Before the implementation of Indian Constitution in 1950, the untouchables were classified into three categories, i.e., untouchables, unapproachable and unseeables. Their touch, shadow, voice and even their sight was considered polluting. They constituted around 20% of Indian population, i.e., every fifth Hindu was an untouchable. These untouchables were addressed with different names in different periods like Chandalas, Nishadas, Shabarases, Pulindas, Dombis, Panchamas, Antyajas, Pariahas, Varnas, AtiSudras, NamaSudras etc. They were forced to live on the outskirts of the settlements in unhygienic, shadowy, dirty, smoky, insanitary areas and in miserable conditions. They were not allowed to have water from the public wells and were forced to drink filthy water, they were not allowed to enter in the temples, their children were not admitted to the schools with other caste children and they were not allowed to use certain kinds of clothes. All in all they were not allowed to live with dignity.

They had no proprietary rights and thus no economic security. They worked as tenant cultivators and were oppressed at the will of the land owners. They were illiterate people and thus they were not engaged in any public services including police and military. They subsisted on food or grain given to them, as village servants. They also ate carrion. They had no chance of improving their status in any way. They were born in debt and perished in debt.

Such was the plight of the untouchables in India since time immemorial. But the system of exploitation did not go unchallenged. In around 11th-15thC, the Bhakti movement tried to cater to the needs of untouchables. Many Bhakti saints including Ramananda, Kabir, Chakradhar, Chaitnya, Eknath, Tukaram, Basav, Mirabai, Nandanar, Cokhamela, Ravidas, etc. came out in their support. They, to some extent, even succeeded in their attempts to establish equality, but failed to establish it on a larger ground.

In contemporary times too, the plight of untouchables continued and a number of social reformers came forward to serve the cause of untouchables as mentioned in previous chapter. However, there was yet another and more popular leader of the untouchables, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who himself belonged to an untouchable caste of
Mahar of Maharashtra. He is known for being the chief architect of Indian Constitution, a celebrated jurist, lawyer, political leader and, a great educationist of modern India. He took great pains in organizing the untouchables and made untiring efforts to improve their lot. He appealed to all the untouchables to gain economic as well as the political power, if they wish to improve their social status.\textsuperscript{16}

Education, under colonial rule, was largely a privilege of higher castes, however, gradually several Sudras and untouchables also started getting access to education. These educated lots of Sudras and untouchables then, being aware, initiated reform movements to improve the condition of the deprived sections of the society. These movements cater to the needs of the people regarding access to education, public employment, ownership of land, access to public wells, etc.\textsuperscript{17}

Ambedkar was one such leader. He, himself being an untouchable, had borne all the discrimination mentioned above. He was born on 14\textsuperscript{th} April 1891 at Mhow, to Ramji Sakpal and Bhimabai. His father had minimal education in Marathi and English\textsuperscript{18} and served in the British army as Subedar. His mother died when he was only six.\textsuperscript{19}

When Ambedkar passed his matriculation examination in 1908, the event was celebrated and K.A. Keluskar (a well known Marathi author and social reformer working as an assistant teacher at Wilson High School, Bombay) presented young Ambedkar, a book \textit{The Life of Gautama Buddha} written by him in Marathi. This work introduced the quintessential aspects of Buddhism to Ambedkar.\textsuperscript{20}

Just after his matriculation examination, Ambedkar was married to Ramabai, as early marriage was a common tradition. After that, he studied at Elphinston College, Bombay, for which help was provided for him by the Maharaja of Baroda Sayajirao Gaekwad, at the persuasion of K.A. Keluskar. For further studies, Ambedkar was sent to Columbia University, USA, again, with the help of the Maharaja of Baroda, from 1913-16. Here he completed his Ph.D. by submitting his thesis, entitled \textit{National Dividend of India: A Historic and Analytical Study} and moved to London\textsuperscript{21} where he joined Grays Inn for Law. For the study of Economics he joined London School of Economics and Political Science but due to lack of funds, he had to interrupt his studies and returned to India in August 1917.\textsuperscript{22} He earned the requisite money with great difficulty\textsuperscript{23} and rejoined his studies in London after three years break in September 1920.\textsuperscript{24} He earned the degree of Master of Science in June
1921 for his thesis *Provincial Decentralization of Imperial France in British India* and also became bar at law in 1922. He returned to Bombay in April 1923. Later in 1923, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science for his reformed thesis *The Problem of the Rupee*.26

Meanwhile, a lot of developments were taking place in Indian political scene. While Ambedkar was in India from 1917-1920, he started a fortnightly paper, *Mook Nayak*, on 31st Jan, 1920.27 On March 21, 1920 he presided over a Conference of the Untouchables at Mangaon in Kolhapur. The conference ended in holding an inter-caste dinner attended by Shri Shahuji Maharaj.28 One more such conference was held under the President ship of Shahuji Maharaj at Nagpur which was also attended by Ambedkar in May 1920.29

In 1924 Ambedkar founded Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha, to redress the grievances of the depressed classes and for their economic enhancement.30 Educate, Agitate and Organize was the slogan of this organization.31 He also started a Marathi weekly newspaper, *Bahishkrit Bharat*32 and founded a militant organization “Samta Sainik Dal” or “Social Equality Army”.33 In 1927, the first struggle took place with the claim for the access to use the water from the Chowdar tank. As the untouchables were denied right to almost all public places, like roads, temples, tanks, the main village etc.34, thus started the Mahad35 (a place in Kolaba district of Maharashtra) Satyagraha.

The people of the untouchable section, who took part in this agitation, were even beaten up and many of them were wounded including Ambedkar. This was a consequence of a widespread rumour according to which, they were trying to enter Veerashwar temple. On August 4, 1927, the Mahad Municipality revoked its resolution in which permission was granted to the untouchables to use Chowdar tank. This infuriated untouchables, and a satyagraha was planned for December 26, 1927. At the end of the Conference a copy of *Manusmriti* (a Hindu law book) was burnt as it was considered as a symbol of injustice to them.36 The day became celebrated as the Untouchable Liberation Day.37 The claim however was finally accepted by the Bombay High Court in 1937.38

In 1927, at Mahad Conference, Ambedkar asserted on the issue of entry into the Veereshwar temple that we want equal rights in society. “We will achieve them as
far as possible while remaining within the Hindu fold or if necessary by kicking away
this worthless Hindu identity. And if it became necessary to give up Hinduism it
would no longer be necessary for us to bother about temples.”

It shows that Ambedkar had an idea of conversion even as early as 1927. The Governor of
Bombay, in 1927 itself nominated Ambedkar to the Bombay Legislative Council.

In 1928, the Simon Commission came to India, to look into the working of the
Government of India Act, 1919. Ambedkar appeared before the commission and
demanded separate political rights for untouchables. But the recommendations of the
Commission as a whole were discarded.

Another conference which invited Ambedkar to preside over the session was
convened at Jalgaon (Berar) on May 29, 1929 by the depressed classes of Central
Provinces and Berar. Here Ambedkar said that it was quite impossible for
untouchables to get their disabilities removed by remaining in the Hindu fold. It was
at this conference that the resolution to get converted to some other religion was
passed, that if in the prescribed time limit caste Hindus did not start working for the
removal of disabilities of the depressed classes. But the Hindus did not take the
warning seriously and when the time limit expired around 12 people from the Mahar
community got themselves converted to Islam in June 1929. This was an eye opener
to the orthodox caste Hindus, who immediately opened two wells for the
untouchables. Unfortunately, the gesture came too late. Ambedkar thanked the
pressure of Muslim and Christian religions for the depressed classes were deriving
some benefits. This gave a boost to the Ambedkar movement. The depressed classes
refused to touch dead cattle and also put on the sacred threads. The caste Hindus
started harassing them but were warned by Ambedkar in a public meeting at Bombay
presided over by Bole.

After this the first Round Table Conference was convened by the British
Government in London on 12th November 1930. Ambedkar was also invited. Here
again Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for the untouchables, which were
granted in the Second Round Table Conference, even after strong opposition from
Gandhi. But Gandhi then resorted to fast unto death to revoke the decision and
Ambedkar had to accept the amendments, which was replaced by Poona pact signed
on 25th September 1932. Under this, separate electorates had to give way to joint
electorates with the reservation of seats for Depressed Classes. In the third Round
Table Conference, Ambedkar was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Assembly for another five years term.\footnote{46}

After this, Ambedkar planned another Satyagraha for temple entry in Nasik. The site chosen was Kalaram temple for 2\textsuperscript{nd} March, 1930. They started the procession and reached the temple, but it was found closed with the arrangement of police party. The next day, the procession started again and people from untouchable classes entered the temple in small bands and courted arrest. The Satyagraha continued for more than a month. On the day of the chariot procession of the image of Ram, some untouchables tried to reach the chariot. This infuriated the caste Hindus and they attacked the unarmed satyagrahis with stones and lathis, injuring many including Ambedkar.\footnote{47} The struggle however, continued for over five years, but without any positive outcome. At last, the satyagraha was called off and the lesson had been drawn “No more Hindu temples”.\footnote{48}

By this time, Ambedkar had no intention to preach Buddhism, yet he made a pilgrimage to Buddhist centre at Nasik (Maharashtra), on the banks of the river Godavari. However, the debates on the rejection of Hinduism had begun.\footnote{49} In April 1933, Ambedkar in a reply to the letter of Savarkar from London wrote, that he had already told Gavai, that he was determined to leave Hinduism. However, he denied conversion to Islam and wrote that he was at the moment inclined towards Buddhism.\footnote{50}

After the failure of the temple entry satyagraha, Ambedkar called a conference at Yeola on 13\textsuperscript{th} October 1935, and the resolution for conversion was moved. It was not intended due to positive support to any other faith but was a rejection of Hinduism.\footnote{51} He said, “Unfortunately I was born a Hindu. It was beyond my power to prevent that but I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu.”\footnote{52} The conference was attended by about 10000 untouchables.\footnote{53} Thus the intention for the conversion to some other religion was made clear by Ambedkar. At this, people from all the religions like Christianity, Islam and Sikhism came forward to convert him, but failed to impress him. An Italian Buddhist monk Lokanatha\footnote{54} (founder of Lokanatha Buddhist Mission) and a German Buddhist monk Gyan Keto (Peter Schoenfeldt)\footnote{55} also came and met him and they became successful in persuading Ambedkar to consider Buddhism as an alternative.
In December, 1935, Ambedkar was invited to preside over the annual conference of Jat-Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore to be held in March 1936. Ambedkar accepted the invitation. But the organizers objected to some lines of his speech and told him to delete those lines from the speech, which Ambedkar refused to do. Thus, the conference was cancelled. And this address of his was published in the form of a pamphlet on *Annihilation of Caste*.

Ambedkar then on May 30-31, 1936, convened a Mahar conference at Bombay to justify his decision of conversion to some other faiths. He said, “The Hindu religion does not appeal to my conscience. It does not appeal to my self-respect. However, your conversion will be for material as well as spiritual gains. I tell you very specifically; religion is for man and not man for religion. To get human treatment, convert yourselves.”

“If you want to gain self-respect, change your religion.
If you want to create a cooperating society, change your religion.
If you want power, change your religion.
If you want equality, change your religion.
If you want independence, change your religion.
If you want to make the world in which you live happy, change your religion.

Why should you remain in a religion that does not value your manhood?
Why should you remain in a religion that does not let you enter in temples?
Why should you remain in a religion that does not give you water to drink?
Why should you remain in a religion that does not let you become educated?
Why should you remain in a religion that bars you from good jobs?
Why should you remain in a religion that dishonors you at every step?

That religion which forbids humanitarian behavior between man and man is not a religion but a reckless penalty.

That religion which regards the recognition of men’s self-respect as sin is not a religion but a sickness.
That religion which allows one to touch a foul animal but not a man is not a religion but madness.

That religion which says that one class may not gain knowledge may not acquire wealth, may not take up arms is not a religion but a mockery of one's life.

That religion, which teaches that the unlearned should remain unlearned, that the poor should remain poor, is not a religion but a punishment.

Do not say that men who treat animals with more respect than humans and who respect all brahmins as Gods are religions.

Do not say that men who feed ants with sugar and let men go without water are religious.

Do not say that men who embrace another religion and push their own far from them hate society.  

Finally he orated the last words of Buddha to Ananda: “Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Betake yourself to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. Look not for refuge to anyone beside yourselves.”

He also said that, “Hunger is the greatest disease”. Thus Ambedkar took the pains to emancipate the untouchables who suffered not only from hunger but from many social disabilities, which were also imposed on them.

For the last 15 years (1920-35), Ambedkar tried to create an opening for untouchables into Hindu society by a tough fight for elementary rights such as drinking water, wearing clean dress, using metal utensils, admission in government schools and colleges, temple entry and voting in elections. But he had to face protest from the orthodox caste Hindus and reactionary elements. According to Ambedkar, Hinduism is the biggest obstacle in the progress of untouchables in India. According to him, India needed a socio-religious revolution and not the economic or political revolution to emancipate the condition of untouchables. The political revolution led by Chandragupta was preceded by the religious and social revolution of the Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by the religious and social reform brought about by the saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikhs was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nanak.

Ambedkar took a break from his religious engagements and as a preparatory measure found Indian Labour Party in August 1936 for the upcoming elections to be...
held in 1937 under the Government of India act, 1935. The Indian Labour Party was second only to the Muslim League as an opposition to congress in the Bombay Provincial Assembly in 1937-39. It won 15 out of 17 seats on which they contested in Bombay. Here again Ambedkar strove hard to emancipate the condition of depressed classes through legislative process. But in November 1939, the Congress ministries in states resigned including Bombay, because the British government did not disclose their policy towards India’s freedom. And in 1940, the British government announced that India would be given the dominion status as soon as the war ends. In 1942, the viceroy of India expanded his Executive Council and selected Ambedkar as a labour member, the post which he held till June 1946. He solved the problem of labourers to the satisfaction of the employees as well as the employers. He even secured the reservation of seats in government services for the scheduled castes, for the first time, giving them the opportunity to improve their position economically and thus socially.

After that in 1946, the Cabinet Mission visited India and formed the Constituent Assembly to frame a Constitution for India. Ambedkar failed to get elected from Bombay, but he managed to secure a seat through Bengal in the Constituent Assembly, which was dominated by the Congress. Ambedkar, however, was not hopeful of his suggestions being listened to in the Constituent Assembly. But when the Assembly met he was welcomed and his cooperation was sought. He too reciprocated the gesture positively and in his speech in the Assembly proclaimed that notwithstanding their differences, the various parties and groups should take a decision in common and march on the way which leads to unity. Later the Congress party even sponsored his candidature when Ambedkar lost his seat due to the bifurcation of Bengal and he was re-elected from Bombay in July 1947. Thereafter, he was invited by J. L. Nehru, to join his cabinet, which he agreed. And on 29th August, the Constituent Assembly unanimously elected him as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. Thus it could be said that most of what Indian republic is today is the creation of Ambedkar. The constitution was adopted by the Assembly on 26th November 1949. Through constitution, he tried to abolish untouchability legally.

To emancipate the condition of women, Ambedkar introduced the Hindu Code Bill in the Constituent Assembly, on 24th February 1949. He was appreciated for that by many a leaders, but due to opposition from the orthodox Hindus he resigned from the Nehru cabinet on 27th September 1951.
On June 5, 1952, the Columbia University (where he got his first Ph. D. in 1916) conferred upon him the degree of LL.D (Doctor of Laws; honoris Causa) calling him as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, one of India’s leading citizens, a great social reformer and a valiant upholder of human rights.  

**Influences on Ambedkar**

Ambedkar was undoubtedly a genius. What made him great include events in his life as well as the influences of great thinkers, the atmosphere in which he lived and brought up and the Western education served as the means. It is difficult to collect all information about the influences but some effort can be made to list them.

He came from a low caste Mahar family. His father Ramji Sakpal was a Subedar Major in army. His mother Bhima Bai was a gentle, self-respecting woman. Both were great social workers of their time. Then came the influence of Buddha’s philosophy from his high school onwards. As towards the end of his life he even embraced Buddhism and wrote the book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.  

Another person who had an influence on him was saint Kabir as his family belonged to the devotional Kabir school of thought. It emphasizes the human attributes of compassion, benevolence and complete surrender to God. Kabir’s thoughts taught Ambedkar not to consider or regard anyone as a great man or a Mahatma as it is difficult to be human let alone to be a saint.

Jyotiba Phule has yet another influence in Dr Ambedkar’s life. Ambedkar dedicated one of his books, *Who Were the Sudras*, in the memory of Jyotiba Phule and wrote about him as “the greatest *Sudra* of modern India who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that for India, social democracy was more vital than the independence from foreign rule.” He even borrowed from him the theory that untouchables (Mahars) were former *kshatriyas*. The theory was, however, also been supported by Gopal Baba Walangkar.

John Dewey his teacher at Columbia University also has affected his thinking to a great deal. Dewey’s philosophy of instrumentation led Ambedkar towards a critical analysis of the problems which the human society is facing. His pragmatic approach might have convinced him that the nature of philosophy must be so as to offer a way out from every sort of trouble and that it has to be dynamic and pragmatic. His views on education also influenced him.
While in the USA, Ambedkar was impressed by American Constitution and the 14th amendment to its Constitution which gave freedom to Negroes. Another personality who impressed Ambedkar in USA was the life of a Booker T. Washington who was a great reformer and educator of Negroes there. He founded the Tuskegee Institute, which propagated among the Negroes, the idea of education of the head, heart and hand and thus broke the shackles of the bondage which had crushed the Negroes for ages physically, mentally and spiritually.

The philosophy of Justice Ranade, too, had an impact on his mind. He summed up this philosophy in three propositions:

1. The ideal to set up has to be practical and not imaginary;
2. In politics sentiments and temperaments of the people are more important than intellect and theory;
3. In political negotiations the rule must be what is possible but that does not mean that we should be content with what is offered;
4. There is also some degree of influence of the writings of J. S. Mill on him. Like him, Ambedkar also favoured freedom of thought, speech and action.

Karl Marx also had an influence on Ambedkar. But he admired Karl Marx only critically as his ideology did not favour his methods which were violent. However, it is evident that he studied and grasped his theories in order to use them in his crusade against economic and social injustice to low caste people.

Ambedkar was influenced by each and every personality mentioned above. But the life of the Buddha, teachings of Kabir and the struggle of Phule proved most influential on him. He regarded these three as his gurus. These personalities gave him strength and Western learning served as the means to fight against the ills of the society.

**Organizations founded by Ambedkar**

Ambedkar founded the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha in 1924. The aim of this Sabha was to prepare the untouchables for the struggle against the oppression that they were witnessing through this Sabha he gave dalits the slogan to educate, organize and agitate.

In 1928 he established the Depressed Classes Education Society, after closing...
In 1936, Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party just before the commencement of elections in 1937. In 1942, Ambedkar founded the Scheduled Castes Federation to organize the Scheduled Castes of all India. And on 8th July 1945, he established the People’s Education Society. Its motto was “Knowledge and Compassion”. There are number of institutions that were founded under its auspices like the Siddharth College of Arts, Science, and Commerce in Bombay, Siddharth College of Law in Bombay, Ambedkar College of Mass Communication in Bombay, Babasaheb Ambedkar College of Arts, Science, and Commerce at Mahad in Raigarh district, Milind College of Arts at Aurangabad, Siddharth Institute of Industry and Administration in Bombay and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial Research Centre at Rajgriha in Bombay and many other primary and high schools and hostels in Maharashtra.

In 1948, he wrote a book *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They became Untouchables*? In this book he has traced the origin of untouchability in India. Other works during the same period include - *Who Were the Sudras? How they came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society; What Gandhi and Congress have done to the Untouchables; Pakistan or the Partition of India and Buddha and His Dhamma.*

Meanwhile Ambedkar married Dr. Miss Sharda Kabir on 15th April 1948 on account of his failing health. In May 1955, Ambedkar founded the Buddhist Society of India. Later on its branches were also set up in Gujarat, Rajasthan, MP, UP, AP etc. Towards the end of his life, Ambedkar wound up the Scheduled Caste Federation and established a new political party Republican Party of India. It could be joined by the people of other communities too, who would strive hard for the success of democracy. The party, however, could not get much success in the political arena.

**Ambedkar on Education**

Ambedkar’s educational ideas were the reactions against the social structure that prevailed during his life. He wanted the depressed classes to strive for the public services, but could not devote much time towards their education due to his involvement in struggle of *dalits*. He established hostels for the untouchables at Sholapur and Belgaum in 1925 and 1928 respectively. He organized the school education of his community on firm footing, which was recognized in accordance with the Charitable Society’s Registration Act XXI of 1861.
On the appeal made by Ambedkar, the Governor on October 8, 1928 sanctioned a scheme for five hostels for secondary school students of depressed classes. The whole board of the Depressed Classes Education Society secured it a grant of five new hostels with the aid of Rs 9000 per annum. The society provided students boarding, lodging and funds for other requirements. Since the grant was not adequate, the society had to collect donations in order to meet the financial requirements. Depressed Classes Education Society was finding it difficult to function due to meager financial resources and the negative attitude of the caste Hindus. To meet the financial needs of society, Ambedkar had to take help from people as well as from the charitable institutions of Muslims and Parsees. The society was running under debt for keeping the hostels.

In April 1929, Ambedkar was invited to preside over the Ratnagiri District Conference held at Chiplun. Here in his Presidential speech he addressed the depressed classes and said “you must abolish your slavery yourselves. It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one’s self-respect. Without it man is a mere cipher. To live worthily with self-respect one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence and recognition”. He further said that they were not slaves but a warrior clan. Nothing is more disgraceful for a brave man than to live a life devoid of self-respect and without love for the country. According to him, the Roman slaves possessed a better opportunity to live than the Indian untouchables. He argued that, Slavery was never obligatory. A person is permitted to hold another as his slave. There is no compulsion on him if he does not want to. But an untouchable has no option. Untouchability is indirect, and therefore the worst, form of slavery. A deprivation of a man’s freedom by an open and direct way is a preferable form of enslavement. It makes the slave conscious of their slavery and that was the first and most important step in the battle for freedom. But if a man is deprived of his liberty indirectly, he is not conscious of his enslavement.

Before the commencement of elections of 1937, the Independent Labour Party elaborated its education policy. It was supporting the free and compulsory education. It also emphasized on technical education and providing scholarships to the deserving students of depressed classes for higher education. It also declared its programme of establishment of regional universities. The People’s Education Society propagated higher education among the depressed classes by establishing and
maintaining various educational institutions as mentioned above. He emphasized that
the purpose of the society is not only imparting education but providing education to
promote intellectual, moral and social democracy. This is what India needed and it
should be promoted and propagated by all who wished to see India flourishing.\textsuperscript{101}

He established People’s Education Society with three objectives in mind: (i) the search for truth; (ii) to practice humanitarian principles in one’s life\textsuperscript{102} and (iii) to raise the cultural level of the depressed and oppressed classes, who did not have any worthwhile cultural heritage as they were denied the educational facilities\textsuperscript{103} The Buddhist principles of \textit{kamma} and \textit{prajna} acted as the path finder. In one of his speeches in 1952 at Elphinston College, Bombay, he argued that the teachers and students of the university should work for meeting the requirements and challenges of the modern world through knowledge.\textsuperscript{104} Ambedkar laid emphasis on everybody’s access to education, and that it should be reasonable.\textsuperscript{105}

With regard to higher education he said that, “it is the duty of a modern university to provide facilities for the highest education to the backward communities”. And for this the backward communities should have some control in the university affairs. According to him the university is primarily a machinery, whereby educational facilities are provided to all those who are intellectually capable of using those facilities to the best advantage but who cannot avail themselves of those facilities for want of funds or for other handicaps in life.\textsuperscript{106} He considered the acquisition of knowledge as necessary for the working and success of the democracy. He said that people drenched in ignorance cannot in any way be aware of their rights and duties and thus there would not be any possibility of self-government. According to him “if we do not get self-government notwithstanding the fact that three fourth of the population is drenched in ignorance, our representative system will be a shame and there would be a rule of wealth against poverty of power against weakness.” He further says that “If we desire to have provincial autonomy, we must ensure two things: one is that the modern education of every grade must be provided to every person or community which are educationally backward in order to make them aware of their rights and duties of citizenship; and secondly in order that every access may be given to the communities under the present circumstances that special representation should be provided for them.”\textsuperscript{107}
Ambedkar saw no progress for untouchables without education. In 1948, in a speech he said, “we cannot rise in life without education and knowledge. The upper castes at present hold the reigns of political power. They are determined to keep hold of power. The education needed to win high position is still only with the upper castes. You cannot wrest this power from them without education.” He appealed to the students not to live in servility to the upper castes, and preferred death to a life of humiliation. In 1942, in Akola he exclaimed “nurture your self esteem. How long will you live like sheep? Learn to face injustice and fight it. If I had not done it myself I would still be called only a Mahar.” The main goal was self-esteem, liberation and the opportunity to develop one’s potential and for this, politics and laws were the means. Organization and unity were necessary for success in political conflict. Education was important in itself, but also as means to gain economic opportunity and administrative office. Ambedkar’s whole emphasis was on making the untouchables aware of their own state of deprivation, organizing them as a group ready to fight for their interests, and ensuring that their interests were not lost sight of in the larger nationalist cause.

He was completely in consonance with John Dewey who laid emphasis on education as a means to change the world and not merely to understand it. He further opined that education should be capable of creating human values which have universal applicability.

Ambedkar on Labour

(A) Industrial Labour

Ambedkar was invited to be the labour member in the Viceroy’s Executive Council in 1942. He accepted the portfolio and remained in the office till June 1946. After taking charge, he addressed the working class and said, “I assure you that I shall not surrender in the battle, I will have to wage for protecting and advancing the interests of the working class in India in the Executive Council.” He justified his accepting the offer by pointing out that if he had not accepted it the untouchables would never be a ruling race.

His success in the office can be seen through the fact that he was able to secure 5-6% posts for untouchables in the central government. In 1943, Ambedkar was disappointed on the split in the ranks of labour movement. He called the Indian
Labour Movement as hollow and superfluous. He further said that the labour should work to establish the labour government in India. He wanted that India must get swaraj but it is more important that in whose hands this swaraj would be. He moved a Bill for amendment which proposed holidays with pay for industrial workers employed in perennial factories. In the seventh Indian Labour Conference held on 27th November 1945, he declared thus: “Labour may ask the moneyed classes a pertinent question saying if you do not mind paying taxes to meet the expenditure on war, why do you object to raising the funds when their purpose is to raise the labour standard?” How many uneducated persons could have been educated and how many sick persons could have been restored to health, if the money spent on war had been spent on public welfare.

As the labour member in Viceroy’s Executive Council (1942-46) he applied a threefold approach towards the Indian labour problems:

1. Providing safeguards and social security measures to workers.
2. Giving equal opportunity to workers and employers to participate in formulating labour policy and strengthening the labour movement by introducing compulsory recognition to trade unions in order to enable labour to play an effective role in the economy of the country and establishing a machinery for enforcing labour laws and settling disputes.

While in the office of ministry of labour his contribution can be summarized as under:

1. He convened the Indian labour conference and standing labour committee.
2. Enactment of labour laws.
3. Establishment of the chief labour commissioner’s organization.
4. Appointment of the labour investigative committee.
5. Agency for fixation of minimum wages.
7. Recognition of trade unions.

In a Conference of the Regional Labour Commissioners, Ambedkar suggested that three things should be abolished to prevent industrial disorder, i.e. machinery for conciliation (which was already there), amendment in the trades disputes act, and minimum wage legislation. He said that industrial peace could be obtained if it has a basis of social justice.
(B) Agricultural Labour

Ambedkar also paid attention to the perennial problem concerning the agricultural labour. He was of the opinion that all sorts of labour should be provided with similar conditions of work, provident fund, employer’s liability, workmen’s compensation, health insurance, including invalidity pensions.123

Ambedkar opined that possession of private property was the cause of exploitation. He condemned everything, which sanctioned poverty. He said that the slogan of a democratic society must be machinery and more machinery, civilization and more civilization,”124 thus making it clear that the machinery and the civilization were profitable to all.125 He had a rational approach towards the economic relationships with two basic ideals: the concept of state socialism and the concept of constitutional law and parliamentary democracy. He emphasized that the main idea behind this “state socialism was to put an obligation on the state to plan the economic life of the people on which would lead to the highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise and also provide for the equitable distribution of wealth.”126 Thus Ambedkar was in favour of complete state control over economy to promote public welfare.127 He wanted agriculture to become a state industry, where collective labour would work to attain economic equality and security, thus making democratic socialism more real.128

Regarding the consolidation of holdings and the unemployed agricultural labour in India, Ambedkar argued that “Industrialization of India is the soundest remedy for the agricultural problems of India.”129 The scheduled castes possessed nothing, and were most poor and highly exploited and humiliated section of Indian society. In the opinion of Ambedkar unemployment, underemployment and imperialism were the greatest foes of the labour in India. Thus he appealed to the labour not to submit to imperialism and not to support any sort of war, especially the Second World War, which was initiated by Nazi Germany that propagated Western form of Aryanization. Consequently, he urged the industrial labour in India to support British in the war as he knew it well that after the war even the British imperialism would come to an end. In all, he had tried to formulate, a full employment policy for labour; a state supported labour welfare system; a tripartite labour tribunal system to solve industrial disputes; and to develop an idealist labour
participatory mechanism in nation-building by asking the unionized labour not to be totalitarian in nature because of their collective bargaining power.\textsuperscript{130}

Ambedkar had untiringly worked to emancipate the downtrodden as they were the exploited lot in each and every sense. He was thus not only a leader of untouchables but to all, who were exploited. Thus in 1947 to improve their lot, he proposed a draft before the Constituent Assembly, titled \textit{States and Minorities} on behalf of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation.\textsuperscript{131} In this draft he said that political democracy had been founded on four premises:

1. “The individual is an end in himself
2. That the individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the Constitution.
3. That the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his Constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege.
4. That the state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.”\textsuperscript{132}

It was feared that if the state refrained from forming any policy for the safeguard of labourers it would mean liberty to the private owner that is liberty to the landlords to increase rents for capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rate of wages. This meant the dictatorship of the private employer. Thus the intervention of the state is wanted as means of safeguarding individual liberty by making it a part of Constitutional provision. But a question is raised, why a Constitutional provision and not the legislative procedure through ordinary process of law?\textsuperscript{133} Here Ambedkar argued that if it is done so there might be a possibility in future that some anti-state socialist party would come to power, and pass a resolution against State Socialism.\textsuperscript{134} Then what is the alternative? The alternative then is dictatorship. But it would nullify democracy. He concluded thus: “the problem is to have state socialism with Parliamentary democracy. The way out seems to be to retain Parliamentary Democracy and to prescribe state socialism by the law of the constitution so that it will be beyond the reach of a Parliamentary majority to suspend, amend or abrogate it. It is only by this that one can achieve the triple object namely to establish socialism, Parliamentary Democracy and avoid dictatorship.”\textsuperscript{135}

To summarize it was with the efforts of Ambedkar that the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was passed. It adopted the industrial and social security measures which led
to reduced exploitation of labour, because it created the chief labour commissioner’s organization, and the role of trade union movements was specified and the protection of interest of labour was secured.  

### Ambedkar on Religion and Philosophy

In the post 1935 era, Ambedkar spent a considerable time in the study of various religions including Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Islam and Buddhism. He also had dabbled with the philosophy of Marx.

His approach to religion was influenced by the contemporary sociological, anthropological and philosophical works of Durkheim, Spencer, Robertson Smith, Mc Dougall, Huxley, Crawley and others; and by the writings of D. Kosambi, Daphtari, P. V. Kane etc. He approached religion from two perspectives: historical evolution and as philosophy of religion, which he defined in his own way. He said the Philosophy of Religion is not only a descriptive science. I regard it as being both descriptive and normative. In so far as it deals with the teachings of a Religion, Philosophy of Religion becomes a descriptive science. In so far as it involves the use of critical reason for passing judgment on those teachings, the Philosophy of Religion becomes a normative science.” Thus making it evident that it is not the Religion that constitute the social order but morality. And it is in the course of historical development that religion took the place of morality where religion has apparently played a positive role with regards to the society. But the moment it gets separated from morality it becomes corrupt and exploitative and no more plays the positive role. This is the scale on which Ambedkar measures the religion. Here the evidence of his Socially Engaged Buddhism can be seen. He was not positivistic and utilitarian in his approach to religion. His comprehension of religion was also influenced by the Marxist ideology, yet his approach to religion was not so.

To understand Ambedkar’s comprehension of religion it would have to be seen from three perspectives: (i) How Ambedkar approached religion; (ii) on what grounds he examined the religion and; (iii) how he transcended religion?

He followed the methodology of a comparative study of religions. He did not see religion theistically like Ranade, nor from deistic perspective like Phule. But initially he saw religion from the point of view of comparative analysis. In his article *Philosophy of Hinduism* he wrote that, comparative religion has done one great
service to humanity. It has broken down the claim and arrogance of revealed religions as being the only true and good religions of study. While it is true that comparative religion has abrogated the capricious distinctions between true and false religions based on purely arbitrary and a priori considerations, it has brought in its wake some false notions about religion. The most harmful one is that all religions are equally good and that there is no necessity of discriminating between them. Nothing can be a great error. Religion is an institution or an influence and like all social influences and institutions, it may help or it may harm a society, which is in its grip. Ambedkar declared in a speech on October 3, 1954 for All India Radio, that for me philosophy had a social and ethical meaning as he wanted it to be means of social change. According to him, "every man should have a philosophy of life for everyone must have a standard by which to measure his conduct. And philosophy is nothing but a standard by which to measure". He gave utmost importance to religion, calling it a social force which stands for a scheme of divine governance, which further is an ideal for society to follow (i.e. it is a kind of chain). He said that people who deny the importance of religion fail to understand the great potency and sanction governed by the religious norm as compared to the purely secular ideal. Religion has the potential to override the practical instinct of man.

According to Ambedkar, there was a time when Religion had covered every aspect of human life and claimed infallibility. It included astronomy, biology, geology, medicine, physiology and psychology. Turn by turn this elaborate dominance of Religion was broken. The Copernican revolution freed astronomy from the dominion of Religion. The Darwinian revolution freed biology and geology; medicine is not yet completely destroyed. However by now even physiology and medicine are freed from the clutches of Religion. For example birth control, abortion, sterilization etc. Psychology on the other hand has not yet been able to free itself from the religious dogmatism. Religious revolution had great implications It gives the freedom of thought to individual, enabled the society to assume control of itself, making its own the world it once shared with superstitions, facing undaunted the things of its former fears and so carving out for itself from the realm of mystery in which it lies a sphere of unhampered action and a field of independent thought. The credit for this kind of revolution he gave to secularism.

He then claimed that to know the philosophy of any movement or any institutional organization one has to study the different kind of revolution which the
Religion has undergone. The revolution touches the nature and content of ruling conceptions of the relation of God to man, of society to man and of man to man. He equates morality with the spirit of love of man by man. Morality has social utility as it arises out of the necessity for man to love man. According to him it does not require the sanction of God. It is not to please God that man has to be moral. It is for his own good that man has to love man. He also supports the view point of Prof Tiele that religion can be a great enemy to progress, science and art on one hand and on the other hand it can also foster civilization.

When the idea of God became identified with Religion is not possible to say. It might have its origin in hero worship or it might have developed as an answer to the question as to who created life or who created universe? But according to Ambedkar the idea of God is not integral to Religion, but the relation between Religion and morality is. Both Religion and morality are connected with the same elemental facts of human existence, namely life, death, birth and marriage. Religion consecrates these life processes while morality furnishes rules for their preservation. Thus the bond between morality and religion is more intimate and more natural than the bond between religion and God. But when and how it developed is unpredictable. Here Ambedkar tried to distinguish the religion of savage society and civilized society on the basis that in civilized society, God comes in the scheme of Religion and morality becomes sanctified by Religion.

According to Ambedkar, Religion should be compatible with reason and science and it should provide liberty, equality and fraternity to all its adherents, and above all it should not sanctify poverty. He further says that political democracy means nothing without the social and economic democracy. In his words, without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. He included fraternity in his scheme of principles, because due to the caste system Indians do not consider themselves a single unit. But this gives them a feeling of nationhood by providing solidarity in social life. Ambedkar wrote that religion must mainly be a matter of principles only, it cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules it ceases to be a religion, as it kills responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act. A religious act may not be a correct act but must at least be a responsible act.
Thus it could be said that Ambedkar gave utmost importance to religion and considered it necessary for the society. He had a clear vision as to what he wanted in a religion and what he does not wish for.

**The Marxist Ideology**

Ambedkar gives a considerable space to Marxism in his writings and speeches. Initially, Ambedkar was quite influenced by the doctrine of Communism. According to Ambedkar, Marxism has changed in the course of time and the residual can be summarized in following points:

1. The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world.
2. That there is a conflict of interest between class and class.
3. That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation.
4. That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property.

He advocated that the philosophy of the Buddha was almost identical to the Marxist ideology. But on a deeper analysis of Communism, Ambedkar found some drawbacks in it. First of all, none of the trade union movements cater to the problems of untouchable labourers. Secondly, Marx had propagated that economy is the only factor that can determine man’s future. Thirdly, that it resorts to the violent methods to achieve its goals, which Ambedkar disapproved of. According to Ambedkar, the untouchables should form their own trade union movements which together with economic issues also address the problem of untouchability. And according to him, agriculture should also be nationalized.

Ambedkar also objected to the moral values in communism which keeps on changing. There is no universal morality in communism. Morality is always in flux. For him, the religion is the source of power, at least in India as is evident from Indian history. Here, everything including strikes, elections can be given a religious turn. He argued that emancipation of human mind and social religious revolutions ultimately brought about economic changes in societies.

Regarding the use of violence in Marxist philosophy Ambedkar in a speech delivered in 1956, questions their ideology as to how a violent revolution leading to...
dictatorship will lead us to achieve a better society?" He criticized the communist philosophy in one of his speeches in 1954 and said, “Communism is like a forest fire it goes on burning and consuming anything and everything that comes in its way. It is quite possible that countries which are far off from the centre of communist activity may feel safe that the forest fire may be extinguished before it reaches them or it may be that fire may never reach them.” Thus communism is like the forest fire and every nation should do the needful to safeguard itself from this fire.

In 1953, Ambedkar suggested that the choice of Asia might well be between Marxism and some alternative which would offer an equally powerful ideology and programme of action. And to him it was Buddhism. Ambedkar favoured State Socialism over any other form of political or economic system. He opposed capitalism as under capitalism labour loses its liberty. He disapproved of communism because under it, labour might get equality with the owners but they surely lose their right to liberty. He thus approved of only one kind of economic structure which would serve the interests of labour best and that is state socialism, where state has a limited control in economic as well as social matters to avoid any kind of dictatorship. This could also be said to be a middle path that the Buddha preached. It is a path somewhere between capitalism and communism. Ambedkar was quite influenced with the Marxist ideology. But he rejected it as a whole on two grounds: firstly, that it sanctioned revolution which is violent and bloody. And secondly, it supports only the economic aspect of equality. On the other hand, Ambedkar’s socialism is non-violent; and along with the economic disparities it also catered to the problem of social inequalities.

Rejection of Hinduism

His disapproval of Hinduism goes back to 1927, when he publically burnt a copy of Manu-Smriti (a law book of 2nd century BCE). Ambedkar was of the opinion that caste and democracy would never go hand in hand. The caste system perpetuates the communal majority instead of political majority. Thus he rejected Hinduism and told Hindus to reconsider some of its elements. Which included:

1. Hindus must decide whether or not to adopt a new morality which would be practiced universally within the nation, because the type of morality a nation adopted was critically important for its survival.
2. Hindus must decide what part of their heritage was worth preserving and what should be destroyed.
3. Hindus must stop looking upon the past as a supplier of ideas for the present.
4. Hindus must accept that nothing is permanent, nothing Sanatan.\textsuperscript{168}

He argues that, Brahmanism is the poison which has spoiled Hinduism.\textsuperscript{169}

“Negatively, I reject the Hindu social philosophy propounded in the Bhagwad Gita based as it is, on the Triguna of the Sankhya philosophy which is in my judgment a cruel perversion of the philosophy of Kapila, and which had made the caste system and the system of graded inequality the law of Hindu social life”.\textsuperscript{170}

He elaborated further: “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 teachings of my master, the Buddha.” He further said that excessive liberty destroys equality, and unlimited equality does not leave any room for liberty. And to safeguard both, not law but fraternity is required, which means brotherhood. He equated fraternity with religion and said, “Law is secular, which anybody may break while fraternity or religion is sacred which everybody must respect. My philosophy has a mission. I have to do the work of conversion; for, I have to make the followers of Triguna theory to give it up, and accept mine. Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set out in the Preamble to the Constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion denies them.”\textsuperscript{171}

Ambedkar said that “how can a philosophy which dissects society in fragments which dissociates work from interest, which disconnects intelligence from labour, which expropriates the rights of man to interests vital to life and which prevents society from mobilizing resources for common action in the hour of danger, he said to satisfy the test of social utility? The philosophy of Hinduism therefore neither satisfies the test of social utility nor does it satisfy the test of individual justice.\textsuperscript{172} Thus, the Hindu society had become static and stagnant due to the other worldly preoccupations of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{173} R. R. Bole in the foreword to Lokhande’s book on Ambedkar says that the difficulty in India is that instead of the individual
being treated as a unit it is the group in which he is born and to which he belongs, viz., caste, religion, region, language which determine his status in society.\textsuperscript{174}

Ambedkar hoped that the exploitation and the deplorable state of untouchables would not continue for long and if such a state of affairs continued in society, those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy.\textsuperscript{175} He further said that the sufferings in India are not only because of economic exploitation but also due to social exploitation and degradation. And that Karl Marx’s ideology based on economic exploitation alone cannot free the individual from the tyranny of society in India.\textsuperscript{176} Hinduism is a religion which favoured graded inequality. And that untouchability was not only a religious system but also an economic system which was worse than slavery.\textsuperscript{177} To develop it further he says that, Hindu religion was a tool in the hands of the highest social class. There is a thinking process which has made a section of people as superior to all which is called as Brahmanism. This is found here as they violated the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. The term Brahmanism according to Ambedkar is a sort of system where there were twin enemies to his creed, capitalism and Brahmanism.\textsuperscript{178}

Ambedkar said that caste has made public opinion impossible. To a Hindu public opinion is his caste. His loyalty is restricted to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious.\textsuperscript{179} The Hindu ideal of society as laid down by its scriptures has been of a demoralizing and debilitating influence on Hindu society. The Hindu’s life according to him is a life of continuous defeat. It is a mode of survival of which every Hindu will feel ashamed.\textsuperscript{180} He was terribly annoyed with Hindu religion as it does not give equal status to its fellow-caste-men and branded them as untouchables.

He criticized and rejected Hindu religion as according to him, it has no moral content. He even ridiculed the \emph{Geeta} for it justified the violence in spiritual sense where the human soul is neither the killer nor the killed.\textsuperscript{181} Hinduism was also criticized on the basis that it supported institutionalized inequality in society. That is inequality based on birth in a particular caste and that they had no social conscience. It does not relate to the prescriptions for daily life.\textsuperscript{182}
According to Gore, Ambedkar’s ideological propositions as they were in 1956 can be summarized as follows:

1. We, the untouchables of India protest.
2. As untouchables we may belong to the same religion as the caste Hindus, but we do not belong to the same society.
3. Untouchability emanates from and reaffirms a philosophy of inequality. Brahmanism is the culprit responsible for this situation and Hinduism is but Brahmanism. It is inflexible and it frustrates and it frustrates all attempts at reform.
4. As untouchables, we have historically clearly identifiable, exploited group, we are a minority in need of a special protective measures – reserved seats, reservation in government jobs and in admission to educational institutions.
5. We demand equality and justice not pity or favour.
6. Pious resolutions and half hearted ameliorative measures will not be enough or acceptable to us. Political independence has not solved any of our problems or met our needs. We will now have to explore new linkages and new strategies to attain our social, economic and political goals.
7. We have now got adult franchise, reserved seats in the legislatures, reservation in jobs and educational institutions. But, the discrimination against us continues.
8. Our problems are not those of any other group which is poor. They are problems of enforced social backwardness, continued discrimination and economic exploitation.
9. We continue to assert our separate identity and demand a more effective share in political power. For this we need to continue to educate, organize and agitate.
10. We have now reached the conclusion that a life of dignity is not to be attained within Hinduism. We will seek it in a new religion – Buddhism. He argued that Hinduism has lost the values of equality, fraternity and liberty and thus could not be reformed so he wanted to give up the Hindu religion. He justified the conversion from Hinduism as it was religion of inequality and in a speech in 1950, he was critical of those who said we should not seek conversion because that would mean abandoning our ancient religion are obviously ignorant of history. The
religion of the ancient Aryans was not the same as the religion of the Hindus today. Why did they change? Why did some of them who followed the Aryan faith become Buddhists? According to him conversion was not escapism but a sensible alternative. Addressing the untouchables he argued: “My decision to convert is not for a material gains. There is nothing that I cannot get while I am still an untouchable. At the root of my decision to convert to another faith is my spiritual urge and nothing else. Hinduism does not satisfy me intellectually. Hinduism is not consistent with my sense of self-respect so far as you are concerned you need to convert both for material as well as spiritual considerations.”

To him, the objective of a religion is to establish a social order in which men live morally. He considered religion as a social force. In his opinion philosophy of religion is to be judged on the grounds of justice and utility. Justice here implies liberty, equality and fraternity. And according to him the philosophy of Hinduism does not satisfy the criteria of either justice or utility. Hinduism is not interested in the common man; it is not interested in society as a whole. But it is interested in a class; and the maintenance of the rights of such few classes is its sole concern. It is thus not possible to ensure social justice to all individuals and sections of the Hindu society within the framework of the caste system. Among non-Hindus the practice of caste and class is only a socio-economic development, but in Hinduism it has got the religious sanction. The untouchability, according to Ambedkar is only a by-product of caste system and thus to emancipate them and ameliorate their condition, the caste system has to be destroyed.

Ambedkar lamented thus: “There had been social revolution in other countries of the World. Why have there not been social revolution in India is a question which has incessantly troubled me. There is only one answer which I can give and it is that the lower classes of Hindus have been completely disabled for direct action on account of this wretched system of chaturvarna. They could not bear arms and without arms they could not rebel.”

Here he was becoming too critical of the Hindu religion as it does not provide an equal social status to all. They have denied it to the lower classes on the basis of religion. They have given a subordinate position to all the depressed classes and kept them out of the society by declaring them as the Panchamas or Antyajas. They are without any sense of security with regard to equality of status or liberty in selecting
their employment, place of living or kind of dress they adorn. And there is no place for morality in Hinduism. These factors became a prelude to his renouncing Hinduism.

At the Carnival of Religions

He had no interest in Religion like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity because their purpose was to establish a relation of man with Ishwar, Allah or God. Dhamma, however, is a social and ethical doctrine which appealed to the mind and reason of Dr Ambedkar, the humanist par excellence.190

In an open letter written in 1936, Ambedkar chose three religions: Islam, Christianity and Sikhism for conversion,191 and said: “Comparing these three, Islam seems to give the depressed classes all that they need. Financially, the resources behind Islam are boundless. Socially the Mohammedans are spread all over India. Politically the depressed classes will get all the rights which the Mohammedans are entitled to.”192 Initially Muslims welcomed, Ambedkar’s move of mass conversion from all quarters. They even sent their delegates from Arab to head the conversion ceremony. The Indian Association of Ulama also assured Ambedkar of an equal status. They also thought that if they get converted to Islam, they will get help from the Nizam of Hyderabad.193 But after a while even some Muslim leaders showed their opposition to the massive conversion of untouchables to Islam. Thus Ambedkar rejected the option arguing that it would also deny them the status of their being minority and thus the advantages given to them as minorities. It was considered because of old cultural affinity.194 Finally, he also rejected Islam on broadly the same grounds as Hinduism. As according to him, even Indian Muslims observe the caste system as Hindus do and that the Muslims women are kept completely in seclusion. He found Islam to be an intolerant and a non-Indian origin religion.195

The Christianity seems equally attractive. If Indian Christians are too small numerically to provide the financial resources necessary for the conversion of the depressed classes, the Christian countries such as the USA and England will pour immense resources necessary for the conversion of the depressed classes. Socially, the Christian community is numerically weak to render much support to the converts from the depressed classes, but it has the government behind it. Politically, the Christianity will give them the same rights which Islam gives.196 But, the church had
not been able to defend the low caste converts to Christianity. So he also rejected it due to its foreign origin and the spirit of individualism.

Compared to Christianity and Islam, Sikhism had few attractions. Being a small community of 40 lakhs the Sikhs could not provide the finance. They are confined to the Punjab, and as for the majority of the depressed classes the Sikhs could give them no social support. But the Sikhs responded most positively. Thus after the rejection of Islam, Ambedkar turned towards Sikhism. The Hindu Mahasabha leader Moonje had a talk with Ambedkar in Bombay. With J. K. Birla, Moonje as well as Sankaracharaya of Karveer Pith supported Ambedkar that reform in Hinduism was least possible. They suggested Ambedkar to either get converted to Sikhism or Arya Samaj, which completely had overcome caste prejudices. And by converting to both these sects, they will remain within the Hindu culture and would be able to enjoy benefits accorded to them as untouchables. In August 1936, Ambedkar announced that he would not convert to Islam and that he was looking forward to Sikhism. This later came to be called as the Ambedkar-Moonje pact. Ambedkar agreed to lead a Sikh conversion movement and also to join Hindus and Sikhs in countering Muslim and Christian proselytizing activities among untouchables. In return, Moonje promised Ambedkar Hindu Mahasabha’s support in the matter regarding the enjoyment of political rights accorded to them as the Hindu untouchables under the Poona Pact of 1932. But they met with strong opposition from Gandhi and other untouchable leaders like Gavai, Rajah, Jagjivan Ram.

On the other hand, if they embrace Sikhism, they will not be denationalized. On the contrary, they will help in the political advancement of the country. Thus Sikhism was given serious consideration. Ambedkar sent his son and nephew to the Golden temple in Amritsar to study Sikhism. In September 1936 he also sent a convoy of thirteen young men to Amritsar to study Sikhism. None of them was a scholar or a first-rate Ambedkarite. These over-enthusiastic students got converted to Sikhism, which was not directed to them. On their return to Bombay, they were received coldly and afterwards they sank into oblivion.

Meanwhile, in November, Ambedkar visited London and had consultation with some German and European jurists to know, if there is a possibility of their retaining the reserved seats in the Provincial assemblies if the Depressed Classes got converted to Sikhism, for the Sikhs were granted reserved seats only in the Punjab.
Thus, after that Ambedkar and the Sikh organizations parted their ways, and by the end of 1937, Ambedkar abandoned the idea of conversion. One more factor in this regard was the expected reaction of the Jats against the converts as told to him by the Sikh Dalits and the fear of Akalis, especially Master Tara Singh, who feared for their leadership and authority. Thus seeing the gloomy side he abandoned the idea of conversion for the time being and diverted his energies towards political battle. Jainism was rejected for its extreme form of non-violence.

As a reaction, the Christians criticized this move of mass conversion only for upward social mobility rather than the spiritual quest and they also objected to so many lower classes coming to their fold. Thus Ambedkar rejected the option due to the caste prejudices among the Christians.

What the consequences of conversion would be to the country, as a whole is well worth bearing in mind. Conversion to Islam or Christianity was rejected as these were the religions of foreign origin and thus will denationalize the depressed classes. If they go to Islam the number of Muslims will be doubled and the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real. If they go to Christianity, the numerical strength of Christians becomes 5-6 crores. It will help to strengthen the hold of the British on this country.

Everybody criticized Ambedkar for his move of conversion, that he is not concerned with the spiritual motive in Hinduism. This clearly shows that he had no faith in God or in religion. An Anti Conversion Conference was called on 30th May in Bombay by the untouchable followers of Gandhi. On the other hand All India Depressed Classes Conference also held a meeting in Lucknow reiterating and reaffirming the conversions.

Thus he rejected all the other religions after bearing in mind all the available options. He read and pondered over all the religious faiths. He even considered their origin, their basic characteristics as well as their impact on Indian society. He went through the religious scriptures of almost all the religions before deciding, which is the most appropriate alternative. He also thought that, would it be easy for his followers to accept, adopt and practice any of these religions. And finally he settled on Buddhism as it was part and parcel of Indian culture and will not harm the country in any way. He even declared before Gandhi that he was choosing the least harmful way to the country.
Why Buddhism?

By the time Ambedkar made up his mind to change over to some other Religion, he was convinced that “an institutional Religion of some kind is essential to human society and that human society required a religious foundation.” Compared to other religions, the Buddha was marked out for his ‘self-abnegation’ and for not making a claim to ‘supernatural origin or authority’. He was also seen as not claiming ‘infallibility’ for his teachings as the other religious founders did, but as appealing to ‘reason and experience’.

In a speech on January 14, 1955, Ambedkar expressed his total disgust with politics and said: “I do not want to have anything to do with these false political elections. With such false elections I could even be a Prime Minister but I do not value it….. I have embraced Buddhism. I would like you to do so too not untouchables alone but the whole of India and even the world..... This religion tells me to work for the well being of all, for their happiness and the fostering of love for all. This religion should be accepted not only by men but by the Gods as well..... If we leave aside a few communists, there is no one in this world who does not want some religion. That which promises equal opportunity to all is the true religion, the rest for all false religions.

He was introduced to Buddhism in his school days by the reading of a copy of the Life of Gautama Buddha in Marathi which was presented to him by Keluskar. Gradually his interest developed in Buddhism as he got to understand the true meaning of Buddha’s teachings. He considered religion an important source of moral teaching. According to him, religion should act as a guiding force in developing relation between man and man. For this Buddhism suited more as it puts morality at its centre. It spoke of this-worldly, social equality among the human beings. It emphasized compassion as a central moral and spiritual value. Earlier in 1924, Ambedkar emphasized the need of political leverage to achieve social equality. But in a speech at Siddhartha College on April 3, 1955, he said, “In human societies, religion alone can establish equality. Religion is essential for establishing equality and democracy.” In May 1950, he declared at the inauguration of the Buddhist temple in Worli that he would devote rest of his life to the spread of Buddhism in India. Ambedkar knew that if Buddhism had to meet social, psychological and spiritual needs of the untouchable classes to give them a fresh identity, it would be able to do
so only if a large number of adherents enrolled in to the fold of Buddhism to provide
for the mass base of dedicated followers.221 His inclination towards Buddhism is clear
from the fact that he named his house as Rajgriha and the first college founded by
him was named Siddharth after the Buddha’s name. In 1948 he got republished Laxmi
Narasu’s book The Essence of Buddhism with a foreward added to it.222 In 1947,
Ambedkar opposed K. M. Munshi’s amendment which sought to forbid the
conversion of minors which mean no conversion at all. He lobbied for the Buddha
jayanti to be declared a holiday. He incorporated many Buddhist symbols as
representing the nation like chakra, Sarnath pillar capitol and the inscription of a
Buddhist aphorism on the pediment of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.223 In 1950, he visited
Sri Lanka and learnt Buddhist ceremonials and rituals and also to collect material on
Buddhism. He also appealed to the untouchables to embrace Buddhism.224

On March 18, 1956, the conversions were held not in Maharashtra but in Agra,
where more than 2000 Jatavs (an untouchable caste, part of a caste group known as
Chamars, whose traditional occupation is the curing and working of leather and
making of shoes,) left the fold of Hinduism and enrolled as the Neo-Buddhists.225 And
all his efforts culminated in the big conversion ceremony held at Nagpur Deeksha
Bhoomi on 14th November 1956, where Ambedkar with lakhs of his followers got
converted to Buddhism. He was ordained by the senior most Buddhist monk in India
Bhikkhu U. Chandramani who hailed from Burma. After conversion Ambedkar
announced that by discarding my ancient religion which stood for inequality and
oppression today I am reborn. I have no faith in the philosophy of incarnation; and it
is wrong and mischievous to say that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu. I am no
more a devotee of any Hindu god or goddess. I will not perform Shraddha. I will
strictly follow the eight-fold path of Buddha. Buddhism is true religion and I will lead
a life guided by the three principles of knowledge, right path and compassion.226

After becoming a Buddhist, Ambedkar then administered three suffrages and
five precepts to the vast gathering. He also made them to take pledge of the 22 rules,
which he himself devised, thus:

1. “I shall not recognize Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as Gods nor shall I
   worship them;
2. I shall not recognize Rama and Krishna as Gods, nor shall I worship them;
3. I shall not recognize Gauri and Ganapati as gods, nor shall I worship them;
4. I do not believe in the theory of incarnation of God;
5. I do not consider Buddha as incarnation of Vishnu;
6. I shall not perform shraddha nor shall I give offerings to God;
7. I shall not do anything which is detrimental to Buddhism;
8. I shall not perform any religious rites through the agency of a Brahmin;
9. I believe that all human beings are equal;
10. I shall endeavour to establish equality;
11. I shall follow the Eight Fold Path of the Buddha;
12. I shall observe the ten Paramitas (observances) of the Buddha;
13. I shall be compassionate to all living beings and I shall nurture them with care;
14. I shall not steal;
15. I shall not lie;
16. I shall not commit adultery;
17. I shall not drink liquor;
18. I shall lead my life striving to cultivate a harmonious blend of the three basic principles of Buddhism (enlightenment precepts and compassion)
19. I thereby reject my old religion, Hinduism which is detrimental to the prosperity of human kind and which discriminates between man and man and which treats me as inferior.
20. I fully believe that Buddhism is saddhama.
21. By my embracing Buddhism I am being reborn
22. I hereby pledge to conduct myself hereafter in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha."

Thus, Ambedkar devised a particular ceremony for the lay converts, which was not there in early Buddhism. It was also one of the reasons for the decline of Buddhism in India because the lay followers followed the rituals and ceremonies of Hindus at the time of birth, death or marriage. And they unknowingly were absorbed in Hinduism. This made the strong case of Buddhism and the untouchable converts.

In an interview to the BBC London in May 1956, Ambedkar asserted that he liked Buddhism because of its three principles which no other religion provides, which included Prajna (knowledge), Karuna (compassion) and Samta (equality). For him, this is the only thing that a man wants for a happy life. He further said that neither God nor soul can save society, and Buddhism is a social gospel and not a religious one."
Ambedkar was quite ill on the day of his Deeksha. Thus, he had not much time for making an organizational framework for the conversions, thus to happen.\textsuperscript{229} There was also a lack of resources as for the Buddhist missionary activities would have to have financial assistance from different sources, for which, Ambedkar wanted other Asian countries to come forward.\textsuperscript{230} Conversion to Buddhism was not only evident in Maharashtra but also in a considerable number in Uttar Pradesh including Uttarakhand. Since there was 300\% rise in Buddhist population in UP during 1951-61.\textsuperscript{231} Even in the 21st century, the conversions are taking place on a regular basis. We have several evidences through news papers that the mass conversion ceremonies are taking place at different places. To cite a few recently organized conversion ceremonies like the Reuters, issue of April 9, 2001, reported that some lower-caste Hindus were planning to embrace the Buddhist faith; BBC news says that to mark the 50th anniversary of Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism, on 14th Oct., 2006, thousands of people have been attending mass ceremonies in India at which hundreds of Hindu Dalits converted to Buddhism and Christianity in Nagpur.\textsuperscript{232} Tens of thousands gathered at Mahalaxmi Race course in Mumbai on Sunday to commemorate the 50th anniversary of B. R. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism. More than one lakh Dalits and tribal Hindus embraced the Buddhist faith in what is considered the largest mass conversion in the country.\textsuperscript{233} The Triratna Buddhist Community News of 29th May, 2007 issue reported that the news of a new wave of mass Conversion movement are coming from India, this time in Mumbai. On Sunday, over 100,000 people mostly from the Adivasis or the Tribal communities, converted in a massive ceremony at the Mahalaxmi ground. This conversion ceremony is a result of efforts of people who has been touring the State after converting to Buddhism in Nagpur in October 2006.\textsuperscript{234}

Jawahar Lal Nehru, thus, observed and said that “Dr. B. R. Ambedkar would be remembered mostly as the symbol of revolt against all the oppressing features of Hindu society.”\textsuperscript{235} Thus it could be said that the movement that Ambedkar had initiated for the emancipation of the down-trodden had been quite successful and is still continuing. He himself had set the example by getting converted to Buddhism. He was aware of the condition of the untouchables of India as he himself was a victim to all the ill-treatment which they had to bear. He appealed to the untouchables to get education and become aware of the atrocities that were inflicted on them by the caste
Hindus, even to this day, when practicing untouchability is a legal offence. He even pleaded them to gain political power and high positions in public services, so that policies could be made to their benefit. This would be possible by taking the help of the tool of reservation, which he devised for the advantage of the untouchables. He even suggested them to get converted to Buddhism. People in large numbers responded to his call and got themselves converted to Buddhism in various mass conversion ceremonies. The converts are now being recognized as Neo-Buddhists and not the untouchable Hindus. Ambedkar, thus, was considered *Messiah* by all the untouchables of Maharashtra and in other states too.

He became the role model for the downtrodden that if he can rise to such an eminence in scholarship, even they could do so.
Notes and References

3. Ibid., p. 143
4. Ibid., p. 72
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 290.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 224.
20. Ibid., p. 19-20
21. Ibid., p. 29-30
22. Ibid., p. 32
23. Ibid., p. 33-43
24. Ibid., p. 44
25. Ibid., p. 49
26. Ibid., p. 48-49
27. Ibid., p. 41
28. Ibid., p. 42
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 54-55.
35. Mahad is a picturesque town in the midst of hills and dales in district Kolaba of Maharashtra. Ahir, *op. cit.*, p. 131
40. Ahir, *op. cit.*, p. 133
41. Ibid., p. 133
43. Ibid., p. 131.
44. Ibid., p. 131.
46. Ibid., p. 135.
47. Ibid., p. 135.

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91. Jatava, op. cit., p. 44.
93. Ibid., p. 124
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid., p. 125
96. Ibid., p. 125
97. Ibid., p. 127
98. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Volume 5, Compiled by Vasant Moon, Education Dept, Government of Maharashtra, 1987, p. 15
99. The resolution to that effect was passed recently in 2003 making Primary education free and compulsory and included in the fundamental rights of Indian constitution. And later added the the right of children to free and compulsory education act, 2009. No. 35 or 2009. An act to provide for free and compulsory Right to Education 2009 act.
100. Gaikwad in Kadam, op. cit., p. 209.
103. Ibid., p. 28.
104. Ibid., p. 53.
105. Ibid., pp. 48, 49.
106. Ibid., p. 49.
107. Ibid., p.
109. Ibid., p. 214.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid., p. 335.
116. Ibid., p. 213.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. Keer, op. cit., p. 372
120. Dhiwal in Kadam, op. cit., p. 182-183
121. Ibid., p. 183
122. Kuber, op. cit., p. 214
123. Ibid.
126. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Volume I, op. cit., p. 408.
128. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Volume I, States and Minorities, Compiled by Vasant Moon, Education Dept, Government of Maharashtra, 1979, 1989, p. 409
129. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 477.
131. Ibid., p. 383.
132. Ibid., p. 409.
133. Ibid., p. 410.
134. Ibid., p. 410-412.
135. Ibid.
139. Yashwant Sumant, Situating Religion in Ambedkar’s Political Discourse, in Jondhale and Beltz, eds. op. cit., p. 70.
140. Ibid., p. 69.
141. Ibid., p. 68.
152. Ling, op. cit., p. 86.
154. M. P. Mangudkar, Why Dr. Ambedkar was Not a Communist, in Kadam, ed. op. cit., p. 73.
156. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol.1, 1989, op. cit., p. 75.
157. Ibid., p. 75.
160. E. V. Chinnaiah, The Impact of Dr. Ambedkar’s The Buddha and His Dhamma, in Kadam, p. 117.
162. Ibid., p. 171.
163. Ibid., p. 172.
164. Ibid., p. 170.
165. Ling, op. cit., p. 85.
167. G. S. Lokhande, 1977, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar: A Study in Social Democracy, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p. 120.
169. Ibid., p. 77.
171. Ibid.
173. Lokhande, op. cit., p. 68.
174. Ibid., p. ix.
175. Ibid., p. ix.
176. Ibid., p. x.
200. Ganesh Akkaji Gavai (1888-1974) was a Mahar from Amraoti in Maharashtra, who was a member of Prarthana Samaj and later became Ambedkar’s main rival in the region, as he was against conversions and wanted to make reforms in Hinduism itself. In Jaffrelot, op. cit., p. 43.

201. M. C. Rajah was the founder President of the All India Depressed Classes Association. He even represented the untouchables in the Imperial Legislative Council since 1927. Like Gavai, he was rival of Rao Bahadur Rettamalle Srinivasan (a dalit member of the Legislative Council of Madras Presidency) in Tamil Nadu, in Jaffrelot, op. cit., p. 59.

202. Jagjivan Ram was a key figure in All India Depressed Classes Association, in Jaffrelot, op. cit., p. 89.

203. Indian Annual Register, 1936, op. cit., pp. 277-78

204. Ling, op. cit., p. 87

205. Keer, op. cit., p. 284

206. Jaffrelot, op. cit., p. 130

207. Ling, op. cit., p. 87

208. Keer, op. cit., p. 289

209. Jaffrelot, op. cit., p. 121

210. Ling, op. cit., p. 86-7

211. Keer, op. cit., p. 259

212. Indian Annual Register, 1936, op. cit., pp. 277-78

213. Jaffrelot, op. cit., p. 129

225. Owen Lynch, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar- Myth and Charisma, in Mahar, ed. op. cit., p. 97
227. Zelliot, in Oddie., op. cit., pp. 121-22
231. Oven Lynch in Mahar, op. cit., p. 97
232. Online edition of Reuters, April 9, 2001
234. Triratna Buddhist Community News of 29th May, 2007
235. K. S. Raju, Dr. Ambedkar's Life and Philosophy, paper presented in the National Seminar on the life, mission, contribution and Relevance of Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Centenary Cell, New Delhi, 1991, p. 48