CHAPTER IV

MARGINALITY OF THE NEO-BUDDHISTS
IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE

If one looks at the historical background and the whole course of the neo-Buddhist movement, it appears, as mentioned earlier, that it is basically a status-seeking movement. We define status as 'a socially identifiable position', which carries with it institutionalized expectations of behaviour. Each position and its correlative role is evaluated by members of a group as superior or inferior, and carries some respect or prestige. The status in society is either ascribed or achieved, that is, based upon either relatively fixed criteria over which one has no control, or upon qualities or attributes that can be gained by direct action. The neo-Buddhist movement aims at changing the ascribed status of the group which was based upon the norms of the Hindu caste system.

As mentioned earlier, when the early reformative efforts to enhance the group's status were rebuffed, there arose counter movement of resentment and differentiation, which resulted into renunciation of Hinduism and conversion to Buddhism. By this, the group tried to reconstruct the conception of itself, as well as to redefine its place or role in society. However, unless and until the outer world accepts the redefinition of the social position of this

* Ref. Chapter on Historical Background.
group, and until this group gets the feeling of acceptance by the others, the group may find itself in a marginal position.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section we are presenting our findings about the neo-Buddhist group's own conception of its position in the society, and its feelings about the recognition given to its claim for that status by the outer world, and the group's efforts to adjust with the situation. In the second section of this chapter we are presenting our findings about the group's position particularly in the economic sphere of life.

Section I: Social Position of the Neo-Buddhists

Respondents' reason for conversion

Though it appeared to us that the conversion of this group to Buddhism was mainly a status-seeking move, still, to confirm our presumption, we requested the respondents to state their reasons for embracing Buddhism. Our findings are given in Table 1.

It is quite clear from the above table that a little more than half of the respondents had embraced Buddhism with the hope of winning equal status with and equal treatment from the higher castes. Compared with the findings on the same issue of other researchers like A. Bopegamage\(^2\) and Adele Fiske,\(^3\) our figures do not seem to vary much. Our figure is 55 per cent while Bopegamage's is 56.07
Table 1. Various reasons for conversion to Buddhism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reasons</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ambedkar's wish</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social equality (includes ill-treatment by the Hindus)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other accepted</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Pressure</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreed with the Principles of Buddhism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>+</sup> This includes one such respondent, who is not formally converted, but as others call themselves Buddhists, he too calls himself a Buddhist.

It also appears that nearly quarter of the respondents --24 per cent-- had embraced Buddhism as they wanted to respect Ambedkar's wish. This indicates that some are blind followers of the leader. A few had got converted as they blindly followed what others did and a few others had got converted because of social pressure. Only 3 respondents had embraced Buddhism after having studied the principles of Buddhism.

An attempt is made to find if there was any relationship between respondent's level of education and the reason for conversion.
**Table 2. The reason for conversion and its correlation with the level of education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reasons</th>
<th>Illiterate and semi-literate</th>
<th>Primary completed to SSC passed</th>
<th>Above SSC to graduation and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ambedkar’s wish</td>
<td>17.85</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social equality (includes ill-treatment by the Hindu)</td>
<td>57.15</td>
<td>52.78</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All others accepted</td>
<td>8.93</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>42.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social pressure</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreed with the principles of Buddhism</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This respondent is not formally converted, but as others call themselves Buddhist, be too calls himself so.

It is clear from the table that there is no difference whether the respondents belonged to very low level or to middle level of education or had studied above S.S.C., social equality was the reason for the conversion of half of all the groups.

It also appears that there was no significant difference between the other reasons given by the respondents belonging to three different levels of education, except, that no respondent belonging to highly educated category
given his reason for conversion as 'social pressure', while 14.28 per cent of those belonging to low educated category had succumbed to such pressures. This difference may indicate that the social pressure was more operative at the low level of education of the respondents.

On the whole, it can be said that a significant number of respondents, irrespective of their educational level, had embraced Buddhism to achieve social equality.

Their Opinion about the Achievement of Equality

The next question was to examine whether they have achieved their main aim of gaining social equality after about 20 years of conversion. In order to elicit the respondents' view on this issue, a question was included in the questionnaire. Those respondents who had already reported that their reason for conversion was to gain social equality, were asked to state whether their wish was gratified after becoming Buddhist. Our statistical findings show that out of 55 such respondents no one said that the wish was gratified totally, nearly one third said that it was gratified to some extent and the felt that it was not at all.

A similar type of question was asked to elicit information about their opinion whether they have achieved equal status in social affairs, political affairs, and economic affairs. The findings are as seen in Table 3.

* We had started our field investigation since 1976, that is 20 years after 1956, when mass conversion movement started.
Table 3. The opinion about the achievement of equal status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether achieved</th>
<th>in social affairs</th>
<th>in political affairs</th>
<th>in economic affairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is very clear from the table that the majority of the respondents did not feel that the group has achieved equal status in these three spheres of life.

A comparison of results show that only in political affairs they believe that they have achieved equal status to some extent (26 per cent). By political affairs they seemed to have meant equal right to vote, equal right to contest the election, etc., by which they could equally participate in the political life of the country. These (26 per cent) respondents, it seems, might not have visualised the difference between the participation in political life and to be able to control the situation.

The Status Aspired and Achieved after Conversion

Next, the respondents were asked to state the status they had aspired to get by becoming Buddhists. Our data, though not big in size, indicate that by becoming Buddhists the whole group sought higher status. Nearly quarter of the group wanted to be higher than what they were before, but
did not clearly point out that they had any particular group in society as their reference group. Sixty-four per cent had higher status group in society as their reference group and nine per cent had Brahmins as their reference group.

The respondents were further asked to state whether they feel that they have achieved the aspired status. The findings are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The Aspired Status by becoming Buddhist and the Feeling of Achievement of that status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether achieved the status</th>
<th>Higher than what you were before</th>
<th>Equal to all the higher status people</th>
<th>Equal to Brahmins</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubtful</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Six respondents did not answer.

It shows that a large majority either had the negative opinion or the doubtful opinion about the achievement of that status they aspired to get. Our findings indicate the frustration of the group in reaching the reference point and this may give an indication of the group’s marginal position.

On the whole, it appears that the neo-Buddhists did not feel that they have achieved equal status. These findings support the findings mentioned earlier.
Compared with our findings mentioned earlier on the same issue, one may find a slight variation in the figures pointing their feeling of non-achievement of equal status. It may be that variations occur because of their marginal and ambiguous position. Even sometimes they make contradictory statements. However, all the findings indicate that there exists a feeling among the neo-Buddhists that they have not achieved the aspired status.

The Claimed and the Gained Status

In another question the respondents were asked to state their own conception of their social status whether as higher or equal or lower in relation to other groups in society. Their responses are given in Table 5.

Table 5. The Respondents' Own Conception of their Status compared to the Status of Other Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other group</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Total No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>81.25</td>
<td>16.75</td>
<td>64 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maratha</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>82.82</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>64 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan caste groups</td>
<td>15.62</td>
<td>81.26</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>64 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The so-called untouchable caste groups</td>
<td>95.32</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>64 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious groups</td>
<td>7.82</td>
<td>85.93</td>
<td>6.23</td>
<td>64 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 36 respondents had stated that all castes are equal.
The table clearly points out that the majority of the neo-Buddhists placed themselves equal to the groups which had higher status in society, and placed themselves higher to the so-called untouchable groups who had low status in society. It appears that after conversion to Buddhism, the group's own conception of itself had changed; they felt that they were equal to the higher status group in the society and higher than the so-called untouchables. So, it means, that the higher status group was their positive reference group of identification and the so-called untouchable group was the negative reference group.

But the real issue is, whether their positive reference group accepts or rejects this 'up-start' group as their equal and if the 'up-start' group gets the feeling that their claim is rebuffed what happens. We have dealt with the consequences of such a situation later on in this study.

Next we asked our informants to state how the other groups, in comparison with their (the other groups') social position, place the neo-Buddhists. Table 6 gives the statistical findings.

The responses as given in the table show that the neo-Buddhists felt, that the groups having higher status in society did not accept them as equals. More particularly almost all the respondents seem to have formed such opinion regarding the caste-Hindu groups.

The table also points out that the so-called untouchable groups in society too had not changed their conception
Table 6. The Respondents' Conception of How the Other Groups Place the Neo-Buddhists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Other Groups</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Total No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maratha</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan caste group</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The so-called untouchable caste group</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religious groups</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of these former Mahars after their conversion to Buddhism. Majority of our respondents stated that the so-called untouchable castes placed the neo-Buddhists as their equals.

Thus these facts indicate that there was no change of status of the neo-Buddhists in the eyes of others. These enquiries also reveal that their positive reference group of identification was not ready to accept them as equals. If we compare the findings in this table with the findings in the previous table, it appears that there is a large gap between their conception of themselves and the others conception about them. This gap between their aspired ideal and their experienced reality may be indicative of their marginal position in the society.
Terms of Identification

Our findings to one more query in the questionnaire also supports this contention. The respondents were asked to state by which term they identify themselves—whether Mahar, or neo-Buddhist, or Buddhists. Mahar was their term of identification prior to conversion and it revealed their caste identity. Buddhist is their new term of identification. Neo-Buddhist is the term which is in common usage. This also suggests that they are newly converted Buddhists, and the society is conscious of the fact that the newly converted Buddhists are the former untouchables.

In our enquiry not a single respondent identified himself as Mahar. Almost all of our respondents said that they were either Buddhists, or neo-Buddhists.

A large number of respondents had no objection to their identification as neo-Buddhist not knowing the specific meaning the term 'neo-Buddhist' conveys. Their leaders are now trying to spread this knowledge among the group. Lack of knowledge about the idea this term conveys was found to be less among the educated respondents. Our enquiries on the point show that almost all of those who had studied above S.S.C. (7 out of 8 persons), and slightly above a quarter of those who belonged to the middle educational level—primary complete to S.S.C. (11 out of 36), and very few of the low educational level (5 out of 56) wanted the only term 'Buddhist' to be used to refer to them.
On the whole, the findings indicate that the group wanted to get rid of their previous identity as Mahars.

However, the important point is, how do others refer to them. The responses of the neo-Buddhists on this point reveal the fact that the terms like 'Mahar', 'Mahar-Boudha' (which very well reveals their marginal status), 'Harijans' were used largely to refer to them. Most of our respondents i.e. 82 per cent, said that they were called as 'Mahar', 'Mahar-Bouddha', 'Harijan', as well as 'Nav-Bouddha' (neo-Buddhist). Only two per cent said that they were called only as Buddhists. Twelve per cent said that people referred to them only as Mahars (not even as 'nav Bouddha').

These findings too indicate that though this group aspired to discard its caste-based identity and wanted to achieve an identity which would convey its higher status, the outer world was not, as yet, ready to accept the changes. This may give a further indication of their marginal status.

Treatments the Neo-Buddhists Receive in Society

The next issue that came within the purview of our enquiries was to examine the treatment the neo-Buddhists received from the non-Buddhists. The respondents were asked to state whether after conversion to Buddhism they were treated differently than the so-called untouchable castes.

Our findings show, that out of 100 respondents, 61 respondents reported that there was no difference in the

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*The term 'Harijan' is coined by Mahatma Gandhi to refer to the untouchables. However, there is a feeling of antipathy to the appellation 'Harijan' on the part of Ambedkar's followers, as according to them this term is a mark of sympathy and not of equality.*
treatment, thirty-three said that they could find some difference, and six did not answer.

A few of those respondents who did not find any difference, told the investigator, that even at public places or at their place of work, they had experienced very obvious discriminating treatment. Some respondents expressed that though at public places or at the place of work or in schools or colleges they were not overtly discriminated, still, they were covertly avoided by giving some other excuses. Particularly when it came to the level of personal relationship, like developing friendship or inviting at one's place, such avoidance was attempted by caste Hindus more than anyone else. Some of these respondents further observed that in the case of other so-called untouchable castes too, very overt expression of untouchability was rare in a city like Poona, but its covert expression was a common experience.

Those 33 respondents who reported that they could find some difference were asked to specify how exactly the difference was felt. Twenty-five felt that there was no discrimination at public places, and some caste Hindus even had invited the neo-Buddhists at their houses on certain occasions. In their opinion, the so-called untouchable caste people do not receive such treatment.

However, this part of the enquiry reveals the fact, that the majority of the neo-Buddhist respondents felt that there was not much change in their untouchable status even
after conversion. This may be mainly due to the fact that status involves at least two persons or two groups. One to claim it and the other one to accept that claim. ⁵ Though the neo-Buddhists claim higher status after their conversion to Buddhism, if the caste Hindus refuse to accept that claim, the neo-Buddhists would not find much difference in the treatment given to them than it is given to the so-called untouchable castes.

In order to get a more clear idea about the perpetua-
tion of the illtreatment meted to the neo-Buddhists, the respondents were asked to cite any incidence when they were treated as untouchable by other people, after their conversion to Buddhism.

Out of 100 respondents only 15 were able to cite such incidences, 47 respondents said that it was difficult for them to state any one such incidence, but it was their every-
day life experience. Twenty-six respondents said that they had no such experience and 12 respondents refused to answer this query.

Out of the 15 respondents who have cited their parti-
cular experiences, six of them have stated incidences which they had experienced at their place of work. Of these one respondent reported that in his factory he was not selected for a training course which was to be held in a foreign country. Such partial treatment was, according to him, due to his caste background. One respondent reported that he could not get promotion due to his caste background.
Another said that Brahmin clerks in his office did not use the glass which he and his other two neo-Buddhist friends used for drinking water. Another respondent, who worked as a gardener in one private house reported that if, any time food was served to him, he had to take food outside the house and had to use separate utensils for food and water. He further said that other caste Hindu servants in that house did not get such treatment. Another respondent who worked as a driver in a house also mentioned the same experience. One more respondent reported that at his place of work, god 'Datta' was commonly worshipped by all the workers in his section on every Thursday; however, his colleagues never allowed him to garland the god's photograph because of his caste background.

Two other respondents have cited their experience of discrimination which were in the context of the place of residence. One such respondent, who was a graduate and had a white-collar job reported that he could not get a residential accommodation in a locality of upper caste Hindus, even after trying hard for it. He explained that by giving some false reasons he was refused by the upper caste owner of the building. Another respondent who was staying in a locality where heterogeneous type of population was residing,

※ According to Hindu tradition, untouchables do not have right to worship.

※※ Parvati Hill area, ref. Chapter on Socio-Economic Characteristics.
reported that he and his family members were ill-treated by the neighbours who were caste Hindus.

One respondent cited an incidence, that when he wanted to get admission for his daughter in one particular school in Poona, the principal of that school told him openly that he should try in another school which was mostly attended by students belonging to low castes.

Some of these respondents stated their experiences when they had visited some nearby villages. Some of them were not allowed to take water from the common well and some were asked to eat outside caste Hindu’s houses.

One respondent narrated an interesting experience. He said that he had experienced such differentiating treatment from a foreigner Boudha Bhikku (Buddhist monk) too. The respondent observed that when one such Bhikku had visited their locality, he tried to remain aloof from them, and that was due to their caste background. He further said, "we are treated as untouchables not only by Brahmins, but also by these Bhikkus who come from foreign lands."

Such incidents, though were cited by a few, are very significant as they reveal how exactly the discrimination was experienced and felt by the neo-Buddhists. Of course, one cannot be sure about whether or not in all these incidents discrimination was intended by the other party. For example, it is difficult to diagnose correctly about the experience cited by the respondent regarding the discriminating treatment received at the hands of a Buddhist monk. It may be
due to their excessive self-consciousness or caste-consciousness, that they might have developed a peculiar tendency of finding malice or discrimination where none was intended. Similarly, it is also possible, that in certain cases their failure might be because of personal defects but they attributed it to caste prejudice. For example, it is likely that in the cases of not getting promotion in the office, or not getting the opportunity for the training in the foreign land, the respondents might be finding their caste background a convenient scapegoat.

However, a correct diagnosis is difficult, since prejudice is frequent enough to make the individuals' plaints fair ones. But the significant point is that, whether or not the discrimination was intended, till the time the individuals concerned feel that it was intended and brood over the situation, their problem continues.

Moreover, though such particular incidents were cited by a few, 47 respondents, other than these, had stated, as mentioned earlier, that such ill-treatment was their usual experience. A few of them told the investigator, that though they did not experience untouchability in the sense of physical touch, still they were never treated as equals to upper caste people. Some educated respondents expressed, that they never received the treatment which was normally given to educated Brahmins. Many respondents who were working in factories or in certain administrative offices stated that they always had to listen to certain insulting
remarks passed at them in an indirect manner. Majority
of these respondents explained that it was difficult for
them to cite any one such incident as it was their every-
day life experience. They expressed their feeling that
though they had changed their religion, in the eyes of others
they were still Mahars.

It appears that the conversion intensified their
aspiration for higher status to the maximum possible level.
After renouncing the Hindu fold they obviously started
feeling that they were no more untouchable Hindus. However,
they have been realizing, as our findings show, that the
outer world has not changed their mind about them. For
them it is mere a change of label from Mahar to neo-Buddhist
or to 'Mahar-Boudha'. In the midst of such frustrating
experience it seems, that it is difficult for the neo-
Buddhists to reach their ideal. It reveals their marginal
position.

Conversion, the only way to achieve the higher status?

Further, in order to know our respondents' opinion
about the role of conversion in achieving the aspired status,
we asked them to state whether they felt, that conversion
to another religion from Hinduism was the only way for the
so-called untouchables to get higher status in Indian
society? Majority of our respondents gave negative answer
to this. In the course of informal talks one respondent
put it in a poetic manner that, "a very huge land is culti-
vated, but is it not necessary to see whether the grains
are grown or not." It indicates, that after two decades' frustrating experience the neo-Buddhists have been realizing that conversion is not the only way to get the aspired status.

These findings are supported by some more responses given by the informants to certain other queries. The respondents were asked to complete one sentence that "by the way of conversion into Buddhism neo-Buddhist have got...". Their responses are given in the following table.

Table 7. Opinion about the Benefits of Conversion to Buddhism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Benefits</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-respect (includes mental satisfaction and ambition to make progress, feeling of equality)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of life is improved</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better treatment by Hindus</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No benefit</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It seems from the table that only a small per cent of the respondents feel that after conversion to Buddhism they receive better treatment from the Hindus. The other

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These were included in the last part of the questionnaire, where the respondents were asked to complete the sentences by filling in the words.
two benefits of conversion—self-respect and improvement in the style of life (behaviour, living pattern, etc.)—were reported by nearly 50 per cent of the respondents. It appears to us, that though these were the healthy developments which may eventually force recognition and respect from the upper group, still, till there is positive recognition by the outer world, there may not be a real change in the social position of these persons. Merely by respecting oneself, social position of an individual does not change. Same respect has to be given by the others. Moreover, increased self-respect may bring about more frustration if the outer world does not change its view towards them. If the caste Hindu society perpetually maintains a rather fixed conception of what the untouchable is, even after conversion to Buddhism the neo-Buddhist group which is affected by this attitude may find itself in a marginal situation during the transitional phase. The similar type of observation was made by Stonequist in the case of a marginal Negro in United States, who, finds himself in a marginal situation due to White man's fixed conception of what the Negro is. Thus, it seems, that at least during the transitional phase, these so-called benefits may add to their marginal situation.

\* Who, in Stonequist's opinion, is not only a racial hybrid but also a cultural hybrid - for details see Stonequist, op.cit., pp. 106-119.
Moreover, as the table shows, 38 per cent respondents reported no benefits of conversion.

On the whole these findings show that majority of the respondents have not reported rise in status as the benefit of conversion to Buddhism, and the other benefits of conversion, which are reported by the respondents, may add to their marginal situation at least during the transitional period. This supports the view as mentioned earlier that conversion to Buddhism has not contributed much towards gaining the aspired status, and, in fact, it has contributed towards leading this group to marginal situation.

**Education, occupation, etc., as the Status giving factors in society**

As seen earlier, majority of the neo-Buddhists realise that conversion is not the only way to get higher status. So the question is, what other factors they visualise as status giving ones. Some replies given by these respondents to questions on this point indicate that they want to give more emphasis to educational development, engagement in more prestigious and remunerative jobs and the improvement in one's behaviour and in the style of life. The respondents were asked to complete such sentences as: (1) 'People who are highly regarded are those...'. (2) 'If you want to raise social status in Indian society, you should...'. (3) 'The best thing for the neo-Buddhists would be...'. (4)'The best thing for the untouchables would be...'.

Our findings show that while answering them nearly three
quarter of the respondents gave importance to good education, good occupation and good behaviour and higher style of life. It seems that they have become aware that these are the status giving factors in the modern world and if they improve in these three spheres, they would get an access to the higher status society.

**Demand for Constitutional Privileges**

Such awareness on their part about the need of educational, occupational and behavioural improvement, has led them to demand the constitutional privileges for them which are given to Scheduled Castes in India. By embracing Buddhism they have gone out of the Hindu caste fold, and they emphatically want to maintain their casteless identity as seen earlier, but at the same time they demand the privileges given to the Scheduled Castes, and want to maintain their caste identity.

Majority of the respondents had secured the free ships while getting their education, and more than half had got the benefit of reserved seat in services. Further more, for getting such benefits more than half of the respondents had applied as Mahars and another quarter of the rest had applied as Neo-Buddhists. In fact the Government of Maharashtra by Resolution No. BCC-1054-III-J dated 9th April 1968 has bracketted the Mahars and the neo-Buddhists together for utilising the special concessions given in educational and occupational fields. So even by applying as Neo-Buddhists they can get the special benefits in
Maharashtra. But still, as our enquiries show, many respondents had applied as Mahars. During the course of our informal discussions we could gather some information on this point. It appears that many of them were not sure that by applying as neo-Buddhists they would definitely get the benefits. Some educated respondents in this group expressed the fear that the Central Government has not extended these privileges to the neo-Buddhists as yet, therefore, if they, in future, seek to get a job which comes under the scope of Central Government, they would not get the benefit of the reserved seat by applying as neo-Buddhist. Therefore, according to their view it was safer to register oneself as Mahar or scheduled caste from the time a child enters school. Such explanations given by them indicate that for them gaining the concessions was more important than maintaining their casteless identity.

Such tendency has been generally explained as the ' Opportunism '. However, if one goes more deeper, it seems that such attempts on their part reflect the general problem situation they are in. Higher education, prestigious and high salaried jobs, modern style of life are the most important values in the modern world. These are also the symbols of higher status group in Indian society. The neo-Buddhists by accepting these modern values and the modern symbols of status are trying to reach their aspired status level. It is a kind of anticipatory socialization. Merton
defines anticipatory socialization as "the acquisition of values and orientations found in statuses and groups in which one is not yet engaged but which one is likely to enter. By raising their educational, occupational and behavioural level they want to get access to the higher status level. However, due to their low economic conditions such achievements are out of their reach. This situation of the poverty, the associated lack of opportunity and the co-existence of cultural emphasis on higher education, occupation and style of life has made them to demand the special privileges given to the scheduled castes in India. In such situation they are making efforts to get the benefit of their caste identity. In the present Indian situation individual's identification with his caste, particularly if the individual belongs to scheduled castes, has become very significant because of the advantages which accrue for belonging to a named caste. In such situation in order to secure the special privileges to raise their secular status they are trying to maintain their caste-identity which otherwise they would discard. Therefore, their so-called opportunism is the outcome of their basic aspiration to rise in status.

To turn to our findings it appears that most of our respondents too gave such type of explanation when they were asked the question, that if you feel that you are a higher status person, why do you try to get the benefits given to the scheduled castes. The reasons they gave were
interesting. Majority of our respondents expressed their desire to make progress and to raise their status and they expressed how their low conditions of life stood against their path of progress, and thus explained the need of the privileges.

Few others pointed out a significant contradiction, and reasoned, that if they received a discriminating treatment in society, why should not they get the benefit of the constitutional measure of "Protective Discrimination."

Few more pointed out another significant reality, that merely by becoming Buddhists their economic conditions cannot be changed, and for bringing about such changes education and good occupation were necessary, and to get that the privileges were necessary.

On the whole our discussion indicates that there was a strong awareness about the need to raise the level of education, occupation and the resultant style of life, and there was also a simultaneous awareness that without the special privileges such improvement was not possible, so, they demanded the privileges which were given to the Scheduled Castes. It seems that the need to get higher status, and for that the need to adopt the culturally prized values—higher education, occupation, etc. is felt by them so strongly that for achieving that they do not
hesitate even to retain their caste identity and conceal their casteless identity which otherwise they emphasize. Due to their aspiration to climb in status, they are undergoing a crisis of identity. At one and the same period they are having the two conflicting identities—the neo-Buddhist and the Mahar which characterise them as a marginal group.

**Food Habits**

Such anticipatory socialization or an effort to adopt the prestigious values of the dominant group was also found in another changed behavioural pattern of the respondents. It was in their food-habits. Mahars had the tradition of eating meat not only of goat, but also of pig, of cow and of dead animals, too. Mahar food habits aroused disgust in the minds of Brahmins, which was one of the considerations for practising untouchability. Therefore, shedding out of such supposed-to-be dirty food-habits was one of the essential conditions for Mahars who were striving to rise in social position. Ambedkar always preached against habits like carrion eating and advocated the adoption of clean habits for Mahars. Even prior to conversion to Buddhism, in certain public meetings, Mahars collectively had passed the resolutions renouncing such

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* All of our respondents were Mahar Hindus before their conversion to Buddhism. Refer to our Chapter on Socio-Economic Characteristics of neo-Buddhists.
so-called dirty food habits. After embracing Buddhism it had an added dimension, as Buddhism preaches 'Ahimsa' (non-violence), and 'no killing' is one of the five precepts (Pancha Sheel) of Buddhist Order.

In our study of neo-Buddhists we attempted to see the extent of change in their food habits. Our statistical findings show that the majority of respondents (88 percent) reported that though they had not completely stopped non-vegetarian food, still, eating of beef, pork and more particularly carrion was renounced. Eating of goat's meat, fish and eggs they still continued. Some of the respondents tried to justify it by saying that 'now-a-days Brahmins too eat mutton, so why should not we eat'. Some tried to rationalize by saying that Buddhism does not say don't eat meat, it says don't kill. Once even Bhagwan Buddha (the Lord Buddha) accepted meat when it was offered as 'Bhiksha' (alms). By giving such justifications they continued eating non-vegetarian food except carrion, beef, etc. Renouncing of the most tabooed food, particularly beef which is the flesh of cow, which is an object of worship for Hindus, appear to be an effort to adopt the prestigious values of the overgroup in order to secure their recognition. Such type of anticipatory socialization was carried on in order to get an access to the reference group.

"Passing"

Such type of effort to get an access to the dominant group may be extended to a high level which can be called
as "passing" as a member of an upper-caste group. To "Pass" means to conceal one's real identity—ethnic, national, etc. and to pretend to be the member of the other group. This passing is found to be present among some of the untouchables in Indian society.

In this group of neo-Buddhist respondents 'passing' was not reported to a great extent. However, it was observed that because of ill-treatment meted out to them they have now realized that it is better, at certain times, to conceal one's identity, even that as a neo-Buddhist. One respondent said, "When I go to villages for some official work, I tell my caste to be 'Mali' (gardener-non-untouchable Hindu caste)". He further observed that "even if we say we are Buddhists, people think of us and treat us as Mahars. So I have come to the conclusion that it is better not to reveal my caste." Such a tendency, though was reported by a few, indicates how, in order to escape discriminations and antagonism and to share the advantages of membership of the dominant group, people tend to 'pass'. This also indicates how it was difficult to seek status even after conversion and this reveals their marginality.

Changing One's Name

Another method adopted was to 'change the names' which is also a form of 'passing'. The neo-Buddhists who were former Mahars have certain surnames. These surnames represent the exogamous units among the Mahars. These
surnames have been continued even after their conversion to Buddhism. Some of the surnames of the neo-Buddhists are also found among some of the upper castes like Maratha. For example, 'Chavan', 'Gaikwad', 'Shinde', 'Bhosle', etc. However, most surnames indicate their caste origin. For example, 'Kamble', 'Dhende', 'Sakpal', 'Ranpise', etc. Such names did obstruct their upward mobility in the society, as reported by some respondents. One respondent expressed 'when we apply for a job, our names Kamble or Kharat put limits to the possibility of our getting the job'. In such a situation, it is likely that they could try to get rid of such marks of identification and 'pass' as members of an upper group.

However, among our neo-Buddhist respondents such tendency was not found. During the course of informal talks with the respondents we could gather some information on this point. A few expressed that though their names indicated their caste identity and though they wished to get rid of them, still, they could not do so, as it was not generally approved by their group members, and they could not afford to cut off their links with the parent group. Another few expressed that even by changing the name the problem cannot be solved, as at once they designate themselves as neo-Buddhist, their identity would be known, as the world knows that neo-Buddhists are former Mahars. Some respondents explained that they were proud of their family names and did not want to change them. The last
explanation given by the respondents indicate how some of these marginal individuals still experienced the pull of their old loyalties to the original group.

However, though this tendency of changing of family names was not found, still an interesting trend could be noted and that was in the pattern of naming the children. It was observed that most of the names either sounded like modern names which were common among the upper castes or educated people, or the names were chosen from the Buddhist stories. For example, the names for boys were, Sanjeev, Rajendra (modern) or Gautam, Rahul (Buddhist) and for girls were, Nutan, Meena (modern) or Gautami, Sujata (Buddhist). While most of the names in the father's generation were not only old type but also, to certain extent, were indicative of their lower cultural pattern, e.g. Dagdu, Bhiku, etc. This new trend of adoption of modern or Buddhist names may indicate their aspiration to get rid of all the signs of their backwardness and get an access to the higher status group.

The Willingness for Social Relations with Other Groups

The findings mentioned above indicate how the neo-Buddhists have been making efforts to reduce the distance between them and the upper group. In order to examine their concept of 'social distance', we used a modified form of Bogardus Social Distance Scale in our questionnaire. We asked the respondents to state whether they were willing to have particular type of relationships like eating ,
together, marriage, etc. with the mentioned groups. The findings are given in Table 8.

The table shows that almost all the respondents were ready for eating together, for joint recreation and for working together with all communities. However, when it came to matters of close personal relationships, the percentage of respondents, who were ready to have such relations with all communities went down. The findings show that only half of the respondents showed their willingness to accept a member of any community as a guest in their house, as a domestic servant and as a neighbour. These are the areas where persons come in more close and personal contacts, and our respondents seem to have restricted their choice of groups to a few to have close relation. When it comes to a personal matter like marriage almost all the respondents seem to have restricted their choice only to their own group. This reveals their continuation with the traditional caste norms of endogamy.

Also this indicates that the respondents had accepted the modern ideology of universalism to some extent, but at the same time that they had retained their traditional caste norms to certain extent. In the case of impersonal, formal relationships, their attitude was modern and universal, while in the case of more personal and close relationships their views were more traditional and particularistic. This reveals the fact that their's was a divided loyalty--partly to the old order and partly to the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Only neo-Buddhists</th>
<th>All communities</th>
<th>All except other religious groups</th>
<th>All except other religions and untouchable castes</th>
<th>Only neo-Buddhists and Brahmins and Marathas</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating together</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As guest in your house</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As domestic servant</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint recreation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As neighbour</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As fellow-worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
new. This character too makes them fall into a marginal group.

Of course, these responses do not show that the neo-Buddhist respondents were willing to restrict their social intercourse only to the upper castes and wanted to avoid their social relationships with the so-called untouchables in order to climb upward. For example, their choice for marriage relations was restricted to their own group, and it did not either extend to or limit to the upper castes. While, on the other hand, they were ready for eating together, etc., with the so-called untouchable castes too. This too indicates their divided mind partly pulled by the old order partly by the new one.

Our findings also indicate that even if they were educated or not, they wanted to have marital relations only within the neo-Buddhist group. Even some of those with higher educational qualifications have expressed this way. Similarly, whether they were young or old, they still wanted to restrict the marital relations only to the neo-Buddhists. It shows that the age and education factors did not have too much influence on their choice of marital partners.

**Friendship**

Friendship connotes a certain equality of status and provides opportunities of personal relationship. Therefore, we made an attempt to find out whether there was any inter-group friendship.
Our findings show that most of such friendships of our respondents were confined to their own neo-Buddhist group. Fifty-six per cent of the respondents reported that they had only neo-Buddhist friends. The remaining 44 per cent respondents reported that they have inter-group friendship as well as friendship with the neo-Buddhist persons. Moreover, out of these 44 per cent respondents, who had inter-group friends nearly half of them had friends who belonged to the so-called untouchable castes like Chambhar, Mang, Bhangi, etc. and the remaining half had their friends who belonged to the upper castes or other religions or other regional groups.

On the whole, according to our findings, the friendship of the neo-Buddhist respondents was mostly confined to their own group or to the other lower status group. A few expressed that instead of getting insulted by the others, they preferred not to associate with others more.

Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood is another such area which provided an opportunity to develop personal relationship with others. We have already mentioned in our chapter on socio-economic characteristics that these neo-Buddhist respondents were residing in the predominantly neo-Buddhist localities. Though, some of the areas had mixed population, still, there were many neo-Buddhists* and their houses were

* Refer to our chapter on socio-economic characteristics, and the part dealing with lower strata of the neo-Buddhists in that chapter.
closely located.

When the respondents were asked to state whether or not they liked their present neighbourhood, out of 100 respondents, 87 answered that they liked it and 13 respondents said that they did not like it. Further, they were asked to give the reasons for their liking or disliking of the neighbourhood. The findings are given in Table 9.

Table 9. Reasons for their Liking or Disliking of their neighbourhood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reasons</th>
<th>No. of Respondents who</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>liked the neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High caste people in the neighbourhood</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low caste people in the neighbourhood</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the midst of neo-Buddhists</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income people in the neighbourhood</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since many years we stay here</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that the majority liked their neighbourhood as they were living in the midst of their own people. This may be giving them a feeling of security of status and a helping hand at the time of family crises.
However, a very few respondents did not mind living in the midst of high caste people with the hope of getting assimilated into them or status raised.

Out of the 13 respondents who did not like their neighbourhood, some of them felt so as they were situated in the midst of low caste people and they always aspired to get assimilated into high caste group; and a few respondents felt so as they did not like their being surrounded by the high caste people who looked at them as strangers.

Further, we asked the respondents to state their preference for a type of neighbourhood and its reasons. The findings are given in Table 10.

It appears from the table that a few (13 per cent) of our respondents preferred the neighbourhood of high caste Hindus as many of them felt that they were equal to the high caste Hindus.

Nearly half of the respondents preferred to be in the midst of neo-Buddhists only as they felt secured in the midst of their own people.

Also nearly 40 per cent of the respondents said that they would like to stay with all others but they expressed the doubt about the treatment which they would receive by staying in the midst of others. Some of these respondents told the investigator that they did not want to have separate 'Boudha wada' (residential cluster of only neo-Buddhists) like former 'Maharwada' (residential cluster

* These respondents were from such residential localities which had mixed population.
Table 10. The Preference for Particular Type of Neighbourhood and Reasons for it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The type of neighbourhood preferred</th>
<th>The reasons</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We are equal to them</td>
<td>To know each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of high caste Hindus</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only of Neo-Buddhists</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any neighbourhood</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
only of Mahars). This indicates that they wanted to be out of 'Ghetto' and wanted to be assimilated in the outer world, but, at the same time, had the doubt about their security of status, when placed amongst others.

On the whole, the findings regarding their attitude about the neighbourhood indicate that there were two streams of thought. One had the wish for assimilation with the dominant group and the other had the wish to have security and recognition. Out of these two thoughts the latter one was more dominant.

Section II. The Position of the Group in the Economic Sphere

Some of the findings in the earlier section of this chapter have shown that this group of neo-Buddhists has realised that education, occupation and style of life are the status giving factors in modern times. In order to acquire this high status and a new identity the group aspires to raise its educational and economic status and the style of life.

We made an attempt to examine how far the group has moved upward on the occupational scale. First, in respondent's own life time and second, compared with his father's occupational status and third, the respondent's aspirations about his children's career.

To know about the occupational mobility in person's
own life-time, we asked the respondents to state the
types of occupation they were engaged in up til the time
of investigation. On the basis of this information
given by the respondents we tried to find out the number
of respondents who had changed their levels of occupa-
tion and tried to examine further if that change was
leading upward.

Our enquiries show that these neo-Buddhist respondents
belonged to three main levels of occupations: (1) Lower
Professions which includes clerical jobs and teaching
jobs in primary or secondary schools; (2) skilled and
semi-skilled labour; and (3) unskilled, manual, agricul-
tural labour which also includes smaller way-side trade as
hawking, etc. Out of the 100 respondents 12 belonged to
the first level of occupation of lower professions, 16
were engaged in skilled or semiskilled labour and 65 were
occupied in unskilled labour. Seven respondents were non-
employed being women. Out of the 100 respondents majority
(87) had not changed their level of occupation in their
life-time and only a small number of 13 per cent had
changed the level leading towards upward direction. A
few of them had changed from semi-skilled labour to lower
professions and above half of them had gone to semi-skilled
level from the level of unskilled labour. However, on
the whole there was no upward occupational mobility in
one's own life time in majority of the cases.

We further made an attempt to find out whether there

For details see the Chapter on Socio-Economic Charac-
teristics.
was a trend of upward mobility from father's occupation to son's occupation.

**Table 11. Levels of Occupation Compared with their Father's**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own Occupation</th>
<th>Father's Occupation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower professions</td>
<td>Skilled, semi-skilled labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower professions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled, semi-skilled labour</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled, manual agricultural labour (includes wayside trade as hawking, etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Seven respondents were non-employed being women.

The table shows that there is a large concentration of respondents in the level of unskilled, manual labour in both the generations—the fathers’ as well as the respondents’ generations. Respondents whose fathers were manual labourers or farm hands, 13 of them had become machine-hands; and 10 had gone up to the level of lower
professions, most of whom were either junior clerks or primary school teachers. This indicates some mobility was there. Also we found that not a single respondent had gone up to the level of higher professions, like engineer or doctor, etc.

On the question of respondents’ aspirations about their children’s career our findings are given in Table 12.

It shows that all the respondents aspired to see their children moving upwards on the occupational ladder compared to their own position on it. Particularly, the aspirations of those respondents who were engaged in unskilled and manual labour, seem to be very high about their children’s career compared to their own occupational status. Nearly a quarter of these respondents wanted their children to be engineers, doctors, etc. This may be partly due to their feeling of non-achievement and relative deprivation in their own life, and partly due to the possibility of achievement of such aspiration by the children under the favourable constitutional measure of 'Protective Discrimination'.

Many of our respondents expected their children to get Government jobs, partly for security and partly due to the relative ease in getting such jobs that are reserved for the backward classes.

On the whole, the findings in this table indicate that aspirations of the respondents about their children's career compared to their own occupational status were high. As Merton points out it may be that frustrated in their own

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* Government of Maharashtra has extended all the Special Concessions to the neo-Buddhists since 1968.
Table 12. Aspirations about their Children’s Career compared with their own Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own Occupation</th>
<th>Expectations about career for children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govt. service</td>
<td>Higher professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Professions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled, semi-skilled labour</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled, manual, agricultural labour (includes way-side trade)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

※ Seven respondents were non-employed.
life to achieve their end-goals, these people seem to project it on their children. 12

Their frustration about their own occupational position could be seen from some of the other findings too. The respondents were asked to state their childhood—hopes about their own occupational career. About half of respondents wanted to become higher professionals like doctors, engineers, or 'big' administrators or a well-known pleader or to be engaged in lower professions as school teachers or clerks in the government, but the other half said that they did not have any such hopes. Many of these latter half respondents expressed in a dejected and fatalistic manner, that they were too suppressed to hope for better. As one respondent put it, "how people like us, who are placed so low and who had no money, could have dreamt of becoming a big "Saheb (a top level officer)".

The respondents who had stated their hopes were asked to state further, whether their hopes were fulfilled in life. Our findings are given in Table 13. It is clear from the table that out of 42 respondents only 18 could fulfil their hopes. Moreover, non-fulfilment of the hopes seems to be more in the case of those who had high hopes. This fact indicates their frustration in their own occupational career.

Most of our findings reveal the frustration of these people about their own occupational status. It is likely that such frustrated persons, and also those who expressed the fatalistic sentiments about their own occupational career,
Table 13. Fulfilment of Childhood Hopes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether fulfilled</th>
<th>Higher Profession</th>
<th>Lower Profession</th>
<th>Government Service</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 58 respondents did not report their childhood hopes.
as mentioned earlier, would project their hopes on their children.

In the traditional Indian social system, many of the occupational roles had an ascriptive content. Particularly all the lowest and unclean kind of jobs were ascribed to the untouchable groups, and such occupations were considered impure. However, the legal enactment has withdrawn, since 1955, the rights of the higher castes to debar the lower castes from doing certain occupations as well as forcing them to carry out certain menial jobs. Though this is true and legally there is no stigma attached to any particular occupation, in actuality not all the former polluting occupations have ceased to be polluting. Sweeping of roads, scavenging, making footwear and a few other occupations and the persons who are engaged in them, are still considered to be inferior and polluting.

We had asked our neo-Buddhist respondents who, in the past, belonged to one such untouchable caste which used to perform such menial jobs, to express their opinion about such low types of jobs and to state whether they would accept such jobs if better salaries are paid. Most of the respondents (63 persons) out of 100 stated that Buddhists should not perform these jobs as these jobs are low in status.

* We did not define what is better salary for these jobs, but according to the investigator's observation, except 2 or 3 respondents, no one questioned it, and their immediate reaction was that the salary is not the point of consideration, status which it carries is more important.
They also stated that whatever the salary is given, they would not do these jobs. Four respondents expressed that in villages some people have to do these jobs though they are Buddhists as they are not educated to do any other job. These respondents said that they themselves would not do these jobs as they are educated. Only a few respondents said that they should not hesitate to do these jobs as these are the means to earn one’s living. These respondents were ready to do these jobs even in a city like Poona. Our factual data shows that some of them or their family members were actually engaged in jobs as sweeping or working as a driver on garbage truck.

It appears then that for a very large proportion of the group status was the most important consideration while choosing one’s occupation. Such attitude is in line with their efforts to move up on the occupational scale.

Our data also indicate that these respondents were aspirants to occupy higher status jobs, but so far they have not been able to move up on the ladder. Majority of the respondents still were engaged in unskilled and manual jobs and such jobs do not help much to elevate the status of the persons who perform them, they only help them to earn a living. Of course, as mentioned in our chapter on socio-economic characteristics, the number of persons who were engaged in so-called defiling jobs as sweeping and scavenging was very small (8 respondents) in our group. Our data

[Note: Refer to the Chapter on Socio-Economic Characteristics - discussion about the occupation of the lower class of neo-Buddhists.]
also reveal that vertical mobility on the class-axis from stratum to stratum was still far off for most of these respondents. The mobility which was found in the group was horizontal mobility.

Furthermore, neither there was occupational mobility in the person's own life time, nor was there a trend of such mobility compared to the respondents' father's occupational level.

Their general living conditions too were poor. Their housing conditions too revealed their poverty. All of them were slum-dwellers. The general style of life of the group, as observed by the investigator was low. The general dressing pattern of the whole group also revealed their poverty. The same was true about the material comforts in the houses. Almost all the houses had very few utensils for cooking or for eating food, and these utensils were mostly of aluminium and sometimes of brass and rarely of stainless steel. A few houses had wooden or steel furniture like a cot to sleep and a chair or two. Some had radios or transistors. It is interesting to note that as Buddhists, they were expected to stay away from drinking, gambling, etc., and though the leaders of the group claim that the group has cleansed its such habits, still the observation of the investigator reveals that in the evenings or on the Sunday mornings, they indulged in such habits.

Thus, on the whole, it appears that the group aspired to get high status in occupational and economic spheres,
but was still far off from reaching such goals. We observe that a large element of the group was unhappy and frustrated with their present economic conditions of life.

Summary

Conversion to Buddhism of Mahars was a status-seeking move. But even after the 20 years of conversion, there has not emerged a feeling among the neo-Buddhists that they have attained high status. By embracing Buddhism the neo-Buddhist group had sought higher status, but the group, as yet, does not feel that they have reached their reference point. There is a large gap between their conception of themselves and their conception by the others. Even the difference between the identification terms used for them by the others and the ones expected by them indicates that though this group aspired to discard its caste identity, the upper group is thrusting upon it the same old identity. The treatment the group receives, as reported by the respondents, reveals, that in the eyes of others they were still untouchables. On the basis of such findings it appears that the conversion to Buddhism intensified the aspirations for status of this group. After renouncing the Hindu caste fold they felt that they were no more untouchable Hindus. But in the eyes of the outer world their conversion meant only a change of label, from Mahar to Nav-Boudha, or to Mahar-Bouddha. Such problems have made them marginals.

The members of this group seem to realize now that
conversion is not the only way to get the aspired status. They are also aware of the fact that education, occupation and style of life are the status giving factors in a modernizing world, and, therefore, they strongly feel that there should be improvement in these spheres to have an access to the higher status society. A certain change in their food habits and their present pattern of naming the children also indicate their efforts at assimilation with the upper group. "Passing" is also tried by a few.

However, their social relations with other groups indicate their divided mind, partly pulled by the traditional concept of social distance and partly by the modern and the Buddhist ideology. Particularly/personal matters the respondents seem to prefer to have relations with their own group members. Even their actual friendships are also found to be mostly confined to their own group or to their status equals. Such attitudes and behaviour may be due to their feeling of uncertainty of their social position in the outer world. The group's divided mind or the feeling of uncertainty of its social position further characterise the group as the marginal group. Even in occupational and economic sphere of life, the group also seems to be in a marginal situation. In order to acquire a new identity and to get rid of the former identity to which stigma was attached, the group aspires to move upward on occupational and economic scales. However, our findings reveal that the group is still far off to attain its goal.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid.


9. Ibid., p. 72.

