporal trajectories converging at a



Portraits of Dr B.R. Ambedkar VII. Gouache on paper, 2023.

fictional Dadar horizon, where bodhi trees symbolize enlightenment. In interpreting Chaityabhoomi through citations of Ambedkarite history, Navayana Buddhist theology and Dalit urbanism, Bhise engages in an act of disruption, signalling a history from below, from the margins and off-frame.

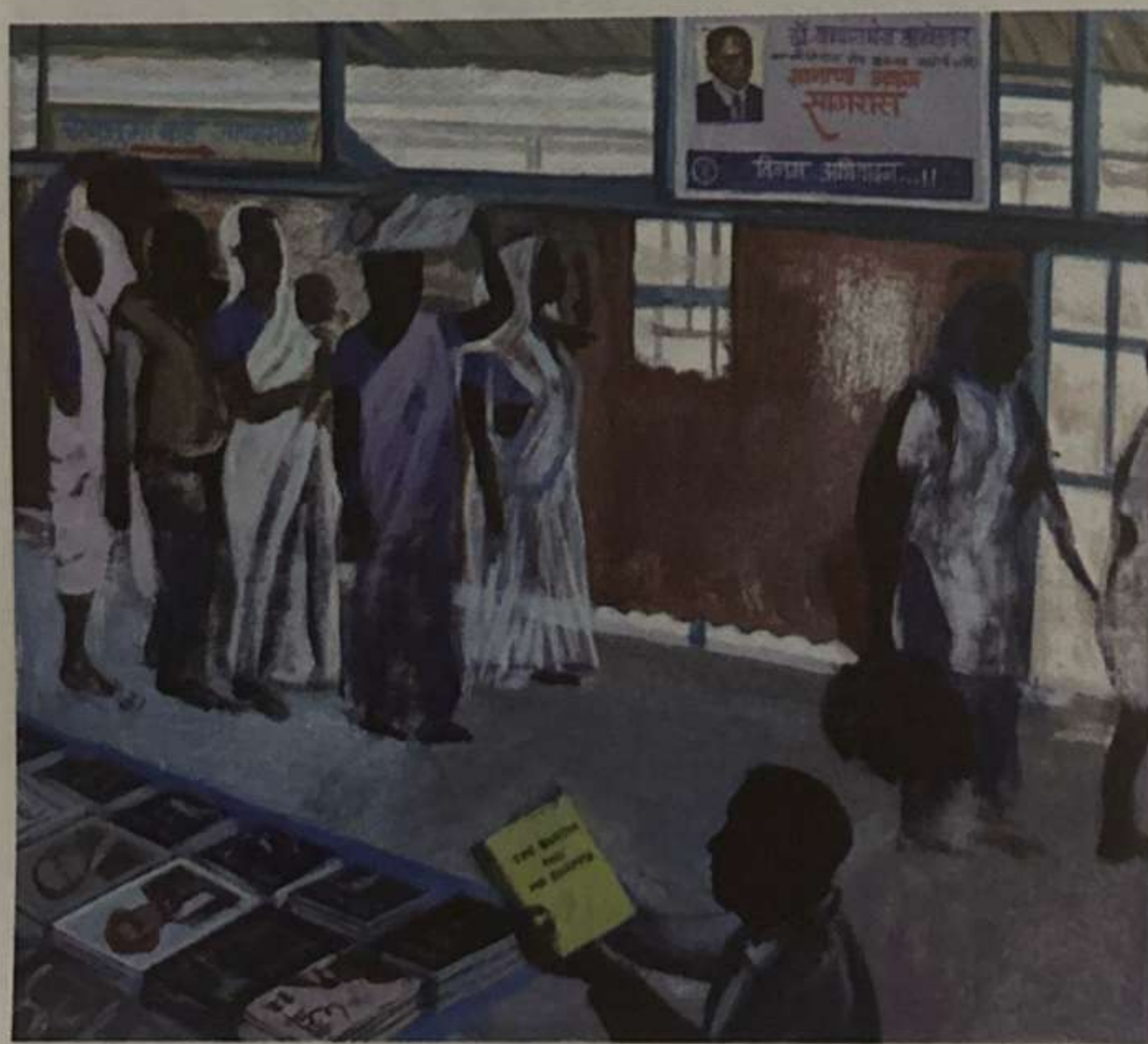
Apart from this stand-alone commemoration, Bhise painted an acrylic series titled *Mahaparinibbana: Chaityabhoomi* evoking the pilgrimage through scenes of arrival and anticipation. Describing the series in an interview with *Critical Collective*, Bhise says, 'During this time of the year, people are also allowed to travel in trains for free. Several people come to Mumbai just to travel in the trains, and then end up also visiting Chaityabhoomi. The aura of Ambedkar still draws people from all walks of life, and in this way, the rules and principles of the varna system are suspended. My work looks particularly at the villagers and labourers who want to explore the city.'

These are the figures inhabiting the *Mahaparinibbana: Chaityabhoomi* series: daubs of white and blue sari-clad women throng the railway station in *I*, becoming solid and delineated as they stand below the white dome of Chaityabhoomi in *III*. Their dichromatic saris are a reference to the uniform of the Samata Sainik Dal, founded by

Ambedkar in 1924 to safeguard the rights of the oppressed. In *II*, a man wearing a Bhim-blue shirt balances his bag on his shoulder as he guides his child in the direction of Chaityabhoomi. The figures in these paintings operate at the same plane in relation to each other, even if that means looking at them from an oblique or diagonal point of view, gesturing towards a visual egalitarianism of a varna-less configuration. Depicting the period of traversal en route to Chaityabhoomi, this series gestures towards a radical anteriority, representing a time preceding transformation, both individual and collective.

Transformations are affected through various means. In *IV*, fresh-off-the-train pilgrims pass a street bookseller hawking books by Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and other Dalit intellectuals, visibly Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957) and Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (1978), among the first Dalit autobiographies – the texts themselves constituting a site of anti-caste memory. Publication and reading are a major aspect of the Ambedkarite counter-public, befitting the legacy of a voracious reader like Ambedkar who not only led the drafting of the foundational text of the Indian republic but grounded his radicalism in the exhortation to educate oneself through books. Since the mid-twentieth century, Dalit writing has been constitutive of the metropolitan public sphere. Early Marathi Dalit literature articulated a critique of Mumbai's modernity drawing on anti-caste and Marxist thought about life and labour by outlining, as Anupama Rao asserts in her essay 'The World and the Word: Dalit Aesthetics and Everyday Life', 'a recognizable Dalit poetics, one that relates writing with urbanity and Dalit Bombay with modern Bombay'.

Modern Mumbai is hardly a new subject for Indian art. The celebrated work of late-twentieth-century painters like Gieve Patel and Sudhir Patwardhan encompasses a street-view chronicle of that metropolis and provides what art historian Karin Zitzewitz in her essay 'The Moral Economy of the Street: The Bombay



Mahaparinibbana: Chaityabhoomi IV. Acrylic on canvas, 2022.

Paintings of Sudhir Patwardhan and Gieve Patel' describes as an 'aesthetic framework for understanding social change'. Speaking about the elision of caste in pictorial signifiers, Alone notes in 'Subversion of Narrative' that twentieth-century Indian representational artists' a return to the narrative in the decade of seventy and eighty have distinct class markers [while] conveniently concealing the caste markers...'

Bhise wields scale and colour to present a view of a city marginalized by the protocols of the savarna gaze governing what is visible in the mainstream. In contrast to depictions of the city featuring its more beautiful parts (Irani cafes, Art Deco housefronts, etc.), Bhise says in his *Critical Collective* interview that he 'paint[s] the parts of the city that I am familiar with... from the perspective of the society I come from'. What is this perspective? Bhise's work embodies a Dalit gaze unto the city, recovering its peripheries or 'outcaste Bombay', as historian Juned Shaikh termed it ('Dalit cultural politics in the city,' he writes, 'emerged in the process of transformation of built form, and the two influenced each other'). Bhise paints not only a city historically occluded by the brahminical visual episteme, but does so through the lens of joyous Dalit assertion. It is this city that Bhise makes visible in the oil series *Jayanti*, centred on Ambedkar Jayanti. In *Jayanti: Worli BBD Chawl*, we see backstage preparations for the celebrations from the thick of it, the artist a participant in the event, beholding geometries of infrastructure organizing the picture plane – corrugated tin in the background and frames with the Dhammachakra motif in the fore – and a rhythmic application of bright colours that impart an animated aspect to the image, as though it were buoyed by the joy of the anonymized celebrants collaborating behind the scene.

An iconography of civic jouissance persists through the rest of the series. In the titular work *Jayanti*, the blue ('not easy to paint and keep fresh in oil,' remarked the artist at the KNMA panel) swathing

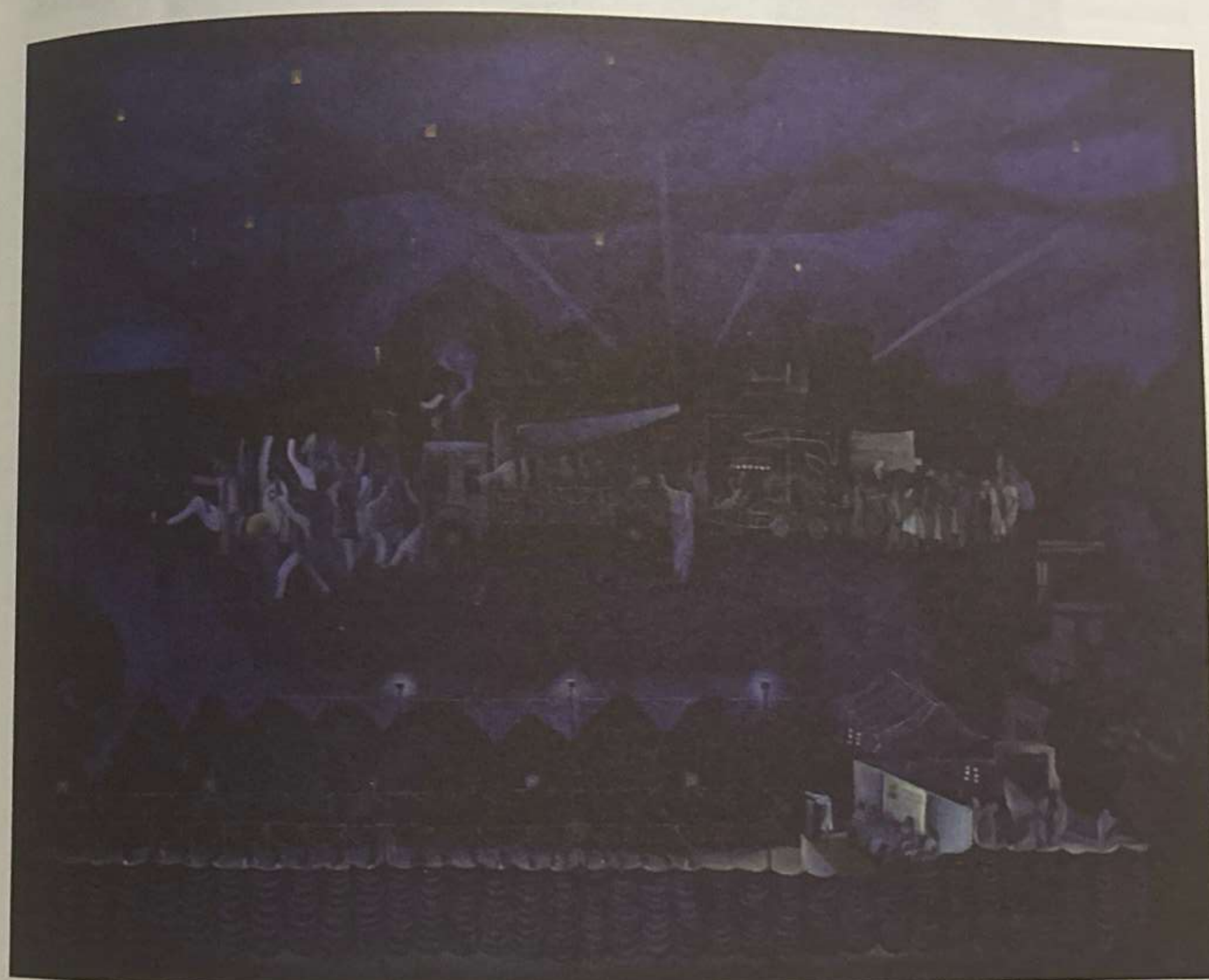


Jayanti: Worli BBD Chawl. Oil on canvas, 2023.

the canvas as the night sky of revelry is the same as the Ambedkarite shade, infusing resistance with joy. The long shot framing affords a balcony view of a lit-up stage celebration: homes festooned with string lights, a procession in the distance bordered by street lights and a kaleidoscope of fireworks and strobe lights illuminating the Bhim-blue sky. Similarly, in *Procession*, the smoke from the factory in the background billows upwards to the blue sky in an expression of jubilation, complementing the fireworks being set off just below in the direction of Ambedkar's pointing figure. In honouring the labour of subaltern workers, there is a commemoration of the leader who fought to assert their self-respect and human dignity. Dignity is on view in *Jayanti and Labour*, where we see the poignant image of a man sleeping amidst pillowy folds of white cloth garnished by Ambedkarian rosettes. Possibly honouring the textile mills that loom large in Dalit Mumbaikars' labour history, the scene restores rest and respite to the Dalit body only ever served up for suffering in brahminical visual culture.



Chaityabhoomi: Assembly of Parinibbana of Great Being. Oil on canvas, 2023.



Jayanti. Oil on canvas, 2023.



Jayanti and Labour. Oil on canvas, 2023.

Through Bhise's *Mahaparinibbana* and *Jayanti* paintings, as elsewhere in works like *Value of Consciousness* and *Idols of Humanity*, as well as his more recent oeuvre comprising paintings like *Gathering*, *Black Dot on Constitutional Republic*, and *Past-Present*, what is striking is the 'construction of a crowd', observed art critic Abhay Sardesai, one of Bhise's interlocutors on the KNMA panel. Bhise's crowds enact an iconography of touch and contact, the fundamental prohibition of caste, even before it is institutionalized, as Jaaware contends in *Practising Caste*: 'Caste manifests itself as regulations on touching others, literally and figurally.' Whereas Marxist Patwardhan consciously maintained an affirmative distance from his working-class Bambaityyas to respect their autonomy and allow for a 'space of contemplation', Bhise adopts the street view as a mode of proximity, immersion and anonymity. In Bhise's work, the very density of touching bodies composes pictorial space. Organized around a central locus or split across multiple spatial

registers – or varnas – these mobile masses jostling and bearing burdens together engulf the picture plane, transgressing rules of untouchability.

The labour politics of touch are writ large in two black-and-white series on sanitation workers, *Sanitary Workers II* and *Sanitary Labourers*. In these drawings, the labouring Dalit body is presented as a fragmented corpus. The series draw on the idea of the subaltern body as an archive of collective trauma. In *Sanitary Workers II*, Bhise uses ink pen and collage to compose torso-down figures embedded into amorphous blobs of detritus. Like the photographs of Sudharak Olwe documenting conservancy workers, the series commits to a brutal fusion of human beings and murky waste, the historical blueprint for Dalit lives. In 1, three headless bodies project out from a grimy chiaroscuro, as though floating on a viscous morass, washed to the surface from sewage. One discernible constituent of the mass of black against which they lie is a skeletal element, resembling a ribcage, a symbol of

Dalit corporeality as both eviscerated and resilient, which recurs in several of Bhise's works on labour.

A related charcoal rendering called *Sanitary Workers II* (7) features a woman and two men carrying a shapeless load, including the ribcage, almost standing in for one figure's head. The black-and-white palette of the work recalls the humiliating chiaroscuro of untouchability – even the shadow of a Dalit taints the brahminical world, the sharp figuration up to the neck transformed through hatching into phantom freight that casts a gloomy shadow. The more tangible, dark, gnarled mass of *Sanitary Workers II* (1) is suggestive of historical memory, repeated in 2, 3 and 4 as a burden of various shapes and sizes. In 4, the trio of workers carrying the mountain-like onus of trauma made tangible walk in profile, a composition (recalling classic socialist realist ones) that has become a mainstay of Bhise's oeuvre in other works that show Ambedkar leading the procession, such as *Babasaheb with Labours*.

In the *Sanitary Labourers* pen drawing series, feet are prominent. Feet are a recurring motif in Bhise's work. Speaking at the KNMA panel about another

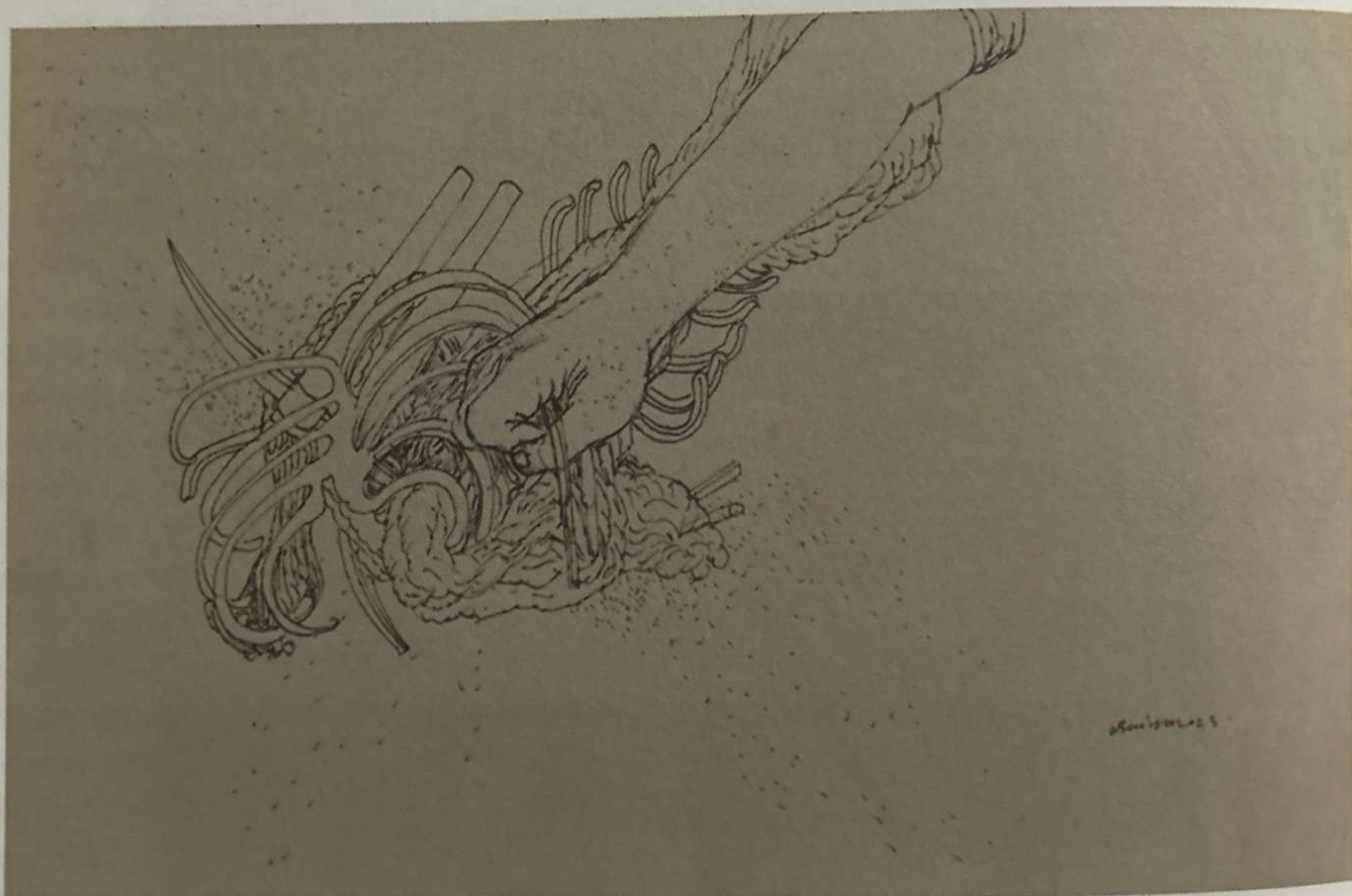
painting called *Quest for Justice*, the artist references his time as a courier boy in the early 2000s: 'You will notice that the figures do not have heads. That used to be me at one time. I used to walk four–five kilometres every day with luggage on my shoulders. By the end of it, my condition would be similar to the figures in this painting. Therefore, I speak about the harshness of labour.' Feet have always been important to chaturvarna theology: the *Rig Veda*'s Purusha Sukta hymn dedicated to the Cosmic Man explains the hierarchy of the four varnas through the metaphor of the human body asserting that 'from his feet the Shudras were born'. In fact, a seminal painting by Savindra Sawarkar – the first artist to develop a visual language that critiqued the 'given' aesthetic codes of brahminism – inaugurated an expressionist Ambedkarian aesthetic in contemporary Indian art by confronting this formula. In *Foundation of India* (1986) which depicted the caste system, the Shudra and Antyaja feet 'hold up the edifice of the nation and religion. Pushed down by all... yet they walk on', according to Saurabh Dube's essay 'A Dalit Iconography of an Expressionist Imagination'.



Sanitary Workers II (1). Ink pen on paper cutting and collage on paper, 2023.



Babasaheb with Labours. Mixed media on raw canvas, 2022.



Sanitary Labourers X. Pen on paper, 2023.

In *Sanitary Labourers II-V, VII, XII and XIV*, feet become the subject, symbolizing the labour of the casted body through various strategies of explication. The ribcage balanced atop the foot in *II*, for instance, is almost a perverse mockery of a classical statue paying homage to this history of exploitation. The tight, tremulous line rendering a group of feet in *V* as hives, and the tender, stippled shading in *XIV* of a pair of legs bent as though in response to an assault on the unseen upper body index the horror of violence and atrocity historically inflicted upon Dalit bodies. In other drawings from this series, the labouring feet are beset with pustulous layers that can be likened to intestines, the Dalit body inside-out under brahminism, emphasizing the physical suffering that defines caste injustice.

Apart from feet, the other anatomical element of note in *Sanitary Labourers* is hands. They hold a cadaverous object resembling a ribcage in *I*, and thrust into debris and waste, again laden with bones, in *IX* and *X*. In *VI*, a stippled hand is angled up with fingers limp, while in *XVI*, the open hand is splayed out, both compositions morbidly hinting at the demise of the figure. At the same time, the pointing finger cannot help but recall the iconic mudra of Ambedkar, meant as an oratorical or pedagogical gesture, towards learning and enlightenment.

Historian Maria J. Fuentes, writing about enslaved women in colonial Barbados in her book *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive*, posited the idea of a 'mutilated historicity', or 'the violent condition in which enslaved women appear in the archive disfigured and violated... how their bodies and flesh become "inscribed" with the text/violence of slavery... the quality of their historicization remains degraded in our present attempts to recreate their everyday experiences. The infliction of scars, lacerations, burns, and wounds of captivity... are the remains with which we must construct their history'. Bhise's representation of the labour of outlawed caste-based practices like manual scavenging through the excerpption of hands and feet can be

read as a synecdochical treatment of a similarly mutilated historicity of the Dalit body. Caste life narratives in both literature and the visual arts pose a challenge to what Alone calls a brahminical metanarrative ('protected ignorance'). Reflecting on Bhise's practice in 'Subversion of Narrative', Alone describes it as 'denoting the social identity without any inhibitions through expressing narrative of archival memory and the lived experiences'.

Part of this subversion is to intervene in the art historical canon of Indian modernism. Bhise questions the modernism borne of brahminical cultural nationalism represented in the Constitution. His interventions introduce the Ambedkarian aesthetic and its constituent politics into the text and iconography of the preamble, calling attention to the disdain for its message decades after the adoption of values of justice and equality. In a two-part gouache series titled *Preamble*, Bhise revisits the illustrations of the preamble to the Indian Constitution. Completed in 1954 by Nandalal Bose, the principal of Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, and his students at the behest of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, these illustrations are the only known example of artwork in a constitution. Grouped under twelve headings, they featured famous figures, landscapes, elaborate hashiyas (margins in Mughal court art) and artworks spanning the subcontinent's art history from the Harappan period to newly postcolonial India. The illustrations don't always match the time period they are meant to stand for, structured through a colonial chronology and interpreted through Bose's own biases as a product of his time, such as a partiality towards male iconic figures. Another one of these contemporaneous tendencies is reflected in the preponderance of elite, dominant caste narratives and historiographies underpinning the illustrations. While Bose had a relationship with M.K. Gandhi, having been invited by the latter to contribute art to Indian National Congress sessions in the 1930s, there seems to be no archival record of the relationship between the artist and Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the chairman of the Constitution's drafting committee.

In part one of the series, we see Bhise's established motifs – the ribcage, workers marching together in profile with their heads eclipsed by socio-economic burdens, and Ambedkar joining them – as well as the everyday symbols of labour such as hard hats and the workers' clothes hung on a structure resembling a fish skeleton, perhaps a nod to the caste politics of food. In *Series I* (10), the trio of female figures with their faces covered entangled in the branches of a tree bring to mind the Dalit minors gang-raped and hanged in Uttar Pradesh, whilst in *Series I* (8), four men stand, ribs out and partly eaten into, with their innards intertwined like a chain girding prisoners. In other works like (7) and (9), the load carried on the shoulders of marchers includes the skyline of factories and sickles in the former and dead trees and human skeletons in the latter, depicting the Dalit experience of caste labour. The scenes of abjection and indignity overlaying the words of the preamble are rendered in gouache, its opacity performing a kind of ironic redaction as the paintings obscure promises of justice, equality and dignity.

In part two of the *Preamble* series, the pen-drawn images portray objection rather than abjection, with scenes of women protesting and male protesters confronting barricades and resisting assault by the police. The fluid black-and-white figuration reveals faces and activates bodies in dynamic poses of defiance, the drawings letting the text show through as though a result of the characters' actions on the page. There also seems to be a more realistic style of representation than the expressionism of the large oil and acrylic works: for instance, in (5), the composition seems to be very similar to painting number II from a gouache series called *Protest*, and both suggest direct observation or reference to documentation of actual protests. (1) places Ambedkar front and centre, rendered in full colour and ribcaged against the preamble, recalling the continued cordoning off of his statues to protect them from vandalization, decades after the offence at Ramabai Nagar. Commenting on the

artwork, Alone writes in 'Subversion of Narrative': 'Bhise indicates how the Constitution forms the backbone of the nation and how it is subverted by the ruling dispensations all the time.' Bhise's explicit Ambedkarite critique of Indian democracy is emphasized by the art historical intervention unto its preamble, questioning the casteist basis of cultural nationalism that informed its illustrations. In his *Preamble* series, the tension between savarna anti-colonialism and anti-caste republicanism plays out on the pages of the most important book in India.

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In the past decade, a new generation of Indian artists from Dalit backgrounds have innovated a contemporary Ambedkarian aesthetic that has become increasingly mainstream, with national and international support and acclaim for these practices. From fighting to access art and culture infrastructures operating within the dominant brahminical paradigm to interrogating and rejecting the aesthetics generated by these apparatuses, both optical and material, oppressed-caste artists like Bhise have trod a long, arduous path to visibility. At the same time, it is true that the commercial exhibitionary complex in which these anti-caste practices circulate remains dominated by dominant castes and tethered to savarna capital, making them vulnerable to the tastes and coffers of the elite.

One of the major Ambedkarian artists to have emerged on the scene in recent times, Bhise's most recent exhibition was at Mumbai's Experimenter Gallery in 2024 as part of a joint show called *We Will See* with Sri Lankan multimedia artist Pushpakanthan which focused on collective memory against hegemonic remembrance. A curatorial accent on a concept spanning two distinct identitarian contexts hints at newer frameworks to look at non-brahminical art practices, beyond the fact of mere difference. In the meantime, Bhise's counter-aesthetic follows Ambedkar's pointing figure, towards the brilliant blue skies of an anti-caste republic.

