

CHAPTER-4

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Conversion as a means of escaping the caste system had already been tried by many Untouchables. It is worth mentioning that conversion to another religion was a way to escape from the disabilities of untouchability in Hinduism. Dr. Ambedkar reckoned that social hierarchy was essential to the Hindu religion. To get out of it meant attainment of equality and self-respect. More than political and religious man is social animal. He may not have or need not have religion; he may not have, needed not have politics but he must have a society. The wretched society based on Caste and Untouchability, had for ages treated the untouchables of India worse than serfs and slaves. Dr. Ambedkar was convinced that there is no salvation within Hinduism for untouchables. He rightly attributed the low-status, degradation and low-esteem of untouchables to a social system that was backed by Hinduism. Hence, conversion to Buddhism was the only way to get emancipation from the age-old caste-ridden Hinduism.

Socio-political Reasons for choosing Buddhism for the Untouchables:

The conversion of the Dalits from Hinduism to other religions was one of the main agendas of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's life since he fully believed that this was the only way for their liberation. He reached this conclusion after struggling for more than two decades for the basic human rights of the Dalits within the Hindu fold. It is true that on 13th October, 1935, he declared in a Conference held at Yeola in Nasik, his definite intention of changing his religion in the presence of more than 10,000 Dalits but his struggle towards his end began much earlier in the Mahad Satyagrahas in 1927. The Jalgaon Conference of 29 May 1929 passed a resolution and called all the Depressed Classes people to embrace any religion other than Hinduism.¹ Ambedkar addressed the Dalits present in the Yeola Conference in these words:

The disabilities we have suffered, and the indignities we had to put up with, were the result of our being the members of the Hindu Community. Will it

not be better for us to leave that fold and embrace a new faith that would give us equal status, a secure position and rightful treatment? I advise you to sever your connection with Hinduism and to embrace any other religion. But, in doing so be careful in choosing the new faith and see that equality in treatment, status and opportunities will be guaranteed to you unreservedly. Unfortunately for me I was born a Hindu Untouchable. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but I declare that it is within my power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu.²

Dr.Ambedkar asked his people to ponder over the causes for their sufferings extending over long period of two thousand years. He asserted that the Hindu Dharma was the main cause. Of all religions in the world it was Hinduism that recognised caste distinctions and Untouchability. This was the cover, the cloak, for all injustices perpetrated on the Scheduled Castes by Caste Hindus. The position even today, he regretted to say, was that in villages they could not live with self-respect. He, therefore, reiterated his conviction that they must discard Hinduism and refuse to submit to indignities any longer.³

The social degradation of the Untouchables having had religious sanction under Hinduism, the untouchables have no where to go but to get out of this gas chamber of Hinduism and seek fresh- air under other liberating religions like Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, etc. Therefore, conversion to other religions had become popular among the untouchables. Not because after conversion to Christianity and Islam the “problem of poverty” would be solved. And for them poverty is not the number one problem. Man can not live by bread alone. He wants self -respect which is denied under Hinduism. They will get it the moment they get out of Hinduism and convert to other religions. Untouchables have discovered that conversion helps them as they will no longer be subjected to atrocities. Conversion to other realigns, therefore, helps the Untouchable to gain dignity and self-respect.⁴

Dr.Ambedkar emphasized (a) the need of the untouchables for self-respect (b) the reality of the division between caste Hindu and Depressed classes, which had to be acknowledged if any justice was to be done (c) the belief that the Brahmin’s deep ingrained ethnocentrism has prevented a reconstruction of Hindu society and stood in the way of aversion of vested rights for the common good.⁵ Dr.Ambedkar envisaged

that the Hindu society was static, Untouchability was recognized by Hindu religion and caste was the corner-stone to the arch of Hinduism. He weighed the merits of the Hindu dharma as against the merits of Buddhism and finally resolved to embrace Buddhism.⁶ However, the reasons for which Dr.Ambedkar preferred the Buddhism can be summarized thus:

- (1) He tried to prove that the Untouchables were Buddhists. In his thesis on the Origin of
- (2) Untouchability, he made it clear that today's Untouchables were once Buddhists.
- (3) Buddhism was an Indian religion and the Buddha was nearer to the Untouchable masses.
- (4) The Untouchables would join with the World Buddhist community and thus pave the way for World brotherhood.⁷

Dr. Ambedkar believes that all right minded people and Buddhist the world over will hail the return of the Buddha to his homeland without much formalism, traditionalism and protocol.⁸ Ambedkar pointed out that Buddha sought to raise the social status of the servile classes and he delivered sermons relating to the socio-religious reforms which the poor, the fallen, and the weak needed. He added that, "Buddhism teaches social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom....equality not between man and man only but between man and woman also. The day before his conversion he added that the greatest benefit he had conferred on the country was by embracing Buddhism. Buddhism is a part and parcel of Bharatiya culture. He said "I have taken care that my conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture and the history of this land".⁹ These show his

1. Leadership quality.
2. Deep insight into the psyche of the common people.
3. Respect for his own culture and realization that one can stay natural by staying close to his roots.

The Buddha stood for equality and he was also the greatest opponent of Chaturvarna.He preached against it, fought against it and strived hard to uproot it. According to Hinduism, neither a Shudra nor a woman could become a teacher of

religion nor could they take *Shanyasha* and reach God. Lord Buddha on the other hand, admitted Shudras to the Bhikkhus Sangha and even women were allowed to the Sangha. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was an attempt to re-establish the marginalized section of the society by pushing it upward towards modern, democratic values. It was a movement that was anti-traditional because it opposed Hinduism but very much pro-Indian. He believed that Buddhism would give the Untouchables the sense of self-respect and freedom from the domination of caste Hindu groups-a platform from which they can aspire for higher social and economic status.¹⁰ The conversion oaths devised by Dr. Ambedkar at the Nagpur ceremony not only contained positive statements about Buddhism such as taking a vow to follow the Eight- Fold Path of Lord Buddha, but also negative statements against Hinduism; such as negating the Hindu gods, negating the scripture-prescribed roles of the Brahmanism. This gives a release from the concept of pollution which he found to be so central in Hinduism. However, by conversion, the Untouchables became non-Hindus and they feels that Dr. Ambedkar won the governmental benefits for them and which are recompense for the ill-treatment of the past.¹¹

The path shown by Dr.Ambedkar was the salvation of the down-trodden classes through taking refuge in the Buddha-Dhamma. Ambedkar views that the Untouchables had a glorious past and that was said to be the glorious Buddhist period of Indian history. Henceforth, Buddhism can provide the Scheduled Castes instant rich historic past, spiritual heritage and cultural pride; which are the essential ingredients for any society to survive. Moreover, Buddhism can unify the splinter groups in the shape of various castes. Lord Buddha once said that if a drop of water is to be saved from extinction it must be dropped in the ocean which will never dry. Similarly, if the members of these smaller groups desire to live as respectable human beings they must become one with the Buddha's religion which is like a big ocean of equality, and it is only in this ocean of equality that they can live with self respect and dignity. Buddha's way is not only good for the down-trodden but also good for the country as well as for the whole mankind. To follow this path means freedom from serfdom and freedom from Caste rigidity as Buddhism enables its votaries to inter-mingle freely in all walks of life. Lord Buddha has been one of the greatest revolutionaries in the socio-emotional as well as the spiritual sphere of life. He was a fundamental revolutionary and Babasaheb Ambedkar gave a call not only to these

down-trodden and oppressed but to all Indians to break down their shackles and bonds by seeing the truth in the Buddhist way of life and creating a new society of harmony and happiness around them.

To sum up, Buddhism is ideally suited for the purpose of egalitarian justice as it is based on the concept of liberty, equality and fraternity. It can elevate the down-trodden, oppressed and suppressed sections to the highest level and give them social equality along with spiritual solace what they want.

Untouchability-the punishment for following Buddhism:

Dr.Ambedkar on his own thesis “*The Untouchables: Who were they and why they became Untouchables?* Published in 1948 says that Untouchability among Hindus is the unique phenomenon, unknown to humanity in other part of the world. Nothing like it is to be found in any other society- primitive, ancient or modern.¹² In more than one sense it is an institution that is unnatural and runs counter to human psychology and social force. He also observed that Untouchability is of comparatively recent origin and could not possible have existed in Vedic times or for centuries after that period. There is certainly no mention of Untouchability anywhere in Vedas. He further said the identification of Untouchable castes by their engagement in impure jobs is an error. All orthodox Hindu writers have identified the impure with the untouchables. Untouchables are distinct from the impure. The impure as a class came into existence at the time of the Dharma Sutras and the Untouchables came into being much latter than 4th century A.D. there is no racial difference between the Hindus and the untouchables. The distinction between the Hindus and untouchability in its original form, before the advent of Untouchability, was the distinction between Tribesmen and Broken Men from alien Tribes. It is the Broken Men who subsequently came to be treated as Untouchables; just as untouchability has no racial basis so also it has no occupational basis.

Dr.Ambedkar traces two roots from which Untouchability has sprung:

- (a) Contempt and hatred of the Broken Men as of Buddhists by the Brahmins and
- (b) Continuation of beef-eating by the Broken Men after it had been given up by others.¹³ Ambedkar has tried to prove with evidence that Untouchables are Broken Men. He viewed that the untouchables are Broken Men belonging to a tribe different from the tribe comprising the village community and the totems of the untouchables

of a particular village differ from the totems of the Hindus of the village. One set of facts comprise the names *Antya*, *Antyaj* and *Antyavasin* given to communities by the Hindu Shastras. They have come down from very ancient past and these words seem to bear some meaning. To Hindu, the word *Antya* means an untouchable who is born last. But Dr. Ambedkar rejecting the view said that the word *Antya* means not end of creation but end of the village. It is a name given to those people who lived on the outskirts of the village. It tells us that there was a time when some people lived inside the village and some lived outside the village and those who lived outside the village, i.e. on the *Antya* of the village, were called *Antyaj*. They lived outside the village from the beginning because they were Broken Men.¹⁴ He further viewed that the Untouchables were Broken Men, that the Broken Men and women were Buddhists. The Dravidians, Dasas and Nagas were the same people and Mahars were Nagas.¹⁵ He said those who have studied the Buddhist history of India know that the people who worked hard in the beginning for the propagation of the religion of Buddha were the 'Nagas'. Nagas were non-Aryans and there existed fierce enmity between the Aryans and the Nagas. Aryans wanted to completely annihilate the Nagas. It was the Nagas who spread the religion of the Buddha thought the world.

To Ambedkar, as the Broken men are Buddhists they did not revere the Brahmin, did not employ them as their priests and regarded them as impure. The Brahmins on the other hand disliked the Broken Men because they were Buddhists and preached against them contempt and hatred with the result that the broken Men came to be regarded as Untouchables.¹⁶ Moreover, he pointed out that the Broken Men hated the Brahmin because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism. Citing from the famous Sanskrit drama *Mricchakatika*, Dr. Ambedkar says if a Brahmin touches a Buddhist, he purifies himself by bath. A Brahmin diverts his path when he sees a Buddhist coming towards him. The Broken Men do not employ them as their priest and do not even allow them to enter into their homes. Brahmanism posed Untouchability upon the Broken Men because they would not leave Buddhism. On this reasoning it is possible to conclude that one of the roots of Untouchability lies in the hatred and contempt which the Brahmins created against those who were Buddhists. Since Untouchability stuck to Broken Men only, it is obvious that there was some additional circumstances which was played its part in fastening Untouchability upon the Broken Men.¹⁷ Hence, Untouchables as the descendants of

the Buddhists had been marginalized when the rest of the society crossed over to Hinduism.

Regarding the Second root of Untouchability, Dr. Ambedkar, viewed that the origin of Untouchability is to be found in the struggle of Brahminism against Buddhism and the means adopted by Brahminism to establish its supremacy over Buddhism. It was a strategy deliberately taken by the Brahmins to give up beef-eating and start worshipping of cow. He pointed out that Buddhism was at one time the religion of the majority people of India. It continued to be the religion of the masses for hundreds of years. It attacked Brahminism on all sides as no religion had done before. Brahminism was on the wane and if not on the wane, it was certainly on the defensive. As a result of the spread of Buddhism, the Brahmin had lost all power and prestige at the Royal Court and among people. Buddhism had made so deep impression on the minds of the masses and had taken such a hold of them that it was absolutely impossible for the Brahmins to fight the Buddhist except by accepting their ways and means and practicing the Buddhist creed in its extreme form. The Buddhists rejected the Brahminic religion which consisted of *Yajna* and animal sacrifice, particularly of the cow.¹⁸ The reverence of the cow created by the Buddhist religion had gone so deep down into the minds of the people that it was impossible for the Brahmins to do anything else except to give up their the practice of cow sacrifice and worship the cow as the Buddhist did. But that was not enough. The Brahmins in their struggles against Buddhism were not actuated by any pious motive of religious consideration. They were actuated by a purely political motive namely to regain the power and prestige they possessed over the masses and which had been transferred to the Buddhist Bhikkhus. They knew that if they were to gain any ascendancy over the Buddhist, they must go a step further than the Buddhist had gone. Hence, the Brahmins proclaimed that they will not only kill the cow but also not destroy any living creature.¹⁹ The meat-eating Brahmins became a strict vegetarian. Hinduism assumed a puritanical covering. The cow being sanctified, sacrificial killing brought to an end and a large number of other Buddhist teachings being incorporated in Hinduism, the masses who had gone over to Buddhism were slowly weakened back.²⁰ Moreover, Ambedkar viewed that before the Buddhist times and upto the period of Ashoka beef was a food common to all classes, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. There is nothing repugnant in that. The cow was just an

animal as the sheep or the goat or the deer was. The only difference probably was that some ate meat of animals that was slaughtered. This was possible for those who could afford to buy. The rest who were poor were used to eat the flesh of dead animals perhaps because the well-to-do did not care to use it as food. It is quiet conceivable also that the village chieftain gave the carcasses of dead cows and dead animals to the men belonging to the broken tribes who had settled on the confines of the village by way of remuneration for the services which they rendered to the settled community. Thus all ate cow's meat the only differences that existed was this namely that the village people ate slaughtered meat while those living outside the village ate the flesh of dead cow. The practice had no religious or social significance. It was only the difference of the rich and the poor. The broken tribe-men who lived on the border continued to eat the flesh of the dead cow²¹. The Untouchables being too poor to use fresh meat or beef at any time continued their age-old practice of eating the carcasses of dead cows. Their practice of eating dead cows was exploited against hem. It was something that naturally repelled the Hindu mind. It was obnoxious. The Brahmins took advantage of this situation without delay. As a matter of repugnance Untouchability was imposed on the entire class. It was really a punishment for sticking to Buddhism when others had deserted it²². Thus, he concluded that the Broken Men were exposed to scorn and contempt explicitly on the ground that they were Buddhists and while the main cause of their Untouchability was beef-eating. Addressing the Scheduled Castes Federation Conference in 1956, at Agra, Dr.Ambedkar said:

The foundation of Hindu religion is based on Chaturvarna- the concept of inequality, injustice, discrimination and exploitation. But the religion I am going to give the Depressed Classes is India's own that is Buddhism, which is based on universal brotherhood, justice, equality and fraternity and to serve the humanity. With its own tradition and culture it will became the world religion and India would be the best place for it. "We are, he said, all old Buddhists, I am going to give this religion a new lease of life. Our entire problem will end only on our going over to the Buddhist faith."²³

Why not conversion to Christianity, Islam and Sikhism:

When Dr.Ambedkar announced his intention to renounce Hinduism, the Muslims, the Christians and the Sikhs came forward to induce him into their

respective religions. He preferred all these three religions except Hinduism due to its deep rooted discrimination, indignities and inequality. Despite his preference, in his Bombay speech he made a comparison between religions in India from the point of view of social systems; where he identifies caste even in the Christian and Muslim community. He draws a sharp distinction between these social systems and the role of caste in Hinduism. If the Muslims and Christians start a movement for the abolition of the caste system in their respective religions, their religions would cause no obstruction. But it is sure that the Hindus can't destroy their caste system without destroying their religion. Ambedkar asserted that "most of the present day Sikhs, Muslims and Christians in India were formerly Hindus- a majority of them belong to the Shudras and Untouchable Castes".²⁴

He sets out the choice of conversion between three religions-Islam, Christianity and Sikhism. While comparing these three, he viewed that Islam seems to give the Depressed Classes all that they need. Financially, the resources behind Islam are boundless. Socially the Muslims are spread all over India. Politically the Depressed Classes will get all the rights which the Muslims are entitled to. Christianity seems equally attractive. Though the Indian Christians are numerically small to provide the financial resources necessary for the conversion of the Depressed classes, the Christian countries of the West will pour immense resources if the Depressed classes show their interest to embrace Christianity. Socially the Christian community is numerically too weak to render much support to the converts from the Depressed Classes. Politically Christianity will give them the same rights which Islam gives. Compared to Christianity and Islam, Sikhism has few attractions. Being a small community the Sikhs cannot provide the finance. They are confined to Punjab and as far as the majority of the Depressed Classes are concerned, the Sikhs can give them no social support. Politically, Sikhism is at a positive disadvantage as compared with Islam or Christianity. Outside the Punjab, the Sikhs are not recognised for special representation in the Legislature and in the services.

Yet, from the religious stand point of the Hindus, obviously Sikhism is the best. If the Depressed Classes join Islam or Christianity, they not only go out of the Hindu religion but they also go out of the Hindu culture. On the other hand, if they become Sikhs they remain within the Hindu culture. This is by no means a small advantage to the Hindus. The consequence of conversion to the country, as a whole, is well worth

bearing in mind. Conversion to Islam or Christianity would 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. If they go to Christianity, the numerical strength of Christians would increase considerably. It will help to strengthen the hold of the British on this country. If the Depressed classes join Islam or Christianity, they not only go out of the Hindu religion but they also go out of the Hindu culture.²⁵ While discussing the issue of conversion with the Depressed Classes leaders at Wardha on first May 1936, Dr. Ambedkar stated in unequivocal terms that:

I do not promote Islam or Christian religions to anybody as yet. If anybody with his own responsibility promotes Islam or any other religion, he will be cheated for which I shall not be responsible. It is a fact that I have declared about conversion. But I have not said to adopt any particular religion as yet. Till that time all should carry out propaganda about conversion that they should not propagate any particular religion. When I declare, then only we and all seven corers untouchables convert at a time.²⁶

Thus, though Ambedkar was in favor of Islam and Christianity he had no intention to embrace these religions. Probably the reason seems to be of its non-Indian origin. Adherence to the Bharatiya culture was pivotal to him. On the other hand if the untouchables embrace Sikhism they will not harm the destiny of the country rather helps it. If they became Sikhs, they remain within then Hindu culture. They will not be denationalized. On the contrary they will help in the political advancement of the country. Dr. Ambedkar announced his choice of Sikhism in August 1936; because he preferred to have some responsibility for the future of the Hindu culture and civilization and did not want to break away with the majority community.²⁷ He, therefore, sent a delegation of thirteen of his supporters to Amritsar to study Sikhism. Visiting to England he talked to the British Statesman regarding the facilities of reserved seats if the depressed classes converted to Sikhism. He expressed his approval of the principle of equality among the Sikhs. Sikhism recognizes Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man. There is equality even between a man and a woman.

Sikhism believes only in one God. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, proclaimed that there was not only one God, he was also free from the bondage of birth and death. Sikhism, however, accepts the Hindu theory of 'Karma' and the transmigration of Soul from one form of life to another until its ultimate merger with

God. The only distinction is one of greater emphasis on the role of human conduct in escaping from the vicious cycle of life, death and re-birth. Heaven and Hell are mental status of the soul and a man need not wait for a Heaven till he dies. He can attain salvation here in this World, while living. The soul does not cease to exist with the destruction of the body. The soul, therefore, neither dies nor sinks or swims .But it comes and goes according to the sweet will of God.

The concept of Guru enjoys paramount importance in Sikh Theology. According to Sikhism, God himself speaks through the Guru. The Guru Granth Sahib occupies the central position in all expressions of the Sikh faith. Decisions are commonly made by using it as an oracle; continuous readings are held in order to confer blessings to avert disaster; and the presence of a copy is mandatory for all important ceremonies. Probably one reason why Sikh religious text deterred him was it being based on something unalterable. Secondly, Ambedkar evinced that today the Sikhs are as hopelessly divided on caste lines as the Hindus are, and their hostility towards the lowest untouchable landless labourers is no way different from that of the Hindus. The Mazhbis (Chuhra) Sikhs and Ramdassias (Chamar) Sikhs are continued to be treated as untouchables.²⁸ Among factors accounting for his decision were the fact that Sikh Dalits had told Ambedkar of the atrocities they had suffered at the hands of the Jats-which undermined all hope of emancipation.²⁹

If negation of God and denial of Veda and Saddhamma be the reason why not Jainism?

Like Buddhism, Jainism also emerged to reform Vedic religion. Both of the religions ignored God, rejected infallibilities of Veda and condemned Chaturvarna of Hinduism. Jainism also promoted equality between man and woman. It, moreover, gives emphasis on wisdom, morality, compassion, love and kindness which is said to be the true basis of Saddhamma. It is known that thoughts of both Buddha and the Jain Trithankars were similar in many points like the doctrine of karma, rebirth and ahimsa; but despite this their theories marked comprehensive difference in interpretations. It was due to this difference in interpretation that Dr. Ambedkar preferred to choose Buddhism rather than Jainism. The reasons are stated below:

Jainism has the central thesis that every one is responsible for his own karma; the attainment of supreme spiritual bliss is possible when the Karma adhering to the Soul

are annihilated ending the ceaseless process of Transmigration. Soul and non-soul (Jiva and Ajiva) are the basic principles which comprises of all that exists in the universe. Souls are infinite in number; they never lose individuality and are said to be indestructible and they cannot merge into any other supreme being. The living and the non-living (Jiva and Ajiva) constitute reality, which, according to Jainism is uncreated and eternal. To Jainism, the Soul is fixed with karmic matter from time immemorial; henceforth the chief objective of the Jain religion is to free the Soul from Karma.

But Buddha rejected the concept of Soul and Transmigration. Belief in the existence of Soul means belief in the existence of God. The belief in the existence of Soul is as much against the cultivation of Samma Ditthi as the belief in the existence of God. The Buddha's doctrine about the soul is called *An-Atta* (non-Soul). The Buddha preached that there was rebirth but not the Transmigration. Ambedkar, thus, fully supported the Buddha's notion of Rebirth, saying that "I have full faith in the rebirth. I can prove it to scientists that rebirth was logical. In my view, it is the elements that changed and not the man".³⁰ The Buddha's Law of Karma though similar in words with the Jain Law of Karma is not same in its connotation. The Jain principle of Karma is based on Soul. In fact there is no Soul in Buddhism. Buddha emphatically maintained that there could be no moral order unless there was a stern observance of the law of Karma. However, he did not believe in the inheritance of past Karma. The Buddha's law of Karma applied only to karma and its effect on present life.³¹

In other words, Dr. Ambedkar accepts the principles of "Reap as you sow" as the correct view of the law of Karma enunciated by the Buddha. But, he is not prepared to accept the absurd notion that the position of each individual in his life has been determined by his merit or demerit in his previous birth, and that his place in the social organism is irrevocably fixed and can't be changed.³²

Regarding the doctrine of Ahimsa, Jainism is perhaps the only Indian religion which has explained it in a systematic manner. To Jainism violence or injuries are of three different kinds. Firstly, physical violence, which covers killing, wounding and causing any physical pain; Secondly, Violence in words, which consist of using harsh language; and Thirdly, mental violence, which implies bearing ill-feeling towards others.³³ Even an unconscious killing of an ant while walking was against Jain

morals. The Jain would not drink water without straining it for fear of killing an insect. The principle of Ahimsa Parama Dharma is an extreme doctrine of Jainism

Compared to Jainism, Buddhism was moderate in its stress on Ahimsa. The doctrine of Ahimsa or non-killing is one of the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. The five moral precepts (Panch sila) are the essential minimum to be observed by any votary of Buddhism. Although Buddhism clearly enjoins abstention from taking any life, it did not prevent its followers from eating meat if provided by non-Buddhist butchers. He was only opposed to the killing of animals in Yagna (sacrifice). He further said “Love all so that you may not wish to kill any”. This is a positive way of stating the principles of Ahimsa. Buddha’s doctrine of Ahimsa does not say “Kill not” it says “Love all”. From the above statement it is clear that Buddha tried to make distinction between ‘will to kill’ and ‘need to kill’. He did not ban killing where there was need to kill³⁴. Supporting Buddhist’s doctrine of Ahimsa, Dr. Ambedkar viewed that one faith can be different from another. There is a great difference between the Ahimsa preached by Buddhism and the Ahimsa preached by Jainism. Jainism has taken Ahimsa to the highest degree”.³⁵

Jainism adopts rigorous practices in their courses of action. The Jain believes that through a long period of fasting, self-mortification, study and meditation one can get rid of Karma and achieve salvation. Castigating ones own flesh for long hours in the blazing sun and rain was an approved practice. On the other hand, Buddhism follows a simple path .The membership of the Buddhist community, whether as monks or lay devotees, was thrown open to all who took refuge in the Three Jewels and were prepared to observe the Sila appropriate to their vocation. Moreover, Jainism was liberal towards the lower section of the society. The Jain canonical text provides that nuns would receive food from Shudras but with the passage of time Jainism was confined within the ruling classes (Kshatriyas) and the mercantile community (Vaishyas); and the mass- like Shudras and Ati-Shudras were left high and dry.

On the other hand Buddha preached and practiced equality. He rejected the system of hereditary caste. A man’s position in society, he maintained, is determined not by birth but by worth, by conduct and by character rather than by descent. From the point of view of religion the Dhamma makes no difference between one caste and another. All are admitted without distinction and difficulty into the Sangha. He founded the first monastic order of nuns (Bhikkhunis) in the world history. He was

the first in the history of the human civilization to allow ordination of women which gave them an alternative to domesticity. Thousands of women became Bhikkhunis and the Buddha praised their spiritual attainment. The Buddha raised the status of women and brought them to a realization of their importance to the society. “He recognized the political right of the woman to join the Sangha, become the leader, develop her own personality and individuality; independent of any male support The Buddha broke the myth of family and the importance of producing male children to attain salvation. He was the first to recognize the need for women’s education and political initiative”.³⁶

Ambedkar viewed that “In the Buddhist religion 75% Bhikkhus were Brahmins. 25% were the Shudras and the others. But Lord Buddha said “O Bhikkhus, you have come from different countries and castes, rivers flow separately when they flow in their provinces but they lose their identity when they meet the sea. They become one and the same. The Buddhist Sangha is like an ocean. It is not possible to identify the waters of Ganga and Mahanadi. Similarly when we join Buddha Sangha we lose other caste and become equal. There is only one great man who preached such equality and that great man is Lord Buddha³⁷. Having dismissed one religion after another in his quest for a universally acceptable, purified and undefiled religion that could hold all mankind together, Dr. Ambedkar came to the conclusion that Buddhism alone could satisfy man’s need for self-development and so also can create eagerness for a politico-ethical solution for the happiness of the entire human race.

Was Ambedkar true to Buddhism in his interpretation?

Even though the teachings of the Buddha are ever true and ever lasting, still they need reinterpretation in each age, in accordance with the growing spiritual and social consciousnesses of humanity. Dr. Ambedkar not only revives the traditional form of Buddhism but also took steps to reinterpret and rejuvenate Buddhism as a religion for the contemporary World. Ambedkar after having gone through the original Pali texts and the teaching of Buddha rejected the later insertions of Buddhist texts and made Buddhism more rational and logical which would be acceptable to all.

Actually Ambedkar was inspired by Buddhism since his childhood and regarded Buddha as a preceptor. When he passed the English fourth standard examination a personal friend of his father Dada Keluskar, gifted a book on the life of the Buddha

which he had written for the Baroda Siyajirao Oriental series. He read the book with great interest and was greatly impressed and moved by it. This is the origin of his interest in Buddha and His Dhamma. Later he came to regard Buddha's Dhamma to be the best because he realized that if a modern man who knows science must have a religion, the only religion he can have is the religion of the Buddha. This conviction has grown in him after twenty five years of study of all religions. Finally, he chose Buddhism of his own accord after making an in-depth study of the Dhamma.³⁸ However, his interest in Buddhism grew in the mid 1940s. In 1936, he named his house '*Rajgriha*', the place of the first Buddhist Council. Moreover, he named his first college, "Siddhartha" after the Buddha. In 1940 Ambedkar republished P.Laxmi Narasu's important work "*The Essence of Buddhism*". This gave a modern interpretation of Buddhism, denying 'Karma' as rebirth and emphasizing the social aspects of the teaching. The social and moralistic interpretation of Buddhism given by P.L.Narasu and other Sakya Buddhists prefigured Ambedkar's later interpretation in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.³⁹ In the foreword to that book, he also mentioned that he was himself planning to write a book on the life of the Buddha. To quote his own words: "In writing this foreword to this reprint, it was my intention to deal with some of the criticisms which have been leveled against the teachings of Buddha by his adversaries-past and present. I have given up that intention for two reasons. In the first place, my health will not permit me to engage myself in this task. Secondly, I am myself working on a life of Buddha and I think that could deal with this matter better in my own work wherein, I could do more justice to it than in a foreword to another man's work."⁴⁰

To Dr.Ambedkar the first Social Reformer and the greatest of them all is Gautam Buddha. Any history of social reform must begin with and no history of social reform in India will be complete which omits to take account of his great achievement. Dr. Ambedkar remarked "Buddhism was revolution. It was as great a revolution as the French Revolution. Though it began as a Religious Revolution, it became more than religious Revolution. It became a social and political Revolution."⁴¹ The ancient Indian history witnessed a great struggle between Buddhism and Brahminism. The history of India is nothing if it is not one of great struggle. It is not even a struggle as has been repeated by professors of philosophy but a quarrel over some creed. It was not only a revolution in doctrine but a revolution in the political and social philosophy. The

quarrel between Buddhism and Brahminism was on this one issue and that was the Buddhist were revolutionaries and Brahmins were counter revolutionaries. That was the difference between Buddhism and Brahminism.⁴²

Dr. Ambedkar observed, “Buddhism was at one time the religion of the people of India. It continued to be the religion of the masses for hundreds of years. It attacked Brahminism on all sides as no religion had done before. As a result of the spread of Buddhism, the Brahmins had lost all power and prestige among the people. They made all possible efforts to regain their power and prestige. As Buddhism was very popular among the common masses it was absolutely impossible for the Brahmins to fight the Buddhists except by accepting their ways and means and practicing the Buddhist creed in its extreme form. After the death of Buddha his followers started setting up the images of the Buddha and building Stupas. The Brahmins followed it. They, in their turn, built temples and installed in them images of Shiva, Vishnu and Ram and Krishna etc—all with the object of drawing away the crowd that was attracted by the image worship of Buddha. That is how temples and images which had no place in Brahmanism came into Hinduism. There is one aspect in which Brahminism suffered in public esteem as compared to Buddhism. That was the practice of animal sacrifice which was the essence of Brahminism and to which Buddhism was deadly opposed. That in an agricultural population there should be respect for Buddhism and revulsion against Brahmanism, which involved slaughter of animals including cows and bullocks, is only natural.”⁴³

Buddhism swept the land as no physical conqueror had ever done in India’s history. Within a few generations almost the entire country especially the masses and the trading classes went over to Buddhism.⁴⁴ According to Ambedkar the Brahmanic philosophy rested on the *Vedas* which are regarded not only as sacred but also as infallible in nature. The Buddha had denied the sacredness of the *Vedas*. He was not ready to accept that whatever the *Vedas* said was final. He denied that the *Vedas* were infallible and their authority could never be questioned. As to infallibility of the *Vedas*, he said nothing was infallible and nothing could be final. Everything must be subject to re-examination and reconsideration. Man must know the truth and the real truth. Infallibility of the *Vedas* meant complete denial of freedom of thought.⁴⁵ The Buddha also opposed the theory of *Chaturvarna* which was repugnant to him. The organisation of society set up by Brahmanism in the name of *Chaturvarna* did not

appear to him a natural organisation. Its class composition was compulsory and arbitrary. It was a society made to order. He preferred an open society and a free society. Thus Dr. Ambedkar said:

The graded inequality, the Buddha thought, might produce in society an ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt, and might be a source of perpetual conflict.⁴⁶

He further said that “equality is the main feature of Buddhism. The religion of the Buddha gives freedom of thought and freedom of self-development to all. To adjure violence is another essential teaching of Buddha. It has never taught to achieve salvation by sacrificing animals or any living being to propitiate Gods. The rise of Buddhism in India was as significant as the French Revolution. Prior to the advent of Buddhism, it was impossible to even think that a *Shudra* would get throne. History of India reveals that after the emergence of Buddhism, and during the reign of Chandra Gupta Maurya (Shudras dynasty) are seen getting thrones. And Buddhism was in its climax during the rule of Ashoka. Thus, Buddhism paved way for establishment of democracy and socialist pattern of society in India”.⁴⁷ Dr. Ambedkar remarked:

Never in the history of the world has any founder of religion taught that the recognition of human suffering was the real basis of religion. Never in the history of the world has any founder of religion taught that the removal of this misery is the real purpose of it. Never in the history of the world had a scheme of salvation been put forth, so simple in its nature, so free from the supernatural and superhuman agency, so independent of, even so antagonistic to, the belief in a soul, to the belief in God and to the belief in life after death! Never in the history of the world had a scheme of religion been put forth which had nothing to do with revelation and whose commands are born of the examination of the social needs of man and which are not the orders of a God.⁴⁸

Thus, he proceeds:

To the Blessed Lord belief in God was the most dangerous thing. For belief in God gave rise to belief in efficacy of worship and prayer and the efficacy of worship and prayer gave rise to the office of the priest and the priest was the evil genius who created all superstition and thereby destroyed the growth of *Samma Ditthi*. The Buddha was against religious rites, ceremonies and

observances. He was against them because they were the home of superstition and superstition was the enemy of Samma Ditthi, the most important element in his *Ashatangmarg*.⁴⁹

Ambedkar pointed out that the Buddha accepted the view that any theory about reality must rest on proof. Thinking must be based on rationalism. He accepted that there was no logical or factual basis for the presumption that God exists or that he created the universe. In repudiating supernaturalism the Buddha had three objects. His first choice was to lead man to the path of rationalism. His second object was to free man to go in search of truth. His third object was to remove the most potent source of superstition the result of which is to kill the spirit of inquiry.⁵⁰ Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that the word of Buddha if there is anything, which could be said with confidence. His teaching was nothing if not rational, if not logical. Anything, therefore, which is rational and logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of the Buddha. The second thing is that the Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion which was not profitable for man's welfare. Therefore, anything attributed to the Buddha which did not relate to man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the word of the Buddha. There is a third test. It is that the Buddha divided all matters into two classes. Those matters about which he was certain and those about which he was not certain.⁵¹ Buddhism certainly offered the best possible choice because it was an egalitarian religion entertaining relations with the Hinduism. The reason for his preference of Buddhism was explained in an article titled "*Buddha and the Future of His Religion*", published in the May 1950 issue of the Maha Bodhi journal of Calcutta. In this article he compared the great Buddha with other religious prophets. Out of many founders of religions there are four whose religions have not only moved the worlds in the past but are still having sway over vast masses of people. They are – Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Krishna. If one compares Buddha with these three great religious personalities like Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Krishna it will be clear that all these preachers proved themselves as God. In Bible, Jesus proclaimed that he is the son of God; Prophet Mohammed claimed to be the last messenger on earth. Krishna went a step beyond both of them; He not only regarded himself as God but God of Gods (*Parameswar*), whereas Buddha termed himself a common man and the son of a common man and preached his gospel as a common man.⁵² He argued that Buddha made a clear distinction between a *Margadata* and a *Mokshadata*. Jesus

Christ, Mohammad and Krishna claimed for themselves the role of *Mokshadata* but Buddha was satisfied being called as a *Margadata*. Henceforth in the *Mahaprinibbana Sutta*, he told to Anand that his religion was based on reason and experience and told that his followers should not accept his teaching as correct and binding merely because they emanated from him. Being based on reason and experience they were free to modify or even abandon any of his teachings, if it was found that at any given time and in given circumstances, they do not apply.⁵³ In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha says “Do not believe in anything merely because it is accepted by many or because it is based on some seemingly brilliant authority or some ancient and venerable situation”. Even he went to the extent of saying that it was open to anyone to question his Dhamma, test it and find what truth it contained.⁵⁴ He, therefore, wished his religion not to be encumbered with the dead-wood of the past. Moreover, Ambedkar maintained that religion “must be in accordance with science. Religion is bound to loose respect...if it is not in accordance with science.”⁵⁵ To Dr.Ambedkar, Buddha’s religion is a discovery in the sense that it is the result of inquiry and investigation into the conditions of human life on earth and understanding of the working of human instincts with which man is born, the moulding of his instincts and dispositions which man has formed as a result of history and tradition and which are working to his detriment.

Despite ill health Ambedkar continued writing for long hours on Buddhism. In his search for the original texts, he began to learn Pali, putting together a dictionary, rewriting the definition from an existing dictionary and giving Marathi and Gujrati word equivalent. In 1950 he published an article in the Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society entitled “*The Buddha and The Future of His Religion*”, in this article Ambedkar stated that Buddhism was a religion for the whole World: If the new World which realized it is very different from the old, must have a religion and the new religion needs a religion for more than the old world; then it can only be the religion of the Buddha. In the same article Ambedkar observed Buddhism is nothing; if not morality.⁵⁶ In May 1950 Dr.Ambedkar participated in the First Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists held at Kandy in Sri Lanka. Thereafter, wherever he went, he talked of the Buddha and Buddhism. In a broadcast on the All India Radio on 3 October 1954, he said:

Positively, my social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Let no one however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teaching of my Master, the Buddha. In his philosophy, Liberty and Equality had a place only as a safeguard against the breaches of liberty and equality; but he did not believe that the law can be a guarantee for breaches of liberty or equality. He gave the highest place to fraternity as the only real safeguard against the denial of liberty or equality or fraternity which was another name for brotherhood or humanity, which was again another name for religion.⁵⁷

In another talk on the BBC, London on 12 May 1956, Dr. Ambedkar said:

I prefer Buddhism because it gives three principles in combination which no other religion does. Buddhism teaches *Pragna* (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), *Karuna* (compassion), and *Samata* (equality). This is what man wants for a good and happy life". Neither God nor Soul can save the society. "Unfortunately the Buddha's teachings have not been properly interpreted and understood. That his gospel was a collection of doctrines and social reforms have not been completely understood. Once it is realized that Buddhism is a gospel, the revival of it would be everlasting event for the World will realize why Buddhism makes such a great appeal to everyone."⁵⁸

Dr. Ambedkar also added the words of Buddha that "man requires two things. One is Gyan and the other is Sheel. Gyan without Sheel is very dangerous. It must be accomplished by Sheel, by which we mean character, moral courage, ability to be independent of any kind of temptation, truthful to one's ideals."⁵⁹ In 1954, during a trip to Burma, Ambedkar made a proposal for sponsoring a campaign for Buddhist conversion in India. Speaking on 19 July to the Buddhist Sasana Council of Burma, he argued that the ground was fertile in India: in the birth place of the religion, where the Buddha was already known, if only as an avatar of Vishnu, people were receptive. But he cautioned them against repeating the mistake of the Christian missionaries who had begun with a focus on Brahmans, thinking that others would then follow. Instead, the focus from the very beginning should be on 'the lower classes.....untouchables and the backward classes'. And a simple 'Buddhist

gospel' that summed up the vast Buddhist literature had to be prepared.⁶⁰ Dr.Ambedkar contributed his first article on Buddhism to the Moha Bodhi journal of Calcutta. In this article he expressed the view that in order to spread Buddhism in the modern world, "the Production of a Bible of Buddhism is the first and foremost need". He argued that:

The Buddhist literature is a vast literature. It is possible to expect a person who wants to know the essence of Buddhism to wade through the sea of literature. The greatest advantage, which the other religions have over Buddhism, is that each has a gospel, which every one can carry with him and read wherever he goes. It is a handy thing. Buddhism suffers for not having such a handy gospel. Indian Dhammapada has failed to perform the function whose gospel is built on faith. But faith can not be assimilated if presented in the form of creed and abstract dogmas. It needs some thing on which the imagination can fasten some myth or epic or gospel- what is called in journalism a story. The Dhammapada is not fastened around a story. It seeks to build faith on abstract dogmas.⁶¹

Dr.Ambedkar viewed that "Any one who knows the central teachings of the Buddha is quite bewildered after reading the *Sutta Pitaka* as we find it now wrapped about by the mythical drapery, disfigured by additions of purely Brahminic ideas entirely foreign to the original Buddhist thought and distorted by the twists and turns given to it by Monastic ideas intended to enforce Monastic ideals."⁶² He mentioned that much of ancient history of India is no history at all. Not that ancient India has no history. It has plenty of it. But it has lost its character. It has been made mythology to amuse women, and children. Fortunately with the help of the Buddhist literature the Ancient Indian history can be dug out of debris, which the Brahmin writers have heaped upon in a fit of madness. The Buddhist literature helps a great deal to remove the debris and see the underlying substance quite clearly and distinctly.

Towards the end of his life Dr.Ambedkar also defended Buddhism against the Marxism. He was not fully in agreement with the philosophy of Karl Marx. In his work "*Buddha or Karl Marx*", he regarded the Marxian philosophy as far behind Buddha. He says that society had been aiming to lay a new foundation based on fraternity, equality and liberty. The French Revolution was welcomed because of this slogan. Unfortunately, it failed to produce equality. The people welcomed the Russian

Revolution because it aimed to produce equality. But it cannot be too much emphasized that in producing equality society cannot afford to sacrifice fraternity or liberty. Equality will be of no value without fraternity or liberty. It seems that the three can co-exist only if one follows the way of the Buddha. Communism can give one but not all.⁶³ Karl Marx talked about only of “Economic Justice” but not “social justice”. Moreover, his philosophy did not suit India. Marx lived in a horizontal society where the ‘rich’ can become ‘poor’ and vice-versa. But the Indian society is vertical. Here an untouchable cannot become a Brahmin and vice-versa. Caste is decided by birth. So there is no promotion or demotion in caste. Hence, the Marxian theory does not apply to a vertical society like India. But Dr. Ambedkar improved upon the Marxian theory and said “social justice” is more important in a vertical society than economic or political justice. Marxism is thoroughly materialistic and atheistic. Ambedkar might have been silent on God. But the most important point which is to be noted here is that Ambedkar was a Buddhist and hence was not an atheist. But at the same time Ambedkarism has all the “materialistic philosophy” of Marxism plus something more. Like Buddha and Marx, he also did not accept that God created the Universe. That means that Ambedkarism is scientific socialism. He rejected everything that is supernatural including the existence of soul or Athma. He also rejected life after death. His Dhamma differed from all other religions.⁶⁴ Despite of all the atrocities and evils that he experienced in Hinduism yet, Ambedkar was not against religion. Religion is necessary for the poor. Religion is necessary for the depressed people. The poor man survives on hope. The root of life lies in hope. Religion makes life hopeful, and gives messages to the Depressed and the poor-do not be afraid, life will be hopeful. Therefore, the poor and the depressed mankind cling to religion. He considered it to be essential for the balanced development of man’s thought and personality. He did not agree with Karl Marx that religion is parasite or opium to beguile man. For Ambedkar, “man could not live by bread alone; he had mind which needed food for thought”; and religion instilled hope in man and always drove him to activity. He emphasized that mankind needed a religion of humanity, and that he discovered in Buddha’s Dhamma.⁶⁵

In his most important essays, “*Buddha or Karl Marx*,” Ambedkar had posed Buddhism against Marxism. Marx said the foundation of Communism is the theory of ‘exploitation’ by the rich of the poor masses because of the property that they hold,

and they enslave the masses, that enslavement leading to suffering, sorrow and poverty. In order to prevent exploitation, it is necessary to remove private property. While not using the word 'exploitation', Buddha said, "There is Dukkha (Sorrow) in the World". He did not use the word 'exploitation', but he did lay the foundation of his religion on what he called '*Dukkha*'. According to Ambedkar the word '*Dukkha*' has been used by Buddha in the sense of 'poverty'. For Buddha, everything was impermanent, and so there was no struggle for property. The Bhikkhus in the *Sangha* were thus not allowed to own private property. All these things Ambedkar points out are already there in the *Dharmachakra Pravartan Sutta*. "The Buddha did not lay the foundations of his religion on God or Soul or anything Supernatural like these. He laid his finger on the fact of life- that people are living in suffering. So far as Communism is concerned, Buddhism has enough of it. Therefore, it is unnecessary for the Buddhists people to go to Karl Marx to get the foundation. That foundation is already there, well laid". Continuing further, he said that the Communist advocate violence to bring about change in society. The violent means may yield quick results but they will not be everlasting. Unlike the Communists, the Buddha does not allow violence. His method is that of persuasion through love and moral teaching. He wants to conquer the opponent by inculcating in him the doctrine that love and not power can conquer anything. This method may be slow, even a bit tedious, but it is the safest and surest way.⁶⁶ Ambedkar viewed communism is like forest fire; it goes on burning and consuming anything and everything that comes in its way. However, comparing Communism with Buddhism Ambedkar stated that:

He had been a student of Politics; he had been a student of Economics, he was a professor of Economics, and also he had spent a great deal of time in studying Karl Marx, Communism and all that and he had also spent good deal of time in studying Buddha' Dhamma. After comparing the two he came to the conclusion that Buddha's advice with regard to the general problem of world, namely, that there is Dukkha, that Dukkha must be removed, that the Buddha's method was the safest and the soundest.⁶⁷

Babasaheb Ambedkar views that the Buddha established Communism so far as the *Sangha* was concerned without dictatorship. It may be that it was a communism on a very small scale but it was communism without dictatorship a miracle, which Lenin failed to do.⁶⁸

Ambedkar's Magnum Opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was a simple, eloquent and rationalistic Buddhist gospel. He was not about to give Dalits a conventional version of Buddhism. He not only revived a traditional form of Buddhism, but also reinterpreted and rejuvenating Buddhism as a religion for the contemporary world.⁶⁹ He regarded Buddhism as the '*navayana*' Buddhism or neo-Buddhism. From his critical stance towards the existing social practices, he radicalized Buddhism as a social message. He, therefore, in his classical work 'The Buddha and His Dhamma', rejected the chronological order of events as recorded in the traditional literatures (barring the initial section of it) and inserted his own thinking into the Buddhist doctrine. He dealt with certain issues demonstrating an independent insight, without doing any harm to Buddhism.⁷⁰ Babasaheb Ambedkar in the introduction to *The Buddha and His Dhamma* cites four vital areas in which he found normal interpretations of Buddhism unacceptable. Dr. Ambedkar, first, rejects the traditional version of Sidhartha's *Parivraja* (Renunciation) which mentioned the story that Lord Buddha 'saw a dead person, a sick person and an old person'. But according to Dr. Ambedkar, 'This answer is absurd on the face of it,' because Buddha took *Parivraja* at the age of twenty-nine and by that time he must have come across many times the above occurrences. He, therefore, says, 'It is impossible to accept the traditional explanations that this was the first time he saw them. The explanation is not plausible and does not appear to reason.'⁷¹ The real answer to the above question can be found by looking into the early life of Lord Buddha. Lord Buddha's father, Suddhodan, was the king of Sakya State and his his mother Mahamaya was the queen. They were Kshatriyas of Lichhabi. When Siddhartha completed twenty years of age, he was initiated into the Sakya Sangha. At his initiation, he took a number of vows and agreed to fulfill the duties as a member of the Sangha. But after becoming a member he soon witnessed a serious conflict within the Sangha. To the state of Sakya, Koliyas was a neighboring state. Both the state entered into dispute on Rohin River's water for irrigating their fields. Siddhartha was twenty-eight years old, when this clash took place between the farmers of the two states and as a result many people were injured on both the sides. In response to this, Sakya, wanted to wage a war against the Koliya and majority people of the Sakys agreed with the idea of war. But Siddhartha opposed this idea because the Sakys and the Koliyas were close relatives. Therefore, he said, "it is unwise that they should destroy each other". But the Army Chief reminded Siddhartha that he could not go against the decision of the majority

members of the Sangha, otherwise he would be punished according to the rules. He had three alternatives to consider-joining the forces and participating in the war: to consent to being hanged or exiled; and to allow the members of his family to be condemned to a social boycott and confiscation of property. After reflecting on these three alternatives, he accepted the second one, because he was very strong against the war and he also did not want his family to suffer, because they were innocent. He said, "I am the guilty person. Let me alone suffer for my wrong. Sentence me to death or exile whichever you like. I will willingly accept it and promise I should not appeal to the king of the Kosalas."⁷² Both the sides agreed on the point that Siddhartha should undertake *Parivraja*. He was at that time twenty-nine years old. Everybody admired him and said that he was the Blessed one, because he chose that path 'for the sake of maintaining peace on earth and goodwill towards men'.⁷³ After his initial wandering, even on hearing that the Koliyas and Sakyas had after all made peace, Gautam determined to continue his renunciation and search, because "the problems of war is a problem of conflict. It is only part of a larger problem. This conflict is going on not only between kings and nations but between nobles and Brahmins, between householders, between friends and family members. The conflict between nations is occasional. But the conflicts between classes are constant and perpetual. It is the root of all suffering in the world. He was determined to find out a solution to this problem of social conflict".⁷⁴ But the idea that Siddhartha left home after seeing a dead man, a sick man and a old man, the idea of rebirth, the notion that "all is sorrow" and the usual form of the Buddhist Sangha as an organization apart from society, gained popular acceptance.

The second problem is created by the *Four Arya Noble Truths*; he writes that this formula cuts at the root of Buddhism. If life is sorrow, death is sorrow and rebirth is sorrow then there is an end of everything. He argues that it is not the appropriate characteristic of the existing world, and the sole object of Buddhism is to end suffering in this world. The four Arya truths are great stumbling blocks in the way of non-Buddhists accepting the gospels of Buddhism. It makes the gospels of Buddha a gospel of pessimism. The essence of his Dhamma is the path of purity; the path of righteousness; and the path of virtue, which every person should follow to end all the suffering. The Buddha says in his first sermon, "no doubt my Dhamma recognizes the existence of suffering but forget not that it also lays equal stress on the removal of

suffering. My Dhamma has both hope and purpose. Its purpose is to remove Avija, by which I mean ignorance of the existence of suffering. There is hope in it because it shows the way to put an end to human suffering. Enthusiastically, the five *Parivrajakas* accepted the first sermon by saying, “never in the history of the world has salvation been conceived as the blessing of happiness to be attained by man in this life and on this earth by righteousness born out of his own effort”⁷⁵ Ambedkar’s understanding of ‘*Dukkha*’ was quite different in its explanation; he saw it in terms of exploitations and social suffering. In his book *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, Ambedkar makes very strong assertions that Buddhism alone can solve the problem of social and natural suffering. He wanted a religion that was clearly worldly in the sense of providing a morality that could have the potential of reconstructing the world on the basis of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

The third problem relates to the doctrines of *Soul*, of *Karma* and *Rebirth*. Belief in the existence of soul means the existence of God to Buddhism. The Hindu law of Karma is based on soul called (Atma). In fact soul is not admitted in Buddhism. Undoubtedly, the concept of soul is hereditary. It goes on from life to life and includes transmigration of soul. But Buddhism has nothing to do with God and soul. The law of karma applied only to karma and its effect on present life. The Buddhist law of Karma may be similar in words but quite different from its usual connotation.⁷⁶ Dr.Ambedkar, interprets this to argue that the Buddhist conception involves rebirth, but not ‘*transmigration*’ (belief in samsara), and the difference is that transmigration assert a nonmaterial soul which is the subject of transmigration and to which Karma attached, but rebirth can be interpreted in a biological and materialistic form (physical elements). Dr.Ambedkar expressed that the Buddha’s discourses were related to biological-genetic inheritance. The Buddha asserts that the status of a man may be governed not so much by heredity as by his environment.⁷⁷ The Buddha teaches that ‘nothing happen in this world without a cause’. The law of Kamma refers to causation, particularly law governing the general moral order. It has nothing to do with the fortunes or misfortunes of an individual. The theory of law of Kamma does not necessarily involve the conception that the effect of the Kamma recoils on the doer of it and there is nothing more to be thought about it....individuals come and individuals go. But the moral order of the universe remains and so also the law of Kamma which sustain it. ⁷⁸ Dr.Ambedkar was not prepared to accept the absurd

notion that the position of each individual in this life has been determined by his good or bad karma of the previous life.

While rejecting Karma as re-birth and transmigration, denial of the existence of God, soul and rejection of the authorities of the Vedas Ambedkar interpreted it to mean a moral law in which all actions had consequences though these were not necessarily to be borne by any particular individual but would work out at the social level.

The fourth modification in Ambedkar's Buddhism was to make *Bhikkhus Sangha* as an organisation of social service. To remove the imprecision that the Buddha addressed himself primarily to the Bhikkhus, Dr. Ambedkar stressed that the Buddha clearly had the laity in mind when he preached. According to Ambedkar, the Five Precepts and Eightfold Path which were included in the original Buddhism-were addressed to the householders. To him, the *Sangha* is a model of a society realizing the Dhamma preached by the Blessed Lord. And the Bhikkhu was the torchbearer of the Buddha's ideal society and the Upasaka was to follow the Bhikkhu as closely as he could. A Bhikkhu must behave well. He should be a model person in his mode and manner of behaviour. Without self-culture a Bhikkhu is not fit to guide. Therefore, he must himself be a perfect man, righteous man and an enlightened man. For this he must practice self-culture and social service.⁷⁹ As he observes in *The Buddha and his Dhamma*:

The object of Buddha to create *Bhikkhu Sangha* was to have a social servant devoting his life to the service of the people. A Bhikkhu's first duty is to serve the suffering humanity by offering practical help and personal guidance. Dr. Ambedkar viewed that if the Bhikkhu is only a perfect man he is of no use to the propagation of Buddhism because though a perfect man he is a selfish man. If, on the other hand, he is a social servant he may prove to be the hope of Buddhism. This question must be decided not so much in the interest of doctrinal consistency but in the interest of the future of Buddhism.⁸⁰ Dr. Ambedkar expressed that we want fewer *Bhikkhus* and we want *Bhikkhus* highly educated. They must realise that their duty is not to be good Buddhists, but to spread Buddhism. They should serve as a model to layman. However, Ambedkar's interpretation of the role of the Bhikkhu as a social servant devoting his life to the service of the mankind is highly commendable and also the need of the hour.

Dr. Ambedkar has pointed out that Buddha's Dhamma was fundamentally different from that of Religion. Religion is regarded as the belief in God, belief in Soul, worship of God, propitiating God by prayers, ceremonies and sacrifices. It is said that religion is personal and one must keep it to oneself. One must not let it play its part in public life. On the other hand Dhamma is social. Dhamma is righteousness, which means right relation between man and man in all spheres of life. Thus the purpose of religion is to explain the world. The purpose of Dhamma is to reconstruct the world. ⁸¹ While interpreting Buddha's *Dhamma* Ambedkar viewed that "it is different from the Vedic or the Brahminic philosophy of *Dharma*". Generally *Dharma* to Brahman means rituals, conversion, Yagans and sacrifice to Gods but Ambedkar said "Buddha's *Dhamma* had nothing to do with God and soul, life after death, nor concern with prayers, rituals, and ceremonies". But the center of his *Dhamma* is man and the relation of man to man in his life on earth. He regarded the main purpose of Buddha's Dhamma is to eradicate sorrow, misery and poverty from the world and also clean the world which is full of suffering. Reconstruction of the world is the foundation and basis of his *Dhamma*. Lord Buddha in his sermon further told, if every person followed (1) the Path of Purity; (2) the Path of Righteousness; and (3) the Path of Virtue, it would bring about the end of all suffering⁸². While explaining in detail, the meaning of these three aspects of his Dhamma, Lord Buddha stressed on number of virtues, which included *Karuna* (loving kindness to human beings) about which he said, 'Love is not enough; what is required is *Maitri*. It is wider than love. It means fellowship not merely with human beings, but all living beings. ⁸³

Dr. Ambedkar has explained Buddha's Dhamma with the following components . These are:

1. Dhamma is to maintain 'purity of life', according to which' one abstains from taking life, from stealing, from wrong practice in sensual lusts.
2. Dhamma is to reach 'perfection in life' which includes 'perfection in body, speech and mind'.
3. Dhamma is to live in Nibanna, which means 'release from passion'.
4. Nibanna demands a person to live righteous life which is its goal as well as its end.

5. Dhamma is to give up craving. In this regard Lord Buddha said, 'that contentment is the highest form is that man should not allow himself to be overpowered by greed which has no limits.'⁸⁴
6. Dhamma is to believe that all compound things are impermanent. The moral of this doctrine is: one should not get attached to anything, which means one should cultivate detachment from property, friends, etc., since 'All these are impermanent'.
7. Dhamma is to believe that karma is the instrument of moral order and has nothing to do with the fortune or misfortune of an individual. The *law of Karma* is to maintain the moral order in the Universe.⁸⁵

To Ambedkar the *Dhamma* of the Tathagata does not require a man to go into homelessness or to resign the world unless he feels called upon to do so; what the Dhamma of the Tathagata requires is for every man to free himself from the illusion of self, to clean his heart to give up his thirst for pleasure, and lead a life of righteousness.⁸⁶ Further explaining his view in his book, Dr. Ambedkar says:

Dhamma is Saddhamma as it makes learning open to all. Dhamma is Saddhamma as it teaches that mere Prajna (wisdom) is not enough; it must be accompanied by *Sila*, *Karuna* and *Metta* (Maitri). Dhamma is Saddhamma as it breaks down barriers between man and man; it teaches that 'worth' and not 'birth' is the measure of man; and Dhamma to be Saddhamma must promote equality between man and man.⁸⁷

To Ambedkar, Buddhism preaches rationalism, and Buddhism is nothing if not rationalism. In Buddha's opinion nothing was infallible, and nothing could be final. Everything must be open to re-examination and re-construction. Whenever grounds for re-examination arise man must know the real truth and he was sure that freedom of thought was the only way to discovery of truth. Infallibility of the Vedas meant denial of freedom of thought. It is the religion of Buddha which gives freedom of thought and freedom of self-development to all. To relinquish violence is another essential gospel of Buddhism. It has never taught to achieve salvation by sacrificing animals or any living being to please god.

The Buddha's Dhamma was not originated as a commandment from any God or Supreme Being but it is a natural law discovered by an Enlightened One 'the Buddha'

for the well-being of all human beings. The Buddha's Dhamma teaches not to commit any crime because nobody else can excuse and remove one's wrong doing. One has to bear the consequences of those crimes oneself. Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that it is very wrong to believe that Buddha is incarnation of Vishnu. This is a false and mischievous propaganda. The preachers of these concepts are mainly the followers of Brahmanism. Their sole aim is to maintain the stratification based on inequality and mutual hatred in order to maintain their hold on the society. Ambedkar has been struggling throughout his life to abolish the evil practice of division based on caste and mutual hatred. Thus, he felt guilty for the late revival work of Buddhism in India. He hoped his people who sacrificed their comforts and followed him will continue to struggle sincerely to propagate the Buddha Dhamma in India.⁸⁸ Ambedkar observed:

If the peace of the world is to be assured, it is not by mere lecturing. Those who do not believe in the virtue of the Path should be persuaded to accept it, and it is obvious that countries where Buddhism exists should make sacrifices, establish mission and find funds, so that they can carry on the work of not merely spreading the gospel, but of converting men and women to the Eight-Fold Path.⁸⁹

Dr. Ambedkar preferred Buddhism because he found the religion of the Buddha rational, scientific and an epitome of liberty, equality and fraternity. He observed that the centre of Buddha's Dhamma is man; its base is morality, and its aim is the well-being of mankind. The way of the Buddha is no doubt, good for the downtrodden, good for the country, and good for mankind. To follow this path means freedom from slavery, freedom from caste rigidity and freedom from graded inequality as it allows all to intermingle freely in all walks of life. Babasaheb Ambedkar points out that Buddhism also emphasizes on other aspects, namely, social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. Moreover, Buddha taught equality, equality not between man and man only, but between man and woman. To bring about Buddhism he suggested three aspects:

Firstly, to produce a *Buddhist Bible*.

Secondly, to bring transformation in the organization, aims and objects of *the Bhikkhus Sangha*.

Thirdly, to set up a *World Buddhist Mission*.

Moreover, Dr. Ambedkar had urged the Depressed Classes people to embrace Buddhism. And he also declared that he would devote his rest of life for the revival and spread of Buddhism in India.⁹⁰ For the liberation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Castes and Minorities Babasaheb Ambedkar have given 'Three Commandments' i.e. *Educate, Agitate and Organise*. We should note that Babasaheb Ambedkar coined these *Three Commandments* inspired from the Buddhist *Tri Saranas*: (1) *Buddham* (Educate), the enlightened one, the educated one; (2) *Dhammam* (Agitate), means how to act on the principles laid down by Buddha; and (3) *Sangham* (Organise), meaning organization of the *Bhikkhus* to protect the Dhamma. He coined these three golden slogans, by going through the time-tested Buddhist doctrines.⁹¹

Babasaheb Ambedkar's conversion movement was an integral part of his social movement for the eradication of untouchability and the upliftment of the down-trodden community in India. He declared that he would devote the rest of his life to the revival and spread of Buddhism in India. The way of the Buddha is not only good for the down-trodden; it is also good for the country, as well as good for the whole of mankind. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar was convinced that the essence of Buddhism is not to confine it to any particular nation or any particular country. It is universal in its appeal. A real Buddhist is a citizen of the world. Buddhism is the noblest of all unifying and uplifting influences that has operated for more than 2500 years.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a true Buddhist in spirit, a Bodhisattva. He raised the banner of Buddhism in India and brought back to his motherland the Buddha who had suffered an exile for over twelve hundred years. In Nagpur conversion he had taken vows to try best to lay the foundation of equality among all human beings.

Buddhist concept of Samya in Ambedkar's Thought:

A plethora of writers on Buddhism have strived to depict Lord Buddha, the enlightened one, as a teacher of Nibanna. Out of many a few writers have shown him as a teacher of humanity. Buddha was a teacher of Nibanna and delivered messages of spiritual emancipation to the suffering masses, as well as he was a great healer of social malice as well. The Buddha was *Mahakarunik*, the Lord of compassion. He, therefore, did not keep himself abreast of the injustice done to millions of people. He had to fight several battles against the social evils prevalent in the contemporary

society and the greatest battle was fought against the caste front. The essence of his doctrines shows two principles, (a) Pragna (wisdom) and (b) *Karuna* (compassion). The principle of Pragna represents the divine aspect of the Buddha while *Karuna* focuses upon his human aspects. The humanistic aspect of Buddha compelled Ambedkar to embrace Buddhism.

During the time of the Buddha the masses of the country were suffering and languishing under the age-old practices of Casteism. Brahmins, the creators of the system reaped a reach harvest of benefits out of it. When a few enjoyed all the rights and privileges of life the majority were reduced to serfdom. The Buddha and his disciples were leading their life by collecting alms from door to door. They received alms from every household irrespective of caste, rank and position. All people were equal in the eyes of the Compassionate one. On several occasions the Buddha refused the royal invitations in preference for those of the poor and the down-trodden. It is viewed that the Buddha received his last meal from Chunda-a smith, man of low Caste. Lord Buddha was the first person who attacked the Hindu Varna Vyavastha and Caste System. The first major text was the Digha Nikaya. This text emerged from the original discourses of Buddha, and it was said to have been compiled by Upali (a barbar by caste) after Buddha's death.⁹²

The society of the 6th century B.C was socio-economically unequal. The Buddha denied the inherent superiority of Brahmans over all other social groups. The Buddhists even criticized the Brahmans for materializing the society by accumulating land, corn and gold. Since aboriginal groups were associated with a low material culture they are ranked as low. The Buddhist literature also depicts the well-to-do sections and of the rich living in luxury, possessing gold, silver, grain, beautiful houses, and servants.⁹³ The existence of economic inequality follows from the division between those who owned the means of production and those who did not. The Buddhist text also reflected that those who worked for themselves as owner and producer were high whereas those who worked for others were low.⁹⁴ In the ideal society of Buddha there was no place for poverty and destitution. It was the responsibility of the king to create ideal conditions. The king should rule his people righteously and also create better social condition. It was the duty of the righteous ruler to abolish poverty and destitution and ensure a means of subsistence to all sections of people. The king is supposed to give wealth to the poor in his kingdom

apart from providing protection to his people.⁹⁵ since poverty and destitution can lead to other social ills, the ideal king must; therefore, provide food for the hungry, clothes for those in need of them, and money for those who are in want.

The Buddha was a thorough equalitarian. He belongs to a tribal democratic republic and also adopted democratic principles in his daily life. He followed the doctrine of egalitarianism and humanism. Every individual in a *Samgha* (a republic) was free and equal by birth and every family was equal for political purposes. Franchise was given to the members of the Samgha. The rule (*rajjam*) was vested in the inhabitants (*vasantanam*), and all of whom were entitled to rule (*rajunam*). Any may become President (*Rajano*), Vice-President (*Upa rajano*), Commander-in-Chief (*Sena-patino*) and Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is evident that all these offices were elective.⁹⁶ Buddhist texts describe the functioning of their Assemblies. The Assembly of Licchavi Sangha consists of representatives of tribes and heads of the families are supposed to sit in the public assembly of the capital. They used to discuss matters related to politics and economy and took decision on the basis of voting. The tribal assembly was presided over by one of the representatives called the Raja or Senapati. When The Buddha established the Sangha he borrowed ideas of the republican form of government in its day to day running. The village assembly enjoyed some autonomy and some villages were governed by committees often chosen by lot. They arbitrated in disputes, were involved in public works, collected revenues and negotiated with the king's representatives. Buddha was the first religious teacher to preach the messages of liberty, equality and fraternity that he found in these Republics. It was actually a revolution that he had brought about. But it had lost because the revolution was so overwhelmed by counter-revolution. What was lost was the sprit of rationalism, and that was the reason why the whole of the Hindu society was in grossest superstition; idolatry, all sorts of evil practices, were practiced in the name of the religion. Buddha's rationalistic approach to truth had been lost. According to Ambedkar the gospel of the counter-revolutionaries is the *Bhagvat Geeta* and *Manu Smriti*.⁹⁷

To Ambedkar, in this country such a situation prevails that will make us unenthusiastic for thousands of years to come. Till this situation exists there cannot be enthusiasm for our progress. This situation is *Chaturvarna* in *Manusmriti*. Due to the stratification in Hindu religion only higher Varnas and caste are benefited. By

remaining in the Hindu fold nobody can prosper in any way. Prosperity can be achieved only in the Buddhist religion.⁹⁸ The Vedas are sacred and infallible and their authority can't be question and so also Chaturvarna as a pattern of society was binding and unquestionable. The Buddha repudiated the thesis that the Vedas are infallible and claimed that, nothing was infallible and nothing could be final. Everything must be open to re-examination and reconsideration if the need arises. Man must know the truth and real truth. Freedom of thought was the most essential thing so also the only way to discover the truth. Infallibility of the Vedas meant complete denial of freedom of thought. The graded inequality, the Buddha realised, might produce in society an ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt, and might be sources of perpetual conflict.⁹⁹

Comparing Hinduism with Buddhism Ambedkar made it clear that what God is in other religions morality is to Buddhism? In Buddhism, Morality is Dhamma and Dhamma is morality. In other words, in Dhamma morality takes the place of God, although there is no God in Dhamma. Morality arises in Dhamma from the direct necessity for man to love man. It is for his own good that man has to love man. In fact Buddhism is nothing if no morality. He further viewed that the sole aim of Buddhism is equality whereas Hinduism candidly depicts inequality. He not only opposed it but also fought against it vehemently.¹⁰⁰ The concept of '*Dharma*' in the Hindu religious books means ritual, worship, sacrifices, offerings and fast. Both Manu and Yajnavalkya accepted and advocated this concept of Dharma, i.e. a chart of privileges, compulsory duties and obligation of the different Varnas and of the castes. Dr.Ambedkar refuted the theory of Dharma contained in the Brahminism. He was not ready to accept the *Srutis* as sacred, infallible and unquestionable. After rejecting the theory of Dharma contained in the religious books of Hinduism, Dr.Ambedkar emphatically interpreted the concept of Dhamma preached and practiced by the Lord Buddha. It was free from all the religious dogmas and the Karma theory. It is to be made a way of life. To him, the social messages of the Buddha were '*Bahujan Hitaya Bahujan Sukhaya*'. He was of the view that (1) Religion is necessary for a free society.(2) Religion must relate to facts of life and not to theories and speculations about God, or soul or Heaven or Earth. (3) Real religion lives in the heart of man and in the Shastras. (4) Man and morality must be the center of religion, if not, religion is a cruel superstition. (5) The function of religion is to reconstruct the World and to

make it happy and not to explain its origin or its end.¹⁰¹ However, despite all the atrocities and odds that he experienced in Hinduism, he was not against religion. He considered it to be essential for the balanced development of man's thought and personality.

In the Buddhist canonical literature Ambedkar had found that the Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion, which was not profitable for the welfare of man. Therefore, anything attributed which did not relate to man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the word of the Buddha.¹⁰² In Ambedkar's views, Buddhism imparts social message. As a social message Buddhism encompasses the questions of justice, love, liberty, equality and fraternity; ahimsa and peace. According to Ambedkar, Buddha was the greatest teacher of mankind who taught the noblest doctrine of love. He says, "Love all so that you may not wish to kill anyone." This is a positive way of stating the principle of Ahimsa. His doctrine of *Ahimsa* does not say "kill not, but say love all".¹⁰³ To Ambedkar, "Buddha, '*the Mahakarunik*', wished all human beings to be happy and secure; and their hearts be wholesome. Just as mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world, above, below, and across without any obstruction, without any enmity".¹⁰⁴ Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that the Buddha opposed inequality, authority, and division of society into various classes which was the brain-work of Brahmanism in India. The Buddha declared:

No one is an out-caste by birth and no one is a Brahmin by birth. It is not birth that makes a man mean, nor is it birth that makes a man noble. It is the conduct that makes a man mean and it is the conduct that makes a man noble.¹⁰⁵

To Ambedkar, Buddha opposed the principles of Chaturvarna of Hinduism. He was a strongest opponent of caste system. To denounce the caste system he had to fight a battle royal for the good and well being of the oppressed section of the society. All were equal in his eye and he also treated all men on equal footing. The mission of his life was the creation of conditions for justice, brotherhood, peace and happiness for all people. The Buddha rejected the existing unequal social structure by founding the institution of the Sangha. The Sangha was thrown open to all regardless of the social origins of the entrants. Thus, Ambedkar observes:

The Sangha is a model of society realizing the Dhamma preached by the Blessed Lord. And the Bhikkhu is the 'torch-bearer of the Buddha's ideal society', and the *Upasaka* is to follow the Bhikkhus as closely as he could. ¹⁰⁶

In his *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, he further noted:

The Sangha was open to all; there was no bar of castes, no bar of sex and status. Caste and social status had no place in the Sangha. Inside the Sangha all were equal. Inside the Sangha rank was regulated by worth and not by birth. ¹⁰⁷

Once six Sakyan Princes, closely related to Buddha, came and they sought to take admission into the order. The Sakyans were well known for their clan. On that occasion a barber, Upali by name, was also present there for his admission. On the rules of the Order, then the Blessed one received first Upali, the barber, and afterwards the young men of the Sakyan clan into the ranks of the order. In Rajagriha there was a scavenger by name, Sunita who was earning his living as a road sweeper. One day Lord Buddha was heading towards Rajagriha for alms and came across Sunita while he was sweeping the road. The Blessed one approached him to come into the order. Sunita gladly received the sanction and ordination. The Buddha led him to the Vihar and taught him the Dhamma and discipline. He said "by the discipline of holy life, restraining and mastery of self, a man becomes holy". Moreover, Sopaka and Suppiya, the untouchables, also approached the Lord to join as his disciple. The Lord admitted them into the order and instructed them the doctrine and discipline. Sumangala, Channa, Dhaniya and Kappatakura were people of low castes who sought the Buddha's permission to become Bhikkhus. The Buddha without hesitation and without caring for their low birth or their previous condition admitted them into the Order. ¹⁰⁸ Thus, Ambedkar quotes the word of Buddha:

O' Bhikkhus, you belong to different castes and have come from various lands. Just as the great rivers when they have fallen into the great ocean lose their identity just so 'O brethren, do these four castes, Kshatriyas, Brahmin, Vaishyas, Shudras when they begin to follow the doctrine and discipline as propounded by the Tathagatta, they renounce different names of castes and rank become members of one and the same society. ¹⁰⁹

The Buddha expressed that:

Go ye, O Bhikkhus, and wander forth for the gain, of the many, for the world, for the welfare of goods and men, preach ye the Dhamma which is beneficial in the beginning, beneficial in the middle and beneficial in the end. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the doctrine glorious, preach ye a life of holiness, perfect and pure. ¹¹⁰

In the matter of his opposition to caste, Buddha practiced what he preached. He did what the Aryan society refused to do. In the Aryan society the Shudra or low caste man could never become a Brahmin. But Buddha not only preached against caste but admitted the Shudras and the low caste to the rank of a Bhikkhu who held the same rank in Buddhism as the Brahman did in Brahmanism. ¹¹¹

Thus the Brahminical emphasis on social hierarchy based on Varna-divisions were countered by the Buddha with the practice of equal access to the Sangha for all. All are equal in the Sangha. Once recruited into the Sangha, the Bhikkhus accepted a simple existence sharing everything equally between themselves and all basic requirements of the Bhikkhus were owned collectively by the Sangha. ¹¹² Even the individual items of daily existence like the robes and the alms bowl were periodically redistributed. The Bhikkhus, including the Buddha himself, wore robes made of rags. But within the Sangha there were to be no centers of power. The principles of seniority decided certain administrative offices and all matters were settled through discussion where a consensus was attempted. If consensus failed to emerge a vote was taken to decide the issue. The Bhikkhu Sangha had the most democratic Constitutional practices. ¹¹³

According to Ambedkar, a study of the Buddhist Bhikkhu Sangha disclose that there were parliaments-for the Sanghas were nothing but parliaments and the Sangha knew and observed all the rules of parliamentary procedure known to modern times. They had rules regarding seating arrangements, rules regarding motions, resolution, quorum, whip, counting of votes, voting by ballot, censure motion, regularization, etc, although these rules of parliamentary procedure were applied by the Buddha to the meeting of the Bhikkhu Sanghas, he must have borrowed them from the rules of the Political Assemblies functioning in the country in his time. ¹¹⁴ Dr.Ambedkar pointed out that the Brahminic doctrine for the acquisition of knowledge was not open to all rather limited to a few. All women, no matter whether they belonged to the Brahmin,

Kshatriya and Vaishya, and all Shudras, both males and females, were prohibited from acquiring literacy. The Buddha raised a revolt against this atrocious doctrine of the Brahmins. He preached that the road to knowledge must be open to all-to males as well as to females.¹¹⁵ Baba Saheb Ambedkar acknowledged Emperor Ashoka made Buddhism the religion of the state. This of course was the greatest blow to Brahmanism. In ancient India the Brahmins were the only educated class. They were also the class which was claiming to be above all others. Buddha disputed their claim for supremacy and declared a war on Brahmins.¹¹⁶ Just as Buddha leveled up the position of the Shudras and the low caste men by admitting them to the highest rank namely that of Bhikkhus, he also leveled up the position of women. In the declining days of the Vedic regimes the Shudras as well as women had come to occupy a very low position. The rising tide of Buddhism had brought about a great change in the status of both.¹¹⁷

Although Manu was later than the Buddha, he has enunciated the old view propounded in the older Dharma Sutras. According to Ambedkar, Manu's view of women was both an insult and an injury to the women of India. It was an injury because without any justification she was denied the right to acquire knowledge which is the birthright of every human being. It was an insult because after denying her opportunity to acquire knowledge she was declared to be as unclean as untruth for want of knowledge and therefore not to be allowed to take Sannyas which was regarded as a path to reach Brahman. Not only was she denied the right to realize her spiritual potentiality she was declared to be barren of any spiritual potentiality by the Brahmins. This is a cruel deal with women. It has no parallel.¹¹⁸ Dr. Ambedkar was convinced that the Buddha by admitting women to the life of Parivrajika, by one stroke, removed both these wrongs. He gave them the rights to knowledge and the rights to realize their spiritual potentialities along with man. It was both a revolution and liberation of women in India. Dr. Ambedkar quotes the words of prof. Max Muller:

The history of India teaches us that the galling fetters of the old Brahminic laws were broken at last, for there can be little doubt that we have to recognize in Buddhism an assertion of the rights of individual liberty, and more particularly, of the rights of rising above the trammels of society, of

going, as it were, into the forest, and of living a life of perfect spiritual freedom, when a desire for such freedom arose.¹¹⁹

This freedom which the Buddha gave to the women of India is a fact of greater importance and out-weighs whatever stigma which is said to be involved in the subordination of the Bhikkhunis to the Bhikkhu Sangha. This was not an empty freedom. Dr. Ambedkar observed:

The Buddha leveled up the position of the Shudras and the low caste men by admitting them to the highest rank namely that of Bhikkhus; he also leveled up the position of women. In the Aryan society women were placed on the same position as the Shudras and in all Aryan literature women and Shudras are spoken of together as persons belonging to the same status. Both of them were denied the right to take *Sanyas*, as *Sanyas* was the only way open to salvation. Women and Shudras were beyond salvation. The Buddha broke this Aryan rule in the case of women as he did in the case of the Shudras.¹²⁰

The Buddha preached his Dhamma among people belonging to all the sections of the society. His preaching's were not only limited to Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Kings, and people of nobility only, but also to the people of lower castes as well, including barber, sweeper, untouchable, robber, criminals and even lepers, who were considered both low and unclean. His Dhamma was open to women. Among his first women converts were his stepmother Mahaprajapati Goutami, his wife Yashodhara and five hundred Shaky ladies, and a young Dalit girl Prakrati, who belonged to the most degraded community, Chandala.¹²¹ Lord Buddha in his message to Prakrati at the time of her conversion said:

Blessed are thou, Prakrati, for though you are a Chandalika, you will be a model for noblemen and noblewomen. You are of low caste, but Brahmins will learn a lesson from you. Swerve not from the path of justice and righteousness and you will outshine the royal glory of queens on the throne.¹²²

Prakrati after receiving the message of Lord Buddha accepted his Dhamma and later, though she belonged to the lowest class, yet was admitted into the Bhikkhunis Sangha. So also Capa, the daughter of a deer stacker, Punna and Punnika the daughters of a worker in rushes and Subha the daughter of a smith were admitted to

the Sangha. When Buddha was residing in Rajagriha, in these mountains there lived a certain clan with huge numbers who occupied in hunting. The Buddha went to the place and converted the women.¹²³ Another issue on which Buddha fought against the leaders of the Aryan Society was the issue of the ethics of teachers and teaching. The Aryans viewed that learning and education was the privilege of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. The Shudras were not entitled to education. But Buddha repudiated his Aryan doctrine. The elevation of the status of the Shudras and women was so much the result of gospel of Buddhism that Buddhism was called by its enemies as the Shudra religion (i.e., the religion of low classes). Dr. Ambedkar viewed equality and equal treatment were cardinal rules for the members. Buddha himself voluntarily and willingly accepted the same rules of discipline to be binding on himself also. Originally the Bhikkhus, including the Buddha himself, wore robes made of rags. Later Jeevaka, the great physician, prevailed upon the Buddha to accept a robe which was made of a whole cloth. The Buddha at once altered the rule and extended it to all monks, The Bhikkhus Sangha had the most democratic constitution. He (Buddha) was only one of the Bhikkhus. At the most he was like a prime minister among members of the cabinet. He was never a dictator. Twice before his death he was asked to appoint someone as the head of the Sangha to control it. But each time he refused saying that Dhamma is the supreme commander of the Sangha. He refused to be a dictator and refused to appoint dictator.¹²⁴ Dr. Ambedkar in his book, *'The Buddha and His Dhamma'*, depicts that Buddhism as a religion of humanity based on the human values of Liberty, Equality Fraternity and Justice. His cherished desire to serve for the suppressed, oppressed and downtrodden fulfilled when he embraced the religion of the Buddha, an apostle of social equality and human brotherhood. Instead of being a mere propagator of his conversion he pledged to benefit the largest number of human being by spreading the message of Buddhism, i.e., love all so that you may not harm anyone.¹²⁵

Ambedkar observed:

Universal pity, sympathy for all suffering beings, good will to every form of sentient life characterized the teaching of Tathagatha (Buddha).¹²⁶

The Buddha came to save the world, and his method for the accomplishment of this end was the destruction of ignorance and dissemination of knowledge as the true values of life and the wise way to live. The Buddha did not arrogate to himself the

power to save people. People had to do that for themselves. And the way to save lay through knowledge. The Lord Buddha devoted all his days after his achievement of enlightenment, to carry out his mission. He actively preached to larger audiences of his monks, instructing the more advanced in the subtle points of inner development, directing the affairs of the order, receiving deputations, carrying on discussion with learned opponents, comforting the sorrowful, visiting the kings and peasants, Brahmins and outcastes, rich and poor. Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that as long as there is no purity of mind, wrong doing and an utter disregard of morals would continue in everyday life; and as long as man does not know how to behave with man and creates barriers between themselves, India can never be prosperous. To end all these troubles, India must embrace Buddhism. Buddhism is the only religion based upon ethical principles and teaches how to work for the good and well-being of the common man. Moreover, Buddhism is a religion of compassion, tolerance, love, sympathy, peace, universal brotherhood and philanthropy. Undeniably, the Buddha was a thorough equalitarian. The sole motto of Buddhism is "*Bahujan hitaya Bahujan Sukhaya*".

To conclude, Dr. Ambedkar expressed his view that Buddhism was a religion which can serve not only this country but the whole world. It is obvious that Dr. Ambedkar understood religion in its proper broad sense as deriving from the root word 'religare', which is non-sectarian in its sense. Even the word Dharma or Dhamma literally mean upholding. In this sense there can be religion without God. In so far as man has spiritual cravings to go beyond his present selfish limitations to a broader vision of the universe, he remains religious. As a true believer in the power of reason to eradicate the evils of blind prejudices and narrowness of dogma Ambedkar could not have been satisfied with any other established religious system. He had realized that the typical priestly mediated cult and teaching that characterizes some major religions, especially Hinduism, would fail to provide salvation to mankind. In Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar found an answer to this craving for spiritual oneness which did not require its foundation in irrational faith, nor was it confined to materialism in the narrow sense. If we keep this background in mind, it should not be difficult to understand why Ambedkar found in Buddhism the right religion that was not only compatible with all of man's noble ideas but gave sustenance to them.

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