CHAPTER V

RELIGION OF THE NEO-BUDDHISTS

As mentioned earlier, the neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra mostly came from one of the former major Hindu untouchable caste of Maharashtra—the Mahars. More particularly, the neo-Buddhists, which we have studied were Hindu Mahars before their conversion to Buddhism. The Mahars, as it seems from Englemann’s record, were traditionally great believers in Hindu religious and mystical beliefs and practices. It also appears that they took particular interest in the performance of the life-cycle ceremonies with all the details. If one sees the more recent record of the Mahar religious structure, as given by Sunanda Patwardhan, it seems that over the centuries it has remained the same. The general religious beliefs and behavioural patterns of Mahars did not change much, whether in the ‘Samskaras’ (life-cycle ceremonies) performed, pilgrimages undertaken, or the visits to the exorcists, or the worship of the objects of their special worship or of the Hindu ‘Sanskritic’ gods.

* Refer to our Chapter on the Socio-Economic Characteristics.

** like cobra, or small-pox goddess called ‘Satwai’.
However, this patterned behaviour got completely upset as the Mahars, under the leadership of Ambedkar, renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism. The conversion to Buddhism meant rejection of all aspects of Hinduism, its beliefs and practices—the performance of samskaras, fasts and festivals, worship of gods and goddesses, visits to places of pilgrimage, and acceptance of Buddhist religion, its ethical tenets and the Eightfold Path, and other Buddhist practices.

In embracing Buddhism, the basic effort was to find a new identification. When the Mahars realized that the Hindus with whom they had so far identified, were not ready to accept them as equals, they dissociated themselves from the Hindu fold and found a new identity by embracing Buddhism.

However, a new identification cannot be formed by the mere willing of it. It must grow with time and experience. In the interval of transition the group may suffer from a divided loyalty, an ambivalent attitude which characterise the marginal man. The old identification, though shaken, may continue to exist and trouble the mind. It may not be easily thrust aside. In such a situation, the group may find itself torn between the two courses of action, unable calmly to take one and leave the other.

Ambedkar, who evolved this new identity for the former Mahars, wanted to erase completely their Hindu identity.
But, he was not very sure that his caste men, mostly illiterate, would negate the former Hindu religious structure by embracing Buddhism. It was his firm belief that Buddhism disappeared from India because of the wavering attitude of the laity which worshipped along with the Buddha many other gods and goddesses set up by Brahmans to destroy Buddhism. Therefore, he did not leave the negation of the former beliefs and practices to the wishes of the people, but he institutionalized them in the form of the 'vows', which everyone embracing Buddhism had to undertake. The vows are 22 in number, of which the first eight vows deal with the negation of the old. These eight vows are as follows:

1. I shall not look upon the Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesha as gods; nor shall I worship them.

2. I shall not look upon Rama and Krishna as gods; nor shall I worship them.

3. I shall not consider any of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon as gods, like Gauri-Ganapati; nor shall I worship them.

4. I have no faith in re-incarnation (in the belief that Gods take 'avatar').

The remaining vows are positive in nature which refer to the acceptance of Buddhist religion, its ethical tenets and the Eightfold Path, etc. The new image is created by a dual process, the positive and the negative.

Hindu Gods.
5. I do not believe that Buddha is God incarnate, that he is an 'avatar' of Vishnu. On the contrary, I consider it as false propaganda.

6. I shall not perform 'Shraddha' - nor offer 'Pinda dan'.

7. I shall not adopt any practice which goes against the precepts of Boudha Dharma (Buddhist Religion).

8. No manner of rite, ceremony shall I get done at the hands of a Brahmin.

The first eight vows are directed to destroy deliberately all the Hindu images and fundamental concepts from the minds of the neo-Buddhists. These vows have given rise to an element of coercion. The present leadership of the neo-Buddhist group also always keeps itself alert to see that all the neo-Buddhists stick to the ideal. But, the deep rooted beliefs, which were nurtured for centuries together, would not be easy to thrust aside. So, during the transitional phase, divided loyalty, ambivalence of attitude, which characterize the marginal group, would be their peculiar characteristic traits.

Our study of a small group of neo-Buddhists reveals how the group has been experiencing a pull of two loyalties, the loyalty to the old order and the loyalty to the new one. Our findings show the extent of continuity with

※ 'Shraddha' and 'Pinda dan' are the forms of ancestor worship among the Hindus.
the traditional Hindu Mahar pattern, and the extent and areas of change towards Buddhistic pattern. It also indicates the stresses and strains which have followed in the wake of this momentous induced change.

Our questionnaire attempted to elicit information from the lower strata of neo-Buddhists regarding their source of guidance in religious matters; the actual observance of certain religious practices in their families like the life-cycle-ceremonies or the 'samskaras', the festivals, the fasts, worship of the gods, visits to the places of pilgrimage, undertaking of vows, etc.; and their beliefs in matters like the concept of 're-birth', and some other magico-superstitious ideas. In this whole exercise the attempt is made to find the extent of their continuity with and the discontinuity from the former Hindu-Mahar religious structure.

Their knowledge and source of Guidance in Religious Matters as Buddhists

After embracing Buddhism, neo-Buddhists were expected to discard all the Hindu religious practices and beliefs and to adopt the Buddhistic form of rituals and beliefs. For the general mass of uneducated people, to forget and

Such beliefs and practices were common among the Hindu Mahars, according to Enthoven's and Patwardhan's records.
reject the deep-rooted traditions and sentiments, is always difficult. It becomes more difficult and complicated if they do not have the accurate knowledge about what exactly they have to discard and to adopt. In this study, which we are doing after 20 years of conversion, it is necessary to know whether the Neo-Buddhists today have the exact idea about what they are expected to do and not to do. So, we attempted to know that how many of our respondents were certain, in their own minds at least, about the 'samskaras' or life-cycle-ceremonies a Buddhist is expected to perform and to discard.

Table 1. Certainty or Uncertainty of the Respondents regarding the Samskaras to be or not to be performed as Buddhist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certainty or Uncertainty</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Samskaras to be performed</th>
<th>Samskaras not to be performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certain</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table clearly shows that most of our respondents fell in the area of uncertainty.

It was necessary to know what was the source of guidance of these respondents, most of whom were quite

We started our field investigation since 1976, 20 years after conversion.
uncertain about these matters.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents according to their source of Guidance in Religious Matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of guidance</th>
<th>No. of Respondents - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Bhikku' (priest)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected Member of the community</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranpise's Book</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people of the community</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other books</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It seems from the above table that 21 out of 100 respondents had authoritative source of guidance like 'Bhikku' or books.

'Bhikku' is a Buddhist Monk. A 'Bhikku' can be the real source of guidance in religious matters. In Poona some 'Bhikkus' from foreign countries reside. One or two of such 'Bhikkus' had visited some of these localities of neo-Buddhists and had given guidance to the people on the matters of religion. Still, only 16 respondents out of 100 mentioned 'Bhikku' as their guide. This may be that they could not reach the people because of the communication problem.
The other authoritative source can be the books. We have specially made mention of Ranpise's book in our questionnaire. V.R.Ranpise has written a book in Marathi, named, 'Boudha Samskar Path' in 1962. It is a form of guide to the neo-Buddhists regarding 'samskaras' and religious festivals, etc. Some authors claim that many Buddhist Mahars are using this book as a model for their behaviour. However, in our group only 4 out of 100 respondents had read the book. We also tried to see, if any other book was used as a guide. Only one respondent had read a book written in Hindi language.

The remaining 79 per cent depended on other people or respected members of the community. Also out of those who have read the books or heard the monks on such matters, some were still uncertain or confused about the 'samskaras' to be and not to be performed because majority of the community, which does not have books or monks as their models, was following some different pattern. This may explain the fact, as seen in the earlier table, that how above 85 per cent respondents were uncertain about what to perform and to discard. This uncertainty also leads them to follow some Hindu rituals.

The 'Samskaras' Performed

An attempt was made to see that which of the Old Hindu 'Samskaras' as mentioned by Enthoven and Patwardhan, were still performed by persons in these households during the
course of last 10 years.

Table 3. 'Samskaras' Performed in the case of women during the course of last 10 years in the respondents' households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Samskaras'</th>
<th>Performed</th>
<th>Not performed</th>
<th>Total No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Dohale Jevan'</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Panchav-Sahavi'</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Barse'</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Javal'</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow remarriage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'Dohale Jevan' is a Hindu ceremony performed in the case of pregnant woman in the 7th or 9th month of her pregnancy. 'Oti Bharane' is the commonly used term for it. On this occasion she is given green sari and a coconut and five fruits which is called 'Oti Bharane'--a kind of blessings given to her. Enthovan and also Patwardhan did not mention this 'Samskara' in the case of Mahar women, but we found that 56 households out of 100 in our group performed it.

'Panchav-Sahavi' is a 'Samskara' performed on the fifth-sixth day after child birth. We found that 55 out
of 100 households still observed it. Many of those who did not observe this 'Samskar' said that in these days deliveries of babies take place in hospitals and this ceremony has lost its importance.

In the 74 households 'Barse' or naming ceremony was performed in the case of female child. Some of those who had not performed this 'samskara', said that they could not afford to do it.

'Javal' or ceremonial cutting of hair was performed in the case of female children in 58 households. Some respondents said this custom was becoming less important in case of a female child.

Widow-remarriage which is mostly tabooed in high caste orthodox Hindu family was reported in only one household. It seems from the Enthovan's and Patwardhan's reports that it is allowed and was practised by Mahars though it was supposed to be degrading. Only one case was reported in our study and people in their informal talks with the investigator talked very low about widow-remarriage in general. This is an imitation of the Brahminical aversion to widow-remarriage.

Table 4 shows that 'samskaras' like 'Barse', 'Javal' were performed in more than 80 per cent families in the case of men.

'Shraddha' or 'Pitar' (ancestral worship) was still observed in 59 per cent of the households. The observance of 'Shraddha' or 'pitar' indicates their belief in concept
Table 4. 'Samskaras' Performed in the case of men during the course of last 10 years in the respondents' households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Samskaras'</th>
<th>Performed</th>
<th>Not performed</th>
<th>Total No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Barse'</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Javsal'</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral ceremony</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Shraddha'/'Pitar'</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of 'soul'. As Buddhists, they are not expected to perform it. One of the vows which every neo-Buddhist undertakes at the time of conversion prohibits him from observing 'Shraddha'. However, our findings show that it is being still continued, though to a lesser extent.

The book Boudha Samskar Path' written by V.R.Ranpise, who is a neo-Buddhist, describes all the ceremonies that they are expected to do. However, all the 'samskaras' mentioned in this book seem to be modelled on the old Hindu Samskaras. The ceremonies named are:

1. 'Garbha Mangala' - sort of blessing given to a pregnant woman.
2. Naming Ceremony - naming of the child.
3. 'Javal' - ceremonial cutting of hair of the child.
(4) Ear-pricking ceremony - ceremonial ear-pricking of the child.

(5) Sending the child to school.

(6) Marriage.

(7) 'Antyavidhi' - Funeral ceremony and the Last Rite.

All these samskaras resemble the Hindu samskaras. We attempted to see whether the neo-Buddhists in our group performed these 'samskaras', and if so, how did they perform them - in a Hindu way or in a Buddhist way, as prescribed in the book by Hanpise, or in a mixed manner in which some of the elements of Hindu and Buddhist ways are mixed up.

Table 5 gives distribution of respondents according to the Samskaras performed in their households.

Above table shows that most of the 'samskaras' mentioned earlier except one - Funeral ceremony, were performed completely in a Hindu way or in the mixed manner—Hindu and Buddhist.

The respondents were asked to give the details about these ceremonies performed in their household so that we would be able to know the exact way how they are performed.

As seen in the table, the first four ceremonies were performed completely in Hindu way by all the respondents who had performed them. For example, performance of 'Javal' - ceremonial cutting of the first lock of hair of the child - by 'mama' (mother's brother) is the Hindu way.
Table 5. Distribution of Respondents according to the Samskaras Performed in their Households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Samskara</th>
<th>According to</th>
<th>Mixed Pattern Hindu and Buddhist</th>
<th>Not performed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hindu pattern</td>
<td>Buddhist pattern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Garbha Mangal'</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming ceremony</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Javai'</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear piercing</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending to School</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral ceremony</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Rite</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= during the course of 10 years' period.

= We have put Funeral ceremony and Last Rite in two different categories as it was found that the respondents differed in the patterns of performing them.
According to the Buddhist way as mentioned in Ranpise's book, a Buddhist monk or 'Upasak' (a layman, who can recite 'Tri Saran' and 'Pancha Sheel') should cut the first lock of child's hair in a Buddhist temple.

The respondents, who had performed these ceremonies in a mixed pattern, were very few. They had performed these ceremonies according to Hindu way and had added a few neo-Buddhist rites too. For example, while performing the naming ceremony, placing of the child in a decorated cradle, naming of the child by child's father's sister, singing of the cradle songs, etc., was done according to the Hindu manner, and in addition to this, Ambedkar's and the Buddha's photographs were worshipped and 'tri saran' and 'Pancha Sheela' were recited.

Ceremonial sending of the child to school is included in the list of the samskara which the neo-Buddhists are expected to perform, but our data show that not a single respondent had performed it. This may be due to the fact that such a ceremony does not form a part of Hindu life cycle ceremonies, and as such, these people have not used it traditionally. Therefore, it seems that, though

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\* 'Tri Saran' - Three Jewels of the Buddhists. 'Pancha Sheel' Five precepts of the Buddhists.

\[\text{Ranpise's book prescribes that a child before going to school should be taken to Buddhist temple to get the blessings of the Buddha and a monk.}\]
they are expected to perform it as Buddhists, they have not as yet accepted this ceremony which is completely new for them.

Marriage ceremony had taken place in the households of 86 respondents in our sample during the course of 10 years' period. Out of these, one respondent had performed it completely in the Hindu manner. According to our observations, this particular wedding had taken place just a week before our visit to that area. It had taken place in a nearby village. We observed that the family wanted to maintain the secrecy about the fact that the wedding was performed in Hindu way, and it had become a point of secret gossip for others in the locality. This indicates that there was coercion on them to fall in line with the Buddhist pattern and those who deviated from it wanted to maintain secrecy about the whole matter.

In 85 out of 86 households, the marriage ceremony took place mostly in a mixed manner. The main wedding ceremony was performed according to Buddhist tradition, which was radically different from that of the Hindu Mahars. With a few exceptions like tying of Mangal Sutra to a bride, tying of Mundavalya on the foreheads of

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The investigator has personally observed such weddings, as she was invited in some families on this occasion.

Mangal Sutra - a chain of black beads which every Hindu married woman of Maharashtra is supposed to wear.

Mundavalya - ornamental headgear.
the groom and bride, showering of flowers on the couple instead of traditional Akshada etc. there was no resemblance to the old Hindu Mahar wedding ceremony.

However, though this main ceremony was fundamentally different from the Hindu pattern, only one important ritual of Hindu Mahar wedding has been still retained by these neo-Buddhists. It was Haldi ceremony. All the respondents who had performed marriage ceremony in their household, reported to have performed Haldi ceremony. This consisted of applying turmeric paste to the groom and the bride. It took place in the morning of the wedding day, when many people were not invited except close relatives and friends.

It appears to us that due to the tremendous public pressure for conformity, the main wedding ceremony, when many were invited, took place according to the Buddhist pattern; and the old Haldi ceremony could be retained, as outsiders were not invited for that. This indicates the fear of public disapproval in their minds.

This fact of public pressure was indicated by one more observation. In the informal talks with the respondents, the investigator was told that if a neo-Buddhist person wanted to print wedding invitation card, it was compulsory for him to print on the card that the ceremony would take place according to Buddhist rituals. Failing this, people

* Akshada - coloured grains of rice or 'Jawar' (millet).
would not attend such a wedding. This also reveals how coercion to stick to the new religion was used.

The last 'samskara' is the funeral ceremony. It seems from the table that it was performed in 58 households and in all these households this was performed according to Buddhist rituals which were radically different from the Hindu Mahar pattern.

Actually, with this 'samskara' of 'Antyavidhi', the Buddhist 'samskaras' end, and should end. In the book by Ranpise 'Shraddha' is not mentioned. Ambedkar, in fact, had asked the neo-Buddhist to discard this fundamental Hindu samskara. Neo-Buddhist also take a vow at the time of conversion that they will not perform Shraddha and Pinda Dana. Yet there is a statement in the book 'Boudha SamskarpPath' by Ranpise saying that "On the 7th day after the death of a person, a communal rite takes place. Apart from this, monthly, six monthly and an yearly rite takes place. In the performance of this rite, according to the book the Upasak gives the Boudha Bhikku food and yellow robes, and likewise a little portion from all the food prepared is kept on a leaf outside in the 'maidan'

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* In the remaining 42 households death had not occurred during the period of 10 years.

** 6th vow in the list of vows.
(ground), for cows and birds to eat. According to one's capacity, money and gifts are given to the poor. A meal is also given to the relatives.  

This is a very significant statement. The '13th day rite' and the 'Shraddha' and the 'pitar' are of fundamental importance to Hindus. By introducing the 7th day rite and by prescribing even the yearly rite, it seems, an effort is made not to leave any vacuum in this particular respect for the Neo-Buddhists. It appears that the same rite in a different form is introduced. Instead of 13th day rite 7th day is introduced and on the anniversary of the death day the Punya Anumodhan Din, as it is now called instead of calling 'Shraddha', is prescribed. 'Bhikku' now replaces the Brahmin. Food to the birds in general is given instead of the crow as was done by the Hindu Mahars. The cow, however, is still retained. Meal is also given to the relatives. The age old custom of gift giving is continued. Instead of Hindu 'Mantras', 'Utsarga Sukta', 'Trisaran', and 'Panchasheel' are chanted.

Looking at this, it appears that even the book on the Buddhist 'Samskaras', which is supposed to be an authoritative source of guidance to these newly converted Buddhists, allows, and in fact, prescribes, the continuity with the old Hindu pattern. It does not lead to the complete break away from the stream of Hindu 'Samskaras', as originally designed by Ambedkar. It is no wonder that such guidance through the book creates more confusion in the minds of
the neo-Buddhists.

What is actually found in our group of neo-Buddhists? This last rite, as seen in the table, was performed in 58 households where the death had occurred during the course of last 10 years. Out of these 58 households, it was performed by 6 respondents that is by 10.34 per cent, according to completely Hindu tradition, by 2 respondents or 3.44 per cent according to Buddhist tradition (as mentioned by Ranpise), and by 50 respondents or 86.20 per cent according to mixed tradition.

Those who had performed it in completely Hindu manner had observed the 'Savdan' rite on the 3rd day after the death when ashes were thrown into the river. They observed pollution up to 12 days, and on the 13th day the traditional Hindu Mahar rite was performed. Bones or 'Asthi' of the dead person were taken to Alandi, and thrown into the river there.

Those who had performed it in Buddhist manner, had followed the pattern prescribed by Ranpise.

Those who had followed the middle way seem to be not sure about the way it should be done. Some of them observed the 3rd day rite 'Savdan' too. The last rite they had performed either on 7th or 11th or 13th day after the death, and till that day pollution was observed. On that day, the deceased's photograph, if they had, was worshipped along with Ambedkar's and the Buddha's photograph. 'Trisaran'

* One of the centres of pilgrimage in Maharashtra.
and 'Panchasheela' were recited. Part of the food prepared was given to cow and crow. Unless the crow touched the food, meal could not be served to the others, which is a typical Hindu pattern. Meal was given to the relatives and to 'Shraman' or 'Upasak'. None of the respondents reported giving of yellow robe to the Bhikkhu. It may be because in none of the houses the 'Bhikkhu', who wears the yellow robe, had come on this occasion. A layman who could recite the 'Panchasheel', 'Trisaran', and the 'Utsarga Sukta' had performed the job and such a person does not wear the yellow robe of a monk. So necessity might not have felt to give him the yellow robe. In some of the houses the custom of taking the bones of the deceased ('Asthi') to Alandi was also observed.

In addition to this 'Last Rite', 'yearly rite' after the death and 'Pitar' was also performed in many households. Of course some of them instead of using the word 'Shraddha', now called it 'Punya Anumodan Din'.

Thus, the picture as a whole about the life-cycle ceremonies indicated that even the book on the Buddhist 'samskaras' has kept most of the important Hindu 'samskaras' in tact. The 'samskaras' which the book prescribes, are mostly modelled on the Hindu 'samskaras', though, some of the names given to them are changed and modification is done in the form of performing them.

In actuality, as our findings show, the continuation of the old Hindu pattern was in existence in the case of
those ceremonies which were mostly the family functions, attended by a few close relatives and friends. For example, 'Garbha Mangal', Naming ceremony, 'Javal', or the 'Haldi' ceremony which was an important part of wedding, or the 13th day rite or the yearly rite after the death. The functions like the main wedding ceremony and funeral ceremony which were attended by many outsiders were performed in the Buddhist pattern. This indicates that there was fear of public disapproval in the minds of many neo-Buddhists, due to which, the ceremonies which were attended by many others were performed according to the expected Buddhist pattern. In public, they bowed down to the expectations regarding conformity to the ideal, and in private, they bowed down to the deep-rooted traditions, and sentiments. This reveals the pull of two loyalties experienced by the neo-Buddhists.

Festivals and Fasts Observed

What we found in the case of life cycle ceremonies stands true in the case of the festivals and fasts too.

Table 6 gives the festivals observed by the Neo-Buddhists.

In this table we have listed the important festivals of Hindus. The table shows that the observance of the most of the Hindu festivals was still very common among the neo-Buddhists.

Dasara, Diwali, Holi and Nag Panchami were still observed by many along with their Hindu religious rituals. The Dasara day is now important from the neo-Buddhist point of view as being the day of mass conversion (Dhamma Chakra
Table 6. Festivals observed by the Neo-Buddhists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>did not observe</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Had the religious rite</td>
<td>did not have the religious rite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navratri</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dasara</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gudhi Padwa</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narali Pournima</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganesh Chaturthi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nag Panchami</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rang Panchami</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shivaratra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holi</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sankrant</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diwali</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pravartan Din). On this day some of them worshipped Ambedkar and Buddha. However, along with this, they followed Hindu tradition of worshipping books and tools on this day. The festival of Diwali was also observed in the Hindu pattern by taking a ceremonial bath by everyone, observing of 'Bhau-beej', worshipping of Lakshmi—the goddess of

※ On this day Ambedkar, along with his millions of followers embraced Buddhism.

※※ "Bhau-beej"—sister of a man waves 'Aarati' or lamp round his face, and gets a gift from him on this occasion.
wealth, etc. Some of the respondents expressed that wor-
shipping of Lakshmi was very necessary as her blessings
were very important in a man's life. This indicates that
the sentiments behind performing such festivals were too
deep to be thrust aside. The same was found to be true in
the case of festivals like Holi and Nag Panchami. The res-
pondents reported that on the Holi day Holi (bonfire) was
lighted at night by the public in those localities, and
every house contributed some cowdung cakes for lighting the
Holi. Naga Panchami which was also an important festival
of Mahars was observed along with the worship of snake god.
Enthoven had recorded that snake was the object of special
worship of Mahars. ¹³

Narali Pournima was observed by 86 respondents. On
this day tying of Rakhee is the Hindu tradition and it was
observed by these neo-Buddhists. Sankrant was observed
along with its religious rite by 70 respondents. The women
folk in these families explained that this festival was
observed and had to be observed in the honour of married
women or 'Savashni' in the house. On this day people dis-
tributed 'Tilgul' to each other. Thirty out of our
respondents had not performed the religious rite but had
prepared the sweet dish at home and had distributed 'Tilgul'.

¹³ A decorated thread is tied on the wrist of a man by his
sister. The sentiment behind this is that the sister expects
protection from her brother by tying 'Rakhee' on his wrist.
²¹ Tilgul: Small cake balls made out of jaggery and sesame.
Ranga panchami is the festival of merry-making when young people play the game of sprinkling coloured water on each other. In 59 households it was observed. Thirty respondents or the members in the households had observed Shivaratri. A fast was observed during the day, the god Shiva's temple was visited and the Shiva was worshipped. Navaratri was observed in the 28 households with its associated practice of worshipping the goddess on the nine nights.

Gudhi Padwa is supposed to be the beginning of a new year for Hindus. In our group a sweet dish was prepared in 69 of the households on this day, but no religious rite was performed. In 31 households even a sweet dish was also not prepared on this day. Ganesh Chaturthi was not observed by any one in our group with its rituals. Only two respondents said that sweets were prepared on this occasion in their houses. It is still an important day for the Hindus.

The picture as a whole indicates that the performance of most of the important Hindu festivals was still very common in our group of Neo-Buddhists.

Table 7 gives the God's Birthday Festivals observed. Some of these are the birthday festivals of different (Brahmanic) Sanskritic gods like 'Datta', 'Hanuman', 'Rama', 'Narasinha' and 'Krishna'. Mahavir Jayanti is birth anniversary of Mahavir and is celebrated by the Jains. Buddha Jayanti is the birth anniversary of the Buddha which is
Table 7. God’s Birthday Festivals Observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Not observed</th>
<th>Total No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Datta Jayanti</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanuman Jayanti</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rama Navami</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narasimha Jayanti</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddha Jayanti</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahavira Jayanti</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gokulashtami</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambedkar Jayanti</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

celebrated by the Buddhists all over the world. Ambedkar Jayanti is the birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It is celebrated by the neo-Buddhists in India. In this we find an instance of deification of their greatest leader.

The above table shows that the observance of birthday festivals of Hindu God’s was very low in our group. In general also, Hindus at present in urban areas do not give as much importance to these gods’ festivals as they give to the festivals mentioned earlier. So may be the case of the Neo-Buddhists. Mahavir Jayanti is the festival of Jains which was not obviously observed by the Neo-Buddhists.

Buddha Jayanti and the Ambedkar Jayanti are the most important festival occasions for the neo-Buddhists. These
were observed by every respondent in this group. They worshipped the Buddha's and Ambedkar's photographs on these occasions. Sweets were prepared at home. People wore new or good clothes on these days.

In every locality of neo-Buddhists, these festivals were celebrated by the public also. Particularly Ambedkar Jayanti was celebrated in a grand manner. For example, in one of the localities called Jarn Mohamad Street in the Cantonment area the neo-Buddhists organised a five-day programme on this occasion since 1974 onwards. They had some entertainment programmes like a film, or a singing party, etc. on each day. They arranged lectures on Buddhist religion, or on welfare issues, etc. Since 1974 they had been erecting a stage every year and on the stage with the help of clay images they presented certain scenes based on the important incidents in Dr. Ambedkar's life, e.g. in 1974 the scene of the Ambedkar's conversion ceremony was presented, the scene of the Poona pact was shown in 1975 and in 1976 the scene of Ambedkar's presenting of the Constitution in the Constituent Assembly was shown. On such occasions the neo-Buddhists in the locality contributed some money to meet the expenses of the celebrations. The shopkeepers in the neighbourhood and active political leaders in the area, even though they were not Buddhists, contri-

For the political leaders who were non-neo-Buddhists, this was one of the means to keep these people pleased and to vein their votes in the future elections.
buted money to celebrate these occasions. The celebration of Ambedkar and Buddha Jayanti on large scale reveals how the loyalty to the new order was being developed.

About the festivals and the 'samskaras' our findings show that the most of the important Hindu 'samskaras' and the important Hindu festivals were still observed by these neo-Buddhists, though in some cases with slight modifications. This reveals how the pull of the old loyalty was still so strong, though attempts were also made to develop loyalty to the new ways.

We made efforts through the questionnaire to know the reason behind the continuation of performance of old Hindu 'samskaras' and the festivals, and below we have given its relationship to the level of education of the head of the household (see Table 8 on next page).

The table as a whole indicates certain points. These are:

(1) The largest category observed the old Hindu 'samskaras' and festivals because of their own belief in the traditions.

(2) Among such people the illiterates and the semi-literate are more, that is 71.42 per cent. This may be due to the fact that the education did not play any effective role in their cases to bring about any change in their traditional beliefs and sentiments.

(3) In the category of those who had passed the S.S.C. and graduation, it shows that 5 out of 8 of them
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for performing the old Samskaras and festivals</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Total No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illiterate and semi-literate</td>
<td>From Primary completed to SSC passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the satisfaction of the old people and children in the house</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For one's belief in the traditions</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other neo-Buddhists perform, so we perform</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
observed the traditional 'samskaras' or festivals to satisfy the old people and the children in the household; two out of 8 of them for their own belief in the tradition; and 1 out of 8 said that just because others performed them they also performed. Thus, it seems that the most of them observed the 'samskaras' and festivals to satisfy the old and the children. So it is likely that after some years, when the old ones would disappear and the children would mature and get education, the performance of such 'samskaras' and the festivals will be less among such educated people. However, at the same time one cannot ignore the fact that unless and until the proportion of educated people in the general population of neo-Buddhists increases, the observance of traditional religious practices would not decrease.

Fasts: Fasting is practised by Hindus as a means of accumulating religious merit or 'punya'. The fasts are observed in honour of certain deities. The fasts very commonly observed by Hindus are: 'Chaturthi', the fast which is in honour of Ganesh', is observed on the fourth lunar day once a month. 'Ekadashi', which is the eleventh day in each fortnight in every lunar month is the fast kept in honour of Vishnu'. But in Maharashtra, all the followers of Varkari' cult, the devotees of the god 'Vithoba', and the people in general too, observe this fast in honour of 'Vithoba'; and though the fast is not kept on every eleventh

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\* Vithoba is regarded as a form of 'Krishna' and 'Krishna' is supposed to be an incarnation of 'Vishnu' - Monier Williams, op.cit., p. 263.
day in each fortnight, the 'Ekadashi' in the month of 'Ashadh' (June-July) and 'Kartik' (October-November) are more commonly observed. The another fast commonly observed is 'Shivaratra' in the honour of the god 'Shiva'. This is held on the 14th of the dark half of the month 'Magha' (about the middle or end of February). Then, the fasts are observed on the different days in a week in honour of certain deities. Monday for the 'Shiva', Tuesday and Friday for 'Devi' or a goddess, Thursday in honour of 'Datta'\textsuperscript{\textsection} or also a saint in Maharashtra called 'Sai Baba', Saturday in honour of 'Hanuman' and 'Shani'\textsuperscript{\textdoublestroke} (Saturn), etc.

**Table 9. Observation of the Fasts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fast</th>
<th>No. of Respondents who observed Fast</th>
<th>Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaturthi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekadashi</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shivaratra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Fast</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that the fasts like Ekadashi, Shiva-

\textsection Datta or Dattatreya is an instance of deification of a great man. He is supposed to have lived about the tenth century of our era and now is worshipped as an incarnation of all the three Hindu Gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh or Shiva - Monier Williams, p. 267.

\textdoublestroke Shani or Saturn - Hindus worship planets and Saturn or Shani is one of the nine planets, Nava Graha.
ratra were still observed by nearly 1/3rd to half of the respondents and the observance of the weekly fasts was very common among these people.

Table 10. Reasons for the Observation of the Fasts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>No. of respondents reporting the reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In honour of Hindu Gods, or for the belief in Hindu religious ideas</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In honour of Ambedkar or Buddha</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some fasts in honour of Hindu gods and some in honour of Buddha/Ambedkar</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable as did not observe any fast</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Respondents</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 shows that more than half of the respondents observed the fasts as they believed in Hindu ideas relating to fasts. Eight respondents out of 100 observed fasts in honour of Buddha or Ambedkar. They observed Thursday as the death day of Ambedkar, on 'Pournima' or full moon day some of them observed fast in honour of the Buddha. Thirty respondents were such who observed certain fasts like 'Ekadashi', 'Shivaratra', etc. and weekly fasts in honour of Hindu gods, and also kept fasts on certain days in honour of Ambedkar or Buddha.
This data indicate that observation of fasts with the belief in Hindu ideas was still common, but at the same time observation of fast in honour of the Buddha or Ambedkar was an emerging trend and some of them (in our group 30 out of 100) could not reject the old but at the same time had accepted the new also. As one respondent expressed that "I do worship the Buddha and keep a fast on 'Pournima' (full moon day) for him, but I also fast on Friday and Ekadashi, as it gives me peace of mind."

**Observation of 'Graham' or eclipse**

Hindus believe the period of eclipse to be inauspicious. Particularly in the case of a pregnant woman it is thought that if she comes out of the house or works during the period of eclipse, her child develops deformity. Among our neo-Buddhist respondents it was found that 71 out of the 100 still believed in the Hindu concept of 'graham', and it was observed more particularly in the case of a pregnant woman.

**Worship of Gods and Goddesses**

As mentioned earlier, the Mahars worshipped many Hindu Sanskritic as well as folk deities. After their conversion to Buddhism, they were expected to renounce the worship of all the Hindu gods and goddesses. In fact, as Buddhists, they should negate the belief in God, as Buddhism does not believe in such a concept. The earliest Buddhist thought was consistently agnostic, and it had omitted from its
world scheme the superhuman and the Divine. For Ambedkar too, one of the important criteria for choosing Buddhism as a faith to be embraced was, that Buddhism decries the existence of god and it is based on reason. Therefore, he expected the neo-Buddhists to renounce their faith in god, and, in particular, discard all the Hindu gods and goddesses. In this study we made an attempt to find out to what extent this expectation was satisfied by our neo-Buddhist respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Only Hindu gods</th>
<th>Only Buddha's Photo</th>
<th>Hindu gods and Buddha's Photo</th>
<th>Photo of Buddha and Muslim Mosque</th>
<th>Not any</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that the largest concentration that is 68 per cent is in the group of those who had the images or photographs of both, the Hindu gods and of the Buddha. This again indicates that their's was a divided faith.

Seven out of 100 respondents had the image or photograph of the Buddha and of no other Hindu gods or goddesses. It seems that these people had discarded the old. But this cannot be called a complete acceptance of the new as they still believed in god.
Twenty respondents had only Hindu gods or goddesses and they had no photo of the Buddha. These people are still stuck to the old. Moreover, if this group and the group of those having images of Hindu gods and of the Buddha joined together, it seems that the continuation of the old was still found in majority of the households.

In our group; as the table shows a very few respondents had a photo of the Buddha as well as a photo of Muslim Mosque in their houses. We were told that these respondents had discarded Hindu Gods, but when certain mishaps took place in their families, they were advised by some people that they should start worshipping a particular Muslim Mosque. Accordingly, these people had become devotees of that Mosque.

It may be that man looks up to certain god or unknown supernatural power for moral support, particularly in the periods of troubles, with blind faith. After embracing Buddhism these people were asked to discard all the former Hindu, beliefs and practices. But in the absence of any substitute for the earlier beliefs a few of them might have resorted to Muslim Mosque for faith.

In our group, 2 respondents said that they did not have image or photos of any god—either Hindu or Buddha.

- There was a photo of Muslim Mosque, and some sentences from 'Kuran'—the religious book of Muslims—were printed below the picture of the Mosque.
These respondents expressed in a tone of disappointment that "what did 'Rama' and 'Krishna' gave us? Nothing. What is Buddha going to give us either? Nothing. So, why should we keep and worship the photos of such gods?" Such expressions indicate their frustration in life.

Those who had the images or photos of Hindu gods had placed the photos or the images in such a place or in such a manner that they would not become visible immediately after entering the house. Particularly, the images were installed in a manner as if they were hidden. This reveals the fear in the mind of these people about the social disapproval in such matters.

As some respondents did not have the photos of Hindu gods, it was necessary to know that whether these small number of respondents had the Hindu gods in the past, and if they had what did they do with them.

It was found that out of these 12 respondents 8 had left the photos or images of gods at the ancestors' house in the native place when they migrated to Poona. One respondent said that his former house got completely destructed and the images and the photos were lost, and three respondents reported that the images and photos were thrown out in the river as they were instructed to do so by the leader after embracing Buddhism.

The leaders of the neo-Buddhist community had given instructions to the masses that they should throw out the
photos of gods into rivers or streams or sell them out. However, in our group we found that a majority of the old respondents had still retained the gods and those 12 respondents who did not have the images or photos of the Hindu gods, only 3 respondents reported that the gods were thrown out in a river. This indicates that though there was tremendous coercion and policing still people maintained their own choice. As one respondent expressed that, "these leaders tell us that the gods should be thrown away in river. Is it possible? The gods which we have worshipped all these years, can we throw them away?" Such expressions reveal that the old identification, though shaken, still had continued to exist and trouble the mind.

**Actual worship of these gods**

It was thought that some people might have retained the images or photos of the Hindu gods but might not be actually worshipping the gods. So an attempt was made to find out how many respondents actually worshipped the gods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12: Distribution of the respondents by the actual worship of the gods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only Hindu gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the figures in this table are compared with the figures in the previous table it seems that:
(1) Some of the respondents who had the images or photos of the Hindu gods did not actually worship them. Our discussion with them reveals that the thought of throwing out the images was rather unbearable to them; therefore they had retained them.

(2) On the other hand, there were a few respondents who did not have the photo of the Buddha, but they worshipped only the Buddha. This reveals some change.

(3) Majority of the respondents had the images or photos of both Hindu gods and of the Buddha and they worshipped both of them.

(4) A few respondents were the devotees of the Muslim Mosque and also worshipped the Buddha.

An attempt was made to examine whether there was any relationship between the level of education of the respondents and their worshipping of particular god and goddesses. It is given in Table 13.

Table 13. Level of Education of the Respondents and the Worship of the gods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Only Hindu Gods</th>
<th>Only the Buddha</th>
<th>Hindu gods and Buddha</th>
<th>Buddha and Muslim Mosque</th>
<th>Not any</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate and semi-literate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed primary to SSC pass</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above SSC and graduation, etc.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It appears from the table that those who worshipped only Hindu gods among them the illiterates and semi-
literates were proportionately more, the respondents from
the middle educational level were comparatively less, and
none of those who had studied above S.S.C. belonged to
this group. This indicates that the educated responded
positively to the changes. Secondly, retaining of the old
is also found in one more group of respondents, who wor-
shed Hindu as well as Buddhist gods. In this group,
again, the concentration is more in the group of illiterates
and semi-literates. This again indicates that rejection
of the old had not taken place in their case, which may be
due to their lack of education.

One more point can be observed that the worship of only
Buddha as a god was found to be proportionately more among
those who had studied above S.S.C., it was comparatively
less in the middle educational level and it was too less
among the illiterates. This indicates that, as the education
level went up, the complete rejection of the old and accept-
ance of the new increased.

Thus, the table as a whole shows that there might be
some positive correlation between the education of the
respondents and the acceptance of the new and rejection of
the old.

* Again, this is not a complete acceptance of the new
as the faith in god is still retained.
The Hindu deities worshipped by the Neo-Buddhists

It was found in our group that the Hindu deities worshipped by our neo-Buddhist respondents included 'Rama-Sita', 'Mahadeva' or 'Shiva', 'Datta', 'Krishna' (Vishnu), 'Lakshmi' which are Brahmanic Gods and some of the folk gods like 'Khandoba', 'Mariam', or 'Laxmia', 'Satwai', 'Mhasoba', 'Vithoba', 'Bharioba', etc.

The Family Deity

The names of the family-deities of 'Mahars', are reported by Entovenh. Our questionnaire tried to elicit the names of the family deities of our respondents. The question was included in the questionnaire with the idea that the respondents, as they are Buddhists, might say that now they have no family deity, or the Buddha is their family deity. However, the investigator found that except 7 respondents all the others out of 100 answered this question very promptly. Out of the 7 respondents 4 had accepted the Buddha as their family deity and 3 said, being Buddhists they had no family deity now.

This indicates two things: (1) The concept of the 'family deity' was still in existence. (2) Referring to 'Buddha' as the family deity at least shows some change, as it indicates the rejection of the former family deities. However, in our group the number of such persons, who gave this response, was very small. Thus it seems that there was not much change with regard to the concept of 'family deities'.
Among those who mentioned the names of the family deities, there were many who mentioned the names 'Khandoba' and 'Marai' or 'Laxmi'. 'Khandoba' was the family deity of 44 respondents, and 'Marai' or 'Laxmi' was of 26 respondents. The other names which were mentioned were—'Kalubai', 'Yellamma', 'Satwai', 'Vetal-Munja', 'Mhasoba', 'Bhairoba', 'Bhavani', 'Ambika', 'Jyotiba', 'Kanhoba', 'Malabai', 'Janai'. All these are the folk gods and goddesses of rural India and also of non-Brahminic castes.

Babasaheb Ambedkar as a god

In our group 91 respondents had the photograph of Babasaheb Ambedkar, and all of them did worship Ambedkar as god. The remaining 9 respondents said that they did not have the photograph in their house but they might purchase one in the near future, and they also worshipped Ambedkar. In all those households which had the photograph it was hanged in such a way that it should become very visible and had the place of pride in the house. It was garlanded on important occasions like festivals or performance of 'samskaras'. On such occasions prayers were said in front of the photo. Some of the respondents who were not certain about the new ways of performing the life cycle ceremonies or the festivals expressed, they worshipped Ambedkar and Buddha and performed the ceremony according to the former pattern. As one respondent said, "We ourselves do not know the new Buddhistic ritual. So we keep Buddha's photo and
alonside with it Babasaheb’s photo and say ‘Prarthana’ (prayers) on every occasion.”

This seems to be a clear instance of deification of their leader—Babasaheb Ambedkar.

**Visits to Temples**

**Table 14.** Distribution of Respondents by their visits to Temples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temple</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu and Buddhist</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not any</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is seen from the table that more than half of the respondents visited only Hindu temples. They visited these temples, though not regularly in many cases, still on certain important occasions or at the time of Hindu festivals and fasts.

The respondents who visited only the Buddhist temple, were only 4 per cent, and those who visited both, Hindu and Buddhist temples, were 21 per cent. Of course, at this point the fact cannot be ignored that Buddhist temples were not in existence in all the localities except one. That may be one of the reasons of not visiting Buddhist temple by many. However, it was observed by the investigator that no trace of any habit was found among the residents
of the locality which had the Buddhist temple. The respondents in this locality were not very particular in visiting the Buddhist temple, even on certain important occasions in the family, or at the time of festivals, etc. In fact, some of the residents in this area were visiting the Hindu temples.

Visit to the Places of Pilgrimage

Among pious Hindus visit to the places of pilgrimage is very common. The Mahars, as recorded by Enthoven, made pilgrimages to the holy places of the Hindus, specially to Pandharpur, Alandi, Jejuri and Tuljapur.18

Table 15. Respondents visiting the places of pilgrimage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visit the places of pilgrimage</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit the places</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not visit</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to go but could not go so far</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that the places of pilgrimage were still visited by a quarter of the population and 5 respondents aspired to go but could not go so far. This indicates that even in this matter there was no complete discontinuity from the former Hindu pattern though such visits to pilgrimages were becoming comparatively rare.
Listening to 'Bhajan', 'Kirtan', etc.

'Bhajan' are the songs sung in praise of some Hindu gods. 'Kirtan' are the stories or episodes from the Hindu mythological literature told in a peculiar poetic manner. These are the vehicles which carry the Hindu ideals to the illiterate Hindus. Enthoven has recorded that the pious Mahars sing in praise of some Hindu gods, especially of Rama or of Vithoba of Pandharpur.19

In our group only 19 respondents reported that they listened to 'Bhajans' or 'Kirtans' some times. The remaining 81 said that they did not do so. Some of them even said that they slept off if Bhajan was going on anywhere nearby. This indicates that this practice had become rare among our respondents.

Reading of literature on Hindu saints like Tukaram, Chokhamela, Kabir, etc.

As mentioned in the chapter on the historical background these were the saints who, in their own way, had made some contribution in the liberation movement of the untouchables. In the time of saints like Namdev, Tukaram, etc., the Mahars were admitted to the 'Varkari' cult of the 'Bhakti Marg'.20 Chokhamela was the saint who belonged to the Mahar caste, and his shrine is at Pandharpur. In the past, many Mahars were the followers of Kabir, Giri, Eknath and Chokhamela.21 Mahars gave reverence to all such saints. There is literature
written by these saints as well as written on these saints. So an attempt was made to see whether the neo-Buddhists in our group read such literature.

In our group only a few respondents reported that they read such literature and a majority of respondents showed a kind of indifference in this matter. Some explained that they had no liking for such thing, some said they had no time for it. In general, in our group, respondents did not have interest in this.

Undertaking of Vow or 'Navas'

The vows to gods are undertaken with the belief in the supernatural power of god to do something extraordinarily good for the person as well as to harm the person or to do certain miracles. The devotees take a vow in the name of certain god, that if their wishes would be fulfilled by the god by giving them the desired thing or by removing certain troubles in their life, they would do certain sacrifices before the god or observe fast in the name of that god as promised by them. It is also believed that if after undertaking the vow person gets the desired thing, and then, if the person does not fulfil his vow by sacrificing the promised thing to god, the person would be harmed by the god.

Undertaking of vow to a deity was common among the Mahars just as it was commonly observed among the religious minded Hindus.

In our group of neo-Buddhists it was found that vows
were undertaken during the course of last few years by some respondents in times of troubles or to get the desired things.

Table 16. Distribution of Respondents by the Reason of undertaking Vows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To improve economic conditions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During sickness</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get rid of domestic difficulties</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a child or to get a son</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To win the case in the court</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 59 Respondents did not take any vow.

It seems from the table that even after embracing Buddhism a good many of our respondents did undertake vows for the various reasons mentioned in the table and continued to believe in and to practise this traditional custom.

Fear of God

As mentioned earlier, Buddhism does not believe in God. Therefore, there should not be any fear of god in the minds of neo-Buddhists. However, many religious practices

\[\text{which means after embracing Buddhism.}\]

\[\text{Domestic difficulties (other than the economic ones) were the quarrels in the family.}\]
like observance of 'Samskaras', festivals, fasts, worship of gods, visiting temples and places of pilgrimages, singing 'bhajans' and undertaking of vows to gods and fulfilling the promises given to god, etc. appear to be the direct or indirect outcomes of the fear of god in the mind of the people. Those who did not practice all them may be free of such fear. But when a person experiences certain serious difficulties or troubles in life, sometimes continuously one after another without any end to them, it is likely that at such points in life a fear of god or the belief in god's supernatural powers may get developed in a person's mind.

The neo-Buddhists are expected to get rid of such fears, and in normal course of life some of them have actually got rid of such fears as seen in the earlier tables. So an attempt was made to see that, how many developed the feeling in times of trouble that, the trouble was caused by the god as god was angry with them, or as they had committed something wrong against the god. Our findings show that 77 per cent developed such feeling and 23 per cent respondents did not.

Those respondents, who reported that they developed such feeling were asked to mention the action they took after developing such feeling. The responses given are seen in Table 17.

It seems from the table that, in times of troubles,
Table 17. The Action taken after Development of Fear of God in Times of Trouble

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The action taken</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worshipped God (Hindu)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took vow or decided to observe fast in the name of God</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resorted to Black Magic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worshipped the Buddha</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not do anything but had the feeling</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During sickness went to doctor as well as worshipped God</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worshipped Muslim Mosque</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 23 Respondents did not develop such feeling.

The fear of god was developed and the respondents resorted to the traditional courses of action. Almost half of the respondents worshipped Hindu gods. Nearly quarter of them took vows or decided to observe fast in the name of a particular god. A few resorted to black magic. Some respondents reported that they developed the fear of god during troubles, but did not take any action to please the god. A few respondents reported that during sickness they went to a doctor but at the same time worshipped god. This indicates that complete dependence either on doctor, that is
on medical science, or on god's power was not found in such cases. This may be due to their position in the transitional phase in the process of change.

A few respondents or 2.59 per cent worshipped the Buddha in times of troubles. This is quite significant as it reveals the peculiar mixture of the traditional and the new elements. Their belief in the power of the god seems to be continued but the god which was worshipped at such times was not the former Hindu god but was the Buddha.

Some respondents resorted to the worship of Muslim Mosque in times of difficulties.

Such situations and the responses indicate that the belief in the power of God, and the fear of god as its consequence, were deeply rooted in their minds such beliefs could not be brushed aside by a decision made by the conscious mind. Though some of the responses mentioned in the above table were given by a few respondents (2 or 3 or 5 respondents in some cases) their significance is not lessened, as they reveal the working of the mind of a person while experiencing troubles.

These respondents, who did not feel that the troubles were caused by the god, were asked to give the reason of the troubles, according to their opinion. Their responses are seen in Table 18.

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This is mentioned earlier also in this chapter while giving details about the gods worshipped by the respondents.
Table 18. Distribution of Respondents by their opinion regarding Reason of Troubles, if not God's wrath

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason of trouble</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural or Physical Reason</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are the fruits of own 'Karma'</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the previous birth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of our own faults</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot say, but not caused by God</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 77 respondents had given the cause of trouble as the anger of god, as mentioned earlier.

The table shows that even in this group a few respondents believed that their own faulty actions in the previous birth were responsible for the troubles in this life. This response, though does not indicate any fear of god in their minds, still reveals the working of their minds which were conditioned by traditional way of thinking.

Six respondents did not give any particular explanation but were firm that God is not the cause.

A few respondents said that the troubles were caused by their own faults, e.g., one of them said that his son was seriously ill which was due to their own fault like negligence of health, not taking advice of the doctor and medicine in time. For a few of the respondents natural reasons were
the causes of troubles e.g. sickness was caused by physical reasons, or floods in 1961 in Poona city were caused by natural reasons, etc.

These responses, except the one, indicate that these persons had discarded the traditional belief in this matter and had accepted the change, the modern concept.

Belief in the Concepts of the 'Karma' and 'Re-birth'

Hindus believe that after death of a man his body perishes but not his soul or 'Atman. There is a cycle of births, and after the death of a man his soul transmigrated into another new body and, thus, the person is reborn. Further, the present state of life is the result of the bad or good 'Karma' or deeds or actions in the previous births; and the good or bad life situation in the future births depends upon the good or bad 'Karma' in the present birth. These are the Hindu religious doctrines of 'Karma' and 'Re-birth'.

What Buddhism has to say about the 'death and after'? In 'Pitakas' one finds passages which appear to suggest that the Buddha admitted the transmigration of an actual entity from one birth to another. But an authority on Buddhism like Lakshmi Narasu denies this. He observes that such statements occur in the popular discourses, the so-called Jataka stories, where the Buddha was speaking in a manner suited to the capacity of the ordinary man. His aim was to teach the common people in a simple way the truth of
the relation between action and its fruit. But he never wanted to imply, that one and the same person is reborn. Lakshmi Narasu observes, that according to Buddhism person that dies, continues to live in his deeds. Wherever a man's words, thoughts, deeds have impressed themselves in other minds, there he has reincarnated. In Buddhism there is a doctrine of 'Karma' or deeds, but this 'Buddhistic doctrine of Karma differs totally from the Brahminic theory of transmigration'.

Thus, according to Buddhism there is no 're-birth' and 'Karma' as conceived by Hindus. There is neither transmigration of 'Karma' or its fruits in the next birth.

Moreover, Ambedkar also had been always voicing against such concepts as 'Karma' and 're-birth', which Brahminism had used as weapons to oppress the so-called untouchables and to make them accept all the miseries without any grumblings.

In this context our respondents' views regarding 're-birth' and 'Karma' become more interesting and useful. In order to elicit information on this point, the respondents were asked four questions.

Through the first question an attempt was made to know whether or not they believed in the idea that the 'karmas' in the present birth have any effect in after life. To this question 64 per cent respondents gave affirmative response while 33 per cent gave negative response and 3 per cent respondents did not answer this question, and said, they
did not believe in the concept of 're-birth'.

The next three questions were asked to confirm their views about the concepts of 'Karma' and 're-birth', and at the same time, to know their aspiration to belong to particular group in the next birth. Through the second question it was intended to know whether or not they had any aspiration to belong to high caste Hindu group in the next birth. To this, 47 respondents out of 100 gave positive response, while 37 respondents gave negative response and 16 respondents completely refused to answer this. These persons who refused to answer did not say that they had no belief in rebirth, but they did not want to answer this question.

The next question was framed to know whether or not they believed that their good 'karmas' in the present birth would fetch them higher status in the next life. Our findings show that 79 respondents out of 100 believed so, and 18 did not believe, and 3 did not answer as they had no faith in the concepts of 'Karma', and 'Re-birth'.

If the responses to this question are compared with the earlier one, it appears that the number of persons thinking of being born as higher caste persons in the next birth was less than the number of those aspiring to become higher status person in the next life. This may be due to their hatred for the higher caste persons, at the same time, their hope that in the present world a person can get higher status without being a high caste Hindu.
An attempt was also made to know to which religious group they aspired to belong in the next birth and what is the reason for it.

**Table 19.** The Distribution of Respondents who aspired to be born in different groups in the next birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The group</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Caste Hindu</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Caste Hindu or Buddhist</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any group</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 3 Respondents had no faith in the concept of 're-birth'.

The table shows that many aspired to be reborn as Buddhists, some as high caste Hindu, and some did not have any particular choice.

The reasons mentioned by the respondents for their aspiration to be re-born in particular group are given in Table 20.

It appears from the table, that to get high status was the reason put forth by majority of the respondents irrespective of the fact that whether they aspired to be reborn as high caste Hindu or as Buddhist or as any other. This indicates that getting high status at least in the next
Table 20. Reasons Given by the Respondents for their Aspiration to be reborn in Particular Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Reasons</th>
<th>High Caste Hindu</th>
<th>Buddhist</th>
<th>High-Caste Hindu or Buddhist (any of the two)</th>
<th>Any group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To get high status</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This religion is given by Ambedkar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That is the best religion</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next birth is decided by God and it depends on accumulation of merit (Punya)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Three respondents had no faith in the concept of re-birth.

birth was the main idea in the minds of the majority. They wished to get high status at least in the future birth as it is the most valued aspect of life for them of which they are deprived in the present life.

One more significant point which can be noted in the above table is the response of 13 respondents who said that the next birth is decided by god. These respondents expressed that the soul of every human being has to pass through the 36 crores of births and the future births, which
can be of animal or of insect, etc., are not decided by man's choice but by the accumulation of merit or demerit ('Punya' or 'Pap') in the previous births. This indicates that these respondents had belief not only in the mere concept that a person is reborn, but also in the details of this Hindu concept.

The responses to all these four queries which were made to examine their belief in the concepts of 'Karma' and 'Rebirth' indicate certain important points:

(1) It appears that the majority of the respondents believed in these concepts.

(2) Some respondents** believed in all the details of the concept of re-birth.

(3) It seems that many respondents wished to get high status at least in the next birth by being re-born in particular groups.

On the whole, the findings reveal, that though in Buddhism there is no concept of 'Karma' and 'Rebirth', still majority of our respondents had not got rid of such Hindu concepts. This indicates, how deep-rooted beliefs cannot be discarded and how new beliefs are difficult to be adopted, due to which the group of neo-Buddhists remains on the margin of the two faiths.

** These details were given to the investigator in informal discussion.

*** Refer to the Table No. 20 in this chapter.
The Summing Up

It seems that the present structure of the religious beliefs and practices of our neo-Buddhist group consists of the elements of both the patterns—the traditional Hindu Mahar pattern and the Buddhist pattern. The continuity with the former Hindu Mahar pattern was found in the performance of many of the 'Samskaras', festivals, fasts, worship of gods, visits to temples, undertaking of vows, the beliefs in the concept of 'Karma' and 're-birth', the mystical beliefs, etc. The change was revealed in the performance of certain ceremonies, like main wedding ceremony, funeral ceremony, and certain festivals like Ambedkar Jayanti, Buddha-Jayanti, observance of fasts in honour of Buddha and Ambedkar, and in worship of Buddha and Ambedkar.

However, the deification of the Buddha or Ambedkar cannot be termed as the adoption of the completely new order. Being Buddhist they should negate the belief in god, as Buddhism, as mentioned earlier, decries the existence of god. Therefore, it seems, that such deification and worship of the Buddha and Ambedkar indicate their attempts to replace Hindu gods by the new gods.

On the whole there was no complete rejection of the old and complete acceptance of the new, but they were in the process of change. They were in the transitional phase, and certain points of confusion and also points of strains
and stresses were revealed, which may be inevitable in such a transitional phase.

In a stable social structure people know their behavioural patterns, role expectations. But when certain change is induced and when people are in the period of transition, the formerly patterned behaviour becomes upset. In such unstable situation some may adjust to the new pattern totally, some partially, and some may retain the old pattern. This is exactly the complex and fascinating picture of the neo-Buddhists we studied.

To recall what Stonequist says, "The individual who through migration, education, marriage, or some other influence leaves one social group or culture without making a satisfactory adjustment to another, finds himself on the margin of each but a member of neither. He is a Marginal Man."

The neo-Buddhists, who have renounced Hinduism and have embraced Buddhism, appear to be on the margin of two faiths--neither completely left the old faith, nor completely adopted the new one. Their divided loyalty, uncertainty, confusion can be explained on the basis of their marginal position during this transitional phase.
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(2) Ibid.


(4) Stonequist, The Marginal Man, op. cit., p. 146.


(6) Reported in Patwardhan Sunanda, Change Among India's Harijans, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1973, Appendix III.


(9) Ranpise, V.R., Boudha Sanskar Path (Marathi), Poona, 1962.

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(16) Thus Spoke Ambedkar, Speeches compiled by Bhagwan Das,
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(18) Ibid.
(19) Ibid.
(20) Ibid.
(21) Ibid.
(22) Lakshmi Narasimha, P., The Essence of Buddhism, Madras,
    Srinivas Varadachari and Co., 1907, p. 185.
(23) Ibid., pp. 194-95.