CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR IN THE
BUDDHIST REVIVAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

IV.1. Dr. Ambedkar and Contemporary Indian Society

IV.1.1. A Brief Description of Dr. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar was born April 14, 1891. The homeland of Ambedkar’s ancestor was in Maharashtra, but he was born in the State of Madhya Pradesh where his father was working at that time. His parents were belonging to Mahar, one of the untouchable communities in India; therefore, Ambedkar was an Untouchable innately according to Hindu tradition.

We will not understand the life and activity of Ambedkar if we do not understand the order of Indian-Hindu society, the caste system. Accordingly, people in society were divided into four castes consisted of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras. The position of each caste was described in Purusha Sukta as follows:

“Now, for the sake of preserving all this creations, the most glorious (being) ordained separate duties for those who sprang from (his) mouth, arm, thigh and feet. For the Brahmans he ordered teaching, study, sacrifices and sacrificing (as priests) for others, also giving and receiving gifts. Defence of the people giving (alms), scarify, also study, and absence
of attachment to objects of sense, in sort for Kshatriyas. Tending of cattle, giving (alms, sacrifice, study, trade, usury, and also agriculture for the Vaisyas. One duty the Lord assigned to the Shudras-serve to those (before-mentioned) classes without grudging.”

Besides four castes, there was another outcaste called the untouchable. Though the Shudras occupied the lowest position in caste system, the Untouchables were even more suffering. The Shudras could contact with other caste people, but the Untouchables could not. They could not because they were considered as the polluted people whose touch causes others to be polluted. Talking about the status of the Untouchables, Ambedkar said that: “They were born impure; they were impure while they lived, they died in the death of the impure, and they gave birth to children who were born with a stigma of Untouchability affixed to them. It is a case of permanent, hereditary stain which nothing can cleanse.” Thus, the common characteristic of caste system is its heredity. One is a Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra, or Untouchable; he will bear it during his life and hand down his children, from generation to generation. And the child Ambedkar was born as an Mahar Untouchable like that.

It is noticed that, the Mahar people were very well known about their daring, courage, determination, faithfulness, loyalty and honesty. In the village, they were honest neighbors. In the war, they were courageous soldiers. This is very important. The blood of Mahar was flowing in Ambedkar’s body, and it affected his nature and characteristic for him to work and struggle in future.

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2 Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, vol. 7, op. cit., p. 266.
Being born as an untouchable who had not tradition of study, but Ambedkar had enough fortunate to pursue his academic study. In 1907, he passed his Matriculation Examination in the Elphinston High School that even children in high caste family at that time could not attain. So that, it was impressive and caught the attention of others, especially those who would like to reform society. On this special occasion, his teacher Shri K. A. Keluskar presented him Life of Gautama Buddha. This was the first time Ambedkar contacted Buddhism. Also in this year, Ambedkar got marriage according to custom.

Ambedkar continued to pursue his study. With the support and help of his respected father, teachers, and benefactors, he gradually got a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Bombay, a Degree of PhD of Economic from Colombia University, USA, a Degree of Doctor of Science from University of Economics and Political Sciences in London, and a Degree of Barrister-at Law from Bonn University, Germany. With these degrees, Dr Ambedkar was perhaps the first Indian to have a Doctorate from the world-famous institutions in England, America, and Germany. His academic qualifications exceeded most of his contemporaries.

As an untouchable, Ambedkar had spent his time of childhood and youth, study and work uneasily. Wherever he came, he faced to discrimination by his classmates, teachers, and colleagues. He was not allowed to play games with his classmates and had to sit on the ground outside the schoolhouse when he was studying in the Government Middle School in Satara. He was not allowed to learn Sanskrit in Elphinston School. When he was working for Maharaja of Baroda, he was refused to rent room and was insulted by other employees.  

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could not practice his job as a barrister because litigants did not like to do business with an untouchable. Therefore, from the very early period of his life, he made a vow to remove the stigma of untouchability.\(^7\)

Along with pursuing of his study, Ambedkar also participated in social activities to struggle for the rights and benefits of the low castes and the untouchables. In 1917, Ambedkar along with the founder of *Depressed Classes Mission Society* Karmavir Shinde presented before the Montague-Chelmsford Reform Scheme the Untouchables’ view regarding to their recruitment to the army.\(^8\) In 1920, Ambedkar established the fortnightly paper *Mook Nayak*, (the Leader of the Dumb) under the patronage of Maharaja of Kolhapur. Through the Paper, he pointed out the humiliation of the untouchables created by the Hindus. In one article of the Paper, Ambedkar wrote that Hindu society similar to the tower of inequality without a door to go out. One was born in the tower and would die in that tower without a way to escape. He called Indian Government to give all its citizens the favorable conditions to rise their life.\(^9\)

After Ambedkar completed his study in Britain in 1923 with a Degree of Doctor of Science, his social activities became more active. In this period, Indian history also witnessed moves that spoke up about the injustice of caste system and untouchability.\(^10\) This affected Ambedkar’s work favorably. On March 9, 1924, he called for a meeting of the untouchables and established the *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* (Association for the Welfare of the depressed classes) with headquarter at Damodar Hall, Bombay. The purpose of the Association was to raise the pitiable plight of the untouchable before the

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\(^7\) Rattu, op. cit., p. 107.
\(^8\) Pujari, op. cit., pp. 71-2.
\(^9\) Rattu, op. cit., p. 27.
\(^10\) In August 4, 1923, the Bombay Legislative Council passed a resolution, moved by the late Shri S. K. Bole allowing the Untouchables to enjoy all public services like wells, schools. Sahu Maharaj of Kolhapur arranged for the free education of the Untouchables and secured jobs for many of them. In 1924, Veer Savarkar, a great fighter for freedom, was released from the Andaman prison; began to fight against untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi also took practical steps to wipe out untouchability (M. L. Shahare, *Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, His Life and Work*, New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1987, pp. 18-20).
Government as well as improving their economical, political, cultural, and educational conditions.\(^{11}\)

Ambedkar’s works and his care of the low section received the respect and trust by the latter. He gradually became their leader. Not only talking, Ambedkar came to have practical activities. From 1927 to 1930, there had been several serious events performed by him and his people, such as the holding of Satyagrahas and burning a copy of Manusmriti.

In two days 19 and 20 of March 1927, there had occurred the conference of the depressed classes at Mahad in Kolaba District. At the conference, Ambedkar advised the untouchables forgiving their habit of eating rotten meat and food thrown away by the Hindus. He further encouraged them to stand up to assert the equal rights. In order to prove that the untouchables also had the equal right with the Hindus, in the second day of the conference, the participants made a procession to the Chowdar tank to drink water the tank.\(^{12}\) Though they were rudely attacked by the high caste Hindus, the event had a very great meaning. Because in the first time in history, the untouchables dared to drink water in public tank that they had been banned for centuries. Pujari observed: “In the course of the Untouchable Movement, the Mahad Satyagraha was a turning point marking the mental revolution of the Untouchables.”\(^{13}\)

After the Mahad Satyagraha, on December 25, 1927, a conference of the depressed classes was convened at Mahad. The Conference criticized the inequality of caste system\(^ {14}\) and stress on the value and the human rights of the Untouchables.\(^ {15}\) The conference also condemned the Manusmṛti as a symbol

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 22  
\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 28.  
\(^{13}\) Pujari, op. cit., p. 85  
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 82.
of inequality. At nine o'clock that night, the attendants of the Conference threw the copy of Manusmṛti into the bonfire in front of pandal to burn it.\textsuperscript{16}

In June 1928, Ambedkar was appointed a professor at the Government Law College in Bombay. On August 3, 1928, he was selected as one of members of Bombay provincial commission. He took advantage of this position to work for the depressed classes. He pointed out the unfortunate condition of the depressed classes before the Commission as well as demanding the political power for them.\textsuperscript{17}

On March 2, 1930, Ambedkar held another Satyagraha in Nasik. The Satyagraha this time was to struggle for the entry of Kalaram temple. For many centuries, the untouchables had not been allowed to enter the Hindu temples in general. As the case of the Mahad Satyagraha, the Nasik Satyagraha also witnessed the conflict between the untouchables and the Hindus. There were some efforts to solve the issue, but nothing happened. Kalaram temple continued to be closed to the Untouchables.\textsuperscript{18}

From the year of 1930, most of political forces of Britain supported the idea of an independent India; therefore, the British Government convened the Round Table Conferences in London. The conference included three secessions in years 1930, 1031 and 1932 to discuss about the future of India. Ambedkar was invited as a representative of the Indian Depressed Classes. At the conferences, he criticized the British Government that the Government did nothing to improve the situation of the low section in society.\textsuperscript{19} He further demanded separate electorates for the untouchables because he considered that,

\textsuperscript{17} Kusum Sharma, \textit{Ambedkar and India Constitution}, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1992, pp. 87-8.
\textsuperscript{18} Keer, op. cit., pp. 136-8; Shahare, op. cit., p. 37.
\textsuperscript{19} Sharma, op. cit., pp. 88-9.
“nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can… We cannot remove them unless we get political power in our own hands.”\textsuperscript{20}

Ambedkar’s idea of separate electorates for the untouchables was accepted by the British Government. On August 14, 1932, the British Prime Minister issued the Communal Award granted separate electorates for depressed classes. However, Gandhi objected to the Communal Award due to he did not want to separate the untouchables from Hinduism. He took fast unto death to fight against the Communal Award.\textsuperscript{21} Only Ambedkar could save Gandhi by withdrawing the demand for separate electorates. Firstly, he refused to do that because he thought that his demand was equitable and he also did not want to betray his people.\textsuperscript{22} Nevertheless, after his meeting with Gandhi at Yeravda jail and persuaded by the latter, Ambedkar finally he accepted Gandhi’s suggestion. The two agreed to sign the Poona Pact at 5 pm on Saturday, September 24, 1932 in which, the more number of reserved seats were given to the Untouchables instead of separate electorates. This was Ambedkar’s great concession. Because of this, the Dalits was not independent and maintained oppressed in the fold of the Hindus.

Ambedkar’s efforts brought some results. The temples were opened to the Untouchables and their restrictions in public places were relaxed in some areas. However, Ambedkar did not think these were sufficient. As far as they were untouchables, they were looked down and oppressed by the Hindus. What Ambedkar aimed at now was not some things like drinking water in public tanks or entering temples but the right of equality and the dignity of human. That was the reason why he refused to co-operate with Gandhi on the matter of the temple-entry movement in 1933. Ambedkar told Gandhi: I think I must ask the Hindus to show me some sacred authority, which would rule out this

\textsuperscript{20} Keer, op. cit., p. 151.
\textsuperscript{22} Pujari, op. cit., p. 106.
feeling of lowliness. If it cannot be, I should say goodbye to Hinduism... I am not going to be satisfied with measures, which would merely bring some relief... I do not want to be crushed by your charity.\(^{23}\)

Ambedkar’s efforts to improve the conditions of the untouchables and remove untouchability did not bring a satisfactory consequence. He began to realize that the problem of the untouchables could not be resolved by social, economical or even political means but it must be resolved by religion method. He said: “We tried everything to acquire an equal status in Hindu society and conducted Satyagraha, but that was of no avail. The Hindu society has no room for equality. Only by quitting Hindu religion will our condition be improved. Conversion is the only way for our emancipation,”\(^{24}\) As a result, at the Conference in Yeola, Nasik on October 13, 1935, Ambedkar advised the depressed classes to give up all agitations. Instead, they should convert to another religion which provide them the equality of status and treatment. He himself declared that he had been born a Hindu untouchable but he “will not die as a Hindu.”\(^{25}\)

After the Yeola declaration of conversion, Ambedkar embarked upon the political career and worked for the fundamental rights and benefits of the depressed classes. In 1935, the Government of India Act was passed. Of which it promised provincial Autonomy to the people of British India and announced the elections to the provincial assemblies that would be held in 1937. Therefore, from the beginning of 1935, political leaders of different parties started their activities for the coming elections. On this occasion, Ambedkar founded the Independent Labor Party (ILP). The purpose of ILP was to reform society and to meet the necessity of the poor agriculturists and workers.\(^{26}\) The


\(^{24}\) Pujari, op. cit., p. 125.


\(^{26}\) Pujari, op. cit., p. 136.
Election happened on February 17, 1937. Ambedkar’s party got victory. Of seventeen candidates, fifteen members were elected into provincial assemblies.27 Also in the year 1937, Ambedkar introduces the Bills to abolish the Vatani custom, and to abolish the Khoti System. In 1938, Ambedkar held the strike to object to the Industrial Disputes Bill which he considered that it unjustly favored the industrialists at the cost of workers.28

When the World War II broke out in 1939, the Congressmen bargained with the Britishers that they would support British in war with condition that the latter agreed to return independence to Indians immediately. However, Ambedkar supported Britain unconditionally. It was so because he thought that if Nazism won the war, values like equality, fraternity and liberty would be doomed.29 Because of his good will, when the Viceroy and Governor General of India decided to expand his Executive Council, he appointed Ambedkar one of members of the Executive Council.30

In 1942, Ambedkar participated in series of conferences of the depressed classes and depressed classes women where he gave them sincere advices and encouraged them to struggle for justice and humanity. My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourselves and never loose hope,”31 he said. Also the year 1942, Ambedkar was granted by the Viceroy the position of Labor Minister in the Executive Council. The Congressmen criticized him about this, but he explained that he actually did not attach to the high office. He charged the position due to he felt that the position

27 Shahare, op. cit., p. 71.
28 Pujari, p. 137
29 Shahare, op. cit., p. 78.
30 Ibid., p. 77
could give him chances to serve the condition of his people and the toilers of the country in general.\(^{32}\)

The Second World War ended in 1945. In March 15, 1946, The British Government admitted the independence of India. This was good news for India as the whole. However, the British Prime Minister Attlee did not support the Minority groups.\(^{33}\) This worried Ambedkar. When the missionary Sir Stafford Cripps come to India to transfer power to Indians, Ambedkar also meet him and proposed preserved seats for the Schedule castes in the future Constitution as well as placed the issue of separate elections for the untouchables. However, when the State Paper was issued, it did not mention of the Schedule castes. After the release of the State Paper, the Viceroy dissolved his Executive Council and Ambedkar came back to Bombay in the last week of May 1946.\(^{34}\)

After returning to Bombay, Ambedkar began to work in educational field. He founded the Siddharth College in Mumbai in 1946 and Milind College at Aurangabad in September 1951. Both of these colleges were under the patronage of People's Education Society that he had founded on July 8, 1945.\(^{35}\)

On July 15, 1947, the British Government passed the Act of Indian Independence. Right after that, Nehru invited Ambedkar to charge the position of Minister of Law and the chairperson of the Committee to draft the Constitution. He completed this great mission at the end of 1948. On November 4, 1948, he presented the Draft Constitution to the Constituent Assembly, of which he expressed his anxiety about the division of religions that he considered as the main cause had made India lost its freedom. He said that the enemies of India was not

\(^{32}\) Shahare, op. cit., 78.
\(^{33}\) Pujari, op. cit., p. 146.
\(^{34}\) Shahare, op. cit., p. 82.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p 247.
from outside but they were in the form of caste and creeds. And he called the Indians to place the country above their creeds.36

Besides the great work of Indian Constitution, Ambedkar also submitted to the Assembly the Hindu Code Bill to protect the right of inherit property for women. However, the Bill was not accepted with the reason that it would undermine the Hindu religion and tradition.37 In the disappointed status, Ambedkar decided to resign from the Nehru Cabinet in 1951, marked the end of his political career.

After his resignation from the Cabinet, he focused more on the matter of conversion. He had written many works on Buddhism like Baudhaka Upasana Patha, Buddha and future of His Religion, Buddha and His Dharma, Revolution and Counter Revolution in India, Buddha and Karl Marx, Why I like Buddhism, etc., to explain the tenets of Buddhism. He further participated in several Buddhist conferences in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar to examine the living Buddhism.

After carefully studying and searching religions and Buddhism, Ambedkar came to conclude that the religion of the Buddha can satisfy the criterions of a true religion and solve the problem of the untouchables.38 Therefore, he finally decided to embrace Buddhism. On the occasion of 2500th Buddha Jayanti Celebration held in Bombay, Ambedkar declared that he would embrace Buddhism in October 14 of the year in Nagpur.39 Accordingly, Ambedkar and some 500,000 his followers participated in the Initiation Ceremony (took refuge in the Triple Gems: Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha, and received the Five Precepts:

36 Nanak Chand Rattu, Dr. Ambedkar, Important messages, Sayings, Wit and Wisdom, New Delhi: Rajgriha, 2001 p. 133.
37 Shahare, op. cit., p. 98.
restrain from killing, stealing, sexual-misconduct, telling lie, and drinking intoxicating substances) performed by Bhikkhu Chandramani.\(^{40}\)

We remember that, at the Yeola Conference 1935, Ambedkar declared that he would not die as a Hindu. With the Nagpur Conversion Ceremony, he accomplished his vow because he was then a Buddhist. After the Conversion Ceremony, he cheerfully said that the Conversion gave him “enormous satisfaction and pleasure unimaginable.”\(^{41}\)

In November 15, 1956, Ambedkar participated in the Fourth World Buddhist Conference in Kathmandu, Nepal. At the Conference, he spoke to the delegates that he found Buddhism is the greatest religion which contributes to the world the great social doctrine.

After returning to Delhi, Ambedkar’s status became weakened very fast. And he breathed his last on the morning of December 6, 1956 in sleeping. His dead body then was taken to Rājagaha, his resident in Bombay.

IV.1.2. Ambedkar’s View of Religions

After the Yeola Conference of conversion in 1935, Ambedkar seemed to turn his direction to practical areas like economics and politics. However, it does not mean that he completely ignored area of religion. In fact, he had studied comparative religions. This helped Ambedkar to have a clear vision of religions.

Ambedkar’s View of Hinduism

One of basic reasons Ambedkar decided to leave Hinduism is because this religion has no sympathy, equality and liberty which are considered as factors

\(^{40}\) These 22 Vows formulated by Ambedkar, as follows:

to uplift an individual.\textsuperscript{42} But above of all, Hinduism advocates the caste system. Caste system devices people in society into four castes including Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishali and Shudras. Not only that, the Hinduism further produced another class of people called the Untouchables who were outcaste. Therefore, according to Ambedkar, the caste system contains its nature of inequality. There is no equality, liberty and fraternity in Hindu religion and society. In an interview in 1937 with reporters, Ambedkar said that he burn a copy of the \textit{Manusmriti} because he viewed it as a symbol of injustice.\textsuperscript{43}

Can the caste system under which he and his people have been crushed across centuries be abandoned? It is imposable. That is because the caste system depends on religious sanctity, the divine authority of the Shastras. Therefore, as long as the depressed classes and the untouchables maintain in Hinduism, they cannot acquire their full manhood. This is the reason Ambedkar abandoned his ancestor’s religion. He said that, “It is the inequality in the Hinduism that compels me to quit Hinduism...”\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Ambedkar’s View of Sikhism}

Dr. Ambedkar seemed to have a good sentiment with Sikhism because Sikhism was a religion which originated from India. He also announced that he might opt for Sikhism because he felt that he should “have some responsibility for the future of the Hindu culture and civilization.”\textsuperscript{45} In April 1936, he attended the Sikh Mission conference at Amritsar. He further sent his son and his nephew to a Sikh temple to research on Sikhism. On September 18, 1936,
he sent a group of thirteen men of his followers to the Sikh Mission at Amritsar to study the Sikhism to prepare for conversion.\textsuperscript{46}

Later on, there were some disagreement between Ambedkar and the Sikh leaders. In addition, he realized that Sikhism is not much different from Hinduism on account of caste discrimination. He was informed that the Sikh Dalits subjected to atrocities created by the hands of the Jats\textsuperscript{47} (a kind of ruler in Punjab). Therefore, he finally did not embrace Sikhism.

\textbf{Ambedkar’s View of Christianity}

Dr. Ambedkar admired of the Christian Gospels greatly. He was aware of the prophetic call for justice and mercy for the disinherit and of the influence of Christian social teachings in Western societies.\textsuperscript{48} However, when he conveyed the reality, he observed converts did not live up to the Gospel. He said that:

\begin{quote}
``When I read the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and certain passages of St. Paul’s epistles, I feel that I and my people must all be Christians, for in them I find a perfect antidote to the poison Hinduism has injected into our souls and a dynamic strong enough to lift us out of our present degraded position, but when I took at the Church produced by Christian Missions in the districts around Bombay, I have quite a different feeling. Many members of my own caste have become Christians and most of them do not command Christianity to the remainder of us. Some have gone to boarding schools and have enjoyed high privilege. We think of them as finished products of your missionary effort and what sort of
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\textsuperscript{48} Christopher S. Queen, Dr. Ambedkar and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation, in Engaged Buddhism, Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia, ed. Christopher S. Quen and Sallie B. King, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 52.
people are they? They are Selfish and self-centered. They don’t care a snap of their finger what becomes of their former caste associates so long as they and their families, or they and the little group who have become Christians, get ahead. Indeed, their chief concern with reference to their old caste associates is to hide the fact that they were ever in the same community. I don’t want to add to the number of such Christians.”

In his speech to Indian Christians at Sholapur on December 31, 1937, he said that the Indian Christians never fought for social justice. Therefore, becoming Christians could not bring any economic and political gain for the Untouchables. In addition, there was the caste discrimination in the Indian Christians. The Christians in South India, for instance, observed caste in Churches. Therefore, they never tackled the matter of caste. The untouchables would remain untouchable even they become Christians.” Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar did not convert to Christianity.

Ambedkar’s View of Islam

As the case of Christianity, Ambedkar firstly admired the egalitarian spirit of the Qur’an preaching equality, love, fraternity and humanity. But later he realized that the “The Muslim society in India is afflicted by the same social evils as afflict the Hindu society. Indeed, the Muslims have all the social evils of the Hindus and more. That something more is the compulsory system of Purdah for Muslim women.” Therefore, Ambedkar did not have a favorable opinion on Islam.

51 Raj Kumar, op.cit, p. 342.
In 1945, on the issue of the partition of Pakistan, Ambedkar condemned the India Muslims opposed to social reform and considered they were an unprogressive people. According to him, Muslims not only supported the caste system but also observed untouchability.\textsuperscript{53} In 1947, when the problem of the partition of India broke out, the Untouchables in Pakistan were forced to convert to Islam. Ambedkar made an appeal to Prime Nehru to do something to eliminate the Scheduled Castes from Pakistan to India. He also called them not to succumb to conversion to Islam as an easy way to escape the violence created by the Muslims.\textsuperscript{54}

Yes, in spite of the egalitarian spirit of the Qur’an preaching equality, love, fraternity and humanity in principle, there was a discrimination of castes, observance of the Untouchables and oppression of women in Islam. With all these considerations regarding to Islam, Dr. Ambedkar could not embrace such the religion.

Above we have examined the view of Ambedkar towards the existing religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam. One thing we see that though religions have different theories and practices, they are the religions of God or Gods and observe caste system and untouchability. This is the main reason Ambedkar did not opt them to convert. As having mentioned, right after Ambedkar declared that he would leave Hinduism, while the Hindus criticized him; leaders of other religions invited him to embrace their faiths. However, he did not choose any of these religions but finally Buddhism.

\textbf{IV.1.3. Ambedkar’s View of a True Religion}

Ambedkar believed that religion is necessary for human society. He consider “the foundation of religion to be essential to the life and practices of a


society.” However, Ambedkar considered that it is necessary to distinguish the differences among religions. The so-called ‘all religions teach the same thing and equally good,’ according to Ambedkar is a wrong view. He argued that though all religions pursue the good, each one views of the good differently. There religion views that brotherhood is good, other considers caste and untouchability is good; there religion advocates violence while another advocate’s non-violence; and so on. He observed, “There cannot be a thesis more false than the thesis that all religions are true…” nothing can be a greater error than this.”

If religion is necessary for people, the true religion is more necessary. Ambedkar gave criterion to identify a true religion. According to him, the religions that take Gods as the object to worship are not true religions. It is because such religions create nothing but superstitions like soul, worship, prayer, rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies. These performances, Ambedkar viewed that, “had nothing to do with morality…in place of God there is no morality.” He explained that in God-worshipping religions, though people seem to perform morality, morality is not their nature but it is “casual and occasional.” They do not commit the evils because they fear the punishment of their Gods. Otherwise, they perform the good because they want to please the Gods or to get something from Gods, or God asks them to so. Therefore, he considered that the religions that depend on Gods are not the true religions.

Besides above idea, Ambedkar also gave specific criterions of a true religion. According to him, a true religion must ensure following qualities:  

1. The society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either society is sure to go to pieces. In all societies law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality must therefore remain the governing principle in every society.

2. Religion as defined in the first proposition must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose its respect and therefore, become the subject of ridicule and thereby not merely lose its force as a governing principle of life but might in course of time disintegrate and lapse if it is not in accord with science. In other words, a religion if it is to function must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science.

3. Religion as a code of morality must also stand together another test. It is not enough for religion to consist of a moral code, but its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Unless a religion recognizes these three fundamental principles of social life, religion will be doomed.

4. Religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty. Renunciation of riches by those who have it may be at blessed state. But poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion, to perpetuate crime, to consent to make earth a living hell.

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IV.2. Ambedkar’s View of Buddhism

IV.2.1. There is no God in Buddhism

In the part of Ambedkar’s view of a true religion, we have mentioned that Ambedkar considered that the religions that worship God are not the true religions. He observed that almost religions nowadays are sort of religion of God except the religion of the Buddha, only the religion of the Buddha does not the religion of God. In The Buddha and the Future of His Religion, Dr. Ambedkar clearly distinguished the differences between the Buddha and other religious founders in various dimensions. One of them is that:

“The first point, which marks off the Buddha from the rest is his self-abnegation. All throughout the Bible, Jesus insists that he is the son of God and that those who wish to enter the kingdom of God will fail if they do not recognize his as the son of God. Mohammad went a step further. Like Jesus he claimed that he was the messenger of God on earth. But he further insisted that he was the last messenger. On that footing, he declared that those who wanted salvation must not only accept that he was a messenger of the God but also accept that he was the last messenger. Krishna went a step beyond both Jesus and Mohammad. He refused to be satisfied with merely being a son of God or being a messenger of God; he was not content even with being the last messenger of God. He was not even satisfied with calling him a God. He claimed that he was Paramesvara, or as his followers describes him Devadhideva, God of Gods. The Buddha never arrogated himself any such status. He was born a son of man and was content to remain a common man and preached his gospel as a common man. He never claimed any supernatural origin or supernatural power nor did he perform miracles to prove his supernatural powers. The Buddha made a clear distinction between a Margadatta (Giver of the Way) and a Moksadata (Giver of Salvation). Jesus,
Mohammad and Krishna claimed for themselves the role of *Moksadata*, the Buddha was satisfied with playing the role of a *Margadata*.⁶³

Ambedkar viewed that in the religion of God, because their followers deal with nothing but belief in God, worship of God, soul, curing of erring souls, propitiating God by prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices, so that morality is not effective.⁶⁴ Otherwise, morality is very effective in Buddhism. In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, he wrote that, “Morality in Dhamma (of Buddhism) arises from the direct necessity for man to love men. 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 love man.”⁶⁵

Besides the criterion of a religion without God, Buddhism satisfies other four criterions as having mentioned. Ambedkar after enunciating the criterions of a true religion, said that Buddhism is a sort of such true religion. In *The Buddha and the Future of His Religion*, he wrote that:

“It may be that that one of the existing religions satisfies one of these tests, some two. Is there any religion which satisfies all the tests? So far I know the only religion which fulfilled these requirements is Buddhism. In other words, Buddhism is the only religion, which the world can have. If the new world – which be it realized is very different from the old – must have a religion – and the new world needs a religion far more than the old world did – then it can only be the religion of the Buddha.”⁶⁶

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⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 322-3.
IV.2.2. There is no Caste System in Buddhism

Swami Vivekananda told that religion is a unifying power that unites man with man. If it distinguishes and separates a man from others, separating him from his fellow beings, cannot be religion. Unfortunately, Hinduism discriminates its followers with the system of castes. This created inequality in Hindu society and the low castes and the untouchables were victims. During his life, Ambedkar had struggle for the untouchables from the fundamental benefits to human right. Finally, he enlightened that the caste system cannot be repaired and the untouchability cannot be removed. Therefore, conversion to another religion is the only way, and he and his people converted to Buddhism, which is considered as a casteless religion.

Ambedkar embraced Buddhism because he considered Buddhism as a casteless religion. He observed that, “the division of the society into four Varṇas (castes) created great inequality.” He considered Buddhism opposed inequality, authority, and division of society into various classes which Brahmanism had introduced in India. The ethic of morality, equality and universal brotherhood is an eternal truth taught by the Buddha.” Really, the Buddha never discriminated either castes or gender. He treated them equally. In the Buddhist Order, people see the presence of all sorts of classes, men and women. Ambedkar recognized this quality in Buddhism. He observed that Buddhism is the only religion to stress the equality of all living things. He said:

69 Ibid., pp. 224-5.
71 The Buddha compared his Sangha with the great ocean which tolerates all rivers: Just as, monks, whatever great rivers there are namely, the Ganga, Yamuna, Aciravati, Sarabhu, Mahi. Yet, when reaching the mighty ocean, they abandon their former names and lineage, and hence firth go
“The Buddha apposed it (inequality) at root and branch. He was the strongest opponent of caste and the staunchest upholder of equality. There is no argument in favor of caste that he did not refute.\textsuperscript{72} The Buddha stood for equality. He was the greatest opponent of Chaturvarṇa. He not only preached against it, fought against it but did everything to uproot it. According to Hinduism, neither a Shudra nor a woman could become a teacher of religion nor could they take Sanyasa and reach God. The Buddha, on the other hand, admitted Shudras to the Bhikkhu Sangha. He also admitted women to become Bhikkhunis. Why did he do? Few people seem to realize the importance of this step. The answer is that the Buddha wanted to take concrete steps to destroy the gospel of inequality.”\textsuperscript{73}

It is properly that there is existence of other qualities of Buddhism, but it is the casteless characteristic attracted to Ambedkar the most and convinced him to embrace. D.K. Baisantry observed that though the morality of Buddhism influenced Dr. Ambedkar’s judgment, it is this religion’s stand for casteless and classless society convinced him to come to embrace it.\textsuperscript{74}

Ultimately, because the untouchables had subjected to numerous sufferings under the caste system for many centuries, therefore, what they needed was to escape from that yoke. Of the existing religions, only Buddhism satisfied their need of a casteless religion. That is the reason Ambedkar did not embrace other religions but Buddhism.

\textsuperscript{73} Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Buddha and the Future of His Religion, in D. C. Ahir (ed.), a Panorama of Indian Buddhism, Delhi, India: Sri Satguru Publications, a Division of Indian Books Centre, 1995, p. 33.
IV.2.3. *Buddhism satisfies the Criterions of a True Religion*

After enunciating the criterions of a true religion, Ambedkar further considered that Buddhism is a sort of such true religion. In *The Buddha and the Future of His Religion*, he wrote that:

“It may be that that one of the existing religions satisfies one of these tests, some two. Is there any religion which satisfies all the tests? So far I know the only religion which fulfilled these requirements is Buddhism. In other words, Buddhism is the only religion, which the world can have. If the new world – which be it realized is very different from the old – must have a religion – and the new world needs a religion far more than the old world did – then it can only be the religion of the Buddha.”

Because of above reasons, Ambedkar considered Buddhism as the true religion. Therefore, he converted to no other religions but Buddhism.

Conversion is never an easy thing. One never converts if he does not face to big trouble in his present faith. This is also true with the case of Ambedkar. Ambedkar managed to improve the condition of the untouchables within the fold of Hinduism. He had hoped the Hindu reformers could see into the matter and bring reforms to the low rank people of society. For example, when a group of Untouchables from a village near Nasik wanted to embrace Islam in 1930, Ambedkar advised them to wait for some time more in order to see whether the caste Hindus actuated what they had promised to them i.e. remove untouchability. However, he was disappointed time to time. All his efforts and struggle had been confronted with difficulty and objection. Therefore, he declared to leave Hinduism and convert to Buddhism finally.

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Ambedkar contacted with Buddhism as early as he was 16 years old when he passed his Matriculation Examination. *The life of Gautama Buddha* really attracted him and inspired him to study Buddhism. “This is the origin of my interest in the Buddha and his Dharma,”77 once he said. In *My Personal Philosophy*, Ambedkar confirmed that his social philosophy liberty, equality and fraternity were not borrowed from the French Revolution but were derived from the teachings of the Buddha his Master.78

Ambedkar’s knowledge of Buddhism in particular was expressed in his writings and speeches. For example, at the Conference in Mahad in 1927, he spoke that “We can attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help and regain our self-respect.”79 His statement remind us the statement of the Buddha in *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutta*: “You should live as islands unto yourself, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge…80 strive on untiringly.”81

As having mentioned, Ambedkar had declared of conversion at the Yeola Conference in 1935 as a consequence of his disappointment in the matter of reform Hinduism. It is properly that, when he was declaring of Conversion, he thought of the religion of the Buddha. We venture to say that because only a year after his declaration of conversion, he quoted the teachings of the Buddha at the Mahad Conference in 1936. He told his people that:

“While thinking over what message I should give you on this occasion, I recollected the message given by the Lord Buddha… I also take your leave in the words of the Buddha. Be your own lamps. Take refuge in reason. Do not listen to the advice of others. Be truthful. Take refuge in truth. Never

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80 *Dīgha Nikāya* II, “Mahāparinibbāna Sutta” (The Buddha’s Last days), translated by Maurice Walshe, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995, p. 245
81 Ibid., p. 270.
surrender to anybody! If you keep in mind this message of the Lord Buddha at this juncture, I am sure your decision will not be wrong.”

It seemed that Ambedkar turn his direction to social, economic and political career sometime after his declaration of conversion. In fact, he continued to study and research on religions and Buddhism. The more he studies about Buddhism, the more he loved the Buddha’s personality and Teachings. Ambedkar felt the Buddha “just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, the Buddha cultivated a boundless heart towards all beings. And his thoughts of love pervaded the whole world, above, below, and across, without any obstruction, without any enmity.” In 1937, Ambedkar named his library Rājagṛiha. Rājagṛiha is a famous name for the Buddhists. It was the place where the Buddha delivered many of his sermons. And as we have mentioned above, his two colleges bore Buddhist names, the Siddharth College and Milind College. The event Ambedkar named his own library and colleges the Buddhist names showed that he was interested in Buddhism so much.

It may be that by the 1940s, Ambedkar started seriously thinking of religious conversion and Buddhism seems to be an inevitable choice for Indian Dalits. We say so because since then he enunciated and developed the theory that the untouchables were descendants of Buddhists in the past. In his work, *The Untouchables* that first published in 1948. In this book, Ambedkar wrote as follows:

“If we accept that the Broken Men were the followers of Buddhism and did not care to return to Brāhmiṇism when it became triumphant over Buddhism as easily as other did, we have an explanation for both the questions. It explains why the Untouchables regard the Brahmins as

inauspicious does not employ them as their priest and do not even allow them to enter into their quarters. It also explains why the Broken Men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism and the Brahmin imposed 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 Buddhist.85

Why Ambedkar enunciated this theory? It is sure that was a preparatory step for the conversion to Buddhism in the future. We remember that the conversion declaration of Ambedkar had confronted to various reactions included his people. If they believe that they had been Buddhists, the matter of conversion becomes easy and acceptable to either the Hindus or Dalits. With this theory, Ambedkar wanted to legalize the conversion that the Untouchables actually did not convert but return to the religion of their ancestors. Zelliot observed that, Ambedkar exploited the myth untouchables are the descendants of the ancient Buddhists in the past in order to make the conversion less prone to the risk of a split and his basic philosophy would not have been too foreign to his followers.86

As the First Law Minister and chairperson of the drafting Committee for a new Indian Constitution, When India became Independent in 1947, Ambedkar suggested for a Buddhist Wheel of Dhamma (Asoka Chakra) on the Indian National Flag and the Lions from an Asokan Pillars at Sarnath as the National Emblem of India.87 This showed that his preference for Buddhism was obvious.

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In 1948, Ambedkar reprinted the Prof. P. Lakshmi Narasu’s *The Essence of Buddhism*, which was considered by him as the best book on Buddhism that had appeared till then.\(^{88}\) He wanted to introduce the work to his people to prepare and equip them to be future Buddhists. He also revealed that he was himself writing a book on Buddhism which deals with the matter better.\(^{89}\) D. C. Ahir observed that, by 1948, it had become abundantly clear that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had made up his mind to embrace Buddhism.\(^{90}\)

In the year 1950, Ambedkar had participated in many Buddhist activities. He celebrated in New Delhi where he delivered a speech that neither Rama nor Krishna could be compared to the Buddha.\(^{91}\) He told the weekly newspaper *Janata* that he “was on the way to embrace Buddhism.”\(^{92}\) A day later, he told the *Times of India* in Bombay that he had been a disciple of the Buddha for many years though it may not be entirely correct to describe him as a Buddhist.\(^{93}\)

From 25 of May to 6 of June in 1950, Ambedkar joined in the first conference of the *World Fellowship of Buddhists* (WFB) in Kandy, Sri Lanka. He told that he came there to observe what extent the religion of Buddha is living, and to find out whether the Bhikkhu Sangha is engaged or not in serving and making the laity perfect in the way the Buddha wished it to be. He also contributed to the Conference *The Rise and the Fall of Buddhism in India*, of which he said that, “Buddhism in its material form had disappeared... But as a spiritual force it still exists.”\(^{94}\)

\(^{89}\) D. C. Ahir, *The Legacy of Ambedkar*, op. cit., p. 149.
\(^{91}\) D. C. Ahir, *The Legacy of Ambedkar*, op. cit., p. 70.
\(^{93}\) Ibid., p. 71.
In 1951, Ambedkar patronized the *Buddha Jayanti* with great zeal and enthusiasm. Speaking at the meeting, Ambedkar said that Buddhism is not only good for the Untouchables but also for Indians as the whole. He said that Buddhism can cure numerous social and economic ills of India. He also firmly declared that: “If the rest of Hindu society does not co-operate, then we, the members of Scheduled Castes, will go on our own and try once again to bring back Buddhism to its former glory and prestige in this country.”

In 1952, Ambedkar told the Ven. Sangharakshita that he and his people would like to convert to Buddhism. He asked Sangharakshita how to officially become a Buddhist. Sangharakshita explained that he must take refuge in the Three Jewels and observe the Five Precepts. Ambedkar then requited Sangharakshita to write to him all the procedure of the conversion ceremony and explain to his people the meaning of conversion.

In 1954, Ambedkar participated in the *Buddha Jayanti* and the Third Conference the *World Fellowship of Buddhist* in Burma where he confessed before the Buddhist monks and scholars that his own philosophy of life of Liberty, equality and fraternity was greatly influenced by Buddhist philosophy and the Buddha his Master. He expressed his regret and sadness toward the decline of Buddhism in India. He also firmly decided that he would embrace Buddhism in 1956 on the occasion of the 2500th year anniversary of the Buddha.

After coming back from Burma, Ambedkar proceeded many Buddhist works. He registered the Indian Buddhist Society and also installed an image of the Buddha in a temple at Dehu Road, Poona. He had written Buddhist books like *Revolution and counter revolution in India, Buddha and Karl Marx* to explain the tenets of Buddhism. He published a book entitled *Bauddha Pooya*.

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97 M. S. Shahare, op. Cit., p. 156.
Path (a Manual of Buddhist Worship) in Pali and Marathi for his followers’ benefit and guidance. He told the gathering of 20,000 men and women that he was writing a book on Buddhism explaining its tenets in simple language to common people. A year may be needed to complete the book and when it completed he would embrace Buddhism.  

In May 1956, Ambedkar had a talk Why I like Buddhism with the British Broadcasting Corporation, London. On the day of the 2500th the Buddha Jayanti Celebration in May 24, 1956, Ambedkar addressed a meeting in Nare Park, Bombay where he declared that he would embrace Buddhism in October. And with the historic Conversion Ceremony on October 14, 1956, Ambedkar finished the long journey of his searching of religion. He finally embraced Buddhism.

So far, we have examined some marks of the process of which Ambedkar came to Buddhism. That was a continuous process from the first contact, study comparative religion and finally becoming a Buddhist. Talking about the journey of Ambedkar to Buddhism, Raj Kumar commented that:

“There is a strong continuity between Ambedkar earlier views of religion as expressed in ‘Away from the Hindus’ and his interpretation of Buddhism as set forth almost twenty years later in ‘The Buddha and His Dhamma’. In fact, the Buddha’s Dhamma, as Ambedkar came to define it, is so consistent with the viewpoint articulated in the 1930s that his eventual choice of Buddhism in the 1950s seems to have been not merely appropriate but inevitable.”

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98 Ibid., p. 482.
100 Raj Kumar, op. cit., p. 45.
One of the important contributions of Ambedkar to Buddhism is make Indian Buddhism became a living Buddhism and its population increased significantly.

Before the advent of Ambedkar, of course, there had been several personalities and movements called and acted for the revival of Indian Buddhism, such as the excavation of Cunningham, Maha Bodhi Society of Anagarika Dhammapala, or the Buddhist movements in the South, and so on. These works, however, mainly limited to academic areas but not absorbed into masses. Chinese Zen Master Hue Neng said that, “If there were no sentient beings, there would be no Dhamma.” It means that Dhamma must be applied and practiced by people. A religion cannot be called an actual religion if it does not satisfy with both aspects of theory and practice. If not so, that is not a living religion but a dead religion preserved in museum. Though it is very nice, it is useless. The event Ambedkar embraced Buddhism along with his many lakhs of messes is a meaningful phenomenon. It made Buddhism became a religion of masses on the one hand, and increased the population for this religion on the other hand.

From the year 1891, the mark Anagarika Dhammapala called for revival of Indian Buddhism, to 1951, the Buddhist population in India slowly increased from 50,000 to 180,823. During 60 years, the Buddhist population increased 130,823 only. Yet, within ten years between 1951 and 1961, especially after the Nagpur Conversion Ceremony 1956 onwards, the Buddhist population unprecedentedly increased 3,069,404 from 180,823 to 3,250,227. Of which, the Buddhist population in Maharashtra Dr. Ambedkar’s homeland increased most significantly from 2,487 to 278,951 in the same period of above ten years.

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102. D. C. Ahir, The Legacy of Dr. Ambedkar, op. cit., p. 239.
This shows that the impact of Dr. Ambedkar is the most champion in India in general and in Maharashtra in particular.

The followers of Buddhism in India nowadays can be divided into four groups. 1) The Buddhists by tradition. 2) The Buddhists of ethnic over-laps such as Tibetans, Asians, Europeans who live in India but they are not Indian residents. 3) The Buddhists inspired by Maha Bodhi Society. 4) And the last ones are those who are the followers of Dr. Ambedkar. Of these four groups, the followers of Ambedkar is the most dominant which occupy about 90 per cent of total Indian Buddhist population and focus in Maharashtra Ambedkar homeland. Talking to the champion role of Dr. Ambedkar in the revival of Buddhism in India, D. C. Ahir opined that: “As in North India, so also in South India, the Buddhist revival movement began at the beginning of 20th century but its progress has been rather slow. However, Buddhism is now showing signs of vigor and vitality… Buddhist population has significantly increased in the wave of the mass movement launched by Dr. Ambedkar in 1956.”

IV.3. The Role of Ambedkar in Revival of Buddhism in India

Ambedkar was really a Buddhist. Once he said that he had been interested in the religion of Lord Buddha as early as his childhood. Moreover, Dr. Ambedkar many times declared that he would like to propagate Buddha-Dhamma not only for the Untouchables but also for other Indians. For example, when he spoke at the Japanese Buddha temple in Worli, Bombay on September 29, 1950, he said that he was “going to devote the rest of my life to the revival and spread of Buddhism in India. In fact, this will be the mission during the last

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104 D. C. Ahir, *The Legacy of Dr. Ambedkar*, op. cit., p. 239.
ashram of my life.” Now, we will examine Ambedkar’s role in revival of Buddhism in India through his contributions of his time and his influences today.

Ambedkar not only acted and converted to Buddhism but also called for the revival of Buddhism in India. Under the influence of Ambedkar, Buddhism in India really opened a new era, era of Ambedkar as the saying of C. D. Ahir, “The mass conversion ceremony at Nagpur on 14 October 1956 was doubtless an epoch-making event; it not only changed Dr. Ambedkar’s destiny, but changed the course of history of Buddhism in India as well. On this day, the Buddhist revival movement in India entered into an era of intense activity which can rightly be called ‘Ambedkar Era of Indian Buddhism.’”

Under the inspiration of Ambedkar’s conversion and calling, several personalities and characteristics have been willing to devote their lives to Dr. Ambedkar’s career and mission. Shri L. R. Balley made a vow that he would service for society and Dr. Ambedkar’s mission until the last of his blood is sacrificed.

All those who were low castes either saints or common people in States like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar… deeply attached to Dr. Ambedkar and his movement and continued to study Buddha-Dhamma after his sudden death. The influence of Ambedkar on Indian Buddhism was expressed on two dimensions: the related activities and the following conversions.

IV.3.1. Dr. Ambedkar and Conversion Issues in Maharashtra

The conversion of Dr. Ambedkar and his followers was a great historic event. His sudden death was not without negative affection to his followers but

110 Ibid, p. 44.
inspiring them to continue to convert to Buddhism as a way to fulfill their leader’s wish. Venerable Sangharakshita who had met Dr. Ambedkar three times and also presented at the funeral of Dr. Ambedkar, always repeated in his lectures he delivered the new Buddhists the message that “Ambedkar was not dead and his work – especially the work of conversion – must continue.”

Venerable Sangharakshita himself initiated about 30,000 people into Buddhism just four days after Dr. Ambedkar’s nirvana.

It seems that every year on October 14, the Dalits and enlightened ones organize conversion ceremonies for those who wish to embrace Buddhism. Accordingly, many conversion ceremonies have been held every year with many lacks of people participated. The year 2006 is the 50th anniversary of Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism, the conversion seemed to occur more loudly in over India. For example, in Gulbarga, hundreds of people converted from Hinduism to Buddhism on October 14, 2006. In Nagpur, hundreds of Dalits embrace Buddhism. They converted to Buddhism to escape their low-caste status because they did not believe in the promises of priests for the next life any more. Other areas like Nagpur, Orissa, Karnataka and Gujarat states also witnessed mass conversions to Buddhism.

In the conversion ceremony Dr. Ambedkar composed twenty two oaths. The content of these twenty oaths are as follows:

1. I shall not consider Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as God nor shall I worship them.
2. I shall not consider Ram and Krishna as God nor shall I worship them.

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114 50 Years after Ambedkar’s Conversion, http://sepiamutiny.com/blog/2006/10/14/fifty_years_ago/ (accessed on November 24, 2014).
3. I shall not believe in Gouri-Ganesh and other Gods and goddesses of Hindu Religion nor shall I worship them.
4. I don't have faith incarnation of God.
5. I believe that, Buddha is incarnation of Vishnu, is a false and malicious propaganda.
6. I shall not perform shraddha, nor shall I give pind-dan.
7. I shall not practice anything which is against and different from Buddha's Dhamma.
8. I will not perform any rituals to be performed by Brahmins.
9. I believe that all human beings are equal.
10. I shall make efforts to establish equality.
11. I shall follow the Eightfold path as told by the Buddha.
12. I shall practice ten Paramitas as told by the Buddha.
13. I shall have compassion and living kindness for all living beings and protect them.
15. I shall not tell lies.
16. I shall not commit any sexual misconduct.
17. I shall not consume liquor/intoxicants.
18. I shall lead a life based on Buddhist Principle of wisdom, Precepts, and compassion.
19. I denounce Hindu religion which is Harmful for my development as a human being and which has treated human being unequal lowly and I accept Buddha's Dhamma.
20. I am convinced that Buddha's Dhamma is Saddhamma.
21. I believe that I am taking new birth.
22. I commit that henceforth I shall act as per Buddha's principles and teachings.
These twenty-two oaths had been given to the new converts along with the Triple Gems and the Five Concepts in the conversion ceremony as a supplement to ensure the converts to be the true Buddhists. Of these 22 oaths, the fourth (I don't have faith incarnation of God) and fifth one (I believe that, Buddha is incarnation of Vishnu, is a false and malicious propaganda) is very important. It is because, for many centuries, Indian people had/have thought that the Buddha is the ninth incarnation of the god Vishnu. This theory had made the Buddha the Hindu god and Buddhism a branch of Hinduism. By declaring the oaths four and five, Ambedkar wanted to cut off this ambiguous interpretation and misunderstanding to make the new Buddhists become the complete Buddhists without clinging to their old faith of Hindu religion.

Despite the sudden death of Dr. Ambedkar which occurred so shortly after his conversion, the mass conversions to Buddhism have continued. The number of conversion ceremonies were countless. It has been so because, according to the researcher Ahir, “the work which Dr. Ambedkar had done during his life time, and thereby prepared a huge mass of humanity for receiving with open aims the gospel of the Buddha.”

Ambedkar not only converted to Buddhism but also wished to make India a Buddhist country. In order to fulfill their leader’s wish and mission, the Ambedkarites not become the Buddhists but also work for the spread of Buddhism. Therefore, besides conversion to become Buddhists, they further organized Seminars and ceremonies, erected Buddhist temples, observed religious mode of living, learnt the Pali language, read Buddhist scriptures, and rewrite the episodes in history as a way to learn and spread Buddhism.

The events were usually held in special days and years that relate to Ambedkar. In order to commemorate twelve years Ambedkar converted to

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Buddhism, there have many events had been held in the year 1968. The purpose of these vents was to discuss the ways and means to give more promotion to the revival movement of Indian Buddhism that Ambedkar had heartedly pursued. The first conference was held in 23 and 24 of October under the auspices of the Bhartiya Bauddha Maha Sangha. Prof. R. D. Bhandare presided over the conference and the Prime Minister of India, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, inaugurated the conference. The second conference was held in November under the egis of the Buddhist Society of India. Bhayyasahab Y. B. Ambedkar, son of Dr. Ambedkar presided over the conference and His Holiness the Dalai Lama inaugurated the conference. Both of the conferences had been attended by scholars and Buddhist leaders like Ven. Kushak Bakula, the Head Lama of Ladakh etc. On this occasion, the Memorial at the Chaitya Bhoomi where the dead body of Dr. Ambedkar had been cremated in 1956 was unveiled by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, V. P. Naik.116

On the occasion of the dead anniversary of Ambedkar, a convention of All Indian Buddhist Dhamma was organized in Nagpur from 6 to 10 of December in 1975. There were around 3000 delegates from all over the country took part in the Conference. At the Conference, the attendants recited the Five Precepts, chanted the Sutras, and did memorial service to Ambedkar. One of the programs of the Conference was the colorful procession of which the image of the Lord Buddha and the casket of the remains of Ambedkar was being parading from the main street of Nagpur then returned to the venue of the Convention at Ambedkar Park. The last day of the Convention was an open session where several resolutions were adopted.117

There were many Seminars which were organized to review, acknowledge and extol the contributions of Dr. Ambedkar to India and Buddhism. For example, on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar's

birthday 1891-1991, besides other activities, An International workshop on “Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Change” was organized in Sarnath. The Workshop with its dozens of important papers was published in 1994 with the same title.  

Since 1956, many movements and organizations have been established to promote Buddhism in India. Some of these are the Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha (TBM), Bahujan Hitay, Jambudvipa Trust and Manuski Project. These movements and organizations were established to spread Buddhism and especially to support Dalit Buddhists. For example, the Manuski (It is Marathi word, means humanity or humanness) has its missions are: 1) To transcend caste barriers through Social Development Programs; 2) To struggle against social discrimination through legal and constitutional ways; 3) To develop Dalit women leadership; 4) To sustain the social projects and building solidarity among the individuals and organizations.  These activities, no doubt, have been performed according to Ambedkar’s wish and inspiration.

IV.3.2. Ambedkar’s Social Reinterpretation of Buddhism

It is true that Buddhism is a religion and the Teachings of the Buddha is to guide people to release from their defilements of attain Nibbana. However, besides this central doctrine, did the Buddha teach other else? According to Ambedkar, the Buddha is not only the religious teacher but also the social activist. The Buddha gave a social message and discussed all social fields such as justice, love, liberty, equality, fraternity.

In The Buddha and the Future of His Religion, Ambedkar wrote as follows:

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118 Ibid., pp. 40-41.
“This is because most of those who have written about the Buddha have propagated the idea that the only thing the Buddha taught was Ahimsa. This is a great mistake. It is true the Buddha taught Ahimsa. I do not want to minimize its importance. For it is a great doctrine. The world cannot be saved unless it follows it. What I wish to emphasize is that the Buddha taught many other things besides Ahimsa. He taught as part of his religion, social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. He taught equality, equality not between man and man only but between man and woman. It would be difficult to find a religious teacher compares with the Buddha whose teachings embrace almost so many aspects of the social life of the people and whose doctrines are so modern and whose main concern was to give salvation to man in his life on earth and not to promise to him in heaven after he is dead”.

Ambedkar’s social view focuses on four questions that he raised in the preface of his work *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, as follows:

1) According to traditional explanation, the Buddha denounced the world to search the path of enlightenment and emancipation after he witnessed the scenes of human’s decay, diseases, and death. However, Ambedkar refused that theory. Instead, he considered that the Buddha denounced the world because he wanted to avoid the coming war between Shakya and Koliya. The Buddha renounced that world in order to find a solution for the problem of social conflict.

2) The Four Noble Truths is the basic doctrine in Buddhism. It is said to be preached by the Buddha right after he attained the great enlightenment.


\[123\] Munekar, op. cit., pp. 57-8.

\[124\] The Four Noble Truths consist of the truth of sufferings, the truth of the causes of sufferings, the truth of the end of sufferings and the truth of the path leading to the end of sufferings.
However, Ambedkar considered that the Buddha did not deliver the doctrine of The Four Noble Truth. It is because Ambedkar viewed that “if life is sorrow, death is sorrow and rebirth is sorrow, then there is an end of everything. Neither religion nor philosophy can help a man to achieve happiness in the world. If there is no escape from sorrow, then what can religion do, what can the Buddha do to relieve man from such sorrow which is ever there in birth itself?” Ambedkar blamed that the Buddha never gave such pessimistic doctrine but it is the additions by the later monks.

Ambedkar viewed that human’s sufferings are not derived from natural phenomena like birth or death; but they derived from social matters like poverty and inequality created by human beings themselves. He said that:

“Poverty gives rise to sorrow…the meaning of sorrow and suffering from social and economic causes…it is clear that the Buddha was very much aware that poverty was a cause of sorrow…is poverty a woeful thing for a worldly wanton?… When a man is poor, needy, in straits, he gets into debt…when he gets into debt, he borrows…when the bill falls due, he pays not and they press him…when pressed, he pays not and they beset him…when beset, he pays not and they bind him…Thus,…poverty, debt, borrowing, being pressed, beset and bound are all woes for the worldly wanton…Woeful in the world is poverty and debt…Thus the Buddha's conception of Dukkha is material. Man’s misery is the result of man’s inequality to man.”

3) Kamma and Rebirth is also the basic doctrine in Buddhism. However, Ambedkar also refused this theory. He argued that the Buddha denied the existence of soul, how could he advocate Kamma and rebirth? On the case the

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127 Ibid., pp. 510-11.
128 Ibid., p. 284.
Buddha advocate kamma and rebirth, “did he use them in different sense than the sense in which they were used by the Brahmins of this day?” Kamma and rebirth used by the Brahmins means the destiny of castes. One is born in a certain caste, he will be the man of that caste all life despise his bad or good conduct. In fact, Kamma in Buddhism is very different from in Brahmanism. In Buddhism, though man has to subject to the fruits that he did in his pass actions, he can improve the condition by the present attempt. In other words, there are no castes in Buddhism. Castes can be changed by one’s actions in the present. Ambedkar of course did not like the theory of kamma used by the Brahmins. I do not think that Ambedkar did not understand the meaning of Kamma in Buddhism properly, but he was afraid that the theory of Kamma would be an excuse for the high caste Hindus to continue to express their superior position towards the depressed classes. In order to avoid these negative consequences, Ambedkar denied this theory. It may also that he wanted to emphasize the efforts in the present. Kamma or not Kamma is not important. The importance is the actions of people and the circumstance of society in the present.

4) About the Bhikkhus, Ambedkar considered that the Buddha created Buddhist Sangha not because he wanted to create the perfect men but to serve people and beings better. Ambedkar viewed that a perfect man is actually a selfish man. If Bhikkhus are the perfect men, they cannot serve others effectively on the one hand, on the other hand, they are of no use to the propagation of Buddhism. Ambedkar viewed that Buddhism is a system of rational and moral action and embraced the social and political directions. The Bhikkhus had a responsibility to spread these useful ideas and should not turn their backs on

130 Ibid.
society. He complained that a number of Buddhist monks became addicted to living luxurious and restful life. He suggested that these monks should move place to place to propagate Buddha Dhamma.

Thus, on the basic doctrines of Buddhism, Ambedkar exploited the social aspects of these doctrines. According to him, reinterpretation of the Buddha’s Teachings and make them suitable with the contemporary circumstance is necessary. It is not make a thread for Buddhism but make Buddhism become more useful. Ambedkar understood this clearly. In the *Buddha and the Future of His Religion*, he wrote that:

“The Buddha claimed no such infallibility for what he taught. In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta he told Ananda that his religion was bases on reason and experience and that his followers should not accept his Teachings as correct and binding merely because they emanated from him. Being based on reason and experience, they were free to modify or even to abandon any of his teachings if it was found that at a given time and in given circumstances they did not apply. He wished his religion not to be encumbered with the dead wood of the past. He wanted that it should remain evergreen and serviceable at all times. That is why he gave liberty to his followers to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required.”

Though Ambedkar’s social view and reinterpretation of Buddhism faced to a number of criticisms, majority of scholars and researchers agreed with

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134 Those who criticized him argued that the Dhamma preached by Dr. Ambedkar was so radical that it no longer reflected basic Buddhist principles but Ambedkarism (L. Kenadi, *Revival of Buddhism in Modern India: The Role of B. R. Ambedkar and Dalai Lama XIV*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing
him. Macy considered the interpretation of Dr. Ambedkar acceptable as it represents a “new orientation, but not a distortion.”\textsuperscript{135} It is because, Kadam explain, “If Dhamma is not social, and is not for the welfare of the people, then it has no value for suffering humanity.”\textsuperscript{136} Similarly, D. C. Ahir also opined that, “even though the teachings of the Lord Buddha are ever true and everlasting, but still they need re-interpretation in each age, in accordance with the growing spiritual and social consciousness of humanity. This duty falls upon the Bodhisattvas who take birth mainly to give impetus to the propagation of the Dhamma. Dr. Ambedkar fulfilled this assignment also successfully…”\textsuperscript{137}

IV.3.3. Plans of Spread the Buddha-Dhamma

Ambedkar viewed that the Teachings of the Buddha are very wonderful; however, it is necessary to have steps to spread them effectively. And in the Buddha and the Future of His Religion, he suggested three steps.

- The first is to produce a Buddhist Bible.
- The second is to make changes in the organization, aims and objects of the Bhikkhu Sangha.
- The third is to set up a World Buddhist Mission.

For the first step, Ambedkar considered that the Buddhist doctrines are so vast and profound so that the common people cannot read and grasp what is the essence of Buddha-Dhamma. Therefore, a small Buddhist Bible is very important and necessary to introduce Buddha-Dhamma to the masses. He


viewed that the Buddhist Bible must be a reasonable one in manner and attractive one in content. Therefore, people can bring it with them anywhere to read at any time.

Ambedkar proposed that the Buddhist Bible should include (i) a brief life of the Buddha, (ii) the Chinese Dhammapada, (iii) some typical dialogues of the Buddha, and (iv) the Buddhist ceremonies relating to important events of man like birth, initiation, marriage and death. It is properly that the Buddha and His Dhamma composed by his own is a sort of such Bible. It may be that The Buddha and His Dhamma does not satisfy a number of readers, but it succeeds in the aspect of a bible as Dr. Ambedkar expected. The Buddha and His Dhamma becomes a source that people turn towards to understand Buddhism while his followers considered this book as "the best guide to be follow and practice."

For the second step, According to Ambedkar, the Buddha created the Bhikkhu Sangha with the purposes that 1) the Bhikkhus can live on the Buddhist ideal on the one hand, and 2) the Bhikkhu can give the laymen true and impartial guidance. However, Ambedkar complained that the Buddhist monks of the time were not closed to the messes. They did neither guide people nor serve them enthusiastically. Therefore, in order to spread Buddhism effectively, the Buddhist monks need to make changes in the organization, aims and objects. For example, they should perform the ceremonies for the laypersons relating to their circle of life and death. Ambedkar observed that Buddhism lacked a ceremony like the Baptism in Christianity. The Bhikkhu should perform this kind of ceremony for the lay persons as a way to tie them to Buddhism. It is said that, from 1955, He wrote to D. Valinshinha that he had prepared a formula of certain rites call "Dhamma Deeksha Ceremony" which everyone embracing Buddhism would be required to undergo; if not so, he
believed that the conversion of the laity was no conversion at all but was only a nominal thing.

For the third step, Ambedkar felt it was necessary to establish the world Buddhist Mission. “Without a Mission Buddhism can hardly spread,” Ambedkar said. He considered that the Buddhists' duty is not only to be the good Buddhists but also to spread Buddhism. The Bhikkhus are also the Missionaries who shoulder the Mission of spreading Buddhism. In order to spread Buddhism effectively, the missions must be highly educated. Therefore, Buddhism did not need to have so many Bhikkhus but it needed only a few Bhikkhus who were very learned men.

To sum up, by embracing Buddhism, Ambedkar not only helped his people to have a new destiny but also contributed to Buddhism significantly. In fact, he wished to devote his life to revive and spread Buddhism in over India. It properly his sudden death prevented him to establish his wish, but his activities and enthusiasm inspired others to continue his work. It can be said that, if the low castes achieve any sweet fruits and the Indian Buddhism spread widely nowadays, majority of those tribute to Ambedkar’s labor.

Talking about the revival of Buddhism in India, majority agreed the prominent role of Dr. Ambedkar. They said that:

“On the whole, revival of Buddhism in India which began towards the end of 19th century presented a picture of lots of activities nut near static growth till 1956 when Ambedkar and his fellow-Mahars became Buddhists in a public ceremony. Buddhism in India would have remained a speck in the ocean numerically, but for mass movements spearheaded by one of the greatest sons of India of all times – Dr. Bhimaji Rao Ramji
Ambedkar… If the works of others were likely “a sort of mild and pleasant breeze…,” the conversion of the king Asoka was the turning point of the rise and expansion of Buddhism…, the arrival of Anagarika Dhammapala from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was a turning point in this revival movement…, the advent of Dr. Ambedkar undoubtedly marked the beginning of a New era; an era of hope, prosperity and progress for Buddhism. He was certainly a hero of the contemporary Buddhist revival movement in India. Had he not initiated mass conversions on October 14, 1956, Buddhism would not have become so soon a living religion in the land of its birth. If today there is respect and reverence for the Buddhist values, and Buddhism is regarded as the broad highway to salvation by the teeming millions, the credit solely goes to Dr. Ambedkar…, the ultimate revival factor was Dr. Ambedkar himself.”

Ambedkar had a great contribution. If the work of excavation helped people to rediscover Buddhism after many centuries disappeared from India, if the work of Anagarika Dhammapala helped people to have a conception of revival of Buddhism in India, Ambedkar made Buddhism become a living religion of the masses, made the Buddhist population increased significantly.

139 Ibid., p. 198.
141 Sanjay Prakash Sharma (ed.), op. cit., p. 192.
143 Sanjay Prakash Sharma (ed.), op. cit., p. 192.