CHAPTER VII

THE NEO-BUDDHIST ELITES

Stonequist, while analysing various marginal situations, has pointed out that it is the advanced and educated people who are most acutely in the anomalous position of the marginal man. For example, he observes so in the case of Negroes in the United States\(^1\) or in the case of Europeanised Africans,\(^2\) etc. In all such cases it is observed that these advanced individuals are more frustrated due to their awareness of the discrepancy between their cultural achievements and the over-group's prejudiced attitude towards them.

Generally education is supposed to be one of the prime movers of social change. It is thought that higher education and the resultant higher occupation and the higher style of life help individuals to climb up on the status ladder. In India, though the traditional status structure was largely based on the criterion of ascription, "under the impact of modern socio-economic trends in the criteria for status differentiation there has been a swing from an ascribed status system to an achieved status system."\(^3\) The various progressive ideas incorporated in the Constitution of India to bring about radical economic and social changes have opened up new vistas of growth for the so-far suppressed and the oppressed groups. As a result, we find a number of

319
such persons who belonged to these oppressed groups—the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes—now acquiring higher education and holding responsible positions. The rapid strides taken by education among these groups has led to the emergence of a new middle class.

However, some researchers have reported the existence of a feeling of frustration among the educated and economically well-placed members of the scheduled castes. Harold Issacs has reported that it is the educated members among the India's 'ex-untouchables' who experience the highest degree of frustration by the existing state of affairs. Farvathamma gives some account of frustration prevalent among the scheduled castes in the post-Independence India, and observes that economic betterment has brought about class consciousness but has not helped remove the stigma of untouchability. Sachchidananda has found in his study of Harijan elites, that though caste as an ascriptive system of evaluation is weakening day-by-day, still, sometimes the ascriptive status scores over the achieved status and the status incongruence leads to frustration, tension and conflict. Deshpande who had interviewed some scheduled caste elites has reported how the acceptance of these elites by the upper castes was passive in nature.

In this study we make an attempt to find out how higher education and higher occupation has influenced the position of the newly-emergent elites among the neo-Buddhists. For
this we contacted 20 such neo-Buddhist individuals who had received higher education and had attained good position in their fields of occupation. We tried to examine their attitudes and behavioural patterns, their conception of their position in society, and their feeling of acceptance by the upper caste group. One of the main thrusts of this study was to find out whether due to their higher education and prestigious jobs they are no more marginal men, or whether they have become more marginal than the poor neo-Buddhists. If because of their higher education and occupation they feel that they are accepted by the dominant group, the conflict as marginal men may end. If they oscillate from one position to another—at certain times reaching a satisfactory adjustment, then being thrown back again into a condition of conflict—they may remain partially adjusted marginal men. Or lastly, the difficulties may be so overwhelming, the self-respecting acceptance by the over group may be so difficult of attainment, that they may become disorganised.8

Our findings which are presented in the chapter on socio-economic characteristics show that all these 20 respondents had studied at least upto graduation level. Some of them had done exceedingly well in their academic life. Many of these individuals had attained top positions in

8 Our respondents included such persons one of whom was a gold-medalist from Engineering faculty, some had topped the list in Public Service Commission Examinations, some had qualifications from well-known foreign Universities, etc.
different administrative departments in the State and the Central Government. A few of them had retired from service after attaining the top position in their field. For example, one of them was a well-known legal luminary and a retired high court judge, one was a person who climbed to the highest position in the police department and retired, another was a former director of All India Radio, etc. Some of the respondents were professional men like advocates or medical practitioners. Some were legal practitioners and active politicians. Some of them had contested and some had won the elections for State Assemblies, or Parliament. On the economic scale too all these respondents were well off and could be placed higher than the average neo-Buddhists belonging to the lower strata. By their individual monthly income level and their household monthly income level, all the respondents can be fitted into the Indian middle class.

To probe into their attitudes and life experiences we had used, as mentioned in the part of methodology of our study, the same Guided Enquiry schedule which we had used for the respondents of the lower strata of neo-Buddhists. But this schedule largely served as a guideline for conducting detailed discussions on different points with these elite respondents. When the respondents showed keen interest on certain issues, we tried to probe into all the details regarding them; and certain issues some of the respondents

* Refer to Table 20 in the Chapter on Socio-Economic Characteristics.
refused to answer in such cases the questions remained unanswered. Moreover, most of these elites being too much preoccupied with their busy schedule of work, it was not possible in some cases to get answers to all questions, in such cases, the Enquiry Schedule could not be completely filled in. However, the respondents' general opinion on most of the basic issues was recorded. Therefore, while presenting our findings in this chapter our analysis will be of more qualitative type than of the quantitative one. At various points we have preferred to state specific individual experiences instead of presenting the statistical details.

In this chapter we will be giving our findings about their social and occupational position, their religious beliefs and practices, and their political attitudes.

The Social Position of the Neo-Buddhist Elites:

Reasons for Conversion

As mentioned in the chapter on the socio-economic characteristics, only 9 of these 20 respondents had undergone formal 'diksha' of Buddhist religion. The remaining 11 without formal conversion had accepted Buddhism as the new religion. Our findings show that the most of those who were formally converted had 3 main reasons for such conversion, viz., it was Dr. Ambedkar's wish, they agreed with the principles of Buddhism, and for social equality. Most of those who were not formally converted, but had accepted Buddhism, did so for such reasons as, all other caste-fellows had
accepted it; it was Ambedkar's wish, they had liked the principles of Buddhism and because they had a hope that it would help to raise one's status. This indicates that the intention to raise one's status or achieve equal status was there, but at the same time effort was made to rationalize the issue of conversion to Buddhism by saying, that they agreed with the principles of Buddhism. Even Ambedkar, who fought for equality whole of his life and who ultimately found hope in Buddhism, had started rationalizing the issue of conversion to Buddhism at the end of his career.9

The status aspired and claimed, and the status gained after becoming Buddhist

All of the 20 respondents except 2 said that after becoming Buddhists they aspired to attain status equal to that of the higher status people in our society. The other two persons said that they wanted to be equal to all human beings and that there was no high or low status, and all human beings are equal. This indicates that except these two individuals who expressed their equalitarian view, all the rest seem to have higher status group in society as their reference point. This finding supports our earlier contention that acceptance of Buddhism was mainly motivated by the desire to raise one's status.

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* Most of the respondents did not mention any one particular reason but 2 or 3 reasons for their acceptance of Buddhism.

** In the last few years of Ambedkar's life he talked more about the spiritual values of Buddhism.
However, it appears that the feeling of achieving the higher status has not as yet emerged among these neo-Buddhist elites. When they were asked to state whether they have achieved this status, all, except three, gave negative answer, and 2 said that they were doubtful about it and only 1 said that he has achieved it.

In another question the respondents were asked to state their own conception of their social status, whether as higher or lower or equal to other groups in society like Brahmns, Marathas, artisan caste groups, so-called untouchable caste groups, other religious groups and so on. Our respondents reported that they are equal to all. They expressed their belief that all human beings are equal.

However, when they were asked to state how they are placed in society by these other groups, except 8 respondents all the other said that caste Hindus still treated them as low, and untouchable caste groups consider them to be equal. The three individuals reported that most of the caste Hindus treat them as equal.

This indicates that a majority of these neo-Buddhist elites still feel that there is a large gap between their conception and others’ conception of their status in society. This may be indicative of the marginal position of these elites.

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* Including lower Hindu castes like Dhobi (washerman), Nhavi (barber) etc. as well as the upper castes like Brahmns.
Terms of Identification

The terms which these respondents use and like to use to identify themselves, and the identificatory terms which others use for them, again, may be indicative of the difference between their conception and others' conception of these persons. Our findings show that out of the 20 respondents 18 reported that they liked to be called as Buddhists only. They do not approve of the term neo-Buddhist, as it reveals their Mahar origin. However, out of these 18 respondents, 16 reported that for official purposes they still call themselves as scheduled caste persons or Mahars; and only two reported that on official record they are neo-Buddhists. The remaining two of the total 20 respondents gave a different view. One of them said he would not mind if any identificatory term is used to address him. He expressed that it makes no difference how one likes to call oneself, it is only person's own feeling, outside world knows his identity and places him accordingly. On official record, however, this respondent was registered as a scheduled caste person. The other respondent said he does not like any of such identificatory terms which reveals person's social or economic status, he likes to be called philosophically as an 'equal status human being'. However, on official record he too was recorded as a scheduled caste man.

These findings show that majority of our respondents liked such identification terms which would not reveal their low caste background. However, for official purposes they
still have retained their caste identity.* A discussion on this point with some of the respondents throws light on the reasons behind such tendency.

One of the respondents who had fought and won the election at State Assembly level by declaring himself as Mahar, and got the benefit of reserved seat, stated that it is impossible to get elected as a general candidate in such a high-caste-dominated and prejudiced society. So, to secure his political right of reserved seat he had to retain his Mahar identity. He further observed that if in whole of India the special privileges are equally given to the neo-Buddhists, as they are given to the scheduled caste groups, no neo-Buddhist will stick to the original caste identity (i.e. as Mahars).

When this point was discussed with another, who is a retired high court judge, he explained that this tendency is because of two reasons: (1) It is, that many people, even educated, are still not confident that they will get the special benefits by calling themselves as neo-Buddhists, and (2) at the Central Government level, if they want to get a job, they do not get the special privileges if they declare themselves as neo-Buddhists. He observed that when higher education and high rated jobs are status giving factors in the present situation, it is natural on the part of the neo-Buddhists to secure them by such means. The solution to

* This is done mostly to get the benefits offered by the Government. For details about the benefits, refer to our chapter on Social and Economic Position of the Neo-Buddhists.
this, according to him lies, in the extension of the special privileges to neo-Buddhists at the Central Government level too, and he was full of hopes that it will be done in the near future. Such explanations indicate that their need to get high rated jobs, privileges in politics, etc. has made them to retain their caste identity, which otherwise they hate. This crisis of identity may be a characteristic of this marginal group which is passing through a transitional phase.

Another of the respondents, who was a top level officer in the Government administrative service, and who on record was a Mahar, gave a very interesting and significant explanation. He said that even after achieving the top most position in their job, people do not record themselves as Buddhists, because Hindus are likely to have more affinity towards Mahars as they belong to Hindu religion, than towards Buddhists who are no more Hindus. This appears to be a reversal trend. This shows that in order to secure the affinity to Hindus the need to declare oneself as Mahar was necessary. This may not be a view of a large number of people, but it reveals the thinking of some of these persons who, on the one hand have sentiment of resentment towards Hindus, and on the other who desire for affinity with them. Such views are the characteristics of the marginal individuals, pulled by two contradictory forces not knowing which

* This respondent, and many others too, had expressed their resentment towards Hindus (means high caste people) in very bitter words by calling the Hindus, 'crooks', 'Brutes', 'stupids', etc.
to accept.

However, it appears that though these neo-Buddhist elites are using the identification terms which are useful for them in this transitional period, still majority of them reported, as seen earlier, that they would like to be called 'Buddhists'. This indicates that they, in fact, like to get rid of their caste identity which reveals their lower status. But, we are told by our respondents that almost all of them are referred to by others as scheduled caste people, Harijans, and Nav-Boudhas (neo-Buddhists) at their place of work and as Mahars, Harijans, Mahar-Boudhas in the society in general, thus revealing a gulf between their own conception and others' conception of them.

Treatment the Neo-Buddhist Elites Receive in Society

These neo-Buddhist elites because of their high level of achievement in education and professional life get more opportunities to participate extensively in the dominant culture than their illiterate brothers. They also come into contact with the larger public. Therefore we wanted to know the type of treatment they receive in society and what kind of problems they face. In particular, we asked the respondents to tell their experiences of discrimination, if any, after the acceptance of Buddhism.

Our findings show that out of 20 respondents eight stated that it was difficult to cite any one such experience, however, discrimination was and is there. They said that sometimes it is not very overtly done, but remarks are
passed, indifference is shown, efforts to avoid these persons are made. Some of these respondents expressed that they could not put their finger on any specific incident, but they have in general, a nagging feeling that they are not-quite-welcome by the higher status groups.

Three respondents said that they personally never experienced discrimination. Some of these respondents reasoned that this was due to their best academic achievements, and also for not taking benefits of reservation or preference in the occupational career. They expressed that whatever they have achieved is purely based on their own extraordinary merits, and, therefore, no one can look down upon them. However, they stated that many a time they get a vague feeling that people are jealous of them as they not only compete with the upper caste Hindus but also surpass them. One of these respondents expressed that "there were certain incidents when I could feel that people could not forget my caste, but they had to keep quiet as they could not point out my drawbacks."

Out of the remaining nine respondents, one did not answer the query and eight respondents reported various experiences of discriminatory treatment they received. Some narrated

Particularly such remarks are with reference to the special concessions given to the scheduled caste persons and Neo-Buddhists.

One of them was a gold-medalist from the Faculty of Engineering, and another had topped the list in the Public Service Commission.
stories about the difficulties they faced in getting residential accommodation; or about the troubles they faced in their jobs of not getting promotion or frequent transfers from place to place or indifferent treatment received from the subordinate staff, avoidance from the colleagues and fault-finding tendency of the superiors. Some of them also reported that while getting education they experienced the indifferent attitude of the staff in their colleges. Two medical practitioners and one advocate reported about the difficulties they faced in getting a place for work and getting the clientele because of their caste background. One of them said that "even in the world of advocates I am a neglected advocate." He explained that even though he had a very sound background of 20 years of legal practice as an advocate, he was never asked to act as a public prosecutor. The same person was elected to the State Legislative Assembly and he stated that "even in Politics and in the publicity given to politicians, we are neglected." He explained that in his first speech in the House as M.L.A. he had made certain fiery statements about the prejudices and biased views of the upper caste Hindus about the untouchables but no newspaper gave publicity to his speech. Two other respondents who are also active in politics stated that their failure in elections was due to the prejudiced attitudes of the caste Hindu voters. One of the respondents who is

* Member of Legislative Assembly.

** They had contested the elections as general candidate and not for the reserved seat.
a well-known retired high court judge after citing various experiences pointed out that "whole of my life is full of such incidents. Neither conversion to Buddhism nor my educational and occupational attainments have protected me from the shattering blows of discrimination."

One woman respondent, who is a medical practitioner, reported how she overheard the derogatory remarks passed about her caste by a caste-Hindu maid-servant. The respondent said that even such little things hurt them.

All these reports about neo-Buddhists' experiences show that they have some feeling of non-acceptance by the upper castes. Only 3 respondents reported that they have no such experience to cite. It appears then that neither conversion nor their personal achievements have completely helped most of these neo-Buddhist elites to get rid of the ill-treatment meted out at the hands of the caste-Hindus.

Our findings also indicate a peculiar tendency among these respondents to find malice and a feeling of bitterness where none was probably intended, and to attribute the failure which may be through personal defect to the discrimination on caste basis. It is doubtful to say that failure in the examinations or in elections, or delays in promotions in service, etc. can be solely attributed to the discriminatory treatment. It is possible that in such situations the respondents found their caste a convenient scapegoat. Similarly, it is difficult to conclude that when a superior officer points out the faults of some of these respondents
it is always with the intention to hurt them on the basis of their caste. Similarly, a feeling of non-acceptance also can be due to one's own feeling of inferiority and over sensitivity. Of course, it is very difficult to arrive at a correct diagnosis since prejudice is frequent enough to make individual's plaint a fair one. However, such peculiar tendencies of finding malice where it is not intended, or of finding caste to be a convenient scapegoat, or having inferiority complex and over sensitivity, etc. are peculiar personality traits of a marginal man.  

Due to such tendencies, such individuals may become problems to themselves. By brooding over the situation, it is likely that a distorted view of the world may be built up. This conception of the world in their mind is more likely to provoke antagonism and prejudice against themselves. Or it may lead to a withdrawal or extreme aggressiveness. The withdrawal was found in the pattern of friendship, in the choice of neighbourhood, etc. of many of the respondents.

**Friendship Pattern**

Our findings about these neo-Buddhist elites' friendship pattern shows that out of 20 respondents, 6 reported that they had a few selected friends who belong to upper castes like Brahmans. There were 3 respondents whose friendship was confined to only neo-Buddhist group and some other untouchable caste persons, while there were 11 respondents who stated that they did not have friends.

*What they exactly meant by friendship is difficult to find out but it definitely meant certain amount of getting together and conversation.*
The responses of most of those respondents who said that they had no friends indicate a tendency of withdrawal among them in the sphere of friendship. One such respondent expressed that, "I don’t believe in friendship with a high caste Hindu. Even educated Brahmins are not worthy of being our friends. They are educated but not intellectual and rational." Another respondent stated that "I always try to remain aloof. Instead of facing disheartening experiences I prefer to remain aloof." One other respondent said that, "In my official capacity I have to move in circles of high ranking persons belonging to high castes. But there is no one with whom I am friendly. We have to follow the formalities of a system which neither I nor they can escape."

It is also interesting to note that these respondents, who said that they have no friends, seem to have only upper castes as their positive reference point. None of them said that they have friends from their own neo-Buddhist group or from other so-called low castes. These are indications that in fact they want to develop friendly relations with upper caste, but fully well knowing that they are not acceptable to upper castes they do not in reality develop friendly relations with them, and therefore, they say they have no friends.

When asked the respondents whether they have visited

* This respondent quoted Ambedkar and said how Ambedkar in his book entitled, "Who are the untouchables", has described the intellectual dishonesty of the educated Brahmins.
high caste people on certain occasions like wedding, etc., and if so, how they were treated, most of these respondents reported that they visited only a few selected people where they were completely confident that they would not be humiliated. This also indicates how there is a feeling of insecurity and the consequent tendency of withdrawal among most of these highly educated and well-placed neo-Buddhists.

Choice of Neighbourhood

It was found that 10 of our 20 respondents were staying in government allotted quarters but some of them had built up their own houses elsewhere. Eight out of the remaining respondents had their own houses and were staying in them and two were staying in rented houses. The respondents were asked to state which type of neighbourhood they would prefer to stay in. Six out of 20 said that they would prefer a cosmopolitan neighbourhood. While stating the reasons for this, two said that in such a locality, people of different views and cultural patterns stay together, and therefore, one gets the opportunity to learn from others. Four said that in such an environment caste background of a person would be forgotten at least in the day-to-day relations.

Thirteen respondents reported that they would prefer a neo-Buddhist neighbourhood. All of them stated that they feel secure among their own people. One respondent put the feeling in such words that "our battle with the outside world is still not over. In the other's camp how can we
feel secure!"

One respondent gave a very interesting reply. He said that he did not want any neighbourhood at all. He said his experiences of a cosmopolitan neighbourhood too were not satisfactory (At the time of investigation he was staying in such a neighbourhood and he had found that people there too were either prejudiced or too indifferent). He dreamt of having an isolated bungalow with a huge campus where he would live like a 'Raja' (King). Such responses indicate that there is a feeling of insecurity in the minds of these elites when placed amongst the non-neo-Buddhists. It is interesting to note that none of them expressed their wish to stay in a high caste Hindu locality. Those who stated preference for cosmopolitan locality did not want to stay in a purely high caste Hindu locality. Their preference for cosmopolitan neighbourhood was with the hope that they would not face humiliation there. This reveals the fact that these elites too in order to avoid discrimination try to withdraw or remain away from the dominant group and most of them stick to their own people.

Also we observe that most of these respondents who have newly built their houses have chosen the localities which are predominantly inhabited by neo-Buddhists.

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They meant the neighbourhood where mostly non-Hindus and non-Maharashtrians would stay.
Choice of a mate

Our findings show that out of the 20 respondents 12 said that they would like to restrict their choice of mate, to the neo-Buddhist group only, and the remaining 8 were in favour of inter-caste marriage. However, among these last 8 respondents only 3 were ready to have marital relations with any group mentioned in the schedule, while 5 were ready to have such relations with caste Hindus only, and more particularly with upper castes.

Our detailed discussion on this issue with most of the respondents was able to throw more light on the reasons behind such attitudes. It was observed that all those respondents who wanted to restrict such relations within the neo-Buddhist group were doubtful about the success of intercaste marriage. Some of them even cited the instances of failure of intercaste marriages. One respondent said that 'casteism is so deeply rooted in our minds that it creates hurdles in the relationship of such husbands and wives who belong to different castes and also in their

This information we got mainly from the Social Distance Scale included in the schedule. As most of the informants were ready to have all the other types of social relations mentioned in the schedule with most of the groups, we have not presented the details about them. About marital relations they had varied and significant opinions. Some respondents discussed the issue of intercaste marriage in details. So we have presented only these findings here.

in the case of their children or other family members.

The groups mentioned were Brahmin, Maratha, Artisan castes, untouchable castes, non-Hindus, etc.
relationship with their other relatives." Another respondent expressed that in such intercaste marriages spouse belonging to upper caste dominates the house and the other spouse not only has no voice, but also has to disown his kith and kin. Particularly, if the husband is neo-Buddhist and wife is Brahmin it gives rise to many more problems." Twelve respondents were of the opinion that intercaste marriages normally end in failure and frustration and intercaste marriage cannot be a solution to the caste problem in our society.

Many of the respondents who were in favour of intercaste marriage, felt that it would help to lessen the prejudices and forget the caste differences and it would be one of the solutions to the caste problem in general. Those respondents who were willing to have marital relations particularly with high caste Hindus seem to have such an attitude, that caste differences should not come in the way to have marital relations with their otherwise status equals. The investigator found that two of these eight respondents had actually tried to choose a mate of high caste for one of their family members, but the efforts failed because of the negative attitude of the other side. The other respondents said that even if they are willing to have such

\[\text{We know the case where a son of a respondent wanted to marry a Brahmin girl but the girl withdrew due to her parent's opposition, and another respondent wanted his younger brother to marry a girl from upper castes, but it did not materialise due to opposition from the other side.}\]
relations with the upper caste persons, they or their family members have not so far tried for it.

Further, we found that none of these respondents, who were in favour of intercaste marriage, had an instance of such type of marriage in their own family. Thus, our findings indicate that more than half of the respondents had their choice of marital relations restricted to their own neo-Buddhist group. This was mainly to avoid frustration. Some were in favour of intercaste marriage, but could not actually do it. This reveals that due to certain structural constraints or by their own choice, which is also led by structural constraints, they still could not establish relationship with the dominant group on equal basis in all spheres of life.

'Passing': In order to escape discrimination and antagonism and to share the advantages of the dominant group a person may tend to 'pass' if in the normal course the affairs it is difficult to get the status. However, among these neo-Buddhist elites 'passing' is not reported to great extent.

We tried to see if among them there exists a tendency of changing one's name, as some of their names are the peculiar marks of identification. Only two respondents reported the change of name. One respondent reported that though he himself has not changed his name, he has made his son to adopt a new name which would not reveal his real caste identity. This respondent stated, "I myself have suffered

※ The name was changed from 'Kamble' to 'Kavathekar'. Kavathe is the name of their native village. The name 'Kavathekar' does not indicate the caste, but the name 'Kamble' is a peculiar Mahar surname.
quite a lot because of our name which immediately reveals my caste background. I did not want my son to have the same sufferings." Another respondent said that he himself has not changed the name but three generations back their family name was changed by his forefathers. One other respondent said that "my name is enough to tell my caste. Once people know my name they look to me as a 'worthless' creature. But this is true when I am in Maharashtra. Outside Maharashtra people don't identify me by my name and there as far as possible I try to conceal my caste."

A few respondents stated that, fortunately for them their surnames were deceptive and did not disclose their caste, and this proved to be convenient for them to pass off. A respondent observed that his name was common among the Brahmins too, and people did take him as a Brahmin, and at such times he too kept quiet.

This reveals the fact that the tendency to 'pass' is not completely absent among these neo-Buddhist elites. Further it shows, that it is difficult to get the status in normal course of affairs and so 'passing' is attempted.

Benefits of conversion

We tried to understand the neo-Buddhist elites' opinion about the role of conversion to Buddhism in the emancipation

★★ Family names of different castes in different regions of India are different.
★★★ This person is active politician and he has to move to different areas for his work.
of their group. We found that out of 20 respondents 5 felt that conversion to Buddhism was the only way opened for their emancipation. To another question, whether they feel that conversion was the real solution, as they still suffer from discrimination, two respondents gave an interesting response. They pointed out that the real solution to the problem of untouchability is the conversion of the whole of Indian society to Buddhism. They were of the opinion that Buddhism preaches equality, and once the whole of Indian society accepts this religion, the internalization of the principle of equality would be easier, than bringing it legally. Moreover, both these respondents were quite hopeful about the possibility of whole Indian society's acceptance of Buddhism.

However, 15 respondents felt that conversion could not be the only way to get status. One of these respondents put it in such words that, "in the beginning many of us felt that conversion would solve our problem, but now it is an experience of many that conversion does not make any difference in our status". Another respondent expressed that "it is difficult to expect that our conversion would bring about change in the perception of others." One other said that "by conversion the original caste identity does not disappear. Even among the converted Christians their original caste background played an important role." Another respondent expressed, "conversion for the name's sake would not solve the problem unless there is improvement
in the level of education, occupation and behaviour. Religion mattered less. It is not only Buddhists but any other scheduled caste person, who is advanced, gets better treatment."

According to many the real benefit of conversion is the development of self respect and aspiration to come up. As one respondent puts it, "A firm ambition that I will make others to treat me as an human being is the real benefit of our conversion." However, if the outer world fails to change its perception, such an increased self-respect and ambition could bring about frustration.

**Need of Education, High Occupation**

All these elites emphasised the importance of higher education and better occupation for their group members. They were of the opinion that when majority of their group members would achieve such higher status in these spheres the whole group would be rated high.

According to many the constitutional privileges are very necessary. They were of the opinion that unless such privileges are offered, poor neo-Buddhist cannot afford to give their children proper education. Such privileges could offer the neo-Buddhists opportunities to come up.

However, one respondent pointed out the adverse effects of getting special privileges. He narrated his own experience of loss of competitive spirit at the intermediate level in college because of his awareness about the availability of the reserved seats in the Engineering College.
While studying the lower strata of neo-Buddhists we observed that the poor masses always complained about the indifferent attitude of the educated and well placed neo-Buddhists towards them. The existence of such attitudes among the educated persons belonging to oppressed groups was also observed by other researchers. Therefore, while discussing the issue of upliftment of the poor neo-Buddhists we asked these elites to state their opinion about such complaints and observations regarding the widening gap between the elites and the poor illiterate masses. Most of them denied the existence of any such indifferent attitude towards the poor. This is not unnatural they said. Such a gap exists between the elites and the poor in any society they believed. Some of them expressed that it is not possible for them to visit the poor masses very often, but that does not mean that they disown them. Some of them, on the contrary, complained that sometimes people try to take undue advantage of their influential position in their fields to get jobs or other concessions. One politically active respondent complained that the good that the politicians do for their poor masses does not get publicity in the newspapers and therefore the uninformed masses complain against them.

* This query does not form a part of the Inquiry Schedule, but it formed the part of general discussion with all the elite respondents.
The Occupational Position

In the chapter on the socio-economic characteristics of the neo-Buddhists we have already pointed out that compared to the lower strata these elites have moved much higher in the economic and occupational spheres. In this chapter we are presenting our findings about the occupational mobility of these elites in their own lifetime, compared to their father's position. We have also examined their views about their children's career.

Our findings show that out of the 20 respondents, 12 started their occupational career in the lower professions like clerical jobs or teaching in secondary schools and then reached the higher professions and 8 respondents since the beginning of their career after completing their education, were engaged in higher occupations, and some of them reached higher grades in their own fields. Compared to their fathers' occupations, many of these elite respondents seem to have moved significantly up. Our findings show that fathers of six respondents belonged to lower professions,

\[\text{\textbullet} \text{ For example, a respondent started as an advocate and retired as high court judge.}\]

\[\text{\textbullet\textbullet} \text{ One of the respondents, who was holding a top level post as an engineer in Government service told an interesting aspect of his life. He said, his mother wanted him to become a ticket-checker in the railways. It was because, she used to work as a hawker selling fruits in railway compartments. Her impression about a ticket checker was such that he was a very powerful officer. Therefore, she always dreamt of her son becoming a ticket checker. This reveals the backwardness of the family background of these elites. Their upward mobility looks very striking if viewed in the framework of such poor family background.}\]
most of whom were primary teachers while the fathers of 11 respondents worked as unskilled manual labourer; fathers of two respondents were in the army as lowest grade officer or soldier and father of one respondent was an actor in 'Tamasha' (commercial folk drama) group.

These findings indicate that in the case of some of these neo-Buddhist elites there is evidence of occupational mobility in a person's own life time and compared to their fathers' position the mobility is significant in the case of most of the respondents.

Some of our other findings have shown that most of these respondents in their childhood had dreamt of becoming highly educated persons and almost all of them have realized their hopes and were satisfied with their occupational status, though some were still striving to move upward.

We also attempted to find out their ambitions about their children's career. It was found that 11 respondents wished their children to be engaged in medical, engineering and legal professions, 3 wished their children to be IAS officer, 2 wanted their children to become officers in the army or the air force. One respondent said that one should always aim at the highest and he would be happy to see his son becoming the President of India or the Prime Minister of India. One respondent wanted his son to start private business, so that there would not be any other one dominating over him. Two respondents did not answer the query.※

※ One of them was a bachelor and the other's children were too young.
Our findings indicate that the aspirations of most of these neo-Buddhist elites about their children's career are not too high compared to their own status. It may be due to that they themselves are quite satisfied with what they achieved, and so there is nothing like 'projecting one's own unfulfilled desire on one's children', as it was found in the case of lower strata of neo-Buddhists.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

After their conversion to Buddhism the neo-Buddhists are expected to discard all their Hindu religious beliefs and practices. Our findings about the lower strata of neo-Buddhists have indicated that it is still not possible for them to negate most of the deeply rooted religious beliefs. However, with higher education, we felt that it would be possible for those elites to forget the old beliefs and practices. In order to elicit information on this point we asked them a series of questions which are included in the Enquiry Schedule. Some of the respondents refused to answer each and every question. Instead, they preferred to discuss some of the important issues like their beliefs in god or image worship, observation of festivals, belief in 'Karma' and 'Re-birth' and the like. We will be presenting our findings on some of these important points and they would throw some light about the religious beliefs and practices of these neo-Buddhist elites.

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* Refer to our Chapter on 'Marginality of neo-Buddhists in socio-economic life'.

** Refer to our chapter on Religion of Neo-Buddhists (lower strata of neo-Buddhists)
Festivals and Fasts

Regarding observances of Hindu festivals, there were six respondents who celebrated only 'Diwali' and 'Dasara', and that too not as Hindu religious festivals. 'Dasara' they celebrated as the 'Dhamma Chakra Pravartan Din' (the day of revolving the wheel of Buddhist religion), and 'Diwali' was celebrated without any ritual significance. Another seven respondents celebrated many festivals like 'Diwali', 'Dasara', 'Holi', 'Nag Panchami', 'Sankranti', but on these occasions without observing any religious rituals they merely prepared sweet dishes at home. Many of them explained that it was mainly for the satisfaction of the children in the house. However, there were seven respondents who celebrated many of the Hindu festivals by observing the religious rituals. Three of them said that the observances of rituals were done because of their own sentiments about it and four reported that it was mainly for the satisfaction of the old people in the house or wife's sentiments about the rituals.

'Ambedkar Jayanti' and 'Buddha Jayanti', which are commonly observed as the religious festivals by the neo-Buddhists, are also celebrated by most of these elites except four. These four respondents said that there is no god in Buddhism. The Buddha too is not a god. Therefore, the birth anniversaries of the Buddha or Ambedkar are not

* On this day Ambedkar embraced Buddhism and set in motion the revival of Buddhism in India.
the religious festivals. Such a response of these few individuals indicates that the acceptance of the new religion is not devoid of the rational point of view of some elites, and their views also are in accordance with the original concept of god in Buddhism.

Regarding the observation of fast, seven reported that they did not observe any fast. Three said that they observed fast on every full moon day as the Buddha was born on a full moon day and had achieved 'Dnyana' (enlightenment) and 'Nirvana' (here means death) on full moon day. Ten respondents, however, reported that they observed various fasts with peculiar Hindu beliefs and sentiments attached to them. A few of them, however, tried to rationalize by saying that even after conversion they continued their practice of observing certain fasts as fasting is good for health. Some of the individuals also were fasting on full moon days indicating the existence of the old and the new.

It appears that some have still retained their feelings regarding observation of festivals and fasts, some are in the mid-stream of change and some have accepted the change.

Worship of Gods and Goddesses

According to our findings it seems that seven of the twenty respondents had the images or photographs of Hindu

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* Refer to our discussion on the concept of god in Buddhism in the chapter on Religion (Chapter V).

** Particular fast is observed in the name of particular god. For details refer to Chapter on Religion of neo-Buddhists.
gods and goddesses, including the folk gods like Khandoba, 'Lakshmiaai', etc. and were worshipping the gods in whom they had deep faith. Seven other respondents reported the Buddha as their god. We visited the residential places of some of the respondents and it was observed that in some houses the photograph of the Buddha was placed in 'Devhara' (an open wooden box in which Hindus place their images or photos of gods) and it was worshipped by placing flowers and by lighting candles before it. A few of these respondents told the investigator that everyday all the family members collectively or individually say 'Vandana' (prayer) to the Buddha. These individuals explained that they worship the image of the Buddha with a firm belief that man needs some 'Shraddhasthana' (place of faith) and it cannot be an abstract sentiment or just a mental construction. They believe that there has to be something concrete which is easier to grasp. They felt that particularly image worship has good impact on the children's minds.

However, there were six respondents who reported that they had no image or photograph of the Buddha too, and they did not believe in image worship at all. Some of these individuals pointed out that even before embracing Buddhism they had lost faith in image worship. While a few reported that after embracing Buddhism they, along with other people at their native place, threw away the images of Hindu gods in streams or rivers. None of them were worshipping the image of the Buddha too. One of the respondents very
thoughtfully put it in such words, "Buddhism is not a religion of gods and rituals, it is a way of behaviour. We behave according to the principles of Buddhism, so we are Buddhists."

Here too we find that some of these elites have not got rid of their old beliefs and sentiments, regarding Hindu gods, some have replaced the old gods by the Buddha and some have accepted the original Buddhism and have tried to interpret it rationally.

Belief in God's Power

Buddhism does not believe in God or Divine Power. The neo-Buddhists are expected to negate such concept about god's power to do harm to a person or to do miracles. However, worshipping of Hindu gods or deification of the Buddha--is a direct or indirect outcome of the belief in god's supernatural power and we have seen that many of these neo-Buddhist elites do worship gods--Hindu or Buddhist or both. Those who do not worship seem to be free of such belief. However, when a person faces serious difficulties in life, such a belief in god's extraordinary power may become more visual which otherwise is concealed or suppressed. We attempted to find out whether these elites have developed some belief in god's power particularly in times of troubles, and if so, how do they react in such situations.

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* Refer to the discussion on the concept of god in Buddhism in the Chapter on the Religion of the neo-Buddhists.
Our findings show that 12 respondents neither do they believe that god can cause troubles nor do they feel that by god's grace one can escape troubles. They said that troubles are caused by physical reasons or by human actions, and the solutions to the problem, too, are the worldly solutions and not the god's grace. However, it is interesting to note that nearly half of these twelve respondents had reported that they always worshipped gods—either Hindu, Buddhists or both—and some of them also had expressed that man needs a place of faith (Shraddhasanthan).

Eight respondents reported that at times of troubles they do remember god. As one respondent put it, "I believe that there is some supernatural power. I don't know whether to call it God or something else. But this power does control certain things in our life. We may do the best efforts, still certain things are beyond our control. At such points in life I do remember god and pray him." Out of these eight respondents, a few reported that they or their wives had undertaken vows in the name of certain gods in times of troubles and some reported that they worshipped gods or said prayers to Gods in times of difficulties. Among these eight respondents it is interesting to note that there were three who in the normal course of life never worshipped gods and did not believe in image worship. However, at times of troubles, in their hearts, they remembered god and prayed to god.

These findings point out a contradiction in the thinking
of some of these respondents. Some of those who felt that man needs a place of faith and believed in image worship, reported that god's grace is not necessary to solve one's problems. On the other hand, some of those, who, in the normal course of affairs never worshipped god, in times of troubles, prayed for him. Such contradiction in their view, such ambivalence of attitude and sentiment is at the core of those things which characterize mostly the marginal man. It appears that there was impact of education, of rational ideology and of Buddhist philosophy on them, but at the same time there was deep rooted faith or a fear and reverence about the unknown supernatural powers. It seems that they were torn between the two courses of action which characterize them as marginal individuals.

However, the findings on the whole indicate that more than half of the respondents did not report their belief in god's power to cause or to solve problems.

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

According to Buddhism there is no 'Karma' and 'Re-birth' as conceived by Hindus. These Hindu beliefs had been refuted by Ambedkar too even before their conversion to Buddhism. Moreover such mystical concepts cannot be acceptable rationally. Therefore, the neo-Buddhist elites are expected to free themselves of such concepts. Our findings indicate that almost all these educated elites, except two, had no belief in these concepts.

* For details refer to the discussion on concept of 'Karma' and Re-birth in the chapter on Religion (Ch. V).
One of the respondents who believed in rebirth observed that he has read and heard various stories of rebirth of a person and it is difficult for him not to believe in the concept of rebirth, but he said that he does not believe that 'Karma' in the previous births affects the conditions in the next birth. The other respondent reported that he wishes to be reborn as a high caste Hindu because his experiences in this society has taught him a lesson about how much a caste matters in life in this society.

On the whole, it can be said that majority of the respondents had no faith in 'Karma' and 'Re-birth'. This may be due to their education which helps to become rational and also may be due to the acceptance of Buddhist principles and influence of Ambedkar on them.

Political Attitudes of the Neo-Buddhist Elites

As mentioned earlier the neo-Buddhist movement is not purely a religious movement, politics and religion comingle in the neo-Buddhist movement. Elites are normally the leaders of a society. Therefore, it is very necessary to examine the political attitudes of the neo-Buddhist elites.

With this in view we asked the elite respondents certain questions included in the Enquiry Schedule. However, three of the 20 respondents flatly refused to respond to any of the queries about their political attitude. The reason which they put forward for this refusal was that they being

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※ Refer to our chapter on Political Marginality of the Neo-Buddhists (lower strata).
government servants, they are not supposed to comment upon any political situation. But there were many other respondents in our elite group who too were government servants, still who stated their political views. Therefore, our findings about the elites' political attitude are based on the information given by 17 out of 20 respondents.

**Political Affiliation**

According to our study three of the 17 respondents had affiliation to Indian National Congress, three respondents reported that they felt affiliated to Republican Party but they did not support any of its groups, three other respondents were the supporters of the Gavai group in the RPI, one supported Kamble group in the RPI, another one reported that he was not satisfied with any of the RPI groups and wanted to start, along with some others, a new group in RPI, and six reported that they had no affiliation to any political party or any group in the RPI.

Though our group of elite respondents is too small to jump to any conclusions, still, our findings can give an idea about the differences of opinion and increasing fragmentation among the neo-Buddhist elites. The findings also indicate that those who reported no affiliation to any party were either indifferent or discontented with the political parties.

The actual voting pattern of these respondents could not be assessed due mainly to two reasons. The first is, that some are in transferable jobs and were placed at
different places and therefore, could not cast their vote as their names were not included in the list of voters at the time of elections. Secondly, it is due to the fact that all of them were not in Poona at the time of elections in 1967 and in 1971, and the parties contesting elections at different places were different. For example, in Poona there was no Republican candidate at the time of both these elections and so even the supporters of RPI also had to vote for some other party, while in Vidarbha, Republican candidates did contest these elections, and the respondents who were placed there at that time could vote for RPI candidate. Therefore, it appears that such findings cannot give a proper picture about their voting pattern.

Views regarding Certain Political Parties

The respondents were asked to state the name of the party which according to them would help the neo-Buddhists. We found that eight out of 17 felt confident in the Republican Party, four confided in the Congress Party (Indira group) and five were not ready to trust any political party that could look to the welfare of neo-Buddhists. All responses indicate that nearly half of our elite respondents have confidence in RPI. Some of the respondents said that "there is a difference in the efforts for our welfare done by RPI and by other parties. What others do is out of compulsion

* Of course a few staunch supporters of some of the factions in RPI did state the name of the group in RPI, but they were too few to make a separate mention.
of the situation and what RPI does is out of wholehearted willingness and with the real sensitivity of our problem. One respondent put it in these words, "the difference in the RPI and the other parties for us is that of a mother and a nurse for a child." Thus, it can be said that though there are differences of opinion among the elite respondents supporting different factions of RPI, still they all trust the RPI's ability to help their people.

Four respondents who confided in the Congress Party (I) said that this is the only party which has a definite programme, and, though out of compulsion, still they have so far worked and they will work in future for our welfare. One of these respondents said, "now the only choice for us is the Congress (I)."

The five respondents who did not trust any political party looked so disgusted with all the parties and their leaders that some of them expressed that now "we should forget the hopes that we would be helped by these selfish politicians; every one of us should become self-depending individual and come up on his own merits."

Views about the Congress Party

According to our findings, except three respondents, all the remaining agreed that the Congress Party has worked for the welfare of their group. Most of them pointed out that the Congress tried to implement the constitutional provisions like the special privileges and it also tried for safeguards against injustice. However, many of these respondents,
though they admitted the Congress Party's contribution, still were not satisfied with the work of the Congress. Some stated as mentioned earlier, that what the Congress has done is out of compulsion. A few said that though Congress advocated anti-untouchability policy, they are not contented with it, what they want is something radical. One other respondent observed that they (Congress) have definitely tried for our upliftment, but they could not solve our problem because their approach was basically economic. Our problems cannot be solved by our economic progress alone. Congress should realize the social basis of our problems.

**Views regarding the Republican Party**

All the respondents felt that the RPI was the only existing party which came into existence solely for their welfare. Many reported that the party has worked for the upliftment of the neo-Buddhists. Some emphasised that it was only due to Republican leaders' efforts and because of the realisation of the strength of RPI that Congress extended the Special Privileges to the neo-Buddhist in Maharashtra. However, some of these respondents expressed their disappointment with the present state of affairs in the RPI, particularly the ever-increasing factionalism, and the critical attitude of every leader towards the other leaders of the group. Some observed that if united, the RPI would be the most ideal party; while a few expressed as "due to factionalism, the RPI is almost dead now, and its resurrection is impossible."
We discussed in details the issue of the fragmentation of the RPI with three of the respondents who were politically very active. All the three had contested the elections for the State Legislature or the Lok Sabha. Two of them were holding secretarial posts of certain factional groups in the RPI. All the three respondents explained their own points of view on this issue.

One of them blamed some other leaders of RPI who, according to him, were too much after their own selfish interests and publicity and have forgotten Ambedkar’s message and group’s ultimate aim. He reported that in January 1974, efforts were made to unite all the factions in the RPI, however, it was soon realized that there were too much differences of opinion and confusion and conflict of thoughts and since October 1974, again, all the factions started acting separately.

The other two respondents were of the opinion that there are so much ideological differences among the leaders that now splits have become inevitable. However, both of them expressed that the neo-Buddhists are not loosing much by these splits. They observed that their group is too small to stand alone, and so, unity would be of no consequence. They said that political power is very necessary to safeguard the interests of their people and to win that power alignment with some other party is inevitable. They further observed that which party they should join is bound to be a matter of difference of opinion due to their basic ideological
differences. But according to them, the neo-Buddhists
group does not lose much by alignments with different poli-
tical parties. By such alignments the candidates get
elected, win power, and though they belong to different
parties, they always safeguard the interests of their own
people. Both these respondents rejected the possibility of
being dominated by other caste groups if they join hands with
such parties the membership of which is largely non-neo-
Buddhist.

Views about Janasangh

Our findings show that except one respondent all the
others expressed bitter anti-Janasanbh feelings. They unani-
mously voiced that the Janasangh is dominated by the Brahmins
and the Brahmins are too communal minded people and are in-
tolerant of the fact that the groups so far suppressed and
oppressed by them are coming up and are competing with them.
Therefore, they believed that the political party which is
dominated by Brahmins can never wish and work for the welfare
of the neo-Buddhists.

One respondent, whose views differed on this point,
noticed that Brahmins are better than Marathas, as Brahmins
are more educated and can think rationally than Marathas
who never shed their prejudices so easily. Therefore, he
observed, that he preferred Janasangha to Congress as the
Congress in Maharashtra is dominated by Marathas.
Views about the Janata Party

Before the time of our investigation of these neo-Buddhist elites the Janata Party was formed and its government had come into power; therefore, we included one more question regarding the view about the newly formed Janata Party. We found that two respondents were extremely hopeful that Janata Party would make efforts for the betterment of the new-Buddhists. Other respondents stated that Janata Party has to bow down to our demands if they want to remain in power. Five respondents did not form any opinion on this point. They said that it would be too early to assess Janata's work for us, but so far they have not done any work. While eight respondents emphatically observed that Janata is nothing but a combination of Janasangh and the R.S.S. (Ramhtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). One of these respondents said, "it is our enemy number one."

On the whole our findings about the views of these elites regarding different political parties indicate that there was dissatisfaction among many respondents about the working of various political parties—either Congress, or Janata, or even the Republican Party. Though many had stated that the Republican Party only could help the neo-Buddhists, still they were disappointed with the present factionalism in the party.

We started this investigation of neo-Buddhist elites at the beginning of 1978.

This question does not form a part of the enquiry schedule and it was not asked to the lower strata of neo-Buddhists.
However, most of these respondents never felt that it was better not to support any party. On the contrary, many observed that right to vote is very precious and they should exercise it vigilantly.

Tendency to fight

We found that most of these neo-Buddhist elite respondents were aware of the fact that their group has not achieved equal status either in social or political or economic affairs. All the respondents expressed that equality cannot be gained without fighting for it.

We attempted to find out whether there was any inclination for revolution among these neo-Buddhist elites. Only one respondent was completely against revolution. He was of the opinion that it is always necessary to see what is one's strength compared to the enemy's strength, before thinking of taking revolutionary steps. Two respondents said that revolution is necessary, but it should be a social revolution. Six respondents were in favour of revolution, but they added a clause, that it should be a bloodless revolution. Eight respondents were inclined to carry out a bloody revolution. These respondents expressed that if others are not ready to change and if all the legitimate ways are closed to us, revolution is bound to come. As one respondent puts it, "We cannot wait for ages. The news of atrocities boil our blood. The insulting treatment and the passing of remarks which

* Both of them could not explain what they exactly meant by the term 'social revolution', and how it should be brought about.
educated persons like us experience make us feel like hitting a blow on the face of a person who insults us. It is just unbearable. Revolution is a must."

Thus, it seems that many were in favour of a revolution, a bloody one it should be as some believe. This may be due to the fact that educated are more frustrated than the ordinary illiterates.

**Views regarding 'Dalit Panther' - the Militant Movement**

As mentioned earlier, the Dalit Panther is a militant movement among the neo-Buddhists. According to our findings none of the neo-Buddhist elite respondents reported to be a member of Dalit Panther. However, 10 of the 17 elite respondents stated that they supported the views of the Dalit Panther. Among those, who did not support the idea of a bloody revolution, there was one who was completely against any such activities because he felt that strength of their group was too small to do such militant activities. The other four stated that fighting is necessary, but the destructive nature of the Panther activities would create more problems. Two stated that to solve their problem radical steps were necessary but steps should be taken with a definite goal, and Panther leaders have no definite goals.

Those who favoured the Dalit Panthers were, in general, of the opinion that peaceful means have proved to be insufficient to win justice. Neither politicians nor the social

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* Refer to our chapter on Political Marginality of Neo-Buddhists.
workers have solved their problems. The impatient and frustrated youth among the neo-Buddhists could not tolerate the injustice done to them by upper castes any more and therefore, a radical militant movement like Dalit Panther came into existence. Neo-Buddhists are so frustrated that emergence of such a movement was justifiable. The Panthers' aim is to fight for equal rights of the neo-Buddhists. In villages as well as in cities wherever neo-Buddhists face injustice the Panthers run to help them. The Panthers want the neo-Buddhists to cast out their submissiveness, timidity and feeling of insecurity and want to encourage them to fight for the rights which the society has denied to them and is not ready to grant peacefully.

Thus though many justified the emergence of a militant movement, still most of the elites were pessimistic about the future of the Dalit Panther mainly because of factional quarrels. Some of the respondents explained that mere enthusiasm does not last longer, firm ideology and definite programme is very crucial in such movements which the Panther leaders lacked, and due to that splits developed and the movement lost its original vigour. Some respondents even grieved to see disintegration of the Dalit Panther.

**Views about the future of the Neo-Buddhists**

When asked about their views relating to the steps that should be taken in future by the neo-Buddhists, almost all of them observed that on the one hand self-improvement through
higher education, prestigious occupation and good behaviour is necessary, and on the other hand fighting has to be continued. More than half of them were of the opinion that definite radical steps are the only ways opened for them to bring about a solution to their problem. One respondent said, "We have to reconquer our just human rights, and for that soft handling is of no use, revolution is the only way."

However, it is interesting to note the paradox that none of the respondents reported their active participation in the militant movement. It may be due to two reasons, viz., either that many of them being government servants feared to report of their association in any such activities, or that being in government service, to save their self-interest, they could not in reality take any radical steps. If the latter reasoning is true, it may provide some justification to the common man's complaint that the elites are contented with their own prosperity and are least interested in the problems of the whole group of neo-Buddhists.

**Summing Up**

It is generally believed that higher education, higher occupation and higher style of life help an individual to climb up the status ladder. This group of neo-Buddhist elite respondents stands quite high up on the educational, occupational and economic scale. Our findings indicate that their personal achievements in education and occupation, as well as their acceptance of the Buddhist identity have
influenced to change their conception of themselves. However, there is a gap between their conception and the 'others' conception of their social position. It appears that most of them have realized that despite of their personal achievements they are not totally able to escape discrimination. Such a frustrating experience of status incongruence has resulted in a tendency of withdrawal in some spheres of their lives, as in making friendship or in choice of neighbourhood etc. In order to escape discrimination 'passing' is also tried by a few.

Our findings about the occupational position of these respondents show that all of them have achieved considerable mobility, particularly compared to their fathers. Most of the respondents also seem to be contented with their achievement in occupational position.

About the religious beliefs and practices of these neo-Buddhist elites, it seems that still all the respondents have not completely broken away from their traditional moorings. It is generally thought that education helps a man to become more rational to get rid of deep rooted prejudices and to accept change. However, it seems that despite of higher education the group as a whole is still in a state of uncertainty and divided between the old and the new. A few have accepted the change, some are still continuing with the old beliefs and practices and a few others are in the midstream of change, who have neither discarded the old
completely nor accepted the new totally, who can be called the marginal among the marginals.

The findings about their political attitudes indicate that there is some discontentment among many of the respondents about the various political parties, including the Republican Party. Further, it shows that there is a definite tendency among these respondents to fight and many elites were in favour of radical steps and even a militant movement to acquire their rights. However, about the future of 'Dalit Panther' many were pessimistic mainly because of the factionalism in it.

Looking at these findings, it appears that the neo-Buddhist elites have not come out of the marginal position. In religious matters as in many other areas there seems to be a divided loyalty, uncertainty. On political issues there seem to be discontentment. The incongruence in the occupational status and social status seems to have led to frustration. This has made them to support militant movements or to take radical steps to achieve their goals.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid., p. 62.


8. Stonequist, op. cit., p. 123, also pp. 201-209.

9. Refer to his various speeches reported in *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*, Speeches compiled by Bhagwan Das, op. cit., Vol. I and Vol. II.

10. Stonequist, op. cit., pp. 150-152.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., pp. 184-199.
