

CHAPTER-3
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Dr. Ambedkar had assessed the Hindu society in these terms which were that the Hindus are the only people in the world whose social order—the relation of man to man is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate. The Hindus are the only people in the world whose economic order, the relation of the workman to workman, is consecrated by religion and also sacred, eternal and inviolate. The Hindu Society is founded in fixity of occupations for each class and continuance thereof by heredity. That is why no social movement has been successful in stamping out Caste and Untouchability in India. No revolutionary transformation has marked the Indian society. Caste is reality because India is a Caste society. Here Caste is endogamous. Once born in one Caste means die in that particular Caste. It is the *Hindu Dharma* or *Manu Dharma* that determines the nature and structure of the Indian social reality. Dr. Ambedkar described Indian social system as ‘a tower having four compartments and complete immobility’. He held that all these social evils, inequality and inhuman practices can be eradicated by means of annihilating the Hindu scriptures. Even Babasaheb Ambedkar appealed to the Hindus to voluntarily come forward to fight against the Caste System. But he did not see any positive response from the Caste Hindus. He realised that the Caste System is a gold-mine to Hindus and they want to make profit out of it. They will never support the movement. He feels it necessary that for self-respect, social equality and abolition of Caste change of religion (out of Hinduism) is the only remedy. Thus towards the end of his life, Dr. Ambedkar left Hinduism and embraced Buddhism along with five millions of Dalits.

Throughout the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries religious reform movements were initiated against Brahmanism and evils of caste system by Hindu religious nationalists school thinkers like, Raja Rammohan Roy, Dwarkanath Thakur, Dayananda Saraswati, Ishwar Chanda Vidyasagar, Lokmany Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bankim Chandra Chattarjee, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Golwalkar, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who were opposed Untouchability and Caste System but on the other hand all of them hailed Hinduism

and thus strengthened the Brahminical hegemony in modern India. While the philosophers, poets and Saints born in the Shudras, Backward and Untouchable (Ati-Shudras) communities, like Buddha, Sant Kabir, Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Thanthi Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, Narayan Guru, Ravidas, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, and Dr.Ambedkar had taken strong steps to abolish Untouchability and establish a casteless society. The Dalit-Bahujans philosophers rejected the Hindu Scriptures and unearthed the ancient Indian history and led self-respect Movements against indignity, impoverishment, discrimination and sub-human condition of Shudras, Atishudras and religious minorities.

In the early twenties of the twentieth century Dr.B.R.Ambedkar emerged as a promising leader to break the centuries old shackles and liberated the Untouchables from the age-old bondage of the Caste Hindu society. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja of Kolhapur, addressing the Untouchables on 12th March, 1920, expressed, “you have found your saviour in Ambedkar. I am confident that he will break your shackles. Not only that, a time will come when, so whispers my conscience, Ambedkar will shine as a front-rank leader of all-India fame and appeal”.¹ Babasaheb Dr.Ambedkar’s political and philosophical ideas were inspired from the teachings of the Buddha, Kabir and Mahatma Phule whom he considered as his ‘Gurus’, revered teachers. He made it clear that the words, liberty, equality, fraternity have not been borrowed from the French Revolution but from the teaching of his master, the Buddha.

Dr.Ambedkar had greatest admiration to Buddha and his doctrines since his childhood. The doctrines of Buddha were based on egalitarianism and humanism. In the opinion of Buddha nothing was infallible, and nothing could be final. Everything must be open to re-examination and reconsideration, whenever grounds for re-examination arise. Man must know the real thing. And he was sure that freedom of thought was the only way to the discovery of truth. Infallibility of Vedas meant denial of freedom of thought.² The God created man or he came out of the body of Brahma, and the doctrine of Karma which is the determination of man’s position in present life by deeds done by him in his past life was rejected by the Buddha. Dr.Ambedkar highly praised the Buddha’s teaching in man’s capacity to work out his salvation without extraneous aid. In the same way Dr.Ambedkar said, “man is a factor in making of history and environmental forces whether impersonal or social if they are he first and not the last things”.³ A man could become great not by his royal birth, but

by his deeds and the Buddha's message was, 'be your own light'. Except this Buddha's republican pattern of Sangha and Buddhist Democracy and Socialistic pattern of Society also had a lasting influence on Ambedkar.

Dr. Ambedkar regarded Mahatma Kabir as his second Guru. In the views of Ambedkar, Kabir's poems express in elegantly imaginative terms the rational and secular ideas of the Buddha. The teachings of Kabir that influenced him were that not to regard any one as a great man or Mahatma, since it is difficult even to be humane let alone to be a saint.⁴

Dr. Ambedkar derived much inspiration from the teaching of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, the father of Indian social revolution, who set up first school for the women of the Depressed Classes in 1851 at Pune, and worked for the upliftment of the down-trodden classes. He established, '*Satya Shodhak Samaj*' (Society of Truth-Seekers) with the object of reform the existing social evils and also criticized the Manusmriti, Vedas and the Brahmans for perpetuating the Varna Vyavastha. Dr. Ambedkar, therefore, dedicated his book 'Who were the Shudras' to the memory of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule.⁵ He described him as "the greatest Shudra of modern India, who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that, for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign rule".⁶

Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur also extended the educational facilities to the *Shudras* and *Atishudras* during the early part of the twentieth century. He not only started schools and other institutions for these people but also built hostels. In his administration, he had given 50% reservation to the Depressed Classes and exploited sections of the society. Hence, the Depressed Classes got reservation in administration in Kolahapur State from July 26, 1902 onwards. He had provided all facilities for higher education of Dr. Ambedkar, hoping that Babasaheb would be able to bring social revolution in Indian society.

Dr. Ambedkar spent three years from 1913 to 1916 at Columbia University (USA), for the M.A. and Ph.D. degree. Among all of his eminent teachers, it was perhaps Dr. John Dewey who had the greatest influence on Ambedkar. Ambedkar's understanding of the America situation was quite sophisticated. Jotiba Phule, as early as 1873, had dedicated his book *Gulamgiri* (slavery) to the people of the United States for their

sublime, disinterested and self-sacrificing devotion of in the cause of Negro Slavery. John Dewey's influence on Dr.Ambedkar seems to be chiefly in developing his commitment to a pragmatic, flexible democratic system in India. His philosophy was meaningful to Ambedkar, for it offered encouragement that educated and politically aware peoples could work out their own political destiny in a pragmatic way, pruning the useless and preserving the useful in their societies.⁷ In his *Annihilation of Caste*, Dr.Ambedkar has quoted his teacher John Dewey's statement. As he says:

Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from past, and with what is positively preserve. As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society.⁸

However, the Western ideologies, philosophies and education helped him to rewrite the fate of millions of down-trodden people in the country.

Inspiration having been dawn from the works and teachings of Buddha, Sant Kabir, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Thanthi Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, Narayan Guru, Rabidas, and Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Dr.Ambedkar necessitated and understood the significance of education for Untouchables those were deprived of for centuries. His epoch making entry on the Indian scenario brought about dramatic change in the socio-economic and political realm of India society. Being born as an Untouchable of Mahar community, he experienced the humiliation and indignity of Untouchability from his childhood. He knew the plight of the illiterate and the unlettered masses. His western egalitarian education and his equalitarian thought had given new dimension to Indian social reform. Dr.Ambedkar's thought and work has changed the whole structure of the old Indian society and reconstructed a new society by helping reconstruction of Dalit Bahujan Society. He has given new identity and new direction to the Dalit community. He has shown a new way to living life beyond Hinduism.

Dr.Ambedkar's Opposition to Brahminical Social Order:

Ambedkar's opposition to Brahminical social order was a direct outcome of his belief in the quality of humanity. But he also saw in it a great threat to national cohesion and integrity. He rightly diagnosed casteism as against the spirit of

nationalism. "Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. Virtue has become caste-ridden; morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste. A Brahmin will follow a leader only if he is a Brahmin, a Kshatriya if he is a Kayastha and so on. The capacity to appreciate merits in a man apart from his caste does not exist in a Hindu".⁹ In Hindu society each Caste, lives for it self and although the Hindus have similarity of customs, beliefs and thoughts, they are neither a society nor a nation in the true sense of the term. They are the collection of castes. Caste is the bane of the Hindus. Caste is the cause of the downfall of the Hindus. Owing to caste the Hindu's life has been a life of continued defeats. Caste has made the Hindus the sick men of India. Caste has ruined the Hindu race and has destroyed demoralized and devitalized Hindu society.¹⁰ The fall of the Hindu community is due to the fact that masses have not cared to know what the birth rights of a human being are and much less have they cared to see that they are recognized and not set at naught by the base acts and deeds of selfish people.¹¹ In India the castes are not merely non-social, also there are anti-social. This is particularly true of the Hindus towards the untouchables. A few facts will suffice to show how anti-social the Hindus are towards the untouchables. For instance, the Hindus will not allow the untouchables to take water from a public well. The Hindus will not allow the untouchables entry in school. The Hindus will not allow the untouchables to travel in buses. The Hindus will not allow the untouchables to wear clean clothes. The Hindus will not allow the untouchables to wear jewelry. The Hindus will not tolerate the untouchables to own lands. The Hindus will not allow an untouchable to sit when Hindu is standing. They are the emanations of the permanent anti-social attitude of the Hindu community against the untouchables.¹² Dr. Ambedkar argued that the Caste-System must be abolished if the Hindu society is to be reconstructed on the basis of equality. Untouchability has its roots in the Caste-System. They need not expect that the Brahmins will raise revolts against the caste-system, as the system gives them special privileges and voluntarily they will not give up their privileged position and the present supremacy in the hierarchy of Hinduism as based on Smrites. It would be too much to expect them to resign all their privileges as the Samurais of Japan did. Also we cannot rely upon the non-Brahmins and ask

them to fight our battle. Many of them are still enamored of the caste-system and are tools in the hands of the Brahmins, others who resent the supremacy of the Brahmins are more interested in leveling down the Brahmins than in leveling up the suppressed Classes. They too want a class of people on whom they can look down and have the satisfaction of not being quite the under-dogs of the society. This means that we ourselves must fight our battles, relying on ourselves.¹³ To Ambedkar, the Hindus have innate and invertebrate conservatism and they have a religion, which is incompatible with liberty, equality and fraternity i.e. with democracy. Inequality, no doubt, exists everywhere in the world but it largely depends on conditions and circumstances. But it never had the support of religion. With the Hindus it is different. There is not only inequality in Hindu society but inequality is the official doctrine of the Hindu religion.¹⁴ He viewed that it is a religion which does not intend to establish liberty, equality and fraternity. It is a gospel which proclaims the worship of the superman-the Brahmin by the rest of the Hindu society. It propounds that the superman and his class alone are born to live and to rule. Others are born to serve them, and to nothing more. They have no life of their own to live and no right to develop their own personality.¹⁵ Having been observed the pathetic plight of the Untouchables at different places, Dr.Ambedkar declared, “If I fail to liberate the miseries of my people and bringing them out of the land of slavery I will kill myself with a bullet”.¹⁶

Dr.Ambedkar, an exceptional erudite scholar took the most audacious burden and responsibility to accomplish the most difficult, rather, impossible task of his world to liberate the divine slaves in bondage. In India, the gods of Brahmanism created slavery as a divine system and the Shudras and Untouchables are being made permanent slave. He waged a battle against God, the divinity, and the Brahmins who claimed divinity for themselves and spread the word across the world that God created Untouchables.

Dr.Ambedkar’s egalitarian efforts for Social transformation:

Throughout the ages, the helpless Dalits (touchable and Untouchable Shudras) have been grappling with the tyrant Hindu Gods, leaders, tactless and unsuccessfully. So as Ambedkar who was one of the victim of social exploitation and injustice of Hindu society. That is why he had given top priority to social reforms in India. He dedicated his life for the cause of the downtrodden with a powerful leadership quality

and very soon carved out a rare place in the hearts of the millions and billions of low case helpless people, who were reeling and wandering leaderless in wilderness with the horror of torture by the upper castes. He organized the suffering masses to fight against the discriminations and social disabilities imposed on them by the Hindu social order. He belonged to the reformist school of thought and drew significantly from the nineteenth-century academics and thinkers. The prominent personalities are Professor John Dewey, Max Mueller, Herbert Spencer, J.S.Mill, Prof. H.J.Laski, Dr.Keynes, Dr. Selligman and Edmund Burke. He waged the banner of revolt in his hands against the iniquitous caste system in Indian society. He criticized the existing caste system amongst Hindus and blamed squarely the caste Hindus and the Hindu religion for the division between man and man which resulted in the political and economic backwardness of these low caste people and the social neglect of the Depressed Classes. Babasaheb Ambedkar was invited to preside over the Depressed Classes meeting near Nasik, in 1928, for the construction of a temple dedicated to Chokhamela, a great Dalit saint, said that removal of Untouchability is vital than the erection of temple. In his opinion, the saint-poets did not preach directly against the Caste System which stood for the domination of one caste over the others, for social inequality and social injustice. The efforts of theses saint-poets were directed to establishing equality, not between a Brahmin as an individual and a Shudra as an individual, but between a Brahmin and a Shudra devotee of God and in this struggle they succeeded. He further stated:

From the view point of the annihilation of caste, the struggle of the saints did not have any effect on the society. The value of man is axiomatic, self evident; it does not come to him as the result of the gliding of Bhakti. The saint did not struggle to establish this point. On the contrary their struggle had a very unhealthy effect on the Depressed Classes. It provided the Brahmins with an excuse to silence them by telling that they would be respected if they also attained the status of Chokhamela.¹⁷

Regarding Hinduism and cruelty of Untouchability, Ambedkar observed that mahatmas have come and mahatmas have gone. But the Untouchables have remained Untouchables. He, therefore, organized Social Revolution throughout the Nation for the establishment of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and human dignity on the basis of the thoughts and works of Gautam Buddha, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Mahatma

Joytibarao Phule, Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, Tukaram, Rabi Das and Chokhamela, who laid their life for social equality. Just like the God of Abraham, the leader of Moss, Dr.Ambedkar started his mass struggle to emancipate the untouchables from the yoke of Brahmanism, and to give to the slaves their salvation.

From the outset, Ambedkar adopted the Temple entry movement as an instrument of social change, not as an end but as a means. But his main focus was social equality not religious or spiritual equality.

Mahad Satyagraha:

The impact of British rule in India brought certain changes in the Hindu Social Order. Government had declared that all public utilities and public institutions, such as wells, schools, buses, railways, and public offices were open to all citizens including the untouchables. The rights to wear any kind of clothes or ornaments were some of the rights which British Indian law gave to untouchables along with the rest. Due to the strong opposition from the caste Hindus the Untouchables could not make any use of them. Dr.Ambedkar took the lead role to break these inhuman practices¹⁸.The Chowder Tank of Mahad was made a public tank in 1869. In 1923, the Bombay Legislative Council passed a resolution to the effect that the untouchable class be allowed to use all public watering places. Addressing the Depressed classes Conference at Mahad in March 1927, Ambedkar in an inspiring tone said:

No lasting progress can be achieved unless we put ourselves through a three-fold process of purification. We must improve the general tone of our demeanor, re-tone our pronunciations and revitalize our thoughts. I, therefore, ask you now to take a vow from this moment to renounce eating carrion. It is high time that we rooted out from our mind the ideas of highness and lowness among ourselves¹⁹

In pursuance of the resolution of the Mahad Municipality which in 1924 had declared to have thrown open its Tank to the Depressed Classes, it was now decided to take water from the Tank and established the right of the Untouchables. Soon afterwards Ambedkar led a procession, starting from the dais where he had spoken, to a water source-the Chawdar Tank-which, in theory, was open to untouchables but to which access had been denied.The Untouchables marched in discipline and enthusiasm to vindicate their rights. Dr.Ambedkar himself was standing on the verge

of the tank. In a symbolic and solemn manner, he drank some water from the tank and a larger number of his followers also joined and vindicated their rights. This transgression was perceived as a provocation by local upper caste Hindus who attacked the demonstrators when they returned to the meeting place.²⁰ Dr. Ambedkar then organized a second meeting which marked the crystallization of a new discourse. This second Mahad conference took place in December 1927. Ambedkar's speech called for a root and branch abolition of the caste system. He remarked that the so-called Caste-Hindus are bitterly opposed to the *Panchamas* (the Depressed Classes) using a public Tank not because they really believe that the water will be spoiled by the use of Untouchables but they are afraid of losing their superiority of castes and of equality being established between the former and the latter. We are resorting to this *Satyagraha* not realizing that the water of this particular Tank has any exceptional qualities, but to establish our natural rights as citizens and human beings. He further said, "This Conference is held to unfurl the banner of equality. Our Conference aims at the same achievement in social, religious, civic and economic matters. We are avowedly out to smash the steel-frame of the caste-system."²¹ The values he invoked were those of the National Assembly of France, and he even compared the Mahad conference to the met of *Versailles*.

At the outset, let me tell those who oppose us that we did not perish because we would not drink water from this Chawdar Tank. We now want to go to the tank only to prove that, like others, we are also human beings. This conference has been called to inaugurate an era of equality in this land. Removal of Untouchability and inter-castes dinners alone will not put an end to our ills. All departments of services such as courts, military police and commerce should be thrown open to us. Hindu Society should be reorganized on two main principles—equality and absence of casteism.²²

Dr. Ambedkar stated the fact that ours is a movement, which aims at not only removing our own disabilities, but also to bring about a social revolution, a revolution that will remove all man-made barriers of caste by giving equal opportunities to all to rise to the highest position and making no distinction between man and man so far as civic rights are concerned. If we achieve success in our movement to unite all Hindus in a single caste we shall have rendered the greatest service to the Indian nation in general and to the Hindu community in particular. Our movement stands for strength

and solidarity; for equality, liberty and fraternity. We refuse to be controlled and bound by the *Shastras* and *Smrites* composed in the dark ages and base our claims on justice and humanity. The Conference passed two resolutions, first, for the eradication of internal divisions within Hindu society so that eventually it would consist of only one category of people, and, second, for the priestly profession to be opened to all.²³ The Conference further declared that the *Manusmriti* which directed molten lead to be poured into the ears of Shudras to hear or read the Vedas, which impaired their self-respect and perpetuated their social, economic, religious and political slavery, be publicly burnt. On December 25, 1927, Ambedkar burnt the old *Manusmriti* and demanded to reshape the Hindu Code governing the life of common people.²⁴ While speaking of bonfire of Manusmriti; Dr.Ambedkar in an interview with T.V.Parvate in 1938, said:

The bonfire of *Manusmriti* was quite intentional. We made a bonfire of it because we view it as a symbol of injustice under which we have been crushed across centuries. Because of its teaching, we have been ground down under despicable poverty, and so we made the dash, stalked all, took our lives in our hands and performed the deed.²⁵

The next day, Dr.Ambedkar lunched a *Satyagraha* to obtain free access to the Chawdar tank and some 3,884 delegates volunteered to take part in it. But the upper caste Hindus lodged a case in the court claiming it as a matter of private property and finally it was advised to wait for the judgments. Dr.Ambedkar hence postponed the *Satyagraha* and organized a procession. The procession reached the tank with slogans and took its round. Actually he organized the Chawdar Tank *Satyagraha* in Mahad, to establish the right of the Untouchables to take water from public watering places.

Kalaram temple Satyagraha:

In Indian history the year 1930 was very important for adaptation of passive method of resistance which is called *Satyagraha*. Ten day before the Dandi March of Gandhi, Dr.Ambedkar, the father of Indian social unrest, lunched his temple entry movement at Nasik. Preparations for this movement had been going on for over three months. He put forward a thought-provoking speech about the ways and means of the entry of Kalaram Temple. He said:

Today, we are about to enter the Temple. But the entry in the Temple would not solve the whole problem. Our problem is comprehensive. It is political, social, religious, economic, and educational- all are part of the problems. The issue of Kalaram Temple entry is an appeal to the Hindu mind. The high caste Hindus deprived us from the far ages. Whether the same Hindus are willing to grant our humanitarian rights will be the question raised from this Temple entry *Satyagraha*. Whether the Hindu mind is willing to accept us as human beings, this is the question to be tested through this *Satyagraha*. The high caste Hindus looked down upon us and treated us even worse than cats and dogs. We wish to know whether those very Hindus would give us the status of man or not. This *Satyagraha* will provide answer to this question. This *Satyagraha* is one of the efforts for bringing about a change of heart among the high caste Hindus. Hence the success of this effort depends on the Hindu mind-set.²⁶

He suggested that our real problem is not going to be solved by the entry into Ram Temple. It will not bring about any radical change in our life. But this is a test to judge the high caste Hindu mind. Whether the Hindu mind is willing to accept the elevated aspirations of the new era that, “man must be treated as man; he must be given humanitarian rights; human dignity should be established” is going to be tested. In order to achieve this goal, we have launched this *Satyagraha*. The main question is whether the high caste Hindus are going to consider these aspects and going to act accordingly. We know that in this Temple resides God made of stone. By having a mere glance at him or by worshiping him, our problem will not be solved completely. Millions of people might have visited this Temple and have had a glance of the God until now. But who would say that their basic problem was solved by this act? We know this. But our *Satyagraha* today is an effort to bring about a change of heart among the Hindus. With this principled position we are launching this *Satyagraha*.²⁷ But with time the temple entry *Satyagraha* was not given support by the administration and both men and women belong to the Untouchables were insulted and beaten badly by the caste Hindus. Many were injured and some were imprisoned by the government on the ground of causing breach of the peace. Finally, Ambedkar gave up the movement. He pointed out that:

I did not launch the temple entry movement because I wanted the Depressed Classes to become worshippers of idols which they were prevented from

worshipping or because I believed that temple entry would make them equal members in and an integral part of the Hindu Society. So far as this aspect of the case is concerned I would advise the Depressed Classes to insist upon a complete overhauling of Hindu Society and Hindu theology before they consent to become an integral part of Hindu Society. I started temple entry Satyagraha only because I felt that was the best way of energizing the Depressed Classes and making them conscious of their position. As I believe I have achieved that purpose and I have no more use for temple entry. I want the Depressed Classless to concentrate their energy and resources on politics and education and I hope that they will realise the importance of both.²⁸

Dr.Ambedkar adopted the temple entry movement to mobilize the Untouchables, hoping to get a place for them in Hinduism, but all his efforts were suppressed by Hindu upper Caste people heavy handedly. Thus he preferred to give up the temple entry issue.

Education—a weapon against injustice and Exploitation:

This was the time that he realised the need for an alternative of it was the complete overhauling of Hindu society and theology. He told his followers to shift their energy to have access to education, once a taboo for them and secondly o take up policies as the only other alternative weapons with which a fight for dignity. In Ambedkar's view, the concept of formal education in Hindu social order was quiet narrow. Formal education was confined only to the study of the Vedas in schools which were established for this purpose alone. The state did not hold itself responsible for opening establishments for the study of arts and sciences that concerned the life of merchants and artisans. In the absence of a formal educational system, each caste managed to transmit to its progeny the ways of doing things it was traditionally engaged in doing. Therefore, illiteracy became an inherent part of the Caste System by a process hat was indirect but internal to Hinduism. Shudras were neither allowed to study the Vedas nor permitted to hear them. As a result the reading and writing became he right of the high castes and illiteracy the destiny of the low caste.²⁹.In this contest Ambedkar observed:

The ancient world may be said to have been guilty for failing to take the responsibility for the education of the masses. But never has any society been guilty for closing to the generality of the people the study of the books of its

religion. Never has society made any attempt to declare that an attempt made by the common man to acquire knowledge shall be punishable as a crime. Manu is the only divine law giver who has denied the common man the right to knowledge.³⁰

Ambedkar waged a relentless war on the caste structure of the Indian society and became the target of attack, and criticism. The Indian Press was totally against his moves. Ambedkar found that the Brahmin and Bania-dominated Press offered no scope towards emancipating Dalits and the most oppressed lots. As a revolt against the caste Hindus, and to articulate his ideals to his fellow brethren, he started a weekly news paper, *Mook Nayak* (the leader of the Dumb), in 1920. In its first editorial he described that India was a home of inequality and the Hindu society as a multi-storied tower without a ladder or an entrance. The people of the one story were found to die in the same as there was no passage from the one to the other. In another article he said that it was not enough for India to become independent. But at the same time it must guarantee equal rights-social, religious and political to all its inhabitants and offering every man opportunity to rise in the scale of life and creating conditions favorable to its advancements. In another article he observed that without fundamental rights for all Swaraj would mean a new slavery for the Depressed classes.³¹ On 3rd April 1927, he founded another fortnightly Marathi paper called *Bahishkrit Bharat* (ex-communicated India or boycotted India) through which he exhorted the untouchables to raise in revolt against the Shastras which sanctified the oppressive social customs. In 1930, the name of the weekly was changed into *Samata*, which meant, "Equality", in order to propagate the ideal of equality. In 1931, he again changed the name of the weekly into *Janata*, that is, "the people". Its object was to educate the people in citizenship rights and make them aware about their patriotic duty to protect the Independence and integrity of the country.³² Ambedkar played a historic role as a journalist by promoting social reforms. As a prominent journalist, crusader for human rights and emancipator of the downtrodden communities, he set an example by serving the socially weak and the oppressed. His paper became an effective medium of education to Depressed Classes on the happening of the country and awakening about their rights and dignities enabling them to present their grievances, views and reaction before the government. Apart from this mental awakening of the down-trodden, he started educational and social institution and

lunched movement for the steady and systematic development of the downtrodden. On July 20, 1924, at the Damodhar Hall, Bombay, he called a meeting of social workers and established the Bahishkrit Hitkrini Sabha (Association for the improvement of the condition of the victims of social ostracism) with the aims and objects mainly: (a) to promote the spread of education among the Depressed Classes by opening hotels and by employing such other means as may seem necessary or desirable; (b) to promote the spread of culture among the Depressed Classes by opening libraries, social centers and classes or study circles; (c) to advance and improve the economic conditions of the Depressed Classes by starting industrial and agricultural schools;(d) to represent the grievance of the Depressed Classes; (e) to organize or help any club, association or any movement calculated to bring about the general enlightenment, social rise or economic betterment of the Depressed Classes.³³

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar realised the importance of education as a vital force for individual advancement and social change. The purpose of education, to Dr.Ambedkar, is to moralise and socialize the people. He, therefore, emphatically added that “Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of everyone. The policy of the Department would be to make higher education cheap for the access of the Lower classes. The object of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school does leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life”.³⁴ According to him, education could be an effective instrument of mass movement for the safeguard of life and liberty; it could mitigate miseries of ignorance and poverty; and education could encourage the oppressed one to fight against injustice and exploitation. He realised that the Hindu society has denied education to the Shudras and Untouchables as a result; hundred and thousands of people are remained ignorant, illiterate and unaware about their rights. He advised the illiterate people that education was the greatest weapon to forge their progress and prosperity. However, he reminded the contribution of 19th century social reformer Mahatma Jotibarao Phule who for the first time had fought to give education to the Dalits and Backward Classes. He along with his wife Sabitribai Phule set up school for boys and girls of Dalits and Backward Classes. Thus, Dr.Ambedkar hailing Mahatma Phule’s importance on education argued:

I firmly believe in the efficacy of education as a panacea for all social evils. The problem of lower order in this country is not only economic but also cultural. It is not enough to house them, feed them and then to leave them to serve the higher classes as was the ancient ideal of this country. It is even more necessary to remove from them that feeling of inferiority which has stunted their growth and made them slaves of others and to create in them a consciousness of significance of life for themselves and for their country of which they have been cruelly robbed by the current social order of this country. I am convinced that nothing can achieve this except the spread of higher education.³⁵

Dr. Ambedkar rationalized the need for spread of education and he dedicated much of his time in spreading education among his down-trodden brethren. That is why he founded the People's Education Society on July 8 in Maharashtra, to promote higher education in society and especially amongst the poor middle classes in general and the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in particular. Ambedkar started Siddhartha College on June 20, 1946 in Bombay; then, Milind College at Aurangabad. In Aurangabad, several educational institutions starting from primary schools to post-graduate Colleges like Babasaheb Ambedkar Arts and Commerce College, Law College, Science College, was established. The People's Education Society made pioneering efforts in bringing the light of knowledge and, learning of the doors of the poor who were enveloped in the darkness of ignorance for centuries.³⁶

Ambedkar regarded education as a double-edged weapon. To him an educated man without character and humility is more dangerous than a beast. If a man's education is detrimental to the welfare of the poor, the educated man was a curse to society. However, Ambedkar's emphasis was on character based education.³⁷ He asserted that though education is being given on a large scale; it is not given to the right strata of Indian Society. He wrote, "If you give education to those strata of Indian society which has a vested interest in maintaining the Caste System for the advantages it gives them, then the Caste System will be strengthened. On the other hand, if you give education to the lowest strata of Indian Society, which is interested in blowing up the Caste System, the Caste System will be blown up".³⁸ Babasaheb

believed that progress of a community always depends upon education and his people would establish real socialism in the land under the rule of peasants and workers.

Learn to live in Self-respect and Self-help:

Dr. Ambedkar untiringly strove to make the Untouchables conscious of their self-respect and the need for self-elevation. Ambedkar toured all over India, organized and addressed meetings after meetings, asking the suffering masses to unite and fight to recover their lost rights. He remarked:

Self-respect is a most vital factor in life. It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one's self-respect. Without it life is mere cipher. To live worthily with self-respect one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence and recognition. He declared that his life was threatened as he came here to wake you up to the causes of your misery and shame. Man is mortal. Every one is to die some day or other. But one must resolve to lay down one's life in enriching the noble ideals of self-respect and in bettering human life. We are not slaves. We are a warrior clan. Nothing is more disgraceful for a brave man to live a life devoid of self-respect and without love for the country.³⁹

He further added that learn to live in this world with self-respect. You should always cherish some ambition to do something in this world. They alone rise who strive. Some of you nurse the wrong notion that you will not rise in this world. But remember that the age of helplessness is ended. A new epoch has set in and all things are now possible because of your being able to participate in the politics and legislatures of this country.⁴⁰ Seeing the destitute condition of his fellowmen he spoke in agony:

My heart breaks to see the pitiable sight of your faces and to hear your sad voices. You have been groaning from time immemorial and yet you are not ashamed to hug your helplessness as inevitability. Why did you not perish in the parental stage instead? Why do you worsen and sadden the picture of the sorrows, poverty, slavery and burdens of the world with your deplorable, despicable and detestable miserable life? You had better die and relive this world if you cannot rise to a new life and if you cannot rejuvenate yourselves. As a matter of fact it is your birth right to get food, shelter and clothing in this

land in equal proportion with every individual high or low. If you believe in living a respectable life you believe in self-help which is the best help.⁴¹

Dr. Ambedkar told to the Untouchables “we want equality in Hindu religion. The *Chaturvarnya* must be rooted out. The principle that privileges for higher classes and poverty for the lower classes must end now. He asserted that what you have lost, others have gained. Your humiliations are a matter of pride with others. You are being made to suffer wants, privations and humiliations not because it was pre-ordained by the sins committed in your previous birth, but because of the overpowering tyranny and treachery of those who are above you. You have no lands because others have usurped them; you have no posts because others have monopolized them. Do not believe in fate. Believe in your strength”.⁴²

Ambedkar urging the Depressed Classes said that “do not depend upon God or Superman and also avoid hero-worship. By this you are deifying a common man like you. These ideas of hero-worship will bring ruin on you if you do not nip them in the bud. By deifying an individual, you are repose faith for your safety and salvation in one single individual with the result that you get into the habit of dependence and grow indifferent to your duty. If you fall a victim to these ideas, your fate will be no better than logs of wood in the national stream of life. Your struggle will come to naught. Do not discard, the political rights, the new epoch has bestowed upon you. Your whole class was trampled down up-till now because you were filled with ideas of helplessness. These ideas of hero worship, deification and neglect of duty have ruined Hindu Society and are responsible for the degradation of our country”.⁴³ He observed:

You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not wait for its abolition upon God or on any superman. Your salvation lies in political powers and not in making pilgrimages and observance of fasts. Devotion to scriptures would not free you from your bondage, want and poverty. Your forefathers have been doing it for generations, but there has been no respite or even a slight difference in your miserable life in any way. Like your forefathers, you wear rags. Like them, you subsist on thrown out crumbs; like them, you perish in utter slums and hovels; and like them, you fall easy victims to diseases with death rate that rages among poultry. Your religious fasts, austerities and penances have not saved you from starvation.⁴⁴

He said to the Untouchables that greatness can be achieved only by struggle and sacrifice. No down-trodden man can achieve greatness unless they are prepared for struggle and suffering. In order to build up his future he must be ready to sacrifice the comforts and necessities of the present. Most down-trodden men fail to achieve greatness in this race of life as they do not have the courage and the determination to sacrifice the pleasures of the present for their future. Dr. Ambedkar said that he was aware of the struggle and sufferings of the untouchables and that in their struggle for liberty they have suffered more than he had. Therefore his message to them was struggle and more struggles, sacrifice and more sacrifice. According to him it is struggle alone without counting sacrifices that will bring them their emancipation. The Untouchables must develop a collective will to rise and resist and must believe in the sacredness of their task and develop a command determination to achieve their goal. Their task is so great and the purpose so noble that as Untouchables should join in a prayer and say:

Blessed are they who are alive to the duty of raising those among whom they are born. Blessed are they who vow to give the flower of their days, their strength is of soul and body and their mite, to further the campaign of resistance to slavery. Blessed are they who resolve-come good, come evil, come sunshine, come tempest, come honour, come dishonour-not to stop until the Untouchables have fully recovered their manhood.⁴⁵

The Hindu Code Bill –a step to liberate women from the thralldom of Hinduism:

It is known fact that the Manu, the Law giver of the Hindus, propounded a theory of perpetual slavery for women. The *Manusmriti* laid down stringent rules and code of conduct for women, according to which women are not to be free under any circumstances. The Hindu religion treated them as a commodity of pleasure. The right to education and the rights to property were denied to them. Manu proscribed right to knowledge for women. The study of the Veda was forbidden and performing sacrifices were not given. The women don't have a choice in selecting her life-partner; only the father had the choice. And after marriage she has to worship her husband and be faith to him despite of biting and torture. Yet Manu not only allows men to abandon his wife but also permits him to sell her. It was Lord Buddha, who

preached equality by denying the sacredness of Veda and Manusmriti. By admitting women to the life of Bhikkunis, the Buddha, by one stroke, removed both these wrongs. He gave them the right to knowledge and right to realise their spiritual potentialities along with man. He opened the way to liberty by allowing them to acquire dignity. It was both a revolution and liberation of women in India.⁴⁶ Later, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule set up schools to give educational rights to the women and Untouchables. Periyar E.V.Ramaswami pleaded for the rights of women especially in the self-respect marriage formula. During the British rule Raja Ram Mohan Roy waged war against the cruel custom of Sati. Finally, Dr.Ambedkar the champion of human rights and the saviour of the Indian women realised that whatever else Hindu Society may adopt; it will never give up its Social Structure for the enslavement of the Shudras and the enslavement of women. It is for this reason that the law must now come to their rescue in order that society may move on.⁴⁷ Thus he tried to uplift the status of women through legal measures and proposed the Hindu Code Bill for their liberation.

The Hindu Code Bill had its origin in a legislation which took effect in the year 1937, which is known as Hindu Women's Rights to Property Act, 1937. This Act was dealt with right to property only and had very limited effect.⁴⁸ To consider some of the difficulties that arouse out of the Women's Rights to Property Act, in 1941, a Hindu Law Committee was appointed under B. N. Rau's chairmanship, and by August 1944 it had published a draft Hindu Code. According to its main provisions daughters as well as sons were given a share of the inheritance upon the deaths of their parents, widows were granted absolute estate, monogamy was a rule of law and divorce was allowed under certain circumstances. The Code was introduced in the legislature in April 1947 but the political circumstances- Independence and Partition- did not allow for discussion of the text. In 1948, Nehru entrusted the drafting of the new Code to a Sub-Committee of the Assembly and nominated Dr.Ambedkar to its head.⁴⁹ In the Constituent Assembly, while speaking on the Hindu Code Bill, he urged the members to have a common code which could do away with the rules of Hindu Law which are scattered in innumerable decisions of the High Courts and of the Privy Council, mostly in seven different matters, i.e., (1) it seeks to codify the law relating to the rights of property of a deceased Hindu who has died intestate without making a will, both female and male; (2) it prescribes a somewhat altered form of the order of

succession among the different heirs to the property of a deceased dying intestate; (3) the law of maintenance; (4) marriage; (5) divorce; (6) adaptation and, (7) minority and guardianship.⁵⁰ Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that the purpose of the Hindu Code Bill was to codify and modify certain branches of the Hindu Law. Dwelling upon its significance, he said that it was beneficial from the point of the country's oneness that the same set of laws should govern the Hindu social and religious life. The Hindu Code was a right step towards a Civil Code. The laws should be easily understandable and be applied to all society irrespective of regional barriers. He added that the modifications proposed were based on the Hindu *Shastras* and *Smritis*.⁵¹

In the Hindu Code Bill drafted by Ambedkar the real condition of women in the Hindu society and the evils that forced them into the conditions were dragged out by Ambedkar which brought great emotions not only among the traditionalists but also among the leader of the Congress including Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The essential principles in the drafts were equality between men and women in the question of property and adoption; the granting of legal status to monogamous married only the elimination of Caste barrier in Civil Marriage and the need to justify a petition for divorce.⁵² On the significance of the Hindu Code Bill, he said:

The Hindu Code Bill was the greatest social reform measure ever undertaken by the Legislature in this country. No law passed by the Indian Legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it in point of its significance. To leave inequality between class and class, between the sex and sex which is the soul of Hindu Society, untouched and to go on passing Legislation relating to economic problem is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap. This is the significance I attached to the Hindu Code Bill.⁵³

Undoubtedly, Dr. Ambedkar was one of the saviours of the Indian women who fought hard to uplift the status of women and called upon to change the Hindu Social system and protect the dilapidated component of Indian society, i.e. the women. He believed that the Hindu Code Bill would improve the condition of women and give them more rights and place women on par with men in matters of property, adaptation and marriage and also requested women to support the Bill and vote for candidates who would bring real democracy in the country.

Political power and Formation of political party:

In addition to social reform movements, Dr. Ambedkar championed the cause of political awareness among the Depressed Classes. His main mission was to keep the people in a state of revolution for bringing a change into the social system and utilising the political right for their advancement. From the 1930s till the 1950s, Babasaheb Ambedkar devoted all his energy to bring political solution to the Untouchables. Thus, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar warned his people not to get entangled in the temple entry movement and inter-dining. He told them that the problem of bread and butter would not be solved by it. He remarked:

The sooner you remove the foolish belief that your miseries were pre-ordained, the better. The thought that your poverty is inevitability, and is inborn and inseparable is entirely erroneous. Abandon this line of thought of considering yourselves to be slaves.⁵⁴

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar giving up the temple entry movement urged his people to devote their energies to gain political power. Addressing the Untouchable youths in Worli he said, "The object of the temple entry movement is good. But you all should be more careful about your material good than spiritual food. You do not get food to eat, clothes to wear opportunities of educating your children, and medical help for want of money. You should therefore be very watchful of the political gains, and you must develop your strength and struggle for gaining material advancement in life."⁵⁵ It was at this meeting that he made a fervent appeal for a building fund to erect a central building to house the headquarters of the movement. As he wrote:

It is the duty of the Legislature, to provide for your food, clothes, shelter, education, medicine and all the means of earning a livelihood. The work of law making and its execution is to be performed with your consent, help and will. In short, law is the abode of all worldly happiness. You capture the power of law making. It is therefore your duty to divert your attention from fast, worship and penance and apply it to capturing law making power. That way lays your salvation. That way will end your starvation. Remember that it is not enough that people are numerically in majority. They must be always watchful, strong, well educated and self-respecting to attain and maintain success.⁵⁶

Dr. Ambedkar said that Political power is the key to all social progress and the Scheduled Castes can achieve their salvation if they captured this power by organizing themselves into a third party and holding the balance of power between the rival political parties- Congress and Socialists. The Scheduled Castes cannot capture political power by joining the Congress. It is a big organization.⁵⁷

Thus, he exhorted his followers not to form political party with Brahmins. Brahmins will never show sympathy for the poor Scheduled Castes and if they did so there will be no one to serve them. You should not be caught in the net spread by the Congress. If you think that by joining hands with the high caste people you will be better off, then you are mistaken. The high caste people will always suppress the Backward Classes. High caste people will enjoy the freedom whereas our people will remain as they are. Poor people can never flourish under the rich and must unite separately to achieve their purpose.⁵⁸ He expressed that true democracy in India could be safe only in the hands of the Non-Brahmin Party. For the interest of the democracy in India the Non-Brahmin Party should rebuild and become a centre of power.⁵⁹ Speaking about the political future of his community, Dr. Ambedkar said:

I want to put the Depressed Classes on terms of equality with the other communities in India. I do not want you to remain servile to other communities, but I want to place the reins of Government in your hands.⁶⁰

It is, therefore, necessary to secure your position in political life of the country. Unless you secure such a position, you will be pushed back to your former position of servility and servitude. Moreover, he exhorted the Untouchables to capture political power, to be on their guard against any verbal and rosy promises, and urged them to believe only those leaders who had experience their own. He asked them to keep before their eyes the fate of the Touchable leaders like Gautam Buddha and Ramanuja who had struggled to better their condition and to remove the stain of Untouchability.⁶¹

The Independent Labour Party: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar formed a Political Party in 1936 which is known as the Independent Labour Party (ILP) with the objects to concentrate and solve the problems and grievances of the landless, poor tenants, agriculturists and workers.⁶² While giving interview to the Times of India, he explained the Party was a labour organisation in the sense that its Programme was

mainly to advance the welfare of the labouring classes. The Party believes in having correct ideology suited to the section of the people of whose interests it regards paramount. The word 'Labour' is used instead of the words 'Depressed Classes', because labour includes the Depressed Classes as well. He added that the Depressed Classes possessed large voting strength in Constituencies in which no seat was reserved for them and it would be possible for them to place that voting strength at the disposal of any candidate, who cared to become a member of the Party. And Ambedkar made it clear that the Party membership was open to persons of all creeds and communities, although the Depressed Classes votes could by reason of the law be made available to persons belonging to such communities and creeds as were included in the general electorate.⁶³ Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that the Party was not going to be a miscellaneous collection of members of the Legislature, who after getting elected, each on his own, would befriend one another in the Legislature, and agree to vote together. The Party would have its roots in the electorate, and its members would fight the election giving promise to the electorate to uphold a common and clearly defined Programme, and to be bound by the rules of discipline framed by the Party. Thus Dr. Ambedkar thought that a Party like the Independent Labour Party was necessary and appealed to all workers, peasants and the lower, middle classes to join it in large numbers and make it a mass organisation.⁶⁴

The Independent Labour Party's primary objective was social transformation by abolishing the caste system. In this regard, the Party put forward candidates for the 1937 elections because this was an opportunity to strengthen the political base among the masses. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) gradually turned itself as a fully-fledged organisation. But the Party mainly confined in the Bombay Province despite of its success in the Assembly election. The Independent Labour Party could hardly become the representative of all workers whereas it was based on a network of Dalit activists. Some Kunbi sympathizers gradually distanced themselves from the Party considering themselves superior to Untouchables.⁶⁵ With the time his Independent Labour Party turned out to be unviable, and in 1942 the party was replaced by the Scheduled Caste's Federation.

The Scheduled Castes Federation: In July 1942, B.R. Ambedkar founded the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) as a strategy to give more emphasis on the Caste politics. The reason for the decision was the Cripps Mission formula, which was

submitted in March 1942 to resolve India's Constitutional impasse. It proposed the election of a Constituent Assembly without taking consent of the Depressed Classes as a minority, like the Muslim who has granted separate state, Pakistan. As a reaction to Sir Stafford Cripps's proposal, in 1942, the All India Depressed Classes' Conference was held in Nagpur. The meeting was attended by 70,000 people, with representatives from Bengal, Bombay, Punjab, and the Madras Presidency and from the Central Provinces and Berar.⁶⁶

The first resolution of this Conference condemned the proposal of His Majesty's government and demanded a separate electorate for Untouchables; the second ask for a Constitutional provision for transfer of the Scheduled Castes to separate Scheduled Caste villages, 'away from the Hindu villages'; and the third resolution was for the creation of a political party for the causes of Scheduled Castes, to be called Scheduled Castes Federation.⁶⁷

The Nagpur resolutions were passed by the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation held in Madras on the 23rd September 1944. One motion reiterated that 'Scheduled Castes are a distinct and separate element in the national life of India and that they are a religious minority in a sense far more real than the Sikhs and Muslims can be and within the meaning of the Cripps proposals'.⁶⁸ Another resolution declares that no Constitution shall be acceptable to the Scheduled Castes if it did not have their consent. The Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation will insist upon their claims for representation in the Legislatures and in the Executive. The Committee convinced that the Scheduled Castes can never get protection, justice or sympathy from the present administration which is controlled by men full of caste consciousness, narrow-mindedness, absence of justice; hatred and contempt for the Scheduled Castes. Therefore, the Committee demands provision for education and also the Constitution must recognise reservation in the Public Services for Scheduled Castes like the Muslim Community.⁶⁹ Urging the Depressed Classes, Ambedkar, said:

I have built the house for you and it is up to you to maintain it in proper order. I have planted the tree, if you water it, you will enjoy the fruits and you will be able to enjoy its shade, if not, you will have to sit in the sun. Our community will be ruined. So every Scheduled Caste should come under the

banner of the Scheduled Caste Federation and make it more powerful. Only if we unite, we can achieve something. United we stand and divided we fall.⁷⁰

In the 1945 election for the Provisional Legislatures was the newly established Scheduled Castes Federation utterly defeated. But SCF was getting ready for the general election of 1952. Ambedkar in his political manifesto had stated some principles: Indians were entitled to equality; every Indian to have freedom-religious, economic and political; insistence on the maintenance of liberty, equality and fraternity; redemption from oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class, and of nation by nation; and for Parliamentary system of government. The manifesto made it clear that the principles were meant for the downtrodden humanity in India. Unfortunately Babasaheb Ambedkar was defeated in the election to Parliament in January 1952.⁷¹ His failure was due to the official position as Labour member in the Viceroy's Executive Council prevented him from taking an active part in the party organisation, which may have been a factor in the defeat. The 1946 Satyagrahas were conducted mainly by the Scheduled Castes demanding separate electorates and recognition of their demands by those planning for Indian independence. And Ambedkar's engagement in writing for his book entitled, 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables' brought electoral setback for his party.⁷²

The Republican Party of India—a party with ideology of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice: The political setback of the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) in the first general election in 1952, brought introspection in the mind of Ambedkar and realizing the drawback he chalked out new political strategy. The Executive Committee of the Scheduled Castes Federation was held on 30th September 1956 at the residence of Dr. Ambedkar, and he made an attempt to transform the Scheduled Castes Federation into a party which would speak for all the "dispossessed", the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes. The move to create the Republican Party India (RPI) came about the same time as the conversion to Buddhism, in Nagpur 14-15 October 1956. Both were efforts to take the Scheduled Castes out of Untouchability and form a large group, one religious and the other political.⁷³ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar addressing a Press conference on 13th October 1956, at Nagpur categorically stated that he had already drafted Constitution of the Republican Party. The aims and objects of the Party were: (1) all Indians are entitled

to equality, the party will foster equality; (2) every Indian has a right to develop himself, the state is only as a means to that end; (3) every Indian has a right to religious, economic and political freedom; (4) right of every Indian to equality of opportunity is upheld; (5) it will keep the state ever aware of its obligations to make every Indian free from want and free from fear; (6) it will insist on the maintenance of liberty, equality and fraternity and will strive for redemption from oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class and of nation by nation; (7) The Republican Party of India stands for the Parliamentary system of government as being the best form of government both in the interest of the public and in the interest of the individual. Dr. Ambedkar also remarked that the Republican Party stands for Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice. He further said that the Party upholds the secular character of the state.⁷⁴

His Ideal Social Order:

As the existing Brahminical Social Order is rooted in the Hindu *Varna* system, it does not give any importance to an individual. Thus in this society an individual does not have any real chance of growth or development as a person. Because of the same reason, the rights of a human being do not find any place in the existing social order. As Ambedkar writes:

There is no room for individual merit and no consideration of individual justice. If the individual has a privilege it is not because it is due to him personally. The privilege goes with the class, and if he is found to enjoy it, it is because he belongs to that class. Contrawise, if an individual is suffering from a wrong, it is not because he by his conduct deserves it. The disability is the disability imposed upon the class and if he is found to be labouring under it, it is because he belongs to that class.⁷⁵

To Dr. Ambedkar, the aim of human society must be to enable every person to lead a life of culture which means the cultivation of the mind as distinguished from the satisfaction of mere physical wants. He remarked:

Ideal as norms are good and are necessary. Neither a society nor an individual can do without a norm. But a norm must change with changes in time and circumstances. No norm can be permanently fixed. There must always be room for revolution of the values of our norm.⁷⁶

The Hindu Social System is the sole creator of Caste and untouchability and also responsible for all social evils in the society. It is not enough for a Hindu to believe in the dogmas of Caste and Untouchability. He must also observe Caste and Untouchability, in the conduct of his daily life. While replying to Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar remarked that Caste is the only reason of inequality in the Hindu Society. Caste has ruined the Hindus. The reorganization of the Hindu Society on the basis of *Chaturvarna* is impossible because the *Varna Vyavastha* is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose. It is incapable of sustaining itself by its own virtue and has an inherent tendency to degenerate into a Caste System unless there is a legal sanction behind it which can be enforced against every one transgressing his Varna. He was of the view that the Hindu Society must be reorganized on a religious basis which would recognise the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.⁷⁷ That is why Dr. Ambedkar wanted to replace the existing social system into an 'ideal society', based on Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. To put it on his own words:

An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a chance taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points and contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is no merely a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.⁷⁸

In his monumental work '*Annihilation of Caste*', he proposed for a new doctrinal basis of the ideal society. Thus he observed:

Whether you do that or you do not, you must give a new doctrinal basis to your religion—a basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, in short, with democracy. I am not authority on the subject. But I am told that for such religious principles as well be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity it may not be necessary for you to borrow from foreign sources and that you could draw for such principles on the Upanishads. Whether you could do so without a complete remoulding, a considerable scraping and chipping off the ore they contain, is more than I

can say. This means a complete change in the fundamental notions of life. It means a complete change in the fundamental notions of life. It means a complete change in our look and attitude towards men and things. It means conversion; but if you do not like the word, I will say, it means new life. But a new life cannot enter a body that is dead. New life can enter only in a new body. The old body must die before a new body can come into existence and a new life can enter into it. To put it simply, the old must cease to be operative before the new can begin to enliven and to pulsate. This is what I meant when I said you must discard the authority of the Shastras and destroy the religion of the Shastras.⁷⁹

On Annihilation of Caste:

Dr. Ambedkar was the first Untouchable in the whole of living Indian history who worked out a systematic theory of the annihilation of Caste. After Buddha, Ambedkar became an icon of the pan-Indian anti-caste revolution.⁸⁰ He viewed that in Hinduism there is neither social equality nor human dignity. And that is why he called for the annihilation of Caste. To him, unless you change your social order you can make a very little progress. You cannot mobilize the community either for defence or for offence. You cannot build anything on the foundation of Caste. You cannot build a nation. Anything that you will build on the foundation of Caste will crack and will never be a whole. Thus for the establishment of new social order or to bring about a change in the existing social order, he suggested the following three steps:

1. Regarding the reformation of caste, he suggested for the abolition of various *Sub-Castes*, because these came into existence only through imitation and excommunication. He assumed that the fusion of Sub-Castes is possible, but there is no guarantee of the abolition of Castes. Thus the process may stop with the abolition of Sub-Castes.
2. Another plan of action for the abolition of Caste, to him, is to begin with *inter-caste dining*. But in his opinion this remedy is not sufficient. Because there were many Castes which allow inter-dining, but it has not succeeded in killing the spirit of Castes and the consciousness of Caste. He, therefore
3. Convinced another plan of action that could be the real remedy to the abolition of Caste is *inter-marriage*.

Thus, supporting to the above statements, he said:

Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount the separatist feeling, the feeling of being aliens, created by the Caste will not vanish. Among the Hindu inter-marriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life than it need be in the life of the non-Hindu. Where society is already well-knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where the society is cut as under -marriage as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. The real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste.⁸¹

In addition to this, Dr.Ambedkar pointed out that the Hindu *Shastras* teaches and perpetuates the religion of Caste. The sanctity of Caste and Varna can be destroyed only by disregarding the divine authority of the *Shastras*. Hence the real remedy to be the destruction of the belief in the sanctity of the *Shastras*. Thus you must take the stand that *Buddha* took. You must take the stand which *Guru Nanak* took. You must not only discard the *Shastras*, you must deny their authority, as did *Buddha* and *Nanak*. You must have counter-age to tell the Hindus, that what is wrong with them is their religion-the religion which has produced in them this notion of the sacredness of Caste.⁸²

The Religious alternative (conversion):

In post-independence India, the atrocities and exploitation of the upper-castes on the Shudras, Ati-Shudras and Adivasis (*Dalitbahujans*) compelled them to choose the path of conversion. They gradually realised that they would never be able to attain their humanity in the Hindu Dharma. Hence, they began to search for an alternative identity. Dr.Ambedkar envisaged no possibility of liberation of *Dalitbahujans* in Hinduism; he, therefore, preferred the path of conversion to Buddhism because of its egalitarian philosophy. And also the Conversion, to him was the best weapon to wean away the Depressed Classes from Hinduism. Around 1950, Ambedkar realised that the salvation of the Depressed Classes could not be achieved only through political platforms and parties, because the political basis of a community always remained in a fluid state. Ambedkar's intention was to revolutionise Dalit politics through Buddhism and transform them into a separate powerful community. By converting to Buddhism, Dr.Ambedkar visualized a separate community outside the Hindu fold. He

was a rationalist as contrast with the intuitionists of the Vedic age. He, therefore, waged war against the Brahmins in the modern age and ultimately took shelter in Buddhism because of the immense benefits it conferred on the Scheduled Caste people.

Ambedkar's first reference to conversion to other religion dates back to 1927. During the Mahad Conference he mentioned for equal rights in society. That can be possible by remaining within the Hindu fold or, by kicking away this worthless Hindu identity. The Jalgaon Conference of 29 May 1929 passed a resolution where he called upon all the depressed class people to embrace any religion other than Hinduism. But in the first Depressed class congress at Nagpur in August 1930 Ambedkar told his audience that he would not abjure the Hindu religion whatever might be the hardships inflicted upon him by the caste Hindus. A few years after the Poona Pact, Ambedkar, took two steps, one religious and the other political, which underline his position as the leader of a group independent of Hinduism. He, therefore, told Gavai with whom he represented the untouchables at the Third Round Table conference, that he intended to leave the fold of Hinduism. He made it clear that Islam repelled him but he had the inclination towards Buddhism. He gave no further signs of making a move till 1935 but presiding over a meeting of representatives of the Depressed Classes at Yeola, which he had convened to assess the socio-political situation of their ten years struggle, and he announced his decision to convert.⁸³ Addressing to the Depressed Classes in Yeola, Dr. Ambedkar said:

Now we come to the conclusion that there is no change in attitude of the touchable and they are not ready to behave with us, with affection despite of our continuous struggle. We have decided to remain separate from the Hindus and to live with self-help and struggle to attain self-elevation.⁸⁴

He expressed his opinion that the time for making a final decision to settle the matter had arrived. The disabilities suffered and the indignities put up with by some sections of the society were the result of their being the members of the Hindu community. It would, therefore, be better to leave that fold and embrace a new faith that would give them an equal status, a secure position and rightful treatment. Referring to his own personal decision in the matter, Dr. Ambedkar said that unfortunately for him he was born a Hindu Untouchable. It was beyond his power to prevent that, but he declared that it was within his power to refuse to live under

ignoble and humiliating conditions. "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu".⁸⁵

After the Yeola declaration of Conversion, the Maharashtra Youth Conference was held on January 1936 at Pune. In his speech Dr. Ambedkar, however, warned his people against the erroneous view that conversion would relieve them from hell and would lead them to the paradise of equality. He further told them that under any new religion they would be required to fight for liberty and equality. He observed, "We are fully conscious of the facts that go anywhere; we would have to fight for our welfare if we took to Christianity, Islam or Sikhism. He added that his term for a compromise with the caste Hindus to keep the struggle for equality inside the Hindu fold would be never fulfilled by the Hindus because bread and butter was not the question. Referring to the Harijan Fund started by Gandhi, he said that its object was to enslave the untouchables to the camp of caste Hindus. He declared that he was now bent on conversion whether the caste Hindus meant help or hindrance. Even if God were produced before him to dissuade him from leaving the Hindu fold, he would not go back on his resolve".⁸⁶

Addressing a conference of Mahar Community in 1936 at Dadar, Dr. Ambedkar said that as long as one stays in the Hindu fold, there would be no salvation. The social gospel of Hinduism is inequality. For the doctrine *Chaturvarna* is the concrete embodiment of the social gospel of inequality. Moreover, he observed that the function of a true religion was the upliftment of the individual. The Hindu religion did not teach the virtues like fellow-feeling, equality and liberty, and even failed to provide them a favorable environment; therefore, leaving the Hindu fold and seeking another religion became imperative. He said that he has decided to give up this religion for ever and the religious conversion is not inspired by any material motive. It is the spiritual feeling that undermines religious conversion. Hinduism does not appeal to my conscience. My self-respect cannot assimilate in Hinduism. But why should you live under the fold of the Hindu religion which has deprived you of honour, money, food and shelter.⁸⁷ Dr. Ambedkar declared in Bombay:

Our aim is to gain freedom. We are not interested in anything else at the moment. Let there be no misunderstanding that the object of our struggle is our liberation from Hinduism and not reform of Hinduism. The chief object of our movement is to achieve freedom, social, economic and religious. We

are not interested in anything else at the moment .We can gain freedom by conversion so there is no necessity of taking responsibility of reforming the Hindu religion. Let me clear that our struggle is our liberation from Hinduism and not reform of Hinduism.⁸⁸

Dr.Ambedkar was basically not a religious preacher nor was he a Sant. Theology was not his aim and mission of life. He exposed the traits of Hindu religion simply because this was the main cause of the slavery of the immense majority, the lowest stratum of our society. It was the Hindu religion which in a systematic manner and with divine sanction took away all social, economic and human rights. While giving the clarion call to leave Hinduism he explained at length:

The Hindu religion is the religion of our ancestors, but it is the worst type of slavery that was thrust upon them. Our ancestors had no means to fight this slavery and therefore, they could not revolt....You look upon me as ‘God’ I am not a God. I am a human being like you all. Whatever helps you want from me, I am prepared to give you. I have decided to liberate you from your present helpless and degraded condition.⁸⁹

Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar had a talk with Dr.Moonje, the spokesman of the Hindu Mahasabha on 18th June, 1936 in Bombay, and cleared all the issues and made the following statement:

The Hindus cannot afford to be indifferent to the movement of conversion which is gaining ground among the Depressed Classes. It would undoubtedly be the best thing from the stand point of the Hindus if the Depressed Classes were to be persuaded to drop the idea of conversion. But if that is not possible, then the Hindus must concern themselves with the next move which the Depressed Classes will take, because their move is bound to have serious consequences upon the destiny of the country. If they cannot be persuaded to stay, the Hindus must help if they cannot lead them, to embrace a faith which will be least harmful to the Hindus and to the country.⁹⁰

On the basis of the above argument, Dr Ambedkar stated, ‘that before a society can make converts, it must see to it that its constitution provides for aliens being made its social life’. Otherwise ‘If there is no such provision on conversion of an alien the question would at once arise where to place the convert. If there is no place for the convert there can be no invitation for conversion nor can there being an acceptance of

it.' He said, 'the Hindu society is characterized by the existence of castes. Each caste is endogamous and lives by membership and does not allow anyone from outside being brought into it'. Therefore, Dr.Ambedkar concluded, 'Caste is incompatible with conversion'. Therefore as long as caste system or even the feeling of the caste is there, conversion or reconversion (*Shudhikaran*) has no meaning.⁹¹

To assess the impact of the resolution and his declaration on the Mahar Masses, on 30-1 May 1933 a Mahar Conference was convened, in which publicly through a written address in Marathi, he explained to the masses 'why conversion?' or 'why should the Dalits change their religion?'

To Dr. Ambedkar, any conversion had two important aspects-social and religious or material and spiritual. But he also added, whatever may be the aspect or thinking about the 'conversion' it is important to understand the nature of Untouchability. The problem of Untouchability is a matter of class struggle between Caste-Hindus and the Untouchables. This is not a matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another. This class struggle has a relation with the social status. In the case of the Dalits, their struggle began as soon as they stated claiming equal treatment. This struggle is permanent and has no end. Dr. Ambedkar stated the fact that the struggle between Caste-Hindus and the Untouchables is a permanent phenomenon. It is eternal, because of the religion which has placed you at the lowest level of the society is itself eternal, according to the belief of the high Caste people. No change, according to times and circumstances, is possible. You are at the lowest rung of the ladder today. You shall remain lowest forever. This means, the struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables shall continue forever.⁹²

Conversion in order to escape torture and to achieve strengths:

Dr.Ambedkar believes that the Untouchables have suffered untold miseries, atrocities, torture and exploitation by caste Hindus over hundred and thousands of years. They have made the daily life of untouchable unbearable and deralegating the majority sections of the society into sub-human condition. To him, the Untouchables have not enough power to survive through this class struggle. Regarding this he has explained three types of strengths, which include (1) Man- Power, since the Untouchables are minority and are too unorganized. The Caste within themselves

does not allow them to Organise. (2) Finance, which the Untouchables have none. You have no trades, no business, no service or land. The pieces of bread thrown out by the higher castes are your means of livelihood. (3) Mental Strength, according to Dr. Ambedkar, the Untouchables condition is still worst. For centuries, you have not only served the higher caste but also tolerated their insults and tyranny without grudge and complaint, which has killed the sense to retort and revolt. I have no doubt that you are oppressed because you have no strength. The Hindus practise injustice and tyranny against you because you are helpless. As you have no strength to challenge this tyranny you need to be secure from outside. Dr. Ambedkar gave the examples of Muslims; the secret of their survival was their strength and solidarity as a community. But according to him as long as they were a part of the Hindu community, they cannot expect any support from within, it has to come from outside, which they can receive by associating with others through 'conversion'. He said to the Untouchables:

From this you realize one thing that, unless you establish close relations with some other society, unless you join some other religion, you cannot get the strength from outside. It clearly means that you must leave your present religion and assimilate yourselves with some other society.⁹³

Conversion in order to get spiritual well-being:

The other important aspect of conversion was related to the spiritual well-being of a person. According to D. Ambedkar, religion is 'which governs people' but when this definition is applied to Hindu religion based society one finds there is no place for an individual. The Hindu religion is constituted on a class concept. Hindu religion does not teach how an individual should behave with another individual. 'A religion which does not recognise the individual is not personally acceptable to me'. In this regard he raised a question by saying, 'three factors are required for the uplift of an individual. They are Sympathy, Equality and Liberty. Can you say by experience that any of these factors exists for you in Hinduism?'⁹⁴ He also wanted to give an end to the system of divine slavery in India by annihilating the Caste System. He rightly identified that God of the Brahmanism is the genesis of all the ills of the system. The Shudras and untouchables suffer from handicapped rights simply because they were Hindus. These Hindus are not regarded as human beings. They are known as castes

and castes have no social mobility. They were born as caste and were to die as caste. No sooner than a Hindu is converted to any other religion, he gains back all rights and privileges which any common human being enjoys or whatever the Brahmins enjoy as their prerogatives.⁹⁵

Dr. Ambedkar even argued that the Untouchables were not Hindus. He told the Untouchables present in the conference, 'you are as separate from the Hindus as Muslims and Christians are'. Some people raised the question that if the Untouchables get converted; the Hindu society will get divided. But he asserted further, 'By conversion nobody can say or feel that one society has been split up. You will remain as separate from the Hindu as you are today, nothing new will happen on account of this conversion'. Dr. Ambedkar made it very clear that the aim of the Untouchables was to gain freedom and 'this freedom cannot be secured without conversion'. Further conversion meant a total 'change of religion followed by the change of name will be more beneficial to you. To call oneself a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist or a Sikh is not merely a change of religion but also a change of name'.⁹⁶ Ambedkar's above argument also referred to the history of conversion movement in India. Through the historical references, he actually dealt with the question of the ancestors' religion and their conversion. He said that the ancient Aryan religion was called Vedic religion and thousands of people followed it in India. But when Buddhism came, a large number of people left Hinduism and joined Buddhism. According to him this was because Hindu religion was not a religion but slavery forced upon the people.

Conversion in order to get equality and self-respect:

For Ambedkar, the principal object of our movement is only to achieve the social freedom for the Untouchables. There are two ways of achieving the equality. The equality will be achieved either by remaining in the Hindu fold or by conversion. If equality is to be achieved by remaining in the Hindu fold, mere removal of the sense being a touchable or an untouchable will not serve the purpose. Equality can be achieved only when inter-castes dinners and marriages take place. This means that the Chaturvarnya must be abolished and the Bramhanic religion must be uprooted. This is of course not possible. The path of conversion is far simpler than this. The Hindu society gives equality of treatment to Muslims and Christians. Obviously the social equality is easily achieved by conversion. While speaking on the question of 'conversion' Dr. Ambedkar also dealt with a number of other questions. He told his

listeners that caste system was actually part and parcel of Hinduism. Thus destroying caste system meant destroying the Hindu religion. On the other hand Islam and Christianity do not satisfy caste, it infact condemn it. Therefore destroying castes among Christians or Muslims will not mean destroying these religions. They will infact, support such a move. Dr. Ambedkar also argued that economic or political rights of the Untouchables will not be affected by conversion. He even preferred in going to the 'social strengths' as compared to these rights.⁹⁷ He says man is not for religion, religion is for man. To become human, to secure equality and to get liberty, convert yourselves.

Dr. Babasaheb studied all the major religions and their cultures. And he also made a deep study of Hindu religion, its Shastras, Puranas and Smrites. Finally, he came to the conclusion that neither Islam nor Christianity can become the alternative of Hindu religion. They have their own drawbacks like Hindu religion. Conversion to Islam or Christianity will denationalize the depressed classes. If they go to Islam the number of Muslims will be doubled and the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real. He was convinced that the same caste system prevails among Christians. Among Muslims also he found the dominance of caste system. And therefore, he was disillusioned by both the Christianity and the Islam. He was also not happy with the status of women in the Muslim society. Finally he turned towards *Buddha and his Dharma*. The search for a proper religion by him throws light on his immense faith in spiritualism and Indian culture.⁹⁸

After deep study he came to the conclusion that there were three cardinal teachings of Buddha that appealed to the masses. His gospel of social equality, his demand for the abolition of the "*Chaturvarna*" system, his doctrine of non-violence and his condemnation of elaborate religious ceremonials and sacrifices which impoverished the masses and created among them repugnance for religious ceremonies. Buddhism therefore, swept the land as no physical conquerer had ever done in India's history. Within a few generations almost the entire country especially to the masses and the trading classes went over to Buddhism.⁹⁹

Speaking at a meeting, on the occasion of the Buddha anniversary in New Delhi, Dr. Ambedkar attacked the Godmen in Hinduism. He said that the Buddha's religion was based on morality. It was based on ethics and morality. Unlike the religious founders of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity who claims to be God, but the Buddha

never arrogated to himself any such status. He was born a son of man. He taught his disciples that he was mortal, his parents were mortal, and do not try to make him God'. He did not ask people to believe in him for their salvation. He acted as a guide and not as a God whereas Krishna said that he was a God of Gods; Christ said he was God's son and Mohammad said that he was the last messenger of God. Except the Buddha all founders of religions claimed for themselves the role of *Mokshadata* (saviour) and claimed infallibility for themselves, while the Buddha was satisfied with the role of *Margadata* (guide). The religion of the Buddha is morality. What God is to other religions, morality is to Buddhism? Buddhist religion is nothing if not morality. The Buddha propounded a most revolutionary meaning of the word "*Dharma*". In *Dhamma*, morality takes the place of God although there is no God in *Dhamma*.¹⁰⁰ The Buddha did not find for himself any place in his *Dhamma*. He declared that the *Dhamma* does not require any authority. But the Dharma to Brahmins was '*Yajnas*' and sacrifices to God. In place of '*Karma*' the Buddha substituted morality as the essence of Dharma. The social gospel of Hinduism was inequality whereas Buddhism was for equality. Hinduism believes in Chaturvarnya and caste system The *Gita* also upheld *Chaturvarnya*. Ambedkar equated Hinduism with caste oppression, inequality, injustice, exploitation, ritualism, authoritarianism, and apathy etc. He found the Buddhism to be the best religion, being this-worldly and having no faith in God, some transmigration, priesthood, ritualism, heaven or hell. It was based on equality, social morality, rationalism, rationality and compassion.¹⁰¹ The merits of Buddhism that attracted Ambedkar were:

1. Buddhism demanded living experience and a life divine, attainable here and now, not after death.
2. It is a religion of realism and never idealism.
3. It upheld the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity as well as justice; it emphasized humanity, love and peace.
4. It was dynamic, scientific and all embracing.
5. Its explanation of life and its meaning and its purpose of birth and death and its aftermath were very clear, intelligible and logical.

6. Above all, man was the centre of his study and examination and not anything outside of him.
7. It is based on ethics and morality, compassion and kind heartedness.
8. Prajna and Sila is the soul of Buddhism.¹⁰²

During an All India Radio broadcast on October 3, 1954, Ambedkar declared:

‘Positively, my social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. Let no one however say that I borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have deprived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha. My philosophy has a mission. I have to do the work of conversion to Buddhism’.¹⁰³

In the last phase of his life, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, resolved to raise the banner of Buddhism and bring back to his motherland the Buddha who had suffered an exile for over twelve hundred years. He unfurled the banner, and his people marched. Thus, he began the last phase of the war. In 1956 Dr.Ambedkar wrote to the General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society, D.Valinshina, saying that he was preparing the conversion of India’s Untouchables to Buddhism. He had prepared a formula of certain rites called “*Dhamma Diksha Ceremony*”, which everyone embracing Buddhism would be required to undergo; for it was his confirmed belief that conversion of the laity was no conversion at all; it was only a nominal thing. Buddhism disappeared from India because of the wavering attitude of the laity which worshiped along with the Buddha many other gods and goddesses set up by the Brahmins to destroy the Buddhism. So there should be a ceremony for initiation into the Dhamma.¹⁰⁴ A talk by Dr. Ambedkar was broadcast in May, 1956 from the British Broadcasting Corporation, London, where he said, he prefers Buddhism because it gives three principles in combination which no other religion does. It teaches *prajna* (understanding against superstitious and supernaturalism), *koruna* (love) and *samata* (equality). This is what man wants for a good and happy life”.¹⁰⁵

On May 24, 1956, he announced on the day of Buddha Jayanti Celebrations at Nare Park in Bombay that he would convert to Buddhism on 14th October 1956, the Asoka Vijaya Dashmi day and called upon all untouchables to join him. On

September 23, 1956, releasing the press note he confirmed that the ceremony would take place at Nagpur on October 14, the day of the Hindu festival of Dasahara. He invited the head of the Buddhist monks of India, Bhikkhu Mahasthaveer Chandramani, of Kushinara, Gorakhpur District, to carry out the ritual. In conversation with Shankaranad Shastri, a devoted lieutenant of him, he said that he preferred Nagpur, which was a historic town where the Buddhist Nagas flourished in ancient times. He would set the wheel of the Buddha's Dhamma in motion once again; spreading the messages of his master to all the corners of the world. Finally, the conversions took place at Nagpur, where several hundred thousands Untouchables, responding to Ambedkar's appeal, came dressed in white, some of them bearing ochre flags, the colour of Buddhism. Ambedkar and his second wife were the first to convert, which they did beneath a canopy, in front of the crowd. The Bhikkhus made them take the oath to *Buddha*, to *Dhamma* (the doctrine of the Buddha) and to *Sangha* (the community of the monks). He then asked them to avow allegiance to *Panchsheel* (the five principles which are the refusal to kill, to steal, to lie, to have illegitimate sexual relationships and to drink). Ambedkar and his wife repeated in Marathi the words of the Bhikkhus in Pali (the language of the Buddhist canon) then bowed down three times before the statue of the Buddha. Dr. Ambedkar then declared:

By discarding my ancient religion which stood for inequality and oppression today I am reborn. I have no faith in the philosophy of incarnation; and it is wrong and mischievous to say that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu. I am no more a devotee of any Hindu god or goddesses. I will not perform Shraddha. I will strictly follow the eight fold path of Buddha. Buddhism is a true religion and I will lead a life guided by the three principles of knowledge, right path and compassion.¹⁰⁶

Dr. Ambedkar repeated the pledges to renounce the worship of the Hindu God and when he declared "I renounce Hinduism", the great leader seemed deeply moved; his voice choked visibly as he spoke. These pledges, framed by him, were twenty-two in number. He denounced Hinduism, its customs and traditions and declared that from that moment onwards he would strike for the spread of equality among human beings.¹⁰⁷ As a part of conversion ceremony he got recited the **22 Oaths** from the people. Dr. Ambedkar called upon hundreds and thousands of Untouchables awaiting

conversion to stand. The entire gathering rouse up and he administered the Three Refugees (*tisarina*), the Five Precepts (*Panchsheel*) and different pledges to the vast gathering.¹⁰⁸ In that occasion Dr. Ambedkar had converted an estimated 380,000 of his followers who were gathered around him. They proclaimed belief in the Buddhist way of life, and Ambedkar declared:

I will not regard Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as Gods nor will I worship them; and I embrace today the Buddha Dhamma discarding the Hindu religion which is detrimental to the emancipation of human beings and which believes in inequality and regards human beings other than the Brahmans as lowborn.¹⁰⁹

With the pledges Babasaheb Ambedkar and his supporters explicitly rejected Hinduism and Hindu philosophy. Ambedkar explained the need for religious conversion on 15th October 1956 at Nagpur, a day after the Deeksha ceremony, he said:

Mind is the source of energy for a person progress. Man's spirit is created in the mind. Hinduism has curbed the minds of the Dalits and the other Bahujans and deprived them of their tremendous spirit and energy. It has snatched away our imagination to rise high. If a man is made hopeless, then at the most he will have no more ambition than to fill his stomach with a minor job...As long as such conditions prevail, it is not possible to create ambition to progress. We have not been able to do anything about it by staying in the Hindu religion... Progress can come only in the Buddhist religion.¹¹⁰

Babasaheb' Buddhism provokes the deprived people to fight for their rights and instill in them great courage and confidence. Ambedkar has given the energy of Buddhism based on the principle of equality, liberty and fraternity to fight the ills of Hinduism. The essence of Buddhists conversion in the words of Babasaheb:

Remaining in the Hindu religion will bring no kind of progress to anyone. For some, the hierarchy of the Hindu religion brings profits; this is true for the superior classes and castes. But what of others? If a Brahmin woman delivers a child, from then on her vision is on any high court judge's place which might fall vacant. If one of our sweeper women is brought to bed, her vision turns towards the place of sweeper. Such strange arrangements the

Hindu religious class system has made. What improvements can come from this system? Progress can come only in the Buddhist religion.¹¹¹

Two months before his death in December 1956, Ambedkar went to Nagpur, which he called the home of the Nagas, an ancient Buddhist people, and again using local leadership and his own impassioned oratory and example, set the Mahars on a new path. The Nagpur newspapers called the scene of mass conversion “a new Pandharpur”.¹¹² Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that Buddhism was a true religion as it led to life guided by three principles: knowledge, right path and compassion. His Buddhism would be a sort of Neo-Buddhism or *Navayana*. Replying to the critics, he said, “I am conferring greatest benefit to the country by embracing Buddhism; for Buddhism is a part and parcel of Bharatiya Culture. I have taken care that my conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture and history of this land”.¹¹³ He remarked that the Buddha adopted the method which was most suitable in the circumstances obtaining them, for the propagation of his religion. Accordingly, we should adopt the method which is most suitable in the existing circumstances. There are no Bhikkhus in this country to do this work. So every one of you has to take the ‘Diksha’. A Buddhist has the right to convert others to his faith, if disruption comes at a later stage, we must have a provision to meet the situation. We must organise huge machinery for the propagation of Dhamma. Every Buddhist has the right to initiate others. This is my announcement today. Go forth with the message of the Buddha. Go forth to liberate people.¹¹⁴

In Buddhism, Ambedkar discovered a ray of hope and light for all communities. His creed of Buddha was not only a protest, but a challenge to the whole of the Hindu Society’s unfair behaviour patterns. And for the individuals, he said, Buddhism teaches social freedom, intellectual freedom, and economic freedom; and political freedom and equality not only between man and man but also between man and woman it. It would be difficult to find a religious teacher to compare with Buddha, whose teachings embrace various aspects of the social life of people, whose doctrines are so modern and with main concern to give salvation to man in his life on earth and not to promise it in heaven after he is dead.¹¹⁵ Though the teachings of Buddha are eternal but he did not proclaim them to be infallible. The religion of Buddha has the capacity to change according to the changes of time, a quality which no other religion can claim to have. Buddhism denies the existence of God and Soul. The real basis of

Buddhism is rational way to eradicate suffering. The Buddha said, “Suffering in the world-suffering is wide spread”. The sole objective of Buddhism is to emancipate the suffering of humanity.¹¹⁶ The Buddha opposed all sorts of irrational behaviour and preached, “Do not accept a thing simply because Buddha said so”. “Lead your life by the light of the lamp of self-reasoning”. None, on earth, before or after Buddha has preached any higher ideals of self-consciousness, self-respect, independence than this.

Thus, Buddhist social approaches were more comprehensive and humanistic than other religion. Buddha’s teaching was more suited to the needs of practical social life. He tried to blend the socio-economic and political ideas on the basis of moral foundations. By stressing the unity of individual on a social and political level he endeavored to transform human life into an ideal one. Moral and religious life, as he conceived it, was really based on the social organization and the conduct of man in society. Conversion to Buddhism was his alternative message to the Depressed Classes, Hindus, as well as to the whole world. He opposed the traditional hierarchical and Unequal Social Hindu Order and visualized a Buddhist alternative society based on liberty, equality, justice and fraternity.

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