CHAPTER 4
AMBEDKAR ON SOCIAL REFORM

States without Justice are nothing but large robber bands.  
Augustine¹

Unless there is justice, there will be no peace in the world.  
Ambedkar²

As a student of history I have been profoundly impressed by the view that however important political forces may be in the regeneration of a community, social, economic and moral forces are far more vital and that political forces are only a means to the social, economic and moral regeneration of a people. I have from the beginning laid greater stress on social movement than on political movement.  
Ambedkar³

Introduction

The second chapter titled “Ambedkar and Social Justice” argued that Social Justice is one of the principal concerns for Ambedkar; and this gets clearly reflected in his understanding of the minority issue. In the preceding chapter, we discussed how Ambedkar understands this issue in the Indian context coming to the conclusion that for him, Dalits constitute the real minority in Indian society, and there was consequently, a genuine need to safeguard their interests against the Communalism practiced by the Hindu majority. We also looked at the reasons given by Ambedkar to support his claims. Further, we discussed the nature of these safeguards, if Dalits have to live in communal harmony with this Hindu majority. He believed that the rights of a minority can only be secured in a democratic setup and a democratic society. If society is not democratic enough then the violations of the minority rights will go unchecked. He also believed that Indian society due to the dominance of Hindu or Brahmanic values is gravely undemocratic to the core. Hence, there is a need to democratize Indian society.

¹ Augustine, Confessions, Vol. 2.
³ Ibid, p. 446.
In this chapter, we will look at Ambedkar’s understanding of Indian society in detail. For this purpose, we will pursue the following questions: what are the characteristic features of Indian society that make it undemocratic? How can Indian society be reformed? What is Ambedkar’s conception of reform, and how is it different from that of others?

Earlier, in the second chapter, we looked at Ambedkar’s understanding of Democracy and its relationship with the value of justice (social) within a political theory framework. In this chapter, we will attempt at understanding these two ideas sociologically; along with that of political theory. Ambedkar’s understanding of Democracy, in fact, combines both these elements. For Ambedkar, Democracy is more than a form of government. It is a “form of the organization of society.” We have also noticed that Ambedkar uses Democracy in two different ways: one, narrowly, as a form of Government; and two, broadly, as a form of Society. When used in the latter sense, Democracy and Justice are synonymous terms. But, when employed in the former sense Democracy and Justice are not synonymous to each other. From such reading will come the following questions: what are the characteristics of such a society? How is it linked to justice (social)? Or, in simple terms, how is democracy linked to justice? Next, Ambedkar, at one level, criticizes the Congress and its politicians for ignoring social reform, while fiercely arguing for political reform.

At another level, he criticizes social reforms by the Hindus for their limited understanding of social reform. He writes,

"The untouchables found an ally in a section of the Hindus. Like the Untouchables, the Hindus also by the contact with the British had come to realize that their social system was very defective and was the parent of many social evils. They too desired to launch forth a movement of social Reform. It began with Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal and from there had spread all over India and ultimately culminated in the formation of the Indian Social Reform Conference with its slogan of Social Reform before Political Reform. The untouchables followed the Social Reform Conference and stood behind it as a body and gave it their full support. As everyone knows the Social Reform Conference is dead and buried and forgotten. Who killed it? The Congress. The Congress and its slogan "Politics First, Politics Last," “Politics by Each, Politics by All” regarded the Social Reform Conference as its rival. It denied the validity of the creed of the Conference that social reform was a necessary precursor of political reform. Under a constant and steady
fire from the Congress platform and from individual Congress leaders, the Social Reform Conference was burnt down and reduced to ashes.\(^4\)

At another place, while criticizing the Social Conference led by Upper Caste Hindus and their nature of social reform, he writes,

"The Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindu family. It consisted mostly of the enlightened high caste Hindus who did not feel the necessity for agitating for the abolition of caste or has not the courage to agitate for it."\(^5\)

From the above comment, it is clearly evident that the Hindus limited social reform only to themselves and did not extend it to the whole of society, to which Ambedkar rightly objects. Here, in this context, it is important to ask: what is Social reform and, importantly, how is this notion of reform related to his understanding of Justice?

Next, one of the important dimensions of Ambedkar’s thought is his conviction in the relevance of religion to human well being. He said, “Religion is absolutely essential for the development of mankind.”\(^6\) Based on this conviction he converted, along with millions of his followers, to Buddhism, thereby starting, what he calls, another “non-violent revolution.” Therefore, it is important to understand its importance in Ambedkar’s thought as a whole. Here, we will be asking the following questions: what is his notion of religion, and why is it vital to man and his well being? How is it connected to social justice? And, importantly, why only Buddhism? At the same time, it is important to ask; how is Buddhism or conversion to Buddhism related to the problem of Dalits as a minority? Ambedkar claims that his principle values of justice: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity have not come from French Revolution but from Buddha. He writes,

“Positively, my Social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. Let no one, however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my Master, the Buddha. In his philosophy, liberty and equality had a place; but he added that unlimited liberty

\(^4\) BAWS, Vol. 9, p. 190.
\(^5\) BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 41.
\(^6\) BAWS, Vol. 17, Part III, p. 537.
destroyed equality, and absolute equality left no room for liberty. In His philosophy, law had a place only as a safeguard against the reaches of liberty and equality; but he did not believe that law can be a guarantee for breaches of liberty or equality. He gave the highest place to fraternity as the real safeguard against the denial of liberty or equality or fraternity which was another name for brotherhood or humanity, which was again another name for religion."

Form the above observation of his, we come across an important insight that Ambedkar offers, related to the connection between law and society. Law, as we have observed in the last two chapters, can be used to bring about social change in society. It can serve both positive and negative functions. When used for enhancing social justice it plays a positive function but when used to maintain prevailing hierarchy and domination it plays the latter function. He wrote, "the true function of law consists in repairing the faults of the society." He advocated the importance of using legal and constitutional means to enhance Social democracy in Third World countries. His roles as a member of the Constituent Assembly and as constitutional lawyer display this understanding of his. However, at another level, Ambedkar also talks about the limitation of legal means for bringing about social democracy. He argues that laws by themselves will not bring about social reform. These laws must be buttressed by the social and cultural practices that are in tune with the law. Otherwise, these laws get nullified in their actual practice. Ambedkar writes at length how laws which are supposed to protect Dalits (or minorities in general), do not actually work, because those who are in a position to implement them are biased against Dalits. Social reform, therefore, becomes indispensable and, therefore, precedes political reform. Here comes the importance of Religion for Ambedkar. Religion, he argues, is more important and powerful than law in holding together men. Therefore, we will try to understand his notion of Religion and its relevance to his thought.

Coming back to the issue of Democracy, Ambedkar writes and speaks extensively on the prerequisites for its proper functioning. As we saw, political democracy, in order to function effectively must be supported by Social democracy. Ambedkar writes, at length, on the conditions necessary for the successful working of a Democracy. In this sense, it is worth looking at in detail, the arguments put forth by Ambedkar for anyone interested in

Democracy. What is Social democracy for Ambedkar? While distinguishing Social democracy from Formal democracy Ambedkar comments, “democracy is more than a form of government. It is a form of organization of Society.”

Now the immediate question that emerges is: What is the nature of Society he is arguing for? What are its characteristics? Within this context, this chapter argues, we need to understand Ambedkar’s critique of Jinnah and Gandhi as antithetical elements to Democracy and the democratic process. They promoted themselves as a Mahatma and as the Qaid-e-Azam by undermining democratic values and importantly, social justice as well. According to him, rather than cultivating a mindset that is essential for democracy and its growth, they promoted sectarian and communal tendencies. Ambedkar criticizes Gandhi as a humbug, who while preaching Dalit emancipation promoted conservative and capitalist interests. We shall look at his critique of Gandhi’s role in depth, later. On the other hand, Ambedkar criticizes Jinnah as someone who abandoned the fight for minority rights in favor of personal political goals.

Coming back to the question of what constitutes a democratic society, Ambedkar responds, by saying,

“There are two essential conditions which characterize a democratically constituted society. First is the absence of stratification of society into classes. The second is a social habit on the part of individuals and groups which is ready for continuous readjustment or recognition of reciprocity of interests.”

In the first condition, he talks about eradicating huge and glaring social divisions in a society; because “social stratification” or “class divisions,” as we have seen in the second chapter, are antithetical to the core political values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar thus shares with Marx, the vision of some kind of a classless society. However, at the same time, he disagrees with Marx on the means for furthering this goal for he was a firm believer in democratic and non-violent means to achieve his goals. Ambedkar said,

8 BAWS, Vol. 4, p. 281.
9 Ibid.
This statement also shows Ambedkar’s belief in the power of democracy, as a form of government that can bring about revolutionary change in society. For this very reason Ambedkar remained a democrat all through his life. He exhausted himself in striving to strengthen the Democratic institutions and structures of society. According to Valerian Rodrigues, Ambedkar worked at basically two levels to ensure the proper functioning of democracy; and, moreover, to secure the rights of minorities. The first level is the legal and constitutional level; and the second, the societal level. We dealt with the former level in the previous chapters, where we looked at the nature of legal and political safeguards. However, these legal and political safeguards are not going to be effective when the environment in which they are supposed to intervene is antithetical to them. There is, therefore, a need to make the environment itself conducive to these legal and political interventions and a major intervention is needed at much more important level – the societal level. Ambedkar wrote and argued extensively about the need for social reform. Within social reform, he gave importance to religion as a potential tool for social change. He believed Indian society needed rigorous overhauling to turn it into a democratic society. Only a democratic society, he argued, can sustain a democratic form of government. Therefore, this chapter argues that Ambedkar’s commitment to democracy and social justice obliges him to understand and critique Indian society and, to work towards democratizing it. Hence, to begin with, let us look at his understanding of Indian society.

Indian Society and its Discontents

Indian society is characterized by a hierarchical ordering of castes, of which the untouchables are the lowest and the Brahmins are the highest in social status. Untouchables qua untouchables hold a unique status in Indian society, unlike any other group in any known human society. During their entire existence – from birth to death –

10 BAWS, Vol. 17, p. 475.
they are impure for the rest of the society. In fact, they stand even lower than animals in the eyes of the Hindus. In other words, they are not part of humanity for the Hindus. Thus, they are not part of Hindu society, but, what constitutes their uniqueness is that they are also fundamentally dependent on it. In this sense, they are related to Hindu society. In other words, they are dependent on the rest of Hindu society but are not part of it. Based on this very fact, Ambedkar claims minority status of Dalits. On the contrary, the Brahmans, along with the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas form the ruling castes of the Indian society. If we go by their numerical strength, their numbers are less than that of the untouchables. Numerically, they are also minorities in Indian society. What makes them not a minority, from an Ambedkarian understanding of minority, is the social status they hold in the Indian society. However, importantly, what is unique about Hindu society is the existence of the heinous practice of untouchablity since time immemorial. This practice, according to Ambedkar, is the most inhuman aspect of Indian society, and this a direct result of Hinduism and the Caste system in practice. It is fundamentally an unequal and unjust society. For this particular reason, for Ambedkar, the terms Hindu society, unequal society, immoral society or unjust society are synonymous. He charges Indian society with having all these features.

The main culprit of this degeneration of Indian society is Brahminism. Hence, Ambedkar uses the terms Brahmanism and Hinduism interchangeably in his writings, especially in his polemical ones. He writes, “Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has is not an integral part of it. It is not imbedded in religion. It is a separate force which is sustained by social necessities and not by injunction of Hindu religion.”11 Firstly, this comment shows that Ambedkar accepts Hinduism as a religion, and classifies it as a positive religion. He writes, “Hinduism like Judaism, Christianity and Islam is in the main a positive religion.”12 But, what does this term positive religion mean? While Primitive religion emerged, “under the action of unconscious forces operating silently from age to age,” a positive religion traces it “origin to the teaching of great religious innovators, who spoke as the organs of a divine

revelation." Or, in simple terms, it is "a result of conscious formulations." For Hinduism, according to Ambedkar, this conscious formulation can be found in a written form in the work of Manu, called the Manusmriti. In his own words, it is a "divine code which lays down the rules which govern the religion, ritualistic and social life of the Hindus in minute detail and which must be regarded as the Bible of the Hindus and containing the philosophy of Hinduism." In this sense, the Manusmriti becomes an important text that needs to be critically and normatively understood for Ambedkar. Ambedkar also cites from other texts, mostly religious in character; but the Manusmriti gains its importance because it is not only a religious text, but also a legal text. Ambedkar argues that in Hinduism, religious, moral and legal codes are inseparable from each other.

In Ambedkarian terms, a critique of the Manusmriti amounts to a critique of Hinduism as a religion and society. We began by identifying caste as the principle evil in Indian society: Ambedkar zeroes in on the Manusmriti as the text that articulates, justifies and propagates the institution of caste. For this reason, the Manusmriti needs to be criticized and Ambedkar takes great pains to explain, how it is immoral and unjust to the core. Ambedkar compares the philosophy espoused in it to that of Nietzsche. Let us begin with Ambedkar's comment on Nietzsche and Manu. He writes,

"Hinduism is the gospel of the superman and it teaches that what is right for the superman is the only thing which is called morally right and morally good.

"Is there any parallel to this philosophy? I hate to suggest it. But it is so obvious. The parallel to this philosophy of Hinduism is to be found in Nietzsche... For the philosophy of Nietzsche stands in great odium. It never took roots. In his own words, he was "sometimes deified as the philosopher of the aristocracy and squirearchy, sometimes hooted at, sometimes pitied and sometimes boycotted as an inhuman being.” Nietzsche’s philosophy had become identified with will to power, violence, denial of spiritual values, superman and the sacrifice, servility and debasement of the common man. His philosophy with these high spots had created a certain loathsomeness and horror in the minds of the people of his own generation. He was utterly neglected if not shunned and Nietzsche himself took comfort by placing himself among the 'posthumous men.' .... This is principally due to the revelation that the philosophy of Nietzsche is capable of producing Nazism. His friends have vehemently protested against such a construction. But it is not difficult to see that his philosophy can be as easily applied to evolve a super state as to superman. This is what the Nazis have done. At any rate the Nazis trace their ancestry from Nietzsche and regard him as their spiritual parent. Hitler has himself photographed beside a bust of Nietzsche; he takes the manuscripts of the master under his own special guardianship; extracts are chosen from Nietzsche’s writings and loudly proclaimed at the

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13 Ibid., p. 8.
From the above statement, we can notice that for Ambedkar what constitutes Nietzschanism is what he calls, 'squirearchy' and aristocracy. Apart from this, it also refers to "will to power, violence, denial of spiritual values, superman and the sacrifice, servility and debasement of the common man." We have seen in the previous chapter that Ambedkar strongly opposes inequality among human relations. At the same time, he opposes any kind of survival of the fittest logic, according to which, it is only the strong who have a right to survive; and not just survive, but to thrive against the interests of the weak. Pushed further, it can also mean the strong must thrive by exploiting the weak. Later, we will study his defence of Buddhist value of compassion for all human and non-human beings. It entails the strong striving to elevate and help the weak, rather than exploiting them.

Coming back to Nietzsche, Ambedkar identifies Nietzsche's approving comment on Manu and his work, and quotes it,

"... Nietzsche himself has openly declared that in his philosophy he is only following the scheme of Manu. In his Anti Christ this is what Nietzsche says:

'After all, the question is, to what end are falsehoods perpetrated? The fact that, in Christianity, "holy" ends are entirely absent constitutes my objection to the means it employs. Its ends are only bad ends; the poisoning, the calumniation and the denial of life, the contempt of the body, the degradation and self pollution of man by virtue of the concept of sin, - consequently its means are bad as well. My feelings are quite the reverse, when I read the law book of Manu, an incomparably intellectual and superior work; it would be a sin against the spirit even to mention in the same breath with the Bible. You will guess immediately why – it has a genuine philosophy behind it, in it, not merely an evil-smelling Jewish distillation of Rabbinism and superstition – it gives something to chew even to the most fastidious psychologist. And, not to forget the most important point of all, it is fundamentally different from every kind of Bible: by means of it the noble classes, the philosophers and the warriors guard and guide the masses; it is replete with noble values, it is filled with a feeling of perfection, with saying yea to life, and triumphant sense of well-being in regard to itself and to life – the Sun shines upon the whole book. All those things which Christianity smothers with its bottomless vulgarity; procreation, woman, marriage, are here treated with earnestness, with reverence, with love and confidence. How can one possibly place in the hands of children and women, a book that contains those vile words: "to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband ..... it is better to marry than to burn." And is it decent to be a Christian so long as the very origin of man is Christianised – that is to say, befouled, by the idea of the immaculate conception?... I

And, Ambedkar writes, "This leaves no doubt that Zarathustra is a new name for Manu and that *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is a new edition of *Manu Smriti.*" But, it is also important to note that Ambedkar, intuitively, identifies the difference that lies between Manu and Nietzsche.

"If there is any difference between Manu and Nietzsche it lies in this. Nietzsche was genuinely interested in creating a new race of men which will be a race of supermen as compared with the existing race of men. Manu on the other hand was interested in maintaining the privileges of a class who had come to arrogate to itself the claim of being supermen. Nietzsche's supermen were supermen by reason of their worth. Manu's supermen were supermen by reason of their birth."  

Having said that, we now need to understand, what is it in Manu or Manusmriti which makes Ambedkar compare it with Nietzsche. According to him, it is the justification of "anything which serves the interests of the Supermen." Ambedkar lists many statements from Manusmriti in his defence. He begins by saying about Manu, that,

"He [Manu] expresses his view in resonant and majestic notes as who are the Supermen and anything which serves the interest of the Supermen is alone entitled to be called right and good. Let me quote Manu.

'X. 3. "On account of his pre-eminence, on account of the superiority of his origin, on account of his observance of (particular) restrictive rules, and on account of his particular sanctification the Brahman is the Lord of (all) Varnas."

"He proceeds to amplify his reasons and does so in the following characteristic manner:

1. 93. "As the Brahmana sprang from (Prajapati's i.e., God's) mouth, as he was first-born, and as he possesses the Veda, he is by right the lord of this whole creation"

1. 94. For the self existent (Svayambhu i.e. God), having performed austerities, produced him first from his own mouth, in order that offerings might be conveyed to the Gods and Manes and that this universe might be preserved."

1. 95. "What created being can surpass him, through whose mouth the gods continually consume the sacrificial viands and the manes the offerings to the dead?"

1. 96. “Of created beings the most excellent are said to be those which are animated; of the animated, those who subsist by intelligence; of the intelligent, mankind; and of the men, the Brahmans.”

“Besides the reason given by Manu the Brahmin is first in rank because he was produced by God from his mouth, in order that the offerings might be conveyed to the Gods and manes. Manu gives another reason for the supremacy of the Brahmans. He says:—

1. 98. “The very birth of a Brahmana is an eternal incarnation of the sacred Law (Veda); for he is born to (fulfil) the sacred law, and becomes one with Brahman (God).”

1. 99. “A Brahmana, coming into existence, is born as the highest on earth, the lord of all created beings, for the protection of the treasury of the Law.” Manu concludes by saying that:—

1. 101. “A Brahmana, coming into existence, is born as the highest on earth, the lord of all created beings, for the protection of the treasury of the Law.”

“Because according to Manu:—

II. 100. “Whatever exists in the world is the property of the Brahmana; on account of the excellence of his origin the Brahmana is, indeed, entitled to it all.” Manu directs:—

VII. 36. “Let the King, after rising early in the morning, worship Brahmans who are well versed in the three-fold sacred science and learned (in polity), and follow their advice.”

VII. 38. “Let him daily worship aged Brahmans who know the Veda and are pure. . . . .”

VII. 37. “Let the king, having risen at early dawn, respectfully attend to Brahman, learned in the three Vedas and in the science of ethics, and by their decision let him abide.”

VII. 38. “Constantly must he show respect to Brahmans, who have grown old, both in years and in piety, who know the scriptures, who in body and mind are pure; for he, who honours the aged, will perpetually be honoured even by cruel demons.”

IX. 313. “Let him not, although in the greatest distress for money, provoke Brahmans to anger by taking their property; for they, once enraged, could immediately by sacrifices and imprecations destroy him with his troops, elephants, horses and cars.”

“Finally Manu says:—

XI. 35. “The Brahman is (hereby) declared (to be) the creator (of the world), the punisher, the teacher, (and hence) a benefactor (of all created beings); to him let no man say anything unpropitious; nor use any harsh words.”

“Thus do I conclude and complete the theory of supermen and of what is right and good let me reproduce the following two texts from Manu:—

X. 122. But let a Shudra serve Brahmans, either for the sake of heaven or with a view to both this life and the next, for he who is called the servant of a Brahman thereby gains all his ends.

X. 123. The service of the Brahmana alone is declared to be an excellent occupation for a Shudra; for whatever else besides this he may perform will bear no fruit. “And Manu adds:—

X. 129. No collection of wealth must be made by a Shudra, even though he be able to do it; for a Shudra who has acquired wealth.”

From the above lengthy quote of Ambedkar from the Manusmriti, we can come to the conclusion that Ambedkar believes that the Nietzschean notion of superman is identical to, what Manu refers to as, the Brahmin. The common man, in this case the Shudra, has the “privilege” of serving the superior class. In this sense, Hinduism promotes inequality.

18 Ibid, p. 74.
Not only does it promote inequality, but this is, in fact, essential to Hinduism’s very existence, according to Ambedkar. In another place, he writes, “In Hinduism, you will find both social inequality and religious inequality imbedded in its philosophy.” Having said this, he talks about the sociological and psychological aspects of this philosophy of Hinduism. As we noticed, the Manusmriti articulates and defends the caste system; which translates into a hierarchical organization of different group or castes. At the same time, it also develops a psychology of hatred and rivalry among groups. What is worse, unlike class, it is a fight for dignity. In other words, class largely is a fight for resources and profit but caste is a fight for something much more basic – human dignity. Ambedkar puts it succinctly, 

“The hierarchical organization of the caste system is responsible for producing a social psychology which is noteworthy. In the first place it produces a spirit of rivalry among the different castes for dignity. Secondly, it produces an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt.”

One of the important contributions that Ambedkar makes is regarding the effect that caste has on the inner experience of the individual and the group. There is no precedent or antecedent to this kind of analysis, as done by Ambedkar, by any sociologist or anthropologist. Most of them, only give a descriptive analysis of the institution of caste. It is important, for us to understand the psychological impact of caste as Ambedkar identifies it.

Ambedkar argues that caste, as an institution, demoralizes the basic nature of people in the society. It annuls the “sense of justice” as John Rawls enunciates it that is natural to human beings. John Rawls, in his article, “Sense of Justice” first, identifies it as natural to human beings. He writes,

“It seems almost certain that at least the vast majority of mankind have a capacity for a sense of justice and that, for all practical purposes to suppose, one may safely assume that all men originally possess it. It is plausible to suppose that any being capable of language is capable of the intellectual performances required to have a sense of justice; and, given these intellectual powers, the capacity for the natural attitudes of love and affection, faith and mutual trust, appears to be universal. There seems to be no doubt then that the minimum requisites for the development of sense of justice are possessed by men as part

of their original natural capacity, and it is their original capacity which is said to be necessary.\(^{20}\)

As Rawls argues, “any person capable of language” has a capacity for a “sense of justice.” Ambedkar, would have endorsed such a view, but has an interesting argument as to how this sense of justice does not exist in an average Hindu. Hindu religion, Ambedkar argues, annihilates his natural ‘sense of justice’ by replacing it with the unnatural sense of the philosophy of ‘superman.’ Later in the thesis, we come to understand, Ambedkar’s strong observation regarding the power that a religion holds in a man’s life, and society in general. He writes,

“Religion as a social force cannot be ignored. Religion has been aptly described by Herbert Spencer as ‘the weft which everywhere crosses the warp of history.’ This is true of every society. But religion has only crossed everywhere the warp of Indian history, it form the warp and woof of the Hindu mind. The life of the Hindu is regulated by religion at every movement of his life. …

“Besides religion is a social force. As I have pointed out religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The scheme becomes an ideal for society to follow. The ideal may be non-existent in the sense that it is something which is constructed. But although non-existent, it is real. Those who deny the importance of religion not only forget this, they also fail to realize how great is the potency and sanction that lies behind a religious ideal as a compound with that of a purely secular ideal. This is probably due to the lag which one sees between the real and ideal which is always present whether the ideal is religious or secular.\(^{21}\)

As we can notice, from the above observation of his that religion is a “social force.” It gets its power from claiming to be a “governance” of divine origin. At the same time, it is a construct; a conscious construct by certain individuals or groups. This aspect of it is what Ambedkar characterizes as “positive religion”; though it is a construct, its power in controlling the lives of humans is real and effective. Ambedkar, here, is responding to the critique by Marxists, who hold to the view that religion is a result of “false consciousness,” which means it gains its power due to the repression of certain desires and needs of human beings. Once these desires and needs get satisfied through non-religious means the need for religion gets negated. In other words, Ambedkar opposes the view that “Religion is the opium of the masses,” which argues that when the material


\(^{21}\) Ibid, p. 23.
conditions improve the need for "spiritual improvement" becomes obsolete. We will come back to this issue in a short while. As of now, it is important to remember that for Ambedkar "religion is a social force." Going back to our discussion on justice, we need to ask the question: what is this "sense of justice"? First and foremost, having a sense of justice amounts to having certain moral feelings or sentiments, according to John Rawls. He then shows us negatively, the characteristic of persons who lack this moral sentiment and its consequences. He explains that those who lack this sense of justice lack the moral feeling of "resentment and indignation." Let us begin by looking at what he has to say regarding these moral sentiments. He writes,

"Resentment and indignation are moral feelings. Resentment is our reaction to the injuries and harm which the words of other inflict upon us and indignation is our reaction to the injuries which the wrongs of other inflict on others. Both resentment and indignation require, then, an explanation which invokes a moral concept, say the concept of justice, and its associated principle(s) and so make a reference to a right or a wrong. In order to experience resentment and indignation one must accept the principles which specify these rights and wrongs. ... by hypothesis the members of this scheme neither accept these principles nor experience any inhibition from principle guilt feelings. Now to deny that these persons are incapable of resentment and indignation is not to say that they might not be angry or annoyed with one another. A person without a sense of justice may be enraged at someone who fails to act fairly. But anger and annoyance are distinct from resentment and indignation; they are not, as resentment and indignation is moral feelings. No doubt there are many behavioral similarities between these feeling: the emotional display in expression and gesture may sometimes be indistinguishable. Still, the explanation of feeling will normally enable us to tell them apart."22

As it is evident from the above statement of Rawls, resentment and indignation are feelings, the lack of which can be characterized as the lack of moral sentiments. Ambedkar, would agree to such an understanding, and would further the argument saying that a particular society, could entirely lack such moral sentiments. Commenting on this aspect in Hindu society, he writes,

"Not having conscience, the Hindu has no such thing in him as righteous indignation against the inequities and injustices from which the Untouchable has been suffering. He sees no wrong in these inequities and injustices and refuses to budge."23

Ambedkar further argues that Hindu society is an unjust society to the core. In his paper, "Philosophy of Hinduism," after criticizing Hinduism for its lack of the political values of

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22 Rawls, n. 20, p. 114.
liberty, equality, and fraternity, he ends up arguing that the existence of untouchables, criminal tribes and other backward groups have not aroused any moral indignation among the Hindus. This is a sign that, the lack of the above-mentioned moral sentiments that Hindus lack a 'sense of justice." He writes,

"Inequality is the soul of Hinduism. The morality of Hinduism is only social. It is unmoral and inhuman to say the least. What is unmoral and inhuman easily becomes immoral, inhuman and infamous. This is what Hinduism has become. Those who doubt this or deny this proposition should examine the social composition of the Hindu Society and ponder over the condition of some of the elements in it." 24

He writes, at length, of what the status of these groups is. He highlights the developmental state in which they exist. Mostly, he concentrates, on criminal tribes, whose main occupation is robbery. He accuses Hinduism for leaving these groups in this state. And finally, while highlighting, the numerical strength of these groups, he writes:

"Consider the total population of these classes. The Primitive Tribes form a total of 25 million souls. The Criminal Tribes number 4 1/2 millions and the Untouchables number 50 millions. This makes a grand total of 79 1/2 millions. Now ask how these people could have remained in the state of moral, material, social and spiritual degradation surrounded as they have been by Hinduism. Hindus say that their civilisation is older than any civilisation, that Hinduism as a religion is superior to any other religion. If this is so how is that Hinduism failed to elevate these people, bring them enlightenment and hope; how is it that it failed even to reclaim them; how is it that it stood with folded hands when millions and millions were taking to a life of shame and crime? What is the answer to this? The only answer is that Hinduism is overwhelmed with the fear of pollution. It has not got the power to purify. It has not the impulse to serve and that is because by its very nature it is inhuman and unmoral. It is a misnomer to call it religion. Its philosophy is opposed to every thing for which religion stands." 25

From this comment, we can deduce that Hinduism has taken away from its practitioners the "sense of justice." Hinduism lacks the resources to purify society because it does not want to, and it is inhuman and immoral essentially. And, finally, he ends with the comment that "Its philosophy is opposed to very thing or which religion stands for religion." Now the question that immediately emerges in the reader's mind is: what is Ambedkar's notion of religion and what does it stand for? But, before we delve into the question, let us understand a bit more about the "sense of justice" and Ambedkar's understanding of justice in depth. Rawls talks about this sense of justice in a negative

24 BAWS (Philosophy of Hinduism), Vol. 3, p. 35.
25 Ibid.
manner by showing us the attributes of a person who lacks it. Earlier, we studied that the lack of the moral feelings of resentment and indignation is also a lack of the sense of justice. Further this person (in Ambedkar’s case, society) lacks the human ties of “friendship, affection and mutual trust. Ambedkar, in a similar manner, criticizes Hindu society for its lack of fraternity or “fellow feeling.” Rawls commenting on this lack writes,

“One may say, then, that a person who lacks a sense of justice and who could never act as justice requires except as self-interest and expediency prompt, not only is without ties of friendship, affection and mutual trust, but is incapable of experiencing resentment and indignation. Thus a person who lacks a sense of justice is also without certain natural attitudes and certain moral feelings of a particular elementary kind. Put another way, one who lacks a sense of justice lacks certain fundamental attitudes and capacities included under the notion of humanity. Now the moral feelings are admittedly unpleasant, in some extended sense of unpleasant; but there is no way for us to avoid a liability to them without disfiguring ourselves. This liability is the price of love and trust, of friendship and affection, and a devotion to institutions and tradition from which we have benefited and which serve the general interests of mankind. Moreover, as long as men are possessed of interests and aspirations of their own, as long as they are prepared in the pursuit of their own ends and ideals to press their claims on another- that is, so long as the conditions giving rise to questions of justice obtain among them – it is inevitable that, given temptation and passion, this liability will be realized. (Since being moved by ends and ideals of excellence implies a liability to humanization and moved by ends an absence of a liability to humiliation and shame implies a lack of such ends and ideals, one can say of shame and humiliation also that they are part of notion of humanity.) Now the fact that one who lacks a sense of justice, and thereby a liability of guilt, lacks thereby certain fundamental attitudes and capacities included under the notion of humanity is not to be taken as a reason for action as justice dictates. But this fact is an important truth. By understanding what it would be like not to have a sense of justice – that it would be to lack a part of our humanity, too – we are led to understand our having this sense.”

In this comment of Rawls, we notice that persons who lack a sense of justice also do not have a liability that arises due to love, trust, friendship and affection. Hence, we can conclude that a person who lacks a sense of justice lacks certain “fundamental attitudes and capacities included under the notion of humanity.” Ambedkar, by calling Hindu society as immoral and unjust is also calling it an inhuman society. Hinduism, thus, is essentially an inhuman religion. Importantly, Ambedkar argues that Hinduism is unjust by showing that it lacks the three principle political virtues of liberty, equality and fraternity. Here, it is important to note, Henry Bergson’s view of justice has influenced Ambedkar. This is what Bergson has to say regarding justice,

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26 Rawls, n. 20, p.115.
"All moral ideas interpenetrate each other, but none is more instructive than that of justice, in the first place, because it includes most of the others, and next, because it is expressed, in spite of its extraordinary richness, in simpler formulae; lastly and above all, because here the two forms of obligation are seen to dovetail into each other. Justice has always evoked ideas of equality, of proportion of compensation. Pensare, from which we derive 'compensation' and 'recompense,' means to weigh. Justice is represented as holding the scales. Equity signifies equality. Rules and regulation, right and righteousness, are words which suggest a straight line. These references to arithmetic and geometry are characteristic of justice through its history."

For Bergson the idea of equality, in fact, equity, is the principle characteristic of justice. In a similar manner, Ambedkar is echoing the Bergsonian notion of justice when he writes,

"No one has expounded it better than Henry Bergson. As interpreted by him the principle of Justice is a compendious one and includes most of the other principles which have become the foundation of moral order. Justice has always evoked ideas of equality, of proportion of 'compensation.' Equity signifies equality. Rules and regulations, rights and righteousness are concerned with equality of value. If all men are equal, all men are of the same essence and the common essence entitled them to the same fundamental rights and to equal liberty. In short, justice is simply another name of equality, liberty and fraternity. In this sense, I shall be using justice as a criterion to judge Hinduism."

It is clear, from the above comment of Ambedkar that liberty, equality, and fraternity are three essential ingredients for justice. After stating this, Ambedkar attempts to show that Hinduism lacks these three principles entirely. First and foremost, Hinduism denies Liberty. By liberty, Ambedkar means man's ability to pursue the goals as per his individual will. Liberty gains its importance due to its indispensability to development of an individual's personality. As stated earlier, for Ambedkar, the development of an individual personality is the highest of a society. Hinduism on the contrary does the opposite. By denying equal liberty to all, it creates a personality which is perverted. In other words, with its institution of caste it develops the personality of few at the cost of many; it develops the personality of the above at the cost of the lower section of the society. Hinduism, according to him, denies equality in three distinct and important

28 Bergson's quote is missing in Ambedkar's piece but the source of the quote is given. See Bergson, *Ibid.*
spheres: social, economic and epistemic. Commenting on the importance of social equality he writes,

"Privilege tilts the balance of social action in favor of its possessors. The more equal are the social rights of citizens, the more able they are to utilize their freedom... if liberty is to move in its appointed end it is important that there could be quality." 31

Social equality for Ambedkar means that all have equal social rights. By Social rights, Ambedkar has in mind access to public spaces, places of power or decision making and other cultural spaces. Hinduism denies these very social rights which are important for utilizing freedom. Economic inequality is another serious hindrance to the liberty of the individual. He writes,

"In the second place there must be economic security. "A man may be free to enter any vocation he may choose...Yet if he is deprived of security in employment he becomes a prey of mental and physical servitude incompatible with the very essence of liberty... the perpetual fear of the tomorrow, its haunting sense of impending disaster, its fitful search for happiness and beauty which perpetually elude shoe that without economic security, liberty is not worth having. Men may well be free and yet remain unable to realize the purpose of freedom." 32

The existence of classes and castes is the very denial of economic equality. Lack of economic equality means lack of economic security for some and unjust economic power in the hands of the upper classes or castes. The lower classes or castes have to give up their political rights due to lack of economic security. Hinduism with its hierarchical ordering of castes and classes ensures that there is economic inequality thereby ensuring the freedom of some at the cost of the lower classes and castes. And last, but just as important, access to proper knowledge and information is necessary for the effective use of one’s freedom. Talking about its importance, he writes, "In the third place there must be knowledge made available to all. In the complex world man lives at his peril and he must find his way in it without losing his freedom." 33

Freedom without proper knowledge will only translate into a negative freedom, where the individual is dependent on his own ignorance to exercise it. This can in some cases become dangerous to the individual himself. Ambedkar comments,

"There can, under conditions, be no freedom that is worthwhile unless the mind is trained to use its freedom. (Given this fact) the right of man to education becomes fundamental to his freedom. Deprive a man of knowledge and you will make him inevitably the slave of those more fortunate than himself... deprivation of knowledge is a denial of the power

31 Ibid., p. 39.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
Hinduism’s distinctive feature is that it denies knowledge and education to the lower castes. Even if education is given it does it differentially. This aspect of Hinduism for Ambedkar has been one the major sources of the lack of social change in Indian society. The suppressed groups lack any intellectual means to critique society and to organize themselves. This has also been one of the major reasons why lower classes could not exercise liberty. Hence, Ambedkar argues that proper social conditions must be ensured if liberty in its true meaning has to realize in society. He said, “Liberty to be real must be accompanied by certain social conditions.”

In the Indian context it is important to purge elements which hinder in the process of generating these social conditions. Ambedkar identifies Hinduism has the major hindrance to this particular, but important, realization. Therefore, Hinduism is something that generates a social condition that is totally antithetical to the effective realization of liberty, must be rejected entirely.

The next important criticism that Ambedkar makes of Hindu society is that the existence social inequality or caste produces a society that is totally antagonistic to fraternity or fellow-feeling. In the second chapter we encountered this political value as one of the important values for Ambedkar’s political thought. In another context, Ambedkar talking about the importance of fraternity in a society writes,

“There are two forces prevalent in Society. Individualism and fraternity. Individualism is ever present. Every individual is ever asking ‘I and my neighbors are we all brothers, are we even fifth cousins, am I their keeper, why should I do right to them’ and under the pressure of his own particular interests acting as though he was an end to himself, thereby developing a non-social and even an anti-social self. Fraternity is a force opposite character. Fraternity is another name for fellow feeling. It consists in a sentiment which leads an individual to identify himself with the good of others whereby ‘the good of others becomes to him a thing naturally and necessarily to be attended to like any of the physical conditions of our existence.’ It is because of this sentiment of fraternity that the individual does not ‘bring himself to think of the rest of his fellow-creatures as struggling rivals with him for the means of happiness, whom he must desire to see defeated in their object of order that he may succeed in his own.’ Individualism would produce anarchy. It is only fraternity which prevents it and helps to sustain the moral order among men. Of this there can be no doubt.”

34 Ibid.
36 BAWS, Vol. III, p. 44.
Ambedkar characterizes individualism as a negative force that can only lead to anarchy. Too much of it can result in a non-social self. But fraternity is a positive force that can keep a check on extreme individualism and can generate the necessary solidarity that is essential for sustaining “the moral order” in society. This sustenance of the “moral order” of society is very crucial to Ambedkar. Because without this moral order a society can soon degenerate into an anarchic society, where oppression and tyranny can go unchecked. In other words, in a society where there is no “fellow-feeling” the oppression or inhuman treatment of man against man goes unchallenged. If a person does not feel for the injustices of others or, as we discussed earlier, lacks indignation then society becomes an unjust society. To buttress his argument about the importance of this feeling of solidarity Ambedkar cites J. S. Mill. Ambedkar begins by asking: How does this sentiment of fraternity, of fellow feeling arise? He quotes Mill, “this sentiment is a natural sentiment.” Mill writing on the sentiment of fraternity writes thus,

"the social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body; and this association is riveted more and more, as mankind is further removed from the state of savage independence. Any condition, therefore, which is essential to a state of society, becomes more and more an inseparable part of every person’s conception of the state of things which he is born into, and which is the destiny of a human being. Now, society between human beings, except in the relation of master and slave, is manifestly impossible on any other footing than that the interests of all are to be consulted. Society between equals can only exist on the understanding that the interests of all are to be regarded equally. And since in all states of civilization, every person, except an absolute monarch, has equals, everyone is obliged to live on these terms with somebody; and in every age some advance is made towards a state in which it will be impossible to live permanently on other terms with anybody. In this way people grow up unable to conceive as possible to them a state of total disregard of other people's interests." 37

From the argument put forth by Mill we can say that the feeling of fraternity is a natural sentiment; and further, social equality becomes absolutely necessary in order for this sentiment to grow and survive. In this sense the political value of “Equality” is intrinsically linked to the value of “Fraternity.” Fraternity and liberty are derived from the value of equality. Commenting on the derivativeness of liberty and fraternity Ambedkar writes,

37 J. S. Mill as quoted by Ambedkar, n. 29.
“Fraternity and liberty are really derivative notions. The basic and fundamental conceptions are equality and respect for human personality. Fraternity and liberty take their roots in these two fundamental conceptions. Digging further down it may be said that equality is the original notion and respect for human personality is a reflexion of it. So that where equality is denied is denied, everything else may be taken to be denied. In other words it is enough for me to have shown that there was no equality in Hinduism.”

Hence, for Ambedkar, in order to establish that Hinduism and its philosophy denies liberty and fraternity; it is enough to show that it denies “Equality.” Therefore, Hinduism with its defense of caste system thereby also denies “Liberty” and “Fraternity.” Coming back to the issue of fraternity as a natural sentiment, Ambedkar after trying to establish that it is a natural feeling asks the question: “What is the explanation of this absence of fraternity among the Hindus?” The answer is Hinduism. It is solely responsible for uprooting this natural sentiment of fellow-feeling. Ambedkar writes, “It is Hinduism and its philosophy that is responsible for it. The sentiment of fraternity as Mill said is natural but it is a plant which grows where the soil is propitious and the conditions for its growth exist.” After criticizing Hinduism and arguing for its total annihilation from Indian society, Ambedkar concentrates his energies in arguing that only Buddhism, a religion which also has roots in Indian soil, has the necessary philosophical and spiritual resources that can create conditions for the growth of fellow-feeling in this country. Later, this chapter will argue that, for Ambedkar Buddhism was a religion which could strengthen the natural sentiment of fraternity not just in India but in the whole world.

We can conclude this section, therefore, with the argument that for Ambedkar, Hinduism, with its institution of caste and other social inequities and Democracy, with its values of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are incongruous to each other. Therefore, there is a need for a religion which nourishes morality and humanism. For Ambedkar the answer lies in Buddhism.

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38 BAWS, Vol. 3. p. 66.
39 Ibid, p. 64.
**The Buddhist Alternative**

In the Introduction to this chapter, we encountered Ambedkar declaring that his social philosophy of liberty, equality and fraternity are not derived from the French revolution but from the teachings of Buddha. Buddhism for the mature Ambedkar was the right alternative for Hinduism, in fact for all the religions of the world. Buddhism for Ambedkar is a true Democrat's religion. It is a religion which is intrinsically democratic. It is a religion which nourishes the moral aspirations of the individual and society. Being a rational religion it rejects the existence of God and aims at eradicating the suffering of the individual in society. According to Ambedkar,

"The religion of the Buddha is morality. It is imbedded in religion. Religion is nothing if not morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions, morality is to Buddhism." 40

While most of the major religions are based on a belief in some supernatural being or God, Buddhism rejects the existence of any such being and would demand and give a rational explanation to the origin of the world. It is a religion which gives the utmost importance to rationality and morality. It considers these two as complementary to each other. Morality, for Ambedkar, is the principle feature of religion without it; it ceases to be a religion. Here, we need to digress a little, to understand Ambedkar's conception of religion and to understand his endorsement of Buddhism.

Religion, as we discussed in an earlier section, is a social force, and it cannot be ignored according to Ambedkar. It stands for "a scheme of divine governance" which becomes an ideal for society. Even if this ideal does not exist in reality it still has great power over the minds of individuals. Compared with a secular ideal it holds greater potency and sanction in society. Apart from its power over individuals; it is a necessary thing for huge sections of humanity, particularly the deprived and dispossessed of the world. Talking about its importance and critiquing Marxists for ignoring it by calling it an "opium of the masses" he writes,

40 BAWS, Vol. 17, Part II, p. 98.
"Religion is absolutely essential for the development of mankind. I know that one sect came into existence after reading Karl Marx. According to them religion is futile. They do not have importance of religion. In the morning, they get breakfast containing bread, cream, butter, chicken leg, etc., full meal, sound sleep, to see movies; and that is all. That is their philosophy. I am not of that opinion. My father was poor; could not get such kind of luxuries. Nobody has ever lived a life as hard as mine. Therefore, I have a realization that how hard a man’s life can be in the absence of luxuries." 41

After stating that he understands what a hard life is better than many Marxists, Ambedkar moves on to talk about the importance of spiritual needs for an individual along with economic ones. He further writes,

"I know that economic elevation movement is necessary. I am not against that movement. Man must progress financially. But I make an important distinction in this matter. There is a difference between buffalo, bull and man. Buffalo and bull need fodder every day. Man also needs food. But the difference in between the two is that buffalo and bull have no mind; man has body and mind too. Therefore, both should be pondered over. The mind should be developed. The mind should be cultured. It should be made cultured. I do not want to have any sort of relationship with such country or people who say that there is no relationship between man and cultured mind except the food. As to keep relationship with people man should have sound body in the same way while making the body healthy, the mind should also be cultured. Otherwise, it cannot be said that mankind has progressed." 42

After acknowledging the importance of “economic elevation,” he develops an argument showing that man has a higher order of desires compared to animals. For him, as Taylor puts it, man is a “self interpreting animal,” who has an ordering of desires much higher compared to any animal. Because of the fact that he is a thinking being, who strives to interpret and find meaning in whatever he does. He is, as Merleau Ponty would say, condemned to meaning. For this purpose his mind should be developed or as Ambedkar would say the “mind should be cultured.” In another context he writes:

"It is true that man shares the constitution and functions of animals, nutritive, reproductive, etc. but these are not distinctively human functions. The distinctively human function is reason, the purpose of which is to enable man to observe, meditate, cogitate, study and discover the beauties of the Universe and enrich his life and control the animal elements in his life. Man, thus, occupies the highest place in the scheme of animate existence." 43

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
Interesting and important to note is the fact that Ambedkar locates religion in the realm of culture, and considers religion as something which should nourish and enhance the culture of the individual and society rather than do the opposite. We can further infer from his comment that Culture is something very important for Ambedkar. Religion gains its importance because it is one of the important elements of culture. If fact, his criticism of Hinduism is that it produces a culture which scuttles the growth of the individual personality. We also noted that it is the most important goal for a society, according to Ambedkar. Religion being an important element of culture cannot and must not be ignored. But, more importantly, he argues that the poor or depressed need a religion. With its scheme of “divine governance” it gives hope to the Depressed. Let us have a look at what he has to say:

“Religion is necessary for the poor. Religion is necessary for the Depressed people. The poor man survives on hope. The root of life lies in hope. What will happen to the life if the hope is lost? Religion makes hopeful, and gives a message to the depressed and the poor — do not be afraid, life will be hopeful, it will be! Therefore, the poor and the depressed mankind cling to the religion.”

From the above comment, we notice that religion or hope is necessary for the poor. Once this is taken away form the poor the poor have no hope. Ambedkar replies to the Marxists that it may be an “opium of the masses” but it is a necessary one.

The important point, we must remember, from an earlier discussion in the chapter, is that Ambedkar sees religion as a great social force. He therefore, wants to use this force to bring about a society that can help to cultivate the mind of the individual, or, in other words, to develop the personality of the individual. This vision of society is what Ambedkar has in mind whenever he refers to democratic society. We will come back to understand his conception of a democratic society in a short while; but, as of now, we can say that religion as a force can play both a positive and a negative role in society. Hinduism, as we concluded, plays a negative role. Therefore, he concentrates on finding a religion that is efficient and effective to play the positive role of, both to cultivate the mind of the individual and, at the same time, to be a source of hope to the “Depressed

44 Ibid.
mankind.” Here, Ambedkar needs to resolve one issue; the issue of relating rationality, morality and religion. He finds in most religions in the world (like Christianity, Islam, etc.,) a strong irrational belief in existence of a transcendent God. He wanted a religion which is immanent in its orientation; which address the problems of this world; or, which can further social justice in society. Moreover, most importantly, it must appeal to rational, moral and spiritual dimensions of a man’s social life. Among these three values the moral dimension of religion is very important for Ambedkar. He therefore, writes:

“In any case, the idea of God is not integral to Religion; How it got infused into Religion is difficult to explain. With regard to the relation between Religion and Morality this much may be safely said. Though the relation between God and religion is not quite integral, the relation between religion and morality is. Both religion and morality are connected with the same elemental facts of human existence – namely life, death, birth and marriage. Religion consecrates these life processes while morality furnishes rules for their preservation. Religion in consecrating these elemental facts and processes of life came to consecrate also the rules laid down by society for their preservation.”

Morality, for Ambedkar, furnishes the rules for preserving the life processes that religion consecrates. Ambedkar argues the link between morality and religion becomes more evident and stronger with the emergence of modern religion. He says this morality itself has gone through a great revolution over the years. To understand what this revolution in morality is, let us begin by looking at what Ambedkar has to say:

“At one end of the Revolution was the antique society with its Religious ideal in which the end was society. At the other end of the Revolution is the modern society with its Religious ideas in which the end is the individual. To put the same fact in terms of the norm it can be said that the norm of the criterion, for judging right and wrong in the antique society was utility while the norm of the criterion for judging right and wrong in the modern society is justice. The religious revolution was not thus a revolution in the religious organization of society resulting in the shifting of the centre – from society to the individual – it was a revolution in the norms.”

Ambedkar clearly argues that the role of morality in promoting Justice in modern society has undergone a major revolution, when compared to antique society. In other words, justice not utility is the criterion for judging a religion. We have already established that Hinduism fails miserably when judged with the criterion of Justice. Ambedkar further argues,

46 Ibid, p. 22.
"Some may demur to the norms I have suggested. It may be that it is a new way of reaching them. But to my mind there is no doubt that they are the real norms by which to judge the philosophy of religion. In the first place the norm must enable people to judge what is right and wrong in the conduct of men. In the second place the norm must be appropriate to current notion of what constitutes the moral good. From both these points of view they appear to be the true norms. They enable us to judge what is right and wrong. They are appropriate to the antique world in which society being the end, the moral good was held to be something which had social utility. Justice as a criterion became appropriate to the modern world in which individual being the end, the moral good was held to be something which does justice to the individual. There may be controversy as to which of the two norms is morally superior. But I do not think there can be any serious controversy that these are not of the norms. If it is said that these norms are not transcendental enough, my reply is that if a norm whereby one is to judge the philosophy of religion must be godly, it must also be earthly." 47

Hence, we can conclude by saying that god is not central to religion but morality. This morality, further, is not a utilitarian morality but a morality which is based on justice. Ambedkar, by making Justice as the central virtue of a religion, is for a Kantian conception of morality. This can be inferred by the way he argues that justice in modern society, as compared to ancient society, makes individual as the goal of justice rather than social utility. A Kantian conception of morality is not willing to sacrifice the individual's right for the sake of overall social good. Utilitarian justice, on the contrary, favors social utility though the individual is still the end. Thus, Justice is the principal feature of modern religion, along with other features. After careful, examination and consideration of all the major religions, Ambedkar, finds Buddhism the ideal religion, which can satisfy all the above-mentioned criteria. We, therefore, need to have a closer look at Ambedkar's understanding of Buddhism, and ask the question: how does he locate justice and its three principle components of liberty, equality and fraternity in Buddhism?

**Religion within the limits of reason alone**

What attracts Ambedkar to Buddhism is its emphasis on rational deliberation. Though a very ancient religion it is ideally suited for modern society, because of its inherent "modernism." Religion, as discussed, is nothing but morality in practice. Without it, a

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47 Ibid.
religion ceases to be a religion. This morality, further, is nothing but furthering justice. Justice, further means, the right relation between man and man. Morality, thus, for Ambedkar means, a la Scanlon, what we owe to each other, qua human beings. Buddhism with its notion of Dhamma aims at establishing proper relations between men. Ambedkar commenting on Buddha and his Dhamma writes that the centre of his Dhamma is man and the relation of men with other men constitutes life on earth. Important, here, is that Ambedkar makes a distinction between Dhamma and religion. Dhamma is nothing but morality. It attains the character of religion because of its emphasis on practice.\textsuperscript{48} Also important to notice, is that this Dhamma is not transcendent Dhamma but something immanent, which is concerned with man and life on earth.

Morality, as Dhamma, has another important goal to achieve according to Ambedkar. It should remove suffering in the world, which mostly arises out of injustice in society. Ambedkar says, "The recognition of the existence of suffering and to show the way to remove suffering is the foundation and basis of his Dhamma."\textsuperscript{49} And, he further says, "This can be the only foundation and justification for Dhamma. A religion which fails to recognize this is no religion at all."\textsuperscript{50} For Ambedkar this aspect of religion is very important. By suffering, Ambedkar means social suffering. This includes oppression, repression, exploitation and other forms of human domination that cause social suffering. Ambedkar compares Marx's concept of exploitation with that of Buddha's notion of human suffering. Ambedkar writes, "If for misery one reads exploitation, Buddha is not away from Marx."\textsuperscript{51} That does not mean that Ambedkar ignores Buddha's notion of human suffering that arises from illusion and ignorance of human reality. But, his main focus has been alleviation of misery and poverty and above all, social justice. Dhamma (or morality) when it becomes a religion, has the same goal of social justice. Therefore, Buddha's second postulate "was that men are living in sorrow, in misery and poverty. The world is full of suffering and how to remove this suffering from the world is the only

\textsuperscript{48} For a better understanding of Ambedkar's ideas on Buddhism, read his BAWS (The Buddha and His Dhamma), Vol. 11. p. 322-34.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 121.
purpose of Dhamma. Nothing else is Dhamma.” Thus, we can say that Dhamma is nothing but morality, morality is nothing but removal of social suffering that arises out of ignorance and exploitation which again, is nothing but striving for social justice.

Now, the question is what exactly is it that Ambedkar finds in Buddhism that is compatible with justice. Ambedkar relates the Buddhist concept of samata with Equality, the concept of Maitri along with kauruna is analogous to “fraternity” but also goes beyond it. The word of this in Pali is metta which can mean: loving-kindness, friendliness, goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, inoffensiveness and non-violence. It is a strong wish for the welfare and happiness of others. It also means an empathy for all living beings, not just humans. While this concept needs no further explanation, the concept of samata needs a little elucidation. This notion of Samata is based on the Buddhist notion annatta which is further based on the concept of sunyata. Sunyata literally means emptiness. Taken to its logical extent it denies the existence of a self or Atman thereby giving birth to the notion of annata. The self, according to this Buddhist doctrine, is an illusion. This illusion creates a psychology of “me and mine”, which is the source of suffering in an individual. Since, no individual is devoid of this illusion; it is the cause of suffering in the world. This discovery of emptiness, the fact that really there is no such thing as a self, and therefore, no coherent real basis for the destructive patterns of “me and mine”, leads to a letting go of grasping, which finally results in Nirvana or Nibbha. This Nibbna is said to be “seeing things the way they really are,” that is, what is ultimately the case, how things really are. Samata derived from the concept of annatta for the reason that, if there is no self or atman then all human are equally empty of it and therefore are equal in a fundamental sense. This goes fundamentally against the Nietzschean notion of a class of superior men or supermen and inferior races. All humans have the same potential to achieve the best in the world as well as descend to the worst. Thus, samata goes beyond the French concept of Equality. It is not simple “equality for all” nor is it just “equity” either. It is both plus much more. In the second chapter of this work, we looked at Ambedkar’s conception of equality, where we noted that this equality extends not just to all equals but also towards unequals. It is not “equity” either; because it extends equality to the unequal on par with the equal. This
equality when understood along with *maitri*, implies equal treatment of the fit and the unfit. Ambedkar writes,

"In the struggle for existence if equality be recognized as the rule of the game the weakest will always go to the wall...should this rule of inequality be allowed to be the rule of life? Some answer in the affirmative on the ground that it results in the survival of the fittest. The question, however is: is the fittest the best from the point of society? No one can give a positive answer. It is because of this doubt that religion preaches equality. For equality may help the best to survive even though the best may not be the fittest."

According to Ambedkar Buddhism is thus, fundamentally the opposite of the Nietzschean notion of superman. It does not profess that only the strong have a right to exist. It does not believe in the rule of the strong over the weak. Being a religion which believes in equality, fundamentally, it does not defend the institution of caste. This is one of the most important aspects of Buddhism that Ambedkar highlights. It also gave equal status to women, in a period when women had no such rights. It allowed people from all castes to partake in the Sangha, a Buddhist collective. Ambedkar argues that Buddhism, unlike Hinduism, is fundamentally opposed to the caste system. Ambedkar also finds Buddhism a better alternative to communism. Both hold ideas in common like the rejection of private property and establishment of some sort of collective. They are also similar in eliminating exploitation and social suffering that arise out of ignorance and dominance but they differ, however, in relation to the means they use to achieve this state. Buddhism believes in moral and non-violent means to achieve this state.

The next important issue concerning Buddhism that we need to discuss is the relationship between minority issue and Buddhism in Ambedkar's thought. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism along with a large section of the Mahar community rejecting Hindu identity. How does he justify this conversion? Ambedkar's argument goes like this: Hinduism is fundamentally antithetical to Democracy and social justice and Buddhism, on the contrary, is the only religion which is most suitable to Democracy and justice. This aspect was dealt in the previous sections. Ambedkar argues that democracy is very essential for minorities; particularly for social and economic minorities or Dalits. Only in

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52 BAWS, Vol. 11, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* p. 308
53 For a better understanding on this issue refer to Rodrigues, n. 51, p. 179.
a Democratic society can there be a proper vigil and check against the majority violating
the rights of minorities. In other words, in a democratic society, whenever the rights of
minorities are violated against the protection given to them in the constitution or the legal
process, there will be strong reaction against any undemocratic moves by the state or
political groups. This is not possible in a democratic society. Ambedkar also believes that
Democracy is a way of living not just a form of government. When democracy does not
translate into a “way of life,” it is nothing but a farce or façade in the name of
Democracy. Ambedkar, for this reason, criticizes his contemporaries and the Congress
for ignoring social reform that aimed at democratizing society but strongly advocated
only “political reform.”

Ambedkar advocates Buddhism as a means to democratize Indian society, as a profound
means of social reform. Pushed further, Ambedkar’s advocacy of Buddhism is not just
limited to India but also a means to democratize the whole world. Apart from this broad
concern, Ambedkar’s advocacy and conversion to Buddhism has an element of protest
against the inhuman treatment of Dalits by the Hindus. His famous declaration: I am born
a Hindu but I will not die a Hindu. Ambedkar also argued that Dalits are targeted by the
Hindus because they do not belong to any particular religion. A religion, apart from being
a source of spiritual development for the individual, is also a great source for generating
fellow-feeling between the religious followers. Because Dalits are divided among
themselves into many sub-castes, along with regional and linguistic variations, a common
religion for them can help to unite and generate the necessary solidarity to fight and
defend against Hindu dominance. This is one of the reasons Ambedkar argues that
Muslims though small in number when compared to Dalits, are attacked less, while Dalits
face frequent abuse from the caste Hindus. Buddhism gives them a unique and a different
identity. It is supposed to give them equal status in society. He says, “What the depressed
classes want is a religion, which will give them equality of social status. To prevent any
misunderstanding, I would like to elaborate the point by drawing a distinction between
social evils which are the result of secular causes and social evils which are founded upon
the doctrine of religion.” Ambedkar also had in mind the deplorable conditions of Dalits
and he finds Buddhism a great source for their spiritual, psychological and moral
strength. Its reliance on rational thought would also make Dalits oriented towards modernism rather than superstition. This is how Ambedkar advises his large number of followers to convert,

"I will tell you specifically that man is not for religion, religion is for man. To become a man, convert yourselves. To get organized convert yourselves. To achieve strength, convert yourselves. To get liberty, convert yourselves. To make your domestic life happy, convert yourselves."54

In this comment Ambedkar begins by attacking the view propagated by Gandhi that a religion is a matter of man’s personal inner conviction and cannot be changed like some shirt or care; and more importantly, change to another religion must not be done, only, for political reasons. To the argument that religion is personal, Ambedkar replies by saying that it is social and nothing but social. As said earlier, Ambedkar interprets religion not in just metaphysical terms but in sociological terms. As someone, who is well-trained both in anthropology and sociology, Ambedkar cannot but view religion in its concrete sociological terms. But to the question why convert to Buddhism and what is unique about it, Ambedkar succinctly summarizes his conversion to Buddhism as thus:

"I maintain,

1. That society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either society is sure to go to pieces. In all society law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its sociable by the postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality must therefore remain the governing principle of every society.

2. That religion as defined in the first proposition must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose its respect and therefore become the subject of ridicule and thereby not merely lose its force as a governing principal of life but might in course of time disintegrate and lapse if it is not in accord with science. In other words, religion if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science. Fundamental principles of social life religion will be doomed.

3. That religion is a code of social morality, must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Unless a religion recognizes these three

4. That religion must not sanctify or ennable poverty. Renunciation of riches by those who have it may be a blessed state. But poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion to perpetuate vice, crime, to consent to make earth a living hell.

54 BAWs, Vol. 17, p. 145.
The only religion which satisfies all these tests is Buddhism.  

Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism and his advocacy of Buddhism is a part of his concern for radical social transformation of Indian society. Ambedkar very well knew that the dominant groups among the Hindus maintain their dominance through cultural means. In addition to economic means, they also use religion to justify their superiority over others thereby creating a hegemonic effect on society. His writing extensively deals with delegitimizing Hindu ideals and system that go in to justifying the practice of Caste and Untouchability. He heavily criticized those who spoke of social reform but ignored caste and other institutions that fundamental to Hindu social structure.

Ambedkar did not limit himself to criticizing only the Hindus. His critique extends to both Christian missionaries and Muslim leaders as well. He criticized both groups for not attacking the institution of caste within their own communities. He, however, acknowledges Christian missionaries for their contribution in developing an education system that was far more egalitarian than the Hindu and Muslim systems. Apart from this, though, Christianity's emphasis on transcendental justice was unacceptable to Ambedkar. As we noted earlier, he wants a religion that was immanent, which dealt with this world rather than some other transcendent world. Comparing Buddhism with Christianity, Ambedkar said there is no sermon on the mount in Buddhist literature. Christianity he says justifies poverty and deprivation by calling it a "blessed state." This makes people accept their deprived condition uncritically and discourages them from fights against injustice and poverty. The same critique can be applied to Islam. He criticizes Islam for not doing anything for ameliorating the conditions of Dalits, all through its thousand-year long history in India.

55 Ibid.
Critique of Social Reform

Ambedkar's critique of social reform is at two levels: first, he criticized those who ignored social reform but favored political reform. Second, he criticized those who advocated social reform but only at a superficial level. We dealt with the critique of the first level in the earlier sections. We will now concentrate on the second level of the critique of social reforms. Ambedkar acknowledges that there emerged social reformers in the Hindu sections, largely from upper caste backgrounds. These reformers, however, limited themselves to advocating widow re-marriages, opposing child marriages, cleanliness drives, etc. It needs to mention that though Ambedkar critiques Ranade's kind of social reform, he also had great regard and respect for him, especially in comparison to Gandhi and Jinnah. But Ranade, too, left out the most important social evil in the Indian society: the caste system. Ambedkar commenting on the Social Reform Party writes:

"How is it then that the Social Reform Party lost the battle? To understand this correctly it is necessary, to take note of the kind of social reform which the reformers were agitating for. In this connection, it is necessary to make a distinction between social reform in the sense of the reform of the Hindu family and social reform in the sense of the organization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. The former has relation to widow remarrying, child marriage, etc., while the latter relates to the abolition of the Caste System. The Social conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindu family. It consisted mostly of the enlightened high caste Hindus who did not feel the necessity for agitating for the abolition of caste or has not the courage to agitate for it. They felt quite naturally a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages, etc., evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them. They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society. The battle that was fought centered round the question of the reform of the family. It did not relate to the social reform in the sense of the breakup of the caste system. It was never put in issue by the reforms. That is the reason why the Social Reform Party lost."  

These reformers stopped short of fighting for elimination of caste, because it is deeply linked to their religious beliefs. In other words, Caste is embedded in Hindu religion. For Ambedkar, you cannot annihilate caste without annihilating Hindu religion. He further writes,

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57 For a sociological discussion on the nature of social reform by upper caste reformers, see Sekhar Bandopadhyay, Caste, Culture and Hegemony, Social Domination in Colonial Bengal (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), pp.144-49.
"social reforms fall into different species. There is a species of reform, which does not relate to the religious notion of people but is purely secular in character. There is also a species of reform, which relates to the religious notions of people. Of such a species of reform, there are two varieties. In one, the reform accords with the principles of the religion and merely invites people, who have departed from it, to revert to them and to follow them. The second is a reform which not only touches the religious principles but is diametrically opposed to those principles and invites people to depart from them and to discard their authority and to act contrary to those principles. Caste is the natural outcome of certain religious beliefs which have the sanction of the Shastras, which are believed to contain the command of divinely inspired sages who were endowed with a supernatural wisdom and whose commands, therefore, cannot be disobeyed without committing sin. The destruction of caste is a reform which falls under the third category. To ask people to give up caste is to ask them to go contrary to their fundamental religious notions. It is obvious that the first and second species of reform are easy. But the third is a stupendous task, well high impossible. The Hindus hold to the sacredness of the social order. Caste has divine basis. You must therefore destroy the sacredness and divinity with which caste has become invested. In the last analysis, this means you must destroy the authority of the Shastras and the Vedas."

From the above comment it clearly emerges that a genuine social reform consists of a radical rejection of Hinduism. This entails that a complete critique of the Hindu epics, the Shastras and the Vedas. Ambedkar, himself, embarked on this project. A major section of his writings consisted of a critique of Hindu texts, primarily aiming to show how Caste is integral to Hindu thought. A major part of his critique of Hindu thought we dealt in the earlier sections of this chapter.

Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi must be seen within this broad argument. Gandhi, according to Ambedkar, was someone who wanted to rejuvenate Hinduism by appealing to its lofty ideals. He picks up a major debate with Gandhi on the issue. Before that, we will look at what Ambedkar himself has to say regarding the evil effects of caste. As said earlier, it is fundamentally antithetical to Democracy. Ambedkar very succinctly summarizes the evils of caste. He writes:

"The existence of the caste system is a standing denial of the existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy.

1. It destroys willing and helpful cooperation.

2. It results in separation of society, into a privileged and a subject class. Such a separation prevents social endosmosis.

3. There is a third character of the caste system which depicts the evils thereof which cuts at the very roots of democracy. It is that one caste is bound to one occupation. Society is no doubt stably organized by nature in such a way as to useful to others; and that it is the business of society to discover these aptitudes and progressively to train them for social use. But there is in a man an indefinite plurality of capacities and activities which may characterize an individual. A society to be democratic should open a way to use all the capacities of the individual. Stratification is stunting of the growth of the individual and deliberate stunting is a deliberate denial of democracy.  

The first and second points deal with his view that Caste destroys Solidarity, which is necessary for the successful functioning of Democracy. So those who are for Democracy cannot support Caste and Class. The third point emphasizes his view that the development of personality is the highest aim of any society, as well as democracy. And caste is the very denial of this personality. As he says, stratification is stunting the growth of the individual and deliberate stunting is a deliberate denial of democracy. Thus, Caste destroys two essential ingredients of democracy that is solidarity and “development of man’s capacities.” Having said this, Ambedkar criticizes Gandhi for his defense of Caste system as an ideal version or form of “division of labor,” which is essential for the smooth functions of democracy. Let us, briefly, look at the arguments that Gandhi gives to defend his view of Caste.

Gandhi and Ambedkar on Caste

Firstly, Gandhi makes the argument that Caste in its present form is a corruption of an ideal and justifiable system called the Varna system. In this system, each individual falls within a separate caste based on professional division of labor. A potter’s son becomes a potter; a barber’s son becomes a barber; a priest’s son becomes a priest, etc. The advantage in such a system, Gandhi argues, is that it completely avoids competition for social status and other economic benefits; which has been the major problem with the modern civilization. In our modern civilization, since social roles are not given or ascribed, everyone is involved in a cut-throat competition to raise their social and economic status. This has resulted in deteriorating moral standards in society. Coming

59 Ibid.
back to the Varna system, Gandhi claims that it deteriorated into a system in which each caste instead of playing its social role efficiently starts taking pride in its profession, thereby creating a hierarchy of castes. This creates a tension between groups, which makes the institution of caste in its present form. But Gandhi argues that if we can restore the old value that goes into making of such a system we can make the system acceptable by making it an efficient organization of society. For this purpose, all we need to do is to see that no caste or group takes pride. In other words, we need to eliminate snobbery the rest will be fine with caste. For this purpose, Gandhi both argued and led small movements to eliminate this social evil of snobbery. In his own style, he led his ashram members, from upper-caste back ground, to do works that were considered polluting.

Ambedkar, coming from an anthropological and a sociological background, does not buy this argument. He argues that Caste both in its ideal form and in practice is unjust to the core. In fact, Ambedkar criticizes those who idealize the real itself. He says, “To idealize the real is nothing short of criminal.” This is precisely the charge that he has on Gandhi. Apart from that, Caste in its Varna or ideal form is unacceptable to Democracy or just society. He begins by accepting that some form of stable organization of society is needed; where each individual is placed in such a way that his “aptitude by nature is useful to others; and it is the business of society to discover these aptitudes and progressively to train them for social use.” But he starts disagreeing with Gandhi by saying that “there is in a man indefinite pluralities of capacities and activities which may characterize an individual. A society to be democratic should open a way to use all the capacities of the individual.” Gandhi seems not to realize that Caste as a system, both in its ideal and real forms, does not let the capacities of the individual be developed. (It is important to note that Gandhi’s position on merit directly contradicts his justification of Caste or Varna system. This chapter also does not claim that Gandhi is against the full development of human personality.) Hence, Ambedkar, argues that Caste, even in its ideal form stunts the growth of the individual thereby stunting the growth of Democracy.

Linked to this issue is the debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the question of the character of both Indian and modern civilization. Gandhi claims that Indian civilization is
essentially anti-materialist in nature. While modern western civilization is materialist in essence. This makes him denounce modern civilization, particularly western civilization. Because of its anti-materialist orientation Indian society developed the institution of Varna system so that every one can exist peacefully without any sense of competition from the other. On the other hand, greed being the essence of modern civilization it promotes heavy competition between groups thereby demoralizing the society, this is because there is no ascribed status as in India. Gandhi also claims that machinery is an evil that modern civilization has produced which mechanizes man and aggravates his greed for material possession. Ambedkar, on the contrary, believes that this is nothing but essentialism. Gandhi, for him, takes an essentialist view of modern and traditional cultures or civilizations. Commenting on the Indian view of life he writes,

"Is the Indian view of life a practicable view? Nietzsche in his cynical mood said of Christianity that there was only one Christian and he was crucified — implying the impracticability of the Christian view of life. This remark, if it is true of the Christian, must be true, in a larger degree, of the eastern view of life as well: for, though regionally western, yet Christianity in its origin as well in its content is essential eastern. ...Note, that of the stark contrasts between the east and the west thrown in relief by the war, the east is ever eager to give prominence in terms of self-glorification to one- that of its being free from the extreme materialism of the west leading to war and devastation. There is however no justification for setting the west in such a cruel contrast. The east is too prone to forget that materialist we all are; even the east in spite of itself." 60

What Ambedkar is saying in the above statement is that all the civilizations are materialist: both ancient and modern: eastern and western. The next point he argues is that there is nothing inherently wrong with machinery and modern civilization. As we know Gandhi popularly characterized modern civilization as "satanic." Because of its heavy reliance on speed, it needs machinery. This machinery not just robs human labor of its value but also creates a society which is unjust and inhuman. He calls machinery a snake hole, which sucks in mankind. Replying to this complaint against modern civilization and machinery, Ambedkar writes,

"The economics of Gandhism are hopelessly fallacious. The fact that machinery and modern civilization have produced many evils may be admitted. But these evils are no argument against them. For the evils are not due to machinery and modern civilization. They are due to wrong social organization which has made private property and pursuit of personal gain maters of absolute sanctity. If machinery and civilization have not

60 BAWS, Vol. 3. p. 486.
benefited everybody the remedy is not to condemn machinery and civilization but to alter
the organization of society so that benefits will not be usurped by the few but will accrue
to all." 61

Firstly, it is important to emphasize that Ambedkar acknowledges that Modern
civilization and Machinery has produced many evils. But, as we can see from his
argument above, this in itself is not reason to reject them as essentially "satanic." The
main culprit as Ambedkar does not forget to emphasize is the "social organization" of
society. He also acknowledges that "personal gain and private property" have gained
much importance in modern civilization, but that does not mean that Modern Civilization
is intrinsically bad and the remedy is, as he says, "to alter the organization of society" in
such a manner the benefits of this machinery and civilization are spread equally. Once
again, Ambedkar's strong commitment to Equality gets reflected here. The next
argument that Ambedkar gives in defense of Machinery is that it can help to eliminate
drudgery. Barring a few elites, drudgery plagues most of mankind. Ambedkar,
criticizing Gandhi's philosophy as something that tries to reduce man to an animal.

"In Gandhism the common man has no hope. It treats man as an animal and no more. It is
ture that man shares the constitution and functions of animals, nutritive, reproductive,
etc., but these are not distinctively human functions. The distinctively human function is
reason, the purpose of which is to enable man to observe, meditate, cogitate, study and
discover the beauties of the Universe and enrich his life and control the animal elements
in his life. Man thus occupies the highest place in the scheme of animate existence. If it is
ture what is the conclusion that follows? The conclusion that follows is that while the
ultimate goal of a brute's life is reached once his physical appetites are satisfied, the
ultimate goal of man's existence is not reached unless and until he has full cultivated his
mind. In short, what divided the brute form man is culture. Culture is not possible for the
brute, but it is essential for the man. That being so, the aim of human society must be to
enable every person to lead a life of culture which means that cultivation of the mind as
distinguished from the satisfaction of mere physical wants. How can this happen?" 62

He, further moves on to the argument that machinery and modern civilization aim at
developing the highest in man, which is worth quoting,

"Both for society as well as for the individual there is always a gulf between merely
living and living worthily. In order that one may live worthily one must first live. The
time and energy spent upon mere life, upon gaining of subsistence detracts from that
available for activities of a distinctively human nature and which go to make up a life of
culture. How then can a life of culture be made possible? It is not possible unless there is

62 Ibid.
a sufficient leisure. For it is only when there is leisure that a person is free to devote himself to a life of culture. The problem of all problems which human society has to face is to how to provide leisure to every individual. What does leisure mean? Leisure means the lessening of the toil and effort necessary for satisfying the physical wants of life. How can leisure be made possible? Leisure is quite impossible unless some means are found whereby the toil required for producing goods necessary to satisfy human needs is lessened. What can lessen such toil? Only when machine takes the place of man. There is no other means of producing leisure. Machinery and modern civilization are thus indispensable for emancipating man for leading the life of a brute, and for providing him with leisure and making a life of culture possible. The man who condemns machinery and modern civilization simply does not understand their purpose and the ultimate aim which human society must strive to achieve."  

The “problem of all problems”, for Ambedkar, is that society must know how to provide leisure to each and every individual. Society must not be divided into a leisure class and a working class but attempt must be made for the whole society becoming some sort of a leisure society. Because only in such a society can an individual get the free time to concentrate on activities that can develop his personality. Leisure allows man to devote himself to a life of culture.

Now the question is how this debate over modern civilization is linked to the issue of Social reform. It is linked to the issue of which direction social reform should take. Ambedkar wanted a more modern kind of society without giving up the values and insight that ancient society had to offer. This is fairly evident from his choice of converting to Buddhism. Gandhi, on the contrary wanted society to look back towards tradition and revive as much as possible which is valuable in it. It must also be said that Gandhi did not accept tradition uncritically, but was not critical enough to impress Ambedkar. With increasing disappointment with upper caste Hindus, Gandhi’s criticism of tradition slowly increased. But, as Christophe Jaffrelot says, “for Ambedkar, the Mahatma was going too slowly. He was deeply disappointed and dismayed by Gandhi’s actions.”  

Ambedkar criticized Gandhi for legitimizing many things in tradition which were unacceptable to his notions of social justice. For example, for a long time, Gandhi supported the upper caste ban on inter-caste dining and marriage. Social reform, for Ambedkar, meant fighting against such evils as social restrictions on inter-caste dining.

and marriage rather than fighting against just child marriage or promoting widow marriages. It is important to keep in mind that he is not in favor of child marriages or opposed to widow re-marriages. In fact, Ambedkar’s fight for the Hindu Code Bill shows his concern for social reform at a substantial level.

Even on the issue of village life and panchayats, Ambedkar seriously disagreed with Gandhi and his claim that Indian village life is ideal and efficient. In other words, he challenged the “little republic” thesis that Indian villages are perfect republics. Ambedkar considered Indian villages as nothing but dungeons of Caste prejudice. He reminded those who argued in this manner, that there are smaller ghettos outside the villages occupied by the untouchables who had no decent share in the so called “republican life.” Social reform, therefore, meant accepting the unjust realities of the village system; and trying to address them, rather than idealizing them. There is another debate importantly connected both to the issue of social reform and the question of minority status for Dalits and to the question of conversion to Buddhism, which is pertinent to understanding Ambedkar’s concept of Social reform.

**Dalits, Buddhism and Social Reform**

A debate existed between Gandhi and Ambedkar over questions concerning Dalits and their status as distinct minority. Linked to this issue is the question of conversion and Dalits. Let us first look at Ambedkar’s position briefly. Ambedkar argues that Dalits both sociological and historically were never a part of the Hindu society. They were excluded in all the important cultural and social practices of the Hindu society. Apart from this, they experienced extreme indignity unprecedented by any other community in the world. They are also the poorest and weakest community in Indian society. All the above factors make them a minority in Indian society. Gandhi acknowledges the fact that the most inhuman treatment has fallen upon Dalits, with the practice of untouchability. But he is not willing to accept that it qualifies them for status as a unique minority. The solution for him is to fight against the social stigma and injustice rather than segregating
them from the rest of society. This would also give the Hindu a chance to reconcile with Dalits. Ambedkar responds to this argument by saying that Gandhi’s arguments are too romantic and unrealistic. It does not take into consideration the social reality of this country. He argues a prejudice and attitude that has lasted for centuries cannot be removed as easily as Gandhi suggests. He seriously doubts whether the Hindu is willing to come together with the Dalits for a common cause. At the same time, Ambedkar is not willing to exonerate the Hindu for his lack of conscience. This comes after his bitter experience with the temple entry agitations; for he declares that he will not die a Hindu. Therefore, Ambedkar converted himself into a follower of Buddha, and urged his own followers to convert to Buddhism. Ambedkar was also critical of Gandhi and other Hindus who claimed to be in favor of Dalits; but, at the same time, claimed that Dalits needed to work hard and cleanse themselves, so that they are acceptable to Hindus. Gandhi in some of his speeches carries this implied message. Ambedkar strongly rebukes Gandhi by saying,

“some Hindus attend the meetings of the untouchables and rebuke the caste Hindus. Some will advise the untouchables from their stage saying, ‘Brothers, live clean, educate yourselves, stand on your own feet, etc.’ Really speaking, if anybody is to be blamed, it is the caste Hindus alone. It is the caste Hindus who commit this wrong. Yet none will try to gather these caste Hindus and reprimand them. To those who preach to the untouchables to continue their agitation with the help of the Hindus and by remaining in the Hindu fold, I would like to remind them of a couple of illustrations from history. I remember to have read about a conversation between an American and an English soldier during the last world war. I find this most appropriate at this juncture. For how long should the war be continued, was the subject of discussion. In reply to this question of the American, the Englishman said with great pride, “we shall fight the war till the last French man is killed.”

The Hindus social reformers do not find anything fundamentally wrong with Indian society but they are eager to show up the faults of Dalits. Mostly, they blame them as being unclean. Ambedkar writes exhaustively about this prejudice and shows that it has more to do with Hindus than with the Dalits. As stated earlier, he did not believe that this age old prejudice could be removed just by a cosmetic brand of social reform. It needed a thorough reform, which entailed replacing Hinduism with Buddhism. For this purpose, he strongly recommended that Indians adopt Buddhism, in its true spirit. He said if none did, at least he and his followers will do. Regarding this a huge outcry emerged among the

65 Ibid.
caste Hindus. Gandhi was one of them. Holding on to his thesis that Religion is a personal matter and cannot be used for political purposes, Gandhi opposed Ambedkar’s conversion. Conversion, for Gandhi, involved a true change of heart and he did not reject it fundamentally. Rather, he argued that all religions are fundamentally equal and all are limited with their partial truths. So, a person who seeks (absolute) Truth need not change to another religion but should follow his own religion truthfully. Ambedkar challenges this understanding of religion. As we noted in earlier sections, Religion, for Ambedkar, is a social force not just some matter of conscience. Its power over society is absolute. It sanctifies the social order without which the social order will not survive. In order to change the social order, therefore, we need to change the religion that sanctifies it. Dalits conversion to Buddhism is deep down to change the social order, but also a deep spiritual yearning. Ambedkar lists the objection raised by caste Hindus as following:

1. What can the untouchables gain by conversion? Conversion can make no change in the status of the untouchables.
2. All religions are true, all religions are good. To change religion is a futility.
3. The conversion of the untouchables is political in its nature.
4. The conversion of the untouchable is not genuine as it is not based on faith.
5. Conversion is worthless if you do it out of frustration alone.
6. What will happen by conversion alone?

To these objections Ambedkar himself replies thus:

“My conversion is sure. My conversion is not for any material gain. There is nothing which I cannot achieve by remaining as an untouchable. Nothing but spirituality is at the base of my conversion. The Hindu religion does not appeal to my reason. The Hindu religion does not appeal to my self-respect. However, for you, for spiritual as well as for material gains the conversion is must. Some persons mock and laugh at the idea of the conversion for material gain. Do not fall hesitant in calling such persons as fools. A religion which preaches what will happen or what will not to the soul after death may be useful for the rich. They may entertain themselves by thinking over such religions at their own leisure. It is quite natural those who enjoyed all sort of pleasures in their lifetime, may consider such religion as a real religion, which mainly tells them the pleasures they are to get after death. But what of those who by remaining in a particular religion have been reduced to the state of dust, who have been denied the basic necessities of life such a food and clothing, who have not been treated even as human beings, are these people instead of thinking of religion from material point of view, expected to look at the sky by merely closing eyes? What is the use of this rich and idle people’s Vedanta to the poor?”

In this lucid reply, Ambedkar rejects the charge that conversion is not for just material gains but is intrinsically spiritual in motive. Here, we come across one of the important arguments of Ambedkar that material gain is precedent to spiritual gain. He does not see the two as divergent modes but complementary ones. We need to look at this issue in-depth to understand Ambedkar's point. In another context, commenting on the argument put forth by Bertrand Russell on the "love of money" that characterizes modern civilization, Ambedkar writes:

"The first misconception is embodied in a statement about the 'love of money' in which [Russell] says, 'it leads men to mutilate their own nature from a mistaken theory of what constitutes success and to give admiration to enterprises which add nothing to human welfare. It promotes a dead uniformity of character and purpose, a diminution in the joy of life, and a stress and strain which leaves whole communities weary, discouraged and disillusioned.' This is a sentiment that smacks of the antique and one served as a basic philosophy of life, probably with justification. The economic life and the philosophic outlook of a society are more intimately connected than is commonly supposed and chipped of its exaggerations, the economical interpretation of history holds true. This time-honored complaint of the moralists against 'love of money' is only a part of their general complaint against the good of the world and finds its justification in the economic circumstances which gave rise to this particular belief. Bearing this in mind, it becomes easy to understand why the philosophy of sour grapes, of the have-nots, is the most human of all beliefs and why it so largely pervades our values about things which we can and things which we cannot possess in spite of our efforts to have them. When we cannot have a thing we argue that it is not worth having." 67

After stating Russell's comment on the "love of money" as something which "mutilates" the character of the individual; Ambedkar counter-argues that this is susceptible to the "philosophy of sour grapes." While discussing the positive points of Buddhism, earlier, Ambedkar points out that a religion, (Christianity, for example) should not sanctify poverty, but should know how to fight this social evil of poverty. Here, in this statement, once again, Ambedkar repeats the same argument of how we justify or valorize ourselves for not having the means which we actually need. He therefore, condemns those philosophies or religions which promote such tendencies. He further moves on to his main argument as thus:

"There is thus genuine difference between the outlooks of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' towards worldly goods as there is between the religions of the down cast and the successful. Each one in obedience of its profoundly moral nature-moral even in its immorality in that it seeks justification for everything it does – idealizes its own attitude. At a time when the whole world was living in 'pain economy' as did the ancient world

and when productivity of human labor was extremely low and when no efforts could augment its return, in short, when the whole world was living in poverty it is but natural that moralists should have preached the gospel of poverty and renunciation of worldly pleasures only because they were not to be had. The belief of a society of ‘pain economy’ is that a thing must be bad if it cannot be had just as a society of ‘pleasure economy’ addicted to “conspicuous consumption” believes that a thing must be nasty if it is cheap. Neither does the re-statement of the evils of ‘love of money’ by Mr. Russell add any philosophic weight to its historic value. The misconception arises from the fact that he criticizes the love of money without inquiring into the purpose of it. In a healthy mind, it may be urged, there is no such thing as a love of money in the abstract. Love of money is always for something and it is the purpose embodied in that ‘for something’ that will endow it with credit or cover it with shame. Having regard to this, there can be no ‘dead uniformity of character’ among the individuals, for through actuated by love of money their purposes on different occasion are likely to be different. Thus even love of money as a pursuit may result in a variety of character.68

“Love of money,” therefore is not just love for money per se, but something else too; money being the means for acquiring something, which individuals love. This love can vary among different individuals, as he says, “no dead uniformity of character” can be imposed. This love of money can in turn create a variety in the characters of individuals which is good for society. Once again, Ambedkar’s view that, the highest development of individual personality as the aim of society, gets reflected in this argument. Love of money can be replaced with material gains. When read in this light material gain can promote spiritual gain, when guided by proper spiritual goals. Only when this pursuit of material gain becomes an end in itself does it become dangerous to society and the individual.

This kind of reasoning emerges from Ambedkar’s pragmatic mode of thinking, which gets reflected in another knotty issue in philosophy: the issue of means and ends. Ambedkar, once again, disagrees with Gandhi over this issue. Gandhi argues that means are more important than the ends. In other words, ends do not justify the means. With this logic Gandhi claims ahimsa is the only possible means for any true political goal, which out which no goal is worth fighting for. To this argument, Ambedkar, replies by asking the question; if ends do not justify the means what else will. True to his pragmatism, he gives the dictum: the right means for right ends. Ambedkar argues that the relation between means and ends are more complex than what Gandhi and other assume them to

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68 Ibid.
be. John Dewey, who had a great influence on Ambedkar, was attacked as an "instrumentalist." Elizabeth Anderson, commenting on his response, writes,

"Dewey's reply to this objection goes to the heart of his moral philosophy. He argued that the character and value of means and ends was reciprocally determined. We do not first already have an end in view, with the only question how to achieve it. We lack a complete conception of our end until we have a complete grasp of the course of action that will take us there. Moreover, a judgment of the value of ends apart from the means needed to get there, and apart from the value of ends as means — as things that have consequences of their own — cannot provide the basis for rational action. Acting on such radically truncated judgments would be crazy. Our judgments of the worth of an end are inextricably tied up with our judgments of the costs of achieving it, both in terms of the means needed to get there and the unintended consequences of getting there. Practical judgment is creative; it institutes new ends-in-view. It is transformative appraisals affect our immediate valuing of things."

Ambedkar in fact refers to John Dewey while replying to the argument that non-violence or Ahimsa as means must be employed at any cost, no matter what the ends are. He writes,

"To express the language of Professor Dewey he is only against 'force of violence' but is all for 'forces as energy.' It must be remembered by those who are opposed to force that without the use of it all ideals will remain empty just as without some ideal or purpose (conscious or otherwise) all activity will be no more than mere fruitless fooling. Ends and means (=force in operation) are therefore concomitants and the common adage that the end justifies the means contains a profound truth which is perverted simply because it is misunderstood. For if the end does not justify the means what else will? The difficulty is that we do not sufficiently control the operations of the means once employed for the achieving of some end. For a means when once employed liberates many ends — a fact scarcely recognized — and not the only one we wish it to produce. However, in our fanaticism for achievement we attach the article 'the' to the end we cherish and pay no heed to the ends simultaneously liberated. Exigencies of an eminently practical life we must set an absolute value on some one end. But in doing this we must take precaution that the other ends involved are not sacrificed."

Ambedkar clearly points out that Ends and Means are concomitant to each other and endorses the common adage that "the ends justify the means." As he asks if ends do not determine the means what else will. He also adds that only a reductive understanding and application of this adage can turn out to be dangerous or fanatical. He also adds that while striving for certain Ends should not sacrifice other Ends that are linked to it. With this logic Ambedkar argues against those who speak of pacifisms or ahimsa that this

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70 BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 486.
alone should not ignore "force as energy". (Gandhi will certainly endorse such a view but certainly disagree with the view that ends can justify means. Gandhi argues that Means have a capacity to alter ends. For example: using violence as a means for a noble purpose can turn out in such a manner that the violent means can over take the goals and makes the noble goals into un-noble, violent ones). Ambedkar writes further to convince his reader that "force of violence" must be rejected but not "force as energy." He writes,

"Thus, the problem is that if we are to use force, as we must, to achieve something, we must see that while working for one end we do not destroy, in the process, other ends equally worthy of maintenance. Applying this to the present war, no justification, I think, is needed for the use of force. What needs to be justified is the destructive violence. The justification must satisfy the world that the ends given prominence to by one or other of the combatants could not be achieved otherwise than by violence, i.e., without involving the sacrifice of other ends equally valuable for the stability of the world. True enough that violence cannot always be avoided and non-resistance can be adopted only when it is a better way of resistance. But the responsibility or an intelligent control of force rests on us all. In short, the point is that to achieve anything we must use force; only we must use it constructively as energy and not destructively as violence."  

This is not to say that Ambedkar justifies violence but argues that it cannot be ruled out categorically. By making the distinction between constructive and destructive energy, Ambedkar justifies only constructive energy. From the above discussion on means and ends, violence and non-violence, we can then come to the conclusion that means and ends are deeply connected for Ambedkar. Therefore, material means by themselves do not qualify to be good or bad but only for the purpose or ends to which they are used determines whether they are good or bad. In this sense, Ambedkar does not deny material gains for converting to a religion: such as Buddhism. Ambedkar certainly believes that material resources can give access to spiritual goals but without them even spiritual goals are unreachable. Dalits, therefore, immediately, need material resources for their spiritual development. Hence, the charge that conversion to a religion should only be for spiritual gains but not material gains gets refuted with this argument of Ambedkar.

"Social reform must not just speak of some metaphysical goals of nirvana or spiritual liberation but also talk about improving the material conditions in which people live: particularly the deprived."

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71 Ibid.
There is still one more argument against conversion. It is that conversion is a sort of escapism. These critics of Ambedkar argued that there is no need to convert to another religion, since Hinduism is reforming itself to suit the demands of Dalits. They point out the many social reformers and the reforms that are already in place. Replying to these critics Ambedkar writes,

"Today, a number of Hindus are bent upon improving the Hindu religion. They claim that the untouchability and the casteism can be eradicated with the help of these people. It is, therefore, not proper to change the religion at this juncture. Whatever opinion anybody may possess about the Hindu social reformers, I personally have nausea for them. I have much experience of them and I feel disgust about these half-witted people. It is really astonishing that those people, who want to live in their caste, die in their own caste, marry in their own caste, are able to fool people with false slogans. Life saying that will break the caste and if the untouchable do not believe them, they get annoyed with them."  

His reply to these critics is that he is disgusted with the manner social reformers have left the important issue of caste in their reforms. These reformers who have come from caste backgrounds are not willing to renounce their loyalty to their respective castes and interests. To clarify what he means, he contrasts these social reformers with those Whites who fought alongside the Blacks to fight against Slavery. He writes,

"When I hear such slogans shouted by these Hindu social reformers, I recollect the efforts made by the American white people for the emancipation of the American Negroes. Years ago, the condition of the Negroes in America was just the same as those of the untouchables in India. The difference between the two was that the slavery of Negroes had the sanction of the laws while your slavery is a creation of the religion. Some American reformers were trying for the abolition of slavery of the Negroes. But can the Hindu social reformers be compared with those white social reformers in America who emancipated the Negroes? The white American reformers fought battles in war with kith and kin for the emancipation of the Negroes. They killed thousands of whites who defended slavery, and also sacrificed their own blood for this cause. When we read these incidents through the pages of history, we are compelled to say that, the social reformers in America and in India are [not] comparable. These so-called benefactors of the untouchables of India called reformers need to be asked—are you prepared to fight a civil war with your Hindu brethren like the whites in America who fought with their white brothers for the cause of the Negroes? And if not, what are these tall talks of reforms for? The greatest of the Hindus who claims to fight for the cause of the untouchables is Mahatma Gandhi. To what extent can he go? Mahatma Gandhi who pilots the non-violent agitation against the British government is not prepared even to hurt the feelings of the Hindus, the oppressors of the untouchables. He is not willing to launch a satyagraha against them. He even prepared to take legal action against the Hindus. I do not see any good of such reformers."  

73 Ibid.
The Whites were willing to fight against Whites themselves to defend the rights of Blacks but in case of Indian caste reformers they are not willing to fight against their own caste members to fight in favor of Dalits. Gandhi, who openly declared himself as a great friend of Dalits, and who is willing renounce Hinduism in case untouchability does not vanish from Hinduism, was not willing, as Ambedkar says, not willing to “hurt the feelings” of caste Hindus. There is one more important issue with which Ambedkar quarrels with Gandhi: his notion of “trusteeship.”

Gandhi held the view that a class war can be avoided if the rich become the trustees of the poor.\(^74\) He therefore, asked the rich mercantile class to start contributing money to development of underprivileged or poorer sections of the society. Keeping this in mind, he asked the rich Indians like the Tatas and Birlas to contribute to national and social development. Gandhi argues, “I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e., owners, not in their own right, but owners in the right of those whom they have exploited.”\(^75\) Gandhi, like Ambedkar, believes that capitalism is unjust and he would also wholeheartedly agree with Ambedkar that it needs to destroyed, but in non-violent ways. However, he further, argues that the way to fight capitalism is not to eliminate capitalists per se, but to make capitalist the trustees of the workers. Commenting about the non-violent methods of fighting capitalism, Gandhi writes,

“By the non-violent method, we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the retention and the increase of his capital. Nor need the worker wait for his conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either is dependent on the other. Immediately the worker realizes his strength, he is in a position to become a co-sharer with the capitalist instead of remaining his slave. If he aims at becoming the sole owner, he will most likely be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.

“Nor need I be afraid of some one else taking my place when I have non-co-operated. For I expect to influence my co-workers so as not to help the wrong-doing of my employer. This kind of education of the mass of workers is no doubt a slow process, but as it is also the surest, it is necessarily the quickest. It can be easily demonstrated in the end of the worker and as no human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption, no human being is so perfect as to warrant his destroying him whom he wrongly considers to be wholly evil.”\(^76\)

\(^74\) For the complete argument, refer to Rodrigues, n. 51, pp. 154-57.
\(^75\) M. K. Gandhi, Young India, 26 November, 1931, p. 369.
\(^76\) Ibid., p. 49.
From this comment of Gandhi, we can understand that both the Capitalist and the worker need a kind of education in which both learn to co-operate rather than fight. Through this process we can contain capitalism from becoming evil. In a similar manner, Gandhi, advises peasants to consent to Zamindars (landlords) ritual services while Zamindars treat their peasants fairly. Ambedkar quotes Gandhi thus,

"Whilst the UP Government is crossing the bounds of propriety, and intimidating people, there is little doubt that the Kisans too are not making the wise use of their newly found power. In several Zamindaries, they are said to have overstepped the mark, taken the law into their own hands and to have become impatient of anybody who would not do as they wish. They are abusing social boycott and are turning it into an instrument of violence. They are reported to have stopped the supply of water, barber and other paid services to their Zamindars in some instances and even suspended payment of rent due to them.... the Kisan movement must be confined to the improvement of status of Kisans and the betterment of the relation between the Zamindars and them. The Kisans must be advised scrupulously to abide by the terms of their agreement with the Zamindars, whether such is written or inferred from custom. Where a custom or even a written contract is bad, they may not try to uproot it by violence or without previous reference to the Zamindars. In every case there should be a friendly discussion with the Zamindars and an attempt made to arrive at a settlement." 77

Here, again, we can see that Gandhi accuses the peasants or Kisans of being violent and the misuse of boycott. He charges them of being selfish and narrow-minded. And the Zamindars are asked or rather requested to treat their peasants humanly or benevolently. There is another case in which Gandhi uses a similar logic – the demand of Dalits for entering Hindu temples.

Gandhi demands Dalits to become clean so that they are acceptable to Hindus. Even in cases where they are at the receiving end, he demands that Dalits practice non-violence and try to behave in a manner where this behavior melts the hearts of Hindus. Ambedkar provides numerous instances where, Gandhi finds faults in the behavior of Dalits and demands change in them. From Ambedkar's point of view, Gandhi totally relies on the benevolence of Hindus to eradicate the social stigma that Dalits experience. Gandhi argues that all humans are essentially good and due to some misunderstanding or ignorance they become evil. Thanks to the fact that they are essentially good we just need to appeal to their conscience and sympathy, so that they realize that they are humans.

77 Rodrigues, n. 51, p. 156.
Once they realize that they are human, evil gets automatically removed. With these kinds of explanations Gandhi can argue that peasants, laborers and Dalits just need to appeal to the conscience of their oppressors through non-violent means. Any other means, including protests, boycotts, etc., are violent in nature and this can hurt the sentiments of the former groups by making the task more difficult. Ambedkar strongly refutes such kind of tactics as conservative, which is nothing but covertly arguing for maintaining the privileges of the dominant groups. Ambedkar here makes a distinction between Justice and benevolence to explain his grievances about Gandhi’s politics. Gandhian politics has space for some kind of benevolence but not for social justice. To understand this better we need to understand the difference between the two, philosophically. David Miller brilliantly explains the difference between the two. He begins by saying that social justice does not comprise the whole of social morality (to which Gandhi appeals to) but is an aspect of it. He writes:

“That justice does not compromise the whole of morality, and that social justice does not comprise the whole of social morality, is by now fairly common place. It is also widely recognized that the main division in individual morality lies between justice and benevolence, and in social morality between social justice and ends such as humanity, welfare, and social utility. The basis of division is fundamentally the same in both cases, and it seems to me to consist in two connected features. First, justice is directly concerned with the distribution of benefits and burdens each individual receives, whereas benevolence and its social analogies are concerned with the overall amount of benefit and burden received by the population in question, and not with the distribution per se; distributive question are only indirectly relevant to benevolence, for instance insofar as the manner in which a given stock of goods is distributed may effect the total amount of satisfaction derived from it. Second, if we denote the practitioner of justice or benevolence as the agent, and the people on whom these virtues are practiced as the recipients, there is a difference in the quality of the relationship between agent and recipient in a case of justice and a case of benevolence. In a case of justice, the recipient is said to be owned something by the agent, or to have a claim to what is due to him, whereas in a case of benevolence he is not. Let me expand a little on these distinctions.”

The first thing that justice is concerned with is “distribution of benefits and burdens each individual receives.” whereas benevolence is concerned with “the overall amount of benefit and burden received by the population in question.” The next, important, distinction Miller makes is that “there is a difference in the quality of the relationship between agent and recipient in a case of justice and a case of benevolence.” Justice is

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different from benevolence in which “the recipient is said to be owned something by the agent or to have a claim to what is due to him, whereas in a case of benevolence he is not.” Emphasizing on this “owed-ness”, Miller further writes,

“The distributive character of justice may be brought out by observing that to act justly towards someone, we must begin by identifying the relevant features of his person and conduct, and when we must match our treatment of him to those features. In some cases the matching can be performed directly from knowledge of the features in question, whereas in other cases a comparison must be made between this person and other people who might also be recipients of our distribution. Thus, if the relevant feature is a right which the person has acquired (for example by entering into a contract), this already indicates what is due to the person, and the treatment which justice requires can, in the absence of competing claims, be read off directly from a knowledge of his right.”

Importantly, Miller argues that to act justly towards someone is to “begin by identifying the relevant features of his person and conduct, and when we must match out treatment of him to those features.” It must also be done by keeping other persons in mind. Miller writes, what makes justice different from benevolence and humanity, to which Gandhi appeals to, is that it is based on duty, whereas the latter are not. Justice is something that is obligatory, while the latter two are not. Acting justly means standing up for someone’s Rights. Elaborating on what Justice means, Miller writes:

“Turning now to the second contrast between justice and benevolence, wherein does the difference in the relationship between agent and recipient reside? Focusing first on the agent, should we say that justice is a duty whereas benevolence and humanity are not? This proposal seems to narrow the scope of ‘duty’ excessively, for any relief of suffering, whether or not required by justice, appears to be a duty, as we might even want to speak of duties not to maltreat animals, which clearly could not be duties of justice. A more refined proposal is made by Mill when he suggests that we should distinguish between duties of justice. The first explication that he offers of this seems unsatisfactory namely that duties of imperfect obligation are those in which though the act is obligatory, the particular occasions of performing it are left to our choice. This suggests that benevolence is always causal, whereas in fact any encounter with a person in serious need immediately activates our duty of humanity irrespective of our choice. But a second attempt of explication is closer to the mark: duties of perfect obligation are those duties in virtue of which a correlative right resides in some person or persons. We must, in other words, focus on the recipient of the duty, rather than on the agent. A duty of justice corresponds to a right in the recipient, though a right in a very loose sense which I should prefer to describe as a claim, to distinguish it from right in the narrower sense as something that arises from a rule or a transaction. In this broad sense we say that a person is entitled to just treatment, meaning that he has a claim against the agent to his just share of resources. This claim can be expressed, if the recipient chooses, in several ways. He

79 Ibid.
can demand his fair share of benefits; he can complain if he fails to receive it, he may be able to take steps against the agent to guarantee performance."\textsuperscript{80}

With justice, the recipient cannot just demand his fair share of benefits but can also complain if he does not receive it and proceed in a legitimate way to procure it. With benevolence or humanity this is not the case. Though a person is morally bound to help others when they are in need but those who need this help have no moral right to get the help. Justice, ensures that the relationship between the "agent and the recipient" is an equal one, whereas with others, the "agent acquires a moral superiority" over those who receives his favor or help. Miller puts it succinctly,

"In the case of a duty of humanity, however, although the agent may be morally bound to perform a duty, the recipient has no claim to the benefit he receives, and cannot legitimately engage in any of the claiming activities just described. He may ask the agent to benefit him, and may think badly of him if he fails to do so, but he cannot insist that his request be met. Compare, for example, asking someone for a loan with claiming a sum of money that has previously been promised. Or compare asking for a pay rise because you want to send your wife abroad for a rest cure with asking for a pay rise because your skill are not being adequately rewarded. One consequence of this distinction between justice and benevolence or humanity is that, in a case of justice, the relationship between agent and recipient remains an equal one, whereas in a case of benevolence or humanity, the agent acquires a kind of moral superiority over the recipient; the recipient has to supplicate the agent for the benefits he receives, and, if his request is granted, is afterwards indebted to his benefactor. If this interchange occurs regularly, an unequal relationship will be established which is likely to weaken the recipient's self-respect --- a fact which will turn out to be of some importance when we come to compare justice and humanity as justification of social policy."\textsuperscript{81}

Thus, we can conclude by saying that benevolence and humanity, which are certainly moral values that Gandhi promotes, are clearly distinct from Justice. Justice assumes and promotes equality between both the agents and its recipients; while benevolence and humanity reinforce unequal relations between agents and recipients of these moral acts. Coming back to the issue of trusteeship between the capitalists and labor or between landlords and their tenants, or between caste Hindus and Dalits, what Ambedkar finds objectionable in Gandhian politics is its lack of sensitivity to the value of justice. He certainly acknowledges that Gandhi promotes values of humanity and benevolence but criticizes him for ignoring justice which is an important value for Ambedkar. Hence, this chapter argues that Ambedkar's criticism of Gandhi is not based on any prejudice or

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
misunderstanding of Gandhian politics but based on a deeper understanding and sensitivity to Justice.

Ambedkar's experience as a Dalit, and the humiliations that Dalits go thorough, makes him extremely sensitive to issues related to social deprivation and human dignity. Ambedkar strongly opposed political charity or charity of any kind that reinforced inequality between humans. As it is characteristic of him, he says, charity is opposed to man's humanity towards man. For someone who is strongly committed to equality and social justice acts of benevolence and humanity are supplementary values not the core value. With such a value system he has no option but to oppose Gandhi tooth and nail.

Ambedkar criticized Gandhi for not fighting for strengthening the Democratic values of society. Gandhi instead, according to him, was promoting conservative tendencies reinforcing traditional hierarchies by interpreting them in ideal terms. Ambedkar was also sensitive to the way how these ideals get translated in realist terms in the Indian context. For Ambedkar demanding the exploiters to be the trustees of the exploited is nothing but perpetuating the domination in a much more subtle manner. For this reason, he strongly criticized Gandhi and the Congress for bringing in big capitalists like the Birlas and the Bajajs into the national movement thereby becoming instruments of the capitalist class. He said that the Indian national movement was lead by Brahmans and Banias. He accused them of thriving by depriving the lower classes.

In his book, Pakistan or Partition of India, Ambedkar describes the abhorrent conditions in which much of Muslim society lives. Ambedkar criticized Jinnah for ignoring social reform. According to Ambedkar, Jinnah committed himself to fighting for the rights of minorities (Muslims) thereby extending support to the rights of Dalits as well. But, due to his own elitist politics, he soon abandons this struggle and argues for a separate nation for Muslims. This Ambedkar argues is nothing but backstabbing minorities and social justice. More importantly, he criticizes Jinnah for ignoring the pathetic condition in which Muslim society exists. Ambedkar finds the condition of women in this society particularly alarming. The level of education of the masses is very low, and the social and
cultural conditions, extremely conservative. In this context, he particularly refers to the existence of caste system among Muslims. Ambedkar finds untouchability being practiced in some quarters of Muslim society. Caste among Muslims is nothing but a mirror image of the Hindu society. Having said this, Ambedkar comments that at least among the Hindus there emerged some social reformers who wanted to change some aspects of Hindu society like widow remarriage, etc., but in case of Muslims no such social reformers emerged. Hence, Jinnah by ignoring this important dimension of Muslim society and by promoting communal sentiment has totally compromised the true concerns of Muslim society. Ambedkar also accuses Jinnah for undermining the democratic ethos and promoting partisan interests in Indian society.

We can, therefore, conclude by saying that Ambedkar criticizes both Gandhi and Jinnah for ignoring an important aspect of Indian politics: the politics of democratizing Indian society. As we argued in the beginning of this chapter the principal aim of Ambedkar is to strengthen democratic structures of Indian society. It also said that only in a democratic society can the interests and rights of the minorities be ensured. We have also seen that this very concern moves him towards accepting Buddhism as the best religion for promoting and maintaining democracy. His criticism of Gandhi and Jinnah also followed from this very concern. The Indian Christians, too, Ambedkar remarked, never fought, as a community, for the removal of social injustice. There is one more important argument that Ambedkar puts forward for why he demands a radical social reform – society can practice tyranny more than any law or rule or government.

Ambedkar argued that no amount of constitutional protections can safeguard the minorities in a society unless the society is intrinsically democratic. With his experience of caste and untouchability it is obvious that Ambedkar realizes that society can practice tyranny against a minority unlike any draconian law or a tyrannical ruler. The inhuman treatment of Dalits in Indian society confirms the argument of Ambedkar. In Indian society, as we know, the tyranny was not imposed by any ruler or law made by a

particular regime but by a religion Hinduism. Ambedkar writes extensively on the way Indian society marginalizes and oppresses Dalits. Due to lack of space we cannot go into the details of Ambedkar’s argument, but in short, we can say that Hindu society practices tyranny against Dalits and other minorities. Ambedkar, a la Rousseau, extends his argument by saying that not just Indian society, but society in general can practice tyranny against an individual or a group. By society here, Ambedkar, means not the State and its apparatus nor law but the rest of the social and cultural aspects of a community. Therefore, he makes a distinction between law and society. Let us see, what he writes.

“Most people do not realize that society can practice tyranny and oppression against an individual in a far greater degree than a government can. The means and scope that are open to society for oppression are more extensive than those that are open to government; also they are far more effective. What punishment in the penal code is comparable in its magnitude and its severity to excommunication?”

Ambedkar finds the “means and scope that are open to a society for oppression” are far more extensive than that of any government. Of these means, he finds excommunication as the severest of all. The social boycott practiced by the Hindus, he finds, is one of the severest forms of oppression towards Dalits. This kind of inhuman practice towards minority community, on such a big scale, is unprecedented in world history. Society with its social mores can be something, which enhances a person’s freedom, and something, which can curtail his freedom. In other words, Ambedkar is not saying that society is necessarily oppressive. There can be a society which can nourish man’s personality; and a society which does this is a democratic society. Law being a part of society is dependent on those who follow it. It takes society for the law to work efficiently: if society rejects the law, the law must be changed. In contrast to law, Ambedkar finds religion to be holding a far more important place in society. He writes, “Law is secular, which anybody may break while fraternity or religion is sacred which everybody must respect.” Important here, is to observe that Ambedkar uses the terms Religion and Fraternity as synonyms. Religion has the power or necessary resources to provide the necessary respect towards law and democratic values. Buddhism, as we argued in this

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chapter, can provide the necessary “sacredness” for promoting democratic values in society. Ambedkar says.

“My philosophy has a mission. I have to do the work of conversion; for, I have to make the followers of Triguna theory to give it up and accept mine. Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set out in the preamble to the constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion (Hinduism) denies them.”

We have already discussed the way in which Hinduism denies what the Preamble of the Constitution affirms. We will now, finally, move on to discussing Ambedkar’s understanding of a democratic society and further as to how Buddhism is supposed to be a vehicle for bringing about social change. We discussed in the first chapter, that culture plays a very important role in society. It is the “way of life” of society. Put in Gramscian terms, it determines both the base and superstructure of the society. We have also said that religion plays a very significant role in determining the culture of a society. Most importantly the social roles and relations of society are determined by it. It legitimizes and sanctifies them. In order to change the social relation it is important to change or modify the religious sanction that sanctifies them. In other words, in order to change or eliminate the caste system we need to change or eliminate the religion i.e., Hinduism that sanctifies it. Further, for Ambedkar, since religion is for an individual or a society as a medium which can foster fraternity and a sense of “sacredness” of certain values; we need to replace it (Hinduism) with Buddhism – a religion, which sanctifies the democratic values of society. We have also seen how Buddhism can promote equality, liberty and fraternity. We now need to understand what democracy is and more importantly what a democratic society is and what the conditions necessary for such a society are.

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85 Ambedkar is referring to the three Gunas that Hindu philosophy talks about and based on which divides the different aspects of human personality. Hinduism further divides people themselves based on these three qualities, in a manner similar to that of Plato. Ambedkar rejects such kinds of classification among human beings as he finds that this theory is responsible for the justification of caste system.

A Democratic Society

The first argument that Ambedkar gives is that Democracy is not just a form of government; it is a way of life. And what is this way of life? From the discussion we had both in this chapter and earlier chapters, we can deduce that it is a way of life, where the values of justice (liberty, equality and fraternity) are realized in the daily life of the society. In other words, by "way of life" Ambedkar means a culture that is democratic or a democratic culture. How can we achieve such a society and what are the necessary conditions that must exist to sustain such a democratic society. Ambedkar's entire life consisted of pursuing an answer to such a question; and he, in his numerous writings, attempts to answer the question. Before that, we need to look at what he considers is the purpose of democracy to have a better understanding of his views of democratic society.

The first important point that Ambedkar makes is the form of modern democracy has changed from that of ancient democracy, as it was practiced in ancient Greece. He says,

"We speak of democracy, but democracy is not always the same. The Greeks spoke of Athenian Democracy. But as everyone knows, the Athenian Democracy is different from our modern democracy as chalk is from cheese. The Athenian Democracy consisted of people 50 percent of whom were slaves. Only 50 percent were free. The 50 percent who formed slaves had no place in the government at all. Surely our democracy is quite different from the Athenian Democracy."

The characteristic distinction between ancient and modern democracy is that in modern democracy the total population participates in the decision making process. And, it does not accept slavery as a morally acceptable condition. But, more importantly, the purpose of democracy is different in modern time, according to Ambedkar. The next thing, he draws our attention to is that "democracy not only undergoes changes in form; but also undergoes a change in purposes. He says,

"You take the ancient English Democracy. What was the purpose of that democracy? It was to curb the power of the King, to prevent the King from exercising what we now in law call his prerogative rights. The king even went to the extent of saying that although parliament may be there, as an enactment making body, 'I as a king have got the

Here, important to notice is that for Ambedkar, the "purpose is linked to form of government." As the purpose changes so does the form of government. Modern democracy has a different purpose, hence, demands a different form of democracy. What it this purpose and how is it different from the ancient one. He says, "the purpose of modern democracy is not so much to put a curb on an autocratic king but to bring about the welfare of the people." Since, the purpose of democracy in modern times is to bring about the welfare of the people; it needs a different form of government. In the second chapter, when discussing his notion of democracy, we notice that, for Ambedkar, the distinctive purpose of democracy is to avoid a permanent rule or ruler in a society. These permanent rulers can turn out to be a single autocratic king or a group of elites or a communal majority. Democracy is a setup to avoid this permanency of power because this can easily lead to dictatorship. And dictatorship is objectionable because it is unaccountable to those on whom this rule is imposed. But, this understanding of democracy is still limited to it as a form of government. He needs to answer, what kind of democratic society is required for this novel purpose of democracy to be realized. Further still, we need to answer to the question, what and how do we bring about a democracy, which cares for the welfare of the people; and, what does he mean by "welfare of the people"? Once again, let us begin by looking at what Ambedkar has to say:

"Again what do we mean by democracy? Let us have a clear understanding before I proceed to my subject. Democracy has been defined, as you know, by various people, writers of political science and philosophers, sociologists and so on. I take only two for the purpose of illustrating my point. I do not know whether any of you is acquainted with that famous book by Walter Bagehot on the English Constitution, the first modern attempt to give a clear picture of democracy. If you refer to that book of Walter Bagehot, his definition of democracy is 'government by discussion.' That is how he defines democracy. Take another illustration that is of Abraham Lincoln. In his famous Gettysburg speech which he made after conquest of the Southern States, he defined democracy as 'a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.' Well may other definitions be added in order to give an idea what people mean by democracy. Personally for myself, I define democracy in a different way, in a much more concrete way, I think. My definition of democracy is 'a form and a method of government

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88 ibid
89 Ibid.
whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed.' That is my definition of democracy. If democracy can enable those who are running it to bring about fundamental changes in the social and economic without resorting to bloodshed, then I say that there is democracy. That is the real test. It is perhaps the severest test. But when you are judging the quality of a material, you must put it to the severest test. And this is how I propose to define democracy at any rate so far as today's address is concerned. Now, unfortunately there are no dogmas laid down by any of the authors who have written about this subject of democracy which can give us any idea in concrete, as to what are the conditions precedent according to their judgement to make democracy a success. One has to read history and as a result of reading history to find out the break-down period in democracy's life in the different parts of the world where it has functioned and come to one's own conclusion."

Ambedkar adds another criterion to his understanding of democracy by saying that it is the best means for bringing radical social and economic changes in society. As we noticed in the earlier part of this chapter, Ambedkar considers democracy (form of government) a potent tool for social change. This view of his, challenges particularly the Marxists, who consider it as nothing but an instrument for maintaining the status quo of the ruling classes. It also flies against the face of those who consider that only dictatorship is capable of radical changes in the society. This chapter argues that Ambedkar's vision of democracy as a potent tool for radical social change is worth considering for political theorists. In earlier chapters, we studied how social justice as the principle political goal for Ambedkar, and how democracy can be a means for achieving social justice. Democracy can also bring about a democratic society. Now, what is a democratic society? Ambedkar replies by saying that it is a classless society.

We discussed Ambedkar's views regarding classes and class antagonisms. The existence of classes or castes is a direct denial of equality; as a result, of Justice and Democracy. Therefore, a democratic society is a classless society. The next important feature of democracy is that it's a way of life which is characterized by fraternity or, as Ambedkar says, religion. It is "primarily a mode of associated living." We also discussed concerning what this associated living means, and how it is another name for fraternity or fellow feeling. He writes. "The roots of democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society." This is dependent on another important feature in a democratic society. It is the recognition of reciprocity of
interests. The second important characteristic of a democracy is, for Ambedkar, the existence of a 'social habit on the part of individuals and groups which is ready for continuous readjustment or recognition of reciprocity of interests.'\textsuperscript{91} To strengthen his argument Ambedkar cites John Dewey thus:

"Two elements in our criterion both point to democracy. The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interests but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. The second means not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but change in social habit — its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse. And these two traits are precisely what characterize the democratically constituted society.

"Upon the educational side, we note first that the realization of a form of social life in which interests are mutually interpenetrating, and where progress, or readjustment, is an important consideration, makes a democratic community more interested than other communities have cause to be in deliberate and systematic education. The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education. But there is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of a number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer to other to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of the barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact denote a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond; they consequently put a premium on variation in this action. They secure liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests.

"The widening of the area of shared concerns, and the liberation of a greater diversity of personal capacities which characterize a democracy, are not of course the product of deliberation and conscious effort. On the contrary, they were caused by the development of modes of manufacture and commerce, travel, migration, and intercommunication which flowed from the common of science over natural energy. But after greater individualization on one hand, and a broader community of interest on the other have come into existence, it is a matter of deliberate effort to sustain and extend them. Obviously a society to which stratification into separate classes would be fatal, must see to it that intellectual opportunities are accessible to all on equable and easy terms. A society marked off into classes need be especially attentive only to the education of its ruling elements. A society which is mobile, which is full of channels of the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability. Otherwise, they will be overwhelmed by the changes in which

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
they do not perceive. The result will be a confusion in which a few will appropriate to themselves the results of the blind and externally directed activities of others."  

This "conjoint communicated experience" is what Dewey, as well as Ambedkar, believe that democracy is. Hence, any social reform must aim at bringing about a society which nourishes such kind of experience. Apart from this the comment also emphasizes on reciprocity as basic ingredient of democracy. John Rawls, who is more close to contemporary political theory, also finds it important to emphasize on reciprocity of interests for his principles of Justice, particularly the difference principle. Rawls writes, "...the difference principle... satisfies a reasonable standard of reciprocity. Indeed, it constitutes a principle of mutual benefit, for, when it is met, each representative man can accept the basic structure as designed to advance his interests. The social order can be justified to everyone, and in particular to those who are least favored." Ambedkar would wholeheartedly endorse such a view of Justice that attempts to reconcile both reciprocity and social justice. Hence, we can conclude by saying that fraternity, solidarity and reciprocity are crucial terms to understand Ambedkar's thought. Ambedkar argues that Buddhism can provide these three essential perquisites in a society for the successful working of democracy. Earlier, we discussed how Buddhism can do such a job. In this sense, conversion to Buddhism, for Ambedkar, has a vital role to play in his broad concern to bring about a democratic society, which can further social justice. In other words, it is central to Ambedkar's concern for social reform.

Ambedkar criticizes those who argue for Democracy as a form of government, but ignore the social reform required to bring about a democratic society. He has Congress politicians in mind, who vociferously demand and defend democracy but show no concern for social reform.

"Of the two views about democracy there is no doubt that the first one is very superficial if not erroneous. There cannot be democracy only in form and structure. Those who hold

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that democracy need to be no more than a mere matter of elections seem to make three
mistakes.

"One mistake they make is to believe that government is something which is quite
distinct and separate from society. As a matter of fact society. Government is one of the
many institutions which society rears and to which it assigns the function of carrying out
some of the duties which are necessary for collective social life.

"The second mistake they make lies in their failure to realize that a Government is to
reflect the ultimate purpose, aims, objects and wishes of the society and this can happen
only where the society in which the government is rooted is democratic. If society is not
democratic, government and the governed the government is bound to be the government
of the governing class.

"The third mistake they make is to forget that whether government would be good or bad
democratic or undemocratic depends to a large extent upon the instrumentalities,
particularly the civil service of which every where government has to depend for
administering the law. It all depends upon the social milieu in which civil servants are
nurtured. If the social milieu is undemocratic the government is bound to be
undemocratic." 94

Apart from these three mistakes, Ambedkar adds that due to their ignorance of what
constitutes a good government, people tend to be satisfied with just democracy as a form
of government. He writes:

"There is one other mistake which is responsible for the view that for democracy to
function it is enough to have a democratic form of government. To realize this mistake it
is necessary to have some idea of what is meant by good government.

"Good government means good laws and good administration. This is the essence of
good government. Nothing else can be. Now there cannot be good government in this
sense if those who are invested with ruling power do not seek the advantage of the whole
people or of those who are downtrodden.

"Whether the democratic form of government will result in good will depend upon the
disposition of the individuals composing society. If the mental disposition of the
individuals is democratic then the democratic form of government can be expected to
result in good government. If not, democratic form of government may easily become a
dangerous form of government." 95

We can conclude this section by saying that, for Ambedkar, a democratic form of
government is one, which seeks the advantage of the whole population and, more
importantly, the downtrodden. Having said that, Ambedkar adds that only if the mental
disposition of the individuals constituting the society have a democratic spirit there

95 Ibid.
results a good government; otherwise, it can become a dangerous to the people and society.\textsuperscript{96} Now, how does one bring about such a society? Ambedkar's reply is that this can be done by making the fundamental values of society democratic. Before we go into answering this question, we need to understand a bit more about what constitutes a democratic society. A democratic society must also be a decent society.

\textit{The Decent Society}

Until now our understanding of a democratic society included only a just society. In Ambedkar's understanding, a democratic society also includes a decent society and a civilized society. Here, the terms decent and civilized society are employed as used by Avishai Margalit in his magnum opus, \textit{the Decent Society}. Commenting on the distinction between a decent society and a civilized society, Margalit writes, "A civilized society is one whose members do not humiliate one another, while a decent society is one in which the institutions do not humiliate people."\textsuperscript{97} By institutions, Margalit means social institutions. If we take this aspect into considerations, not just bureaucratic institutions but social structures like caste can humiliate people. The practice of Untouchability, with all its features, will be the obvious example of humiliation in Indian society. Ambedkar also accuses the Hindu religion for humiliating Dalits by excluding them from it. At the same time it also creates a culture where the members of society in the form of caste humiliate each other. In such a case, Indian society, with its social institution of caste and its legitimizing religion of Hinduism, is an uncivilized society. Ambedkar writes extensively about the numerous instances of Dalit humiliation and means by which Dalits are humiliated in the daily life of Indian society. Not just Dalits, every other lower caste community is humiliated by the upper caste community. In short, Hindu society is a humiliating society. The prime mover for this kind of society is Hinduism. Therefore, there is a need to replace it with a religion which does not just promote Democracy but

\textsuperscript{96} Even Charles Taylor, argues that "free societies require a high level of mutual trust." See his "Democratic Exclusion," in Rajeev Bhargava, Amiya K. Bagchi and R. Sudarshan (eds), \textit{Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 146.


\textsuperscript{98} Ambedkar, in fact, titles one of the sections as his \textit{Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto and other Essays} as "Civilization or Felony" for characterizing Hinduism. See BAWS, Vol. 5, p. 127.
also helps in bringing about a society which is both a civilized and a decent one. Buddhism is such a religion.

Buddhism and Democracy

Ambedkar argues that Buddhism developed democratic processes early in India, only to get replaced by Brahmanic or Hindu systems. Commenting about the way these democratic institutions were in practice in Buddhist India, Ambedkar writes,

“There could be no doubt that one of the countries which could boast of a great ancient civilization was India. When inhabitants of Europe were living under almost barbaric and nomadic conditions, this country had reached the highest peak of civilization. It had parliamentary institutions when people of Europe were mere nomads.

“It looked to the laymen as if our parliamentary institutions today had borrowed all parliamentary procedure from European countries particularly from Britain, but I think anyone who refers for instance, to the pages of the Vinay-pitaka will find that there is no ground for such a view.

“some of the rules which are laid down in Mary’s parliamentary practice were known to the people of India as students of Vinay-pitaks. People seemed to think that the procedure that there could be no debate in parliament unless there was a motion and no vote could be taken unless a motion was put was something new. But I think this was a popular fallacy. In Vinay-pitaka which regulated meetings of the Bhikkus Sangh, there was the well-known rule that no debate could take place except on Neil motion.

“We today think that secret ballot is something which was invented by the British people. That again is a mistake. In Vinaya-pitaka there is a definite provision for tellers to count votes. They were called salpatraka Grahoks, Salpatraka (bark of tree) was used as ballot paper. There was also a system of secret ballot where the Bhikku himself could drop his salpatraka in the ballot box.”

As is evident from what he says, Buddhism and its followers developed many democratic or what Ambedkar calls “parliamentary institutions,” and democratic methods of secret ballot, decision making based on a democratic procedure, etc. Important to remember, here, is that Ambedkar’s citing of this is to emphasize the democratic nature of Buddhism not to revive these old institutions. He also claims that Indians had a head start in developing these institutions but soon lost them. He further writes,

"I am referring to political matters because it has been said by many historians that whatever advancement they made in other branches of life the Indian people were politically very backward. I deny that proposition."

"I admit that we somehow lost that political genius. We lost all parliamentary institutions and we became subject to the autocratic king. It marked the decline of civilization and the Indian society has been declining from time to time as all other societies have done."[100]

Next, the reason why Indian civilization was not able to progress, Ambedkar clearly replies by putting the blame on the laws of Manu. These laws gave a death knell to Buddhist practices. Since, these laws were said to be divinely ordained no one could seriously challenge them; though secular laws challenged these "ecclesiastical laws," they could not also replace them. Commenting on this he writes,

"The true function of law consists in repairing the faults of the society. Unfortunately ancient societies never dared to assume the function of repairing their own defects; consequently they decayed. One of the reasons for the decay of Hindu society is that it was governed by law which has either been made by Manu or Yajnavalkya. Law that has been laid down by these law-makers is divine law. The result was that Hindu society was never able to repair itself.

"In Europe after a course of time, jurisdiction of ecclesiastical laws challenged by secular laws with the result that today laws in the West were purely secular and the jurisdiction of the church was confined merely to the priest.

"Unfortunately many writers who carried on researches into India's past, including the great scholar Prof. Max Muller, have given currency to the notion that Indian laws have not changed at all. This is in conformity with what the orthodox pundits maintain. But from such study as I have made I can say that it is a complete fallacy.

"There is no country in the world which has undergone so many revolutions as this country. This country has been in conflict between ecclesiastical law and secular law long before the Europeans sought to challenge the authority of the pope. Kautilya's arthasastra laid foundation of secular law. In India, unfortunately ecclesiastical law triumphed over secular law. Why did it happen? In my opinion, it was one of the greatest disasters in this country. The unprogressive character of Hindu society was due to the notion that laws cannot be changed."[101]

In this comment, after talking about the way religious laws prevailed over the secular laws, Ambedkar introduces us to another of his insights about Indian society and its history. He says that India is a land of many revolutions. In another place, he argues that India is witness to many class struggles or wars. Both these arguments of his are an

[100] Ibid.
attempt to show that Indian history is a dynamic history which has been witness to many struggles but ultimately crushed by Brahmanical forces. Hence, Ambedkar advocacy and conversion to Buddhism had to be understood keeping this understanding of his. When looked at within this framework, his conversion is to continue the struggle that India has been witness to, and to take the side of Buddhist or progressive forces by standing against the counterrevolutionary Brahmanic forces.

Apart from this, Ambedkar gives another interesting historical reason for both his and his followers’ conversion to Buddhism. He argues that, historically, Dalits were followers of Buddhism but were soon excommunicated from the rest of Hindu society, after the gradual disappearance of Buddhism in India. Dalits have lost the memory of their Buddhist past. Ambedkar also attempts to provide evidences to support his claim. He gives a similar reason for choosing Nagpur as the city for the ceremony of conversion. From this point of view, his conversion means giving back Dalits their past religion and identity which they lost on the way. He writes, “… broken men were the followers of Buddhism and did not care to return to Brahmanism when it became triumphant over Buddhism as easily as others did… the broken men [Dalits] hated Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism and the Brahmins imposed untouchability upon the broken men because they would not leave Buddhism…”

However, Ambedkar’s main concern for his advocacy of Buddhism is to democratize society. He wants to democratize the society because only in a democratic society can social justice as value be realized. Further, only where there is justice, can there be peace in society. The same argument can be extrapolated and applied to the world. As Ambedkar says, “Unless there is justice, there will be no peace in the world.”

Ambedkar’s message for the whole world is that whereever there are cultures which are undemocratic to the core we need to democratize them. If it is possible to democratize these cultures, well and good, otherwise we need to replace them with a better democratic

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103 Ibid., p. 317.
culture. Buddhism, in his view, will be the best alternative compared to Christianity, Islam or any other religion; because its values are fundamentally democratic in nature. More importantly, compared to other religions its fundamental philosophic base is immanent in character rather than transcendent. It strives for justice in this world rather than a promise of justice in some heaven. It is also a peace-loving religion and fundamentally aimed at bringing peace to the world. Since Buddhism is a religion which claims to end suffering in the world, it is therefore, committed to bring justice to the world. In this sense, Ambedkar’s interpretation of Buddhism is both novel and radical; because it goes against a conventional understanding of Buddhism as a religion which speaks of salvation for individuals and only the individual. 105

Conclusion

From what we discussed in this chapter, we can come to certain conclusions regarding Ambedkar’s concern for social justice and social reform. One of the principle aims of this chapter was to show that Ambedkar’s concern for social justice, particularly for minorities like Dalits, obliges him to defend a democratic form of government. This causes him to argue that only in a democratic society can a democratic form of government can flourish. A democratic society is one in which the culture of society is democratic; where members of the society have democratic values and habits. And more importantly, there should be Equality in society, which means it should be a classless society. For this very reason, we need social reform and social movements. These social movements must be in such a manner that they are effective in reforming the society; and they ensure that what is reformed must be sustained. They should also be non-violent in nature. This takes him to religion; and, particularly, to Buddhism. Religion, for Ambedkar, plays a crucial role in the culture of the society. Moreover, it sanctifies and justifies the social relations of the society. This means that if we need to change the social relations of a society, either we need to modify or change the religious sanctions, or

105 Theravada Buddhism defends such a view that Buddha was not primarily concerned with social justice; he was more concerned with liberation of the individual and this means renouncing the world.
replace it with another religion which sanctifies another set of social relations. Since Hinduism, for Ambedkar, sanctifies caste and thereby inequality, we need to replace it with a religion which sanctifies equality, which Buddhism does. In short, Buddhism is essential for Indian society to make it democratic, and make it a safe place for minorities and their rights.

While arriving at this conclusion, we touched upon many aspects of Ambedkar’s thought concerning social reform. We began by his understanding of Hinduism; how it is unjust and immoral to the lower classes and castes. Importantly, we notice here that it takes away the sense of justice that is natural to human beings and replaces it with a perverted sense of contempt for the lower classes. As Ambedkar says, it is Nietzschean to the core. Therefore, it is unsuitable to democracy; and dangerous to society, particularly to the minorities. To repeat, it is dangerous to minorities because it sanctifies caste, and, thorough caste, communalism. To impose Democracy without making the society democratic means giving unjustified power into the hands of the majority. We have also come across Ambedkar’s assertion, both in this chapter and the earlier one that developing the personality of the individual is the highest aim of a society. This again is possible only in a democratic society for Ambedkar. From this argument of his, we can derive that for Ambedkar culture is very important, and culture, as he views it, in the Arnoldian sense of the term. Mathew Arnold’s notion of culture, as we discussed in the first chapter, talks of high culture. By high culture Arnold means a culture, which cultivates the mind of the individual; to relish the sublime in things. Ambedkar would approve such a view of culture; but, at the same time, he would completely oppose the view that only a few elite can, in reality, achieve such a state of development. In other words, every human being should be given the proper resources or means to achieve such a state. His defense of machinery takes this argument into account. He argues that machines by replacing the labor done by the laboring classes can eliminate drudgery, and give space and time to these classes to concentrate on activities that are worthwhile. Hence, one of the aspects of a democratic society is to have a culture that nourishes the personality of the people. Apart from this ideal understanding of culture, Ambedkar also, had a realist and critical understanding of culture. We noticed, Ambedkar, like Gramsci,
was well aware of the role of Culture in maintaining hegemony of the Dominant Classes or Castes of society. He argued that Caste cuts across the “base” and “superstructure” in India. Dalits were lower than the lowest of classes, thereby, making the lowest denominator caste, not class, in India. He strongly opposed the “economism” of Marxists with his own set of questions: If caste is nothing but class in India, why do upper castes object and punish Dalits if out of their own money Dalits purchase and serve Ghee at their weddings? Apart from these two aspects of culture; Ambedkar also had a view that Dalits belonged to a different tradition, historically, but had lost it; thereby defending a view of culture as historical continuity. Ambedkar had a strong historical sense as seen in his argument that he had decided upon Buddhism because it has roots in Indian civilization. In principle, he does not have any objection to cultural pluralism, provided that they are not against Democratic ethos and social justice. Ambedkar would completely agree with Miller that cultural pluralism and social justice are not necessarily antagonistic, but would prefer some kind of homogeneity which can breed “fellow feeling” one of the necessary prerequisites for social justice. In the previous chapter, we have observed that Ambedkar defends nationalism with a similar argument. He even defends the Muslims’ right to Pakistan if they choose to, based on a similar value for difference. Ambedkar’s argument for secularism as a system, where the state remains equidistant from all religions, provided they do not violate the basic rights of the people, clearly indicates that he is not averse to cultural pluralism. It also needs to be said that for Ambedkar, Secularism or separation of State and Religion, does not mean that state shall remain completely uninvolved to religion. Religion, as we discussed earlier, plays a crucial role in cultural process, therefore if we need to remove undemocratic elements in culture we, through the state, need to intervene even if it goes against some religious values. However, he would prefer a common religion so that it generates a common culture which can bring about further solidarity among the people. We also notice here that religion and solidarity are synonymous terms for Ambedkar. In simple terms, he prefers homogeneity to diversity. Compared to someone like Gandhi, he accepts diversity reluctantly. He argued that cultural difference can give rise to conflicts which are tough to manage. This is one of the arguments in his paper “Thoughts on Linguistic States.”
The next major theme in the chapter has been Ambedkar’s critique of social reform as propagated by caste Hindus. He criticizes them for their conservativeness even when talking about reform in society. Here we noticed that he criticizes people like Jinnah for ignoring social reform among Muslims entirely. Next, we moved on to his critique of Gandhi. With Gandhi, Ambedkar had fundamental differences. First, philosophically, on the question of relation between means and ends; here, we saw that Ambedkar differs with Gandhi on the argument that means are more important than ends. For him, ends are as important as the means, and their relationship is a complex one. This kind of argument, we observed, falls within the philosophy of pragmatism by which Ambedkar was deeply influenced. With this difference, we saw that on questions of violence (force), machinery, state, etc., as a means are not evil fundamentally, but it is their use or for the ends for which they are employed that becomes evil for Ambedkar. Gandhi, on the contrary, argues that these means (machinery, etc) are fundamentally, morally objectionable. On the question, whether Hinduism can be reformed to make it more equitable, both differ. Ambedkar argues that Hinduism is morally bankrupt to the core and needs to be replaced by Buddhism. Gandhi argues that Hinduism is essentially more moral than any other religion and only need certain cosmetic changes to get back to its true form. This paper argues that anthropologically and sociologically Ambedkar is more right in the assessment of Hinduism than Gandhi. Ambedkar had a more systematic reading and understanding of Hinduism than Gandhi. Gandhi attempts to give an insider or believer’s view of Hinduism (in the Kierkegaardian sense), and in the process romanticizes and glosses over the negative side of Hinduism. Moreover, he is quite optimistic and unrealistic in his interpretation of Hinduism. Ambedkar on the contrary, as one who has taken stock of the negative aspects of Hinduism, is never oblivious to its side of Hinduism.