CHAPTER III

THE BUDDHISTS ETHNIC IDENTITY

PART I

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concentrates on the Buddhists' ways of maintaining their new identity.

The Mahars got a new framework for ethnic identity by embracing Buddhism. Patwardhan's (1973) study reported that 90% of the respondents from her sample declared themselves as Buddhists while only 10% considered themselves as Mahars. Interestingly, in the present study all the respondents (100%) have identified themselves as Buddhists. Gokhale's (1993) study maintains that the rejection of all Hindu traditions was the most important and outstanding feature of the self identification among Buddhists. In this context, Arun Sadhu (Nov. 1975) wrote in the Times of India: "They (the Buddhists) seem to have got rid of their age old inferiority complex. They have a fresh sense of identity and a newly acquired confidence. What is more, the youth among them have completely shed the superstitions that had cramped their existence, and have adopted a more rational view of life".

The Buddhists have made a great deal of effort to
learn and practise the customs, rites and rituals of Buddhism. Gokhale (1993) noted that the elite among them codified the new ideology through written words, new institutions, articles and books on Buddhism. The religious specialists were trained for guiding the people about Dhamma. They circulated pamphlets on the topic. The photograph of Dr. Ambedkar and Buddha can be found on the cover page of almost all the publications by the Buddhists.

In Dalit literature, conversion has become a favourite subject and amongst educated elite it has become a topic for discussion. Viharas, i.e. stupa (A Buddhistic monument) like buildings, were built for the meetings of the Buddhists. Deshmukh (1979), Bhaskar (1977) and Dethe (1980) stated that the Buddhist elite frame a new identity, interpret a new culture in the minds of masses, and spread the Buddhist ideology amongst the masses.

From the above discussion it is clear that conversion to Buddhism provided a new ethnic identity to the Mahars. They used different strategies to gain self respect, esteem and dignity, and established a new and separate identity apart from the Hindu ideology. The Buddhist ideology, which has egalitarian values, spread very fast amongst the Mahars. The Buddhist efforts at achieving a new culture is a deliberate process to systematically and studiously achieve and maintain a new cultural identity.
3.2. WAYS OF MAINTAINING A NEW ETHNIC IDENTITY:

In this section I have examined the ways by which the Buddhists community in Pune maintain their new identity. Data obtained from the survey was used to supplement qualitative observations. The following are the SEVEN important ways through which the Buddhists maintain their new ethnic identity.

1. Adherence to the Buddhist's cultural symbols.
   a) Building of the Viharas.
   b) Performing the Vandana.
   c) Meditation.

2. Propagate the Buddhist's ideals.
   a) Study of Buddhism and Dalit literature.
   b) Spreading the concept of Buddhism.

3. Refusal to worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses and to celebrate Hindu festivals.

4. Express the sense of 'we feeling', sense of the community and solidarity by
   a) Residential Segregation.
   b) Affectionate feeling, Friendship and contacts.
   c) Endogamy.

5. Participation in Ethnic Associations.

6. Celebration of the Buddhists sacred days.

7. Expression of devotion, loyalty and love to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.
3.2.1 Adherence to the Buddhist Cultural Symbols

3.2.1.1 Building of the Viharas:

In all the research localities; Dapodi, Bopadi and Yerwada, there are Buddhist 'Viharas'. These Viharas are very large and resemble the Buddhist Stupa. These are used for religious and socio-cultural purposes.

The Vihara is a gathering or meeting place for the Buddhists. The Buddhists built the Vihara to display a sense of separate identity and new faith. The word for a temple in Marathi 'Deul' and 'Mandir' are carefully and studiously avoided by Buddhists. In the old Buddhist tradition the term 'Vihara' means a meeting or gathering place. The Vihara is generally plain and rectangular in shape from the outside and looks like the Sanchi Stupa. The image of the Buddha is kept in the Vihara. The community gathers here for 'Vandana' (prayer) and lectures. The children are instructed and guided about the 'Dhamma' (Buddhist way of life) in the 'Vihara'. They adorn the vihara in various ways. Zelliot (1992) states that the Buddhists built the Vihara as a symbol of their new ethnic identity and newly accepted faith. Sumedha (1995) reported that "A number of Buddhist stupas, viharas and study centres are being built in several places. At the Deeksha Bhoomi ground in Nagpur a gigantic stupa has been built as a
part of a multi-crore project by a committee headed by former Legislative Council Chairperson R.S. Gavai.

i) The 'Vihara' at Dapodi-Bopodi area:

In the Dapodi, the Vihara is situated on the bank of the Pavana river. It covers an area of nearly half an acre. This land was donated by the Barathe family who belong to the Buddhist community of Dapodi. Christopher Charles Benninger, the Director of the 'Centre for Development Studies and Activities' was the architect of this Vihara and it was built by Dinshaw and Dinshaw Builders, Pune. This Vihara looks like a cave and has a combination of traditional and modern design. For building this Vihara, Rs. fifty six lakh were funded by some agencies, namely, Karuna Trust (UK.) and Aid for India - (UK), besides some local donations. The Vihara was managed by Trilokya Bouddha Maha Sangha Sahayak Gana. Their office is presently located in this Vihara. It is very large and has three wings. In the midst of the Vihara there is a shrine hall in which 500 people can be accommodated for socio-religious functions, and 300 people for meditation. A brass image of Buddha, bought at Sri Lanka, is installed in the shrine hall. This idol is kept on a lotus which is also made of brass. Mats and cushions are kept in this hall for meditation with a small stage for the guide.
the right wing are a meeting hall for Trust meetings and management meetings, a Library named 'Dr. Ambedkar Dyanmandir' and offices of Triratna Granthamala publishing and advertising. This office has its own publications namely Sinhanaad publication and Triratna Pustkalaya. The Bahujan Hitay Office has four cabins and one computer room. The left wing has the President's office and four guest rooms. Of these four rooms, two rooms are for the preceptor and founder and two rooms are reserved for Indian and foreign visitors. There is a training centre to train the religious specialists. Twenty eight people are admitted at a time for training in this centre. It consists of five rooms, kitchen and dining hall, and bathrooms and toilets. In this training centre, religious training is imparted to those who apply for it or those who want to become 'Dhammachari'. This is a one year course. During this course candidates get training about Buddha's teaching, meditation, and how these things can be applied in day to day life. These trainees also get a stipend of about Rs. 850. per month.

The weekly programmes of this vihara was documented during the field work and is as follows:

(i) Daily Vandana - Twice a day at 6.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m.
(ii) Mondays - Meditation class for beginners.
(iii) Tuesdays - Dhammachari (religious expert) meeting.
(iv) Wednesdays – Meeting for locals and dhammacharis and a class on different topics such as 'Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism', 'Bhagwan Buddha ani tyancha Dhamma', (Lord Buddha and his religion), 'Bodhisatvache saha parinitiya' 'Sapta Bodhange'.

(v) Thursdays – Class for 'Dhammamitra' (religious expert) by 'Dhammachari'.
(For attaining the 'Dhammamitra' designation they have to take a four year course).

(vi) Fridays – Class for masses.

(vii) Saturdays – Special class for women by 'Dhammacharini' (religious expert - female).

(viii) Sundays – It is a day for Shibir (camp).

ii) The 'Vihara' at Yerwada area:

There is a Vihara in Dr. Ambedkar Society in the Yerwada area. It is located on a vast open space within the locality. Considering the need for organizing all the religious and social functions, the members of this locality implemented the plan of building Vihara, named as 'Sanskritik Bhavan'. The members of this locality collected donations for a period of three years. The range of this donation being Rs. five to one thousand and above. Mr. Vasantdada Patil, the former Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra State had donated Rupees one lakh for this building from the State funds. In addition, local donation
and voluntary of labour of local people assisted the construction. Mr. Menzis, a friend of Dr. Ambedkar, was the architect of this vihara and Mr. Unwala, the Builder. It is very big, with one big hall having a capacity of accommodating 700-1000 people. In addition to this there are three rooms, of which one room is used for office purposes and the other two for guests. In the hall, there is a big stage on which the image of Buddha, photograph of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule are kept. The image of Buddha is made of brass and brought from Thailand. There is no priest or pujari in Vihara. The local community uses this vihara for various purposes.

The following activities have been observed during the fieldwork.


ii) Thursdays - morning and evening Vandana.

iii) Every full moon day - Vandana and religious lectures by elite or religiously trained persons.

iv) Everyday Balwadi and stitching classes run by the Ramamata Mahila Mandal.

v) On Buddha Purnima free food to visitors.

vi) This vihara is also used as a marriage hall.

vii) Samyak Pratishtan organises classes for Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) and Preliminary
coaching for 10th Std. examinations

In this way, this vihara is a centre for religious, social, educational and philosophical activities.

In the present investigation I have observed that almost all the respondents regularly visited the Vihara. The responses to the question, 'Do you visit the Vihara?' was positive. Almost all (97%) of the respondents said yes, they visit the Vihara regularly. Only a negligible percentage (3%) of the respondents said 'no', they do not visit the Vihara.

In order to study the effect of education, occupation, income and age of the respondents on the maintenance of their ethnic identity, these variables were cross-tabulated against the indicator visit to the Buddha Vihara. The results of the cross-tabulations shows that there is no association between the respondents occupational, educational, income level, age and their visit to the Buddha Vihara. The respondent's visit to the Buddha Vihara is not affected by their attainment of high educational, occupational, income status and age. (Please see Appendix II 3.1 to 3.4)

From the above, it is clear that almost all the Buddhists staying in the research localities, irrespective of their level of education, occupation, income, and age,
visit the Vihara. This enhances their separate ethnic identity and expresses their new faith. They maintain their new ethnic identity through adhering to Buddhists cultural symbols.

3.2.1.2 Performing the 'Vandana':-

The 'Vandana' is the Buddhist prayer. Zelliot (1992) stated that the 'vandana' is a word which is used instead of the word 'prarthana' or 'puja' which describes the Hindu prayer or rituals. In Molesworth's dictionary 'Vandana is defined as adoring, worshiping, rendering reverence or homage'.

Vandana generally consists of Trisharan and Panchsheel and other Pali Buddhist's textual material. The 'Trisharan' represents loyalty to 'Dhamma' and shows the acceptance of Buddhists oaths: "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in Dhamma, I take refuge in Sangha". The Panchsheel are the five ethical principles: "I will not take life, I will not steal, I will not lie, I will not drink and I will avoid wrongful sex". The Buddhists have taken an oath to live their life according to 'Panchsheel' and twenty two special Buddhist oaths given by Dr. Ambedkar. Gokhale (1993) said that these twenty two oaths consist of total acceptance of Buddhism and complete negation, rejection and renunciation of Hinduism.

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The first eight oaths deal with the total negation and rejection of the Hinduism. They are as follows:

1. "I shall not look upon Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh as Gods, nor shall I worship them.

2. I shall not look upon Rama and Krishna as Gods; nor shall I worship them.

3. I shall not consider any of the Gods and Goddesses of Hindu Pantheon as Gods, like Gauri-Ganapati; nor shall I worship them.

4. I have no faith in re-incarnation (in the belief that Gods take 'Avatar').

5. I do not believe that Buddha is a God incarnate, that He is an avatar of Vishnu. On the contrary I consider it as false propaganda.

6. I shall not perform shraddha, nor offer pinda dan.

7. I shall not adopt any practice which goes against the precepts of Buddha Dhamma.

8. No manner of rite, ceremony shall I get done at the hands of a Brahmin" (quoted by Patwardhan 1973).

These oaths are compulsory for the Buddhists. It is clear that these oaths are aimed at erasing Hinduism from the minds of Buddhists.

It is an ancient tradition in Buddhism to offer flowers, essence, and light a lamp in front of the image of
Buddha while performing vandana, each of which has its
significance. Here, a flower is a symbol of transitory, not
eternal life. Our body or all other material things are
like the flower. Today we could be fresh, smiling, cheerful
and fragrant, while tomorrow we would be dull and
spiritless with an offensive smell like the flower which
would wilt within a day or two. So we should abstain from
material things. The lamp is a symbol of Buddha's wisdom
and intelligence. Buddha erased the darkness of ignorance
by his wisdom, intelligence and understanding. Likewise, we
should also kindle our lamp of wisdom from Buddha's
enlightenment. The third, is essence i.e. Agarbatti which
is a symbol of pure and good natural life. Just as the wind
spreads the incense, so should the fragrance of our good
nature and pure life spread in all directions.

In the Buddhist settlements, where the research was
conducted, I have observed that almost all the respondents
do the 'Vandana'. When the questions, Do you perform the
'vandana'? and how often you do it? were posed to them,
almost all (98.5%) the respondent said that they do the
'vandana' in their homes. Some of them go to the 'Vihara'
for the 'Vandana. Very negligible percentage (1.5%) of the
respondents do not perform the 'Vandana'. Our findings
indicate that out of (98.5%) of the respondents, a few
(4.1%) are regular in performing the Vandana, while some
others (38.5%) do the vandana frequently, and more than half (55.9%) of the respondents perform the vandana sometimes.

I have observed the performance of vandana in the Buddhist family of Kamble at Yerwada. A typical performance of the Vandana involved the following rituals: At the time of performing the Vandana, Mr. Kamble kept Dr. Ambedkar’s photograph beside the image of the Buddha, then garlanded Dr. Ambedkar’s photograph and offered flowers to the image of the Buddha. Two lighted candles were placed at both sides of the Buddha’s idol lighted essence sticks (Agarbatti) were put in front of the image of Buddha and rangoli (design with white powder) were drawn. Then the whole family sat for performing the vandana. The vandana was done in a kneeling position by some while some of them sat cross legged. The Trisharan and Panchsheel were recited.

The frequency of performance of vandana is cross-tabulated against the level of education, occupation, income and age of the respondents. The results of cross-tabulations shows that attainment of the higher degree of education, occupation, income and age does not affect the maintenance of ethnic identity through performing the ‘Vandana’. (See Appendix II, Tables 3.5 to 3.8).
Performance of the Vandana not only contributes to a sense of belonging to Buddhism but also alienated them from Hinduism. Thus the practice of Vandana contributes to the maintenance of the new identity.

3.2.1.3 Meditation:

After performing the 'vandana' the Buddhists meditate as it is one of Buddha's teaching. Meditation is another indicator of maintaining the new identity. In the present investigation I observed that in Pune, Trilokya Buddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana, the Buddhists institution, trains the religious specialists called Dhammachari or Dhammatarini and Dhammamitra. These trained religious specialists are then sent all over Maharashtra to guide the masses. In the Vihara at Dapodi-Bopodi area, meditation classes are conducted for newcomers and beginners by Dhammachari. In the research locality of Yerawada, the Buddhists conducted the 'Bal Sanskar Varg' which teaches rituals of Buddhism, including meditation and Vandana, to children. Religious specialists are called from the Trilokya Bouddha Mahasangha for guiding and teaching children. On every Thursday, after performing the Vandana, men and women meditate for twenty minutes.

In Igatpuri a big meditation Centre is being run by Mr. Satyanarayan Goenka (Moon 1995). There is considerable...
interaction among Buddhists, and also others, on account of these meditation practices regularly.

Most of the respondents (95.2%) said that they meditate regularly after performing the vandana or in the mornings. Only very few (4.8%) respondents said that they do not meditate regularly.

Elite from the Buddhist community feel that they maintain their new identity by practising a new set of values. Dr. Guru says: "After conversion, they have established their new culture ie. Buddhist Culture, which is entirely different from the Hindu culture. Both the cultures are poles opposites. One is based on the structure of equality and the other on inequality. The Buddhist culture is the negation of Hindu culture. It is based on ideology of the positive. This ideology was given by Dr. Ambedkar".

The cross-tabulation of the meditation and level of education, occupation, income and age shows that there is no significant difference in the frequency of meditation among respondents belonging to different levels of education, occupation, income and age categories. However, there is a slight difference in the practice of meditation among those with higher income and higher occupational ranks as compared to the lower income and occupational
categories. This difference may be due to the nature of jobs that they hold leading to time constraints. (see Appendix II. Tables 3.9 to 3.12)

The data and the discussion thus far shows that the Buddhist religious practices play an important role in spreading the Buddhist culture among the masses. It helps them in acquiring a sense of unity among them. Elite as well as masses follow all the rites and rituals of the Buddhism. They adhere to the Buddhist cultural symbols and thus maintain their separate identity.

3.2.2 Propagate the Buddhist Ideals:

3.2.2.1 The Study of Buddhism and Dalit Literature

The study of Buddhism and Dalit literature is one of the ways of propagating the Buddhist ideals and maintaining ethnic identity.

After conversion to Buddhism, the Dalit writers from the Buddhists community, began writing and depicting the pains and experiences of their life as members of the lower caste. The Dalit literature includes biographies, novels, poetry, short stories, plays and literary criticism. Dalit literature is an extraordinary literary and social movement. It has created its own place and identity in Marathi literature. It has played an important role in
awakening the people, spreading the Buddhist ideology and Ambedkarite thoughts. Gokhale (1993: 298) says: "Dalit literature is a movement for cultural revival and for the elaboration of counter ideology... It has produced works which are recognised as having a specific genre.... Dalit literature occupies a particular place within modern Marathi literature and has come to receive attention as a subject of literary discussion and criticism by Marathi literatures as a whole". Jogdand (1991) stated that according to Buddhists, traditional Marathi literature is not meant for dalits. There is not a single thing that they can call their own. Marathi literature is dominated by upper and middle caste and class. So, they wanted to create something different from the traditional Marathi writers. Zelliot (1992) pointed out that the most interesting themes of the Buddhists writers are their own past, the references to Babasaheb Ambedkar and Buddhists tradition. Bagul (1971) noted that Dalit literature is the literature of the oppressed people reflecting their pain and joy. It gives us the message of love and equality. This is revolutionary literature. The main focus of Dalit literature is man. Phadke (1985) Bagul (1981) and Manohar (1978) stated that the central theme of Dalit writings emphasized on Dalits. They express harsh facts of their life through essays, short stories, dramas. Bhoite and Bhoite (1977) said that the Dalit literature is not only a literary movement but is a
social movement. It is one of the important protest movements which contributed to the liberation of the dalits.

In the present investigation, I have seen that almost all (95.2%) of the respondents possess books on Buddhism and Dalit literature. Only a few of the respondents (4.8%) did not possess books on Buddhism because of low economic and educational conditions. Almost all (95%) of the respondents have Dr. Ambedkar's book 'The Buddha and his Dhamma'. The Buddhists consider this book as the most important book and use it as a religious scripture. All the respondents study Buddhism by reading, listening and meditating on the book 'Buddha and his Dhamma', and attending the classes on Buddhism organised by the local community. I have observed that in the Yerawada area, the local community arranges lectures on Buddhism on every full moon day, during Dr. Ambedkar Jayanti, Ambedkar Purnatithi and Bouddha Pornima. They call experts from all over Maharashtra. In Dapodi-Bopodi area, there are special coaching classes on Buddhism for local people organised by Trilokya Buddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana. In all localities under study, sometimes after performing the 'Vandana', the Buddhists do read the book. In a group interview at Yerawada, the respondents mentioned that the study of Buddhism gives them sense of human respect, self worth and dignity. It has also give
them right to live as human beings. In addition the Dalit literature provided them inspiration and aspiration.

The responses to questions on their practice of reading religious books and Dalit literature were cross tabulated with variables such as education, occupation, income and age. The results of cross tabulations shows that almost all the respondents irrespective of their educational, occupational, income level and age do study and own books on Buddhism. Even illiterate respondents said that they possess books on Buddhism, because their children are educated. The illiterate, older respondents do study of Buddhism by listening to their family and attending the classes and lectures on Buddhism organised by the local community (see appendix II tables 3.13 to 3.16).

Thus the study of Buddhism and Dalit literature has played an important role in the process of maintaining the ethnic separatedness. It has brought change in ideologies, values, beliefs and attitudes of the people. This has helped towards in maintaining and strengthening of a new cultural identity among the Buddhists.

3.2.2.2 Spreading the Principles of Buddhism:

Spreading the principles of Buddhism is another way by which the Buddhists maintain their identity and inculcate
In the present study I have observed that most of the respondents try to propagate the principles of Buddhism. In order to find out different ways of propagation of Buddhism the question, "what efforts do you take to propagate the principles of Buddhism"? was asked to the respondents. They spread Buddhism in two important ways: (1) By asking relatives and friends to perform all rituals according to Buddhism, and (2) by visiting the native place and propagating the teaching of the Buddha amongst the villagers. Three-fourths (79.57%) of the respondents try to help their relatives and friends in acquiring the Buddhists customs and rituals by asking them to perform all the functions, ceremonies and programmes according to the Buddhist tradition.

The following life ceremonies have been observed during the field work:

(1) Garbha Mangal - This ceremony is performed in the 7th month of a pregnancy. They give blessing to the pregnant woman. Buddhists use the term Garbha Mangal instead of 'Dohal Jevan', which is the term used by Hindus. While celebrating 'Garbha Mangal', the Buddhists keep the photograph of Dr. Ambedkar and an image of Buddha. They garland the photograph of Dr. Ambedkar and worship Buddha.
and recite Trisharan and Panchsheel. The pregnant woman wears a green sari. After the Vandana, the pregnant woman is given a coconut and five fruits. This is called as "oti Bharan". They serve food to all guests.

(2) Naming Ceremony: - The Buddhists perform the 'Vandana' and then name the baby. In the research localities, they have started naming their children according to Buddhist tradition. Names such as Rathnabodhi, Buddhabhushan, Vaishali, Vishakha, Mudita, Sujata, Siddhartha, Gautam, Oshonik etc. have become rather common. They sing 'Palana' (cradle) songs of Dr. Ambedkar and Buddha instead of 'Ram and Krishna'.

(3) Birthday: - The Buddhists garland the photograph of Dr. Ambedkar, worship Buddha, recite prayers and distribute sweets.

(4) Marriage ceremony: - Marriage ceremony is performed according to Buddhist practices only. (The bride wears a white sari instead of green unlike the Hindus. The groom also wears white clothes. They do not put a 'Mundavali'. (wreath of flowers bound around the brow of the bride and groom at a marriage). Marriage ceremony is performed in front of the photograph of Dr. Ambedkar and the image of Buddha. The bride and the groom worship Dr. Ambedkar and Buddha under instructions of a religious expert. The
religious expert recites the 'Vandana'. The bride and groom take 'marriage vows' and garland each other. Instead of 'Akshada' (rice) they shower flowers on the new couple.

(5) **Grihpravesh:** Instead of the 'Vastushanti' (house warming) the Buddhists use the term 'Grihpravesh' (The ceremony for occupying a new house). They do not perform 'Satyanarayan' (puja of God Satyanarayan) nor 'Hom' (The casting of clarified butter, rice etc. into the fire as an offering to the gods accompanied with prayers or invocations according to the object of the offering) as do the Hindus.

(6) **Antyavidhi:** The Buddhists use a term 'Antyavidhi' for funeral ceremony. At this time they perform 'Vandana', and carry the dead body in a glass vehicle to the graveyard. Before cremating the body, they again perform the 'Vandana'.

(7) **Punya Anumodan Din:** Punya Anumodan Din is the death anniversary. Instead of performing 'Shraddha' the Buddhists call it Punya Anumodan Din. On this day, they worship the dead person and recite the 'Vandana'. They give a talk in the memory of the dead person and serve food to all.

For all the above ceremonies, Buddhists keep Dr. Ambedkar's photograph and an image of Buddha and recite the Buddhist 'Vandana'. All functions are performed according to Buddhist tradition. For instructing and guiding the new converts, pamphlets and books have been published.
The indicator, spreading of Buddhism among relatives, has been cross-tabulated against educational, occupational, income level of the respondents. It shows that there is no significant relationship between this indicator of maintaining identity and the level of education, occupation, income and age of the respondents. Most of the respondents propagate rites and rituals of Buddhism among their relatives in order to enculturate the new generation. (See Appendix II, Tables 3.17 to 3.20).

Another way of propagating the principles of Buddhism is to visit the native place and propagate the teaching of the Buddha amongst the villagers. Some of the respondents (43.7%) said that they go to their native place and propagate Buddhism. They sit with the villagers and talk to them about the importance of education and Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts and teaching of the Buddha in vernacular. They try to erase all the deep-rooted traditional Hindu faith, emotions and inferiority complex from the minds of the villagers.

During field work I met five elite members of the Buddhist community. They included, Prof. Jogdand, Prof. Gaikwad, Mr. Sonkamble, Mr. Kharat and Dr. Gaikwad. They regularly visit their native places to lead Ambedkarite thought and importance of education to the villagers. They
act as a reference model for the villagers. They also provide help and guidance to youngsters who visit Pune city.

It shows Buddhists are establishing their new culture among the masses. They organise activities to spread their new religion, its ideology and thoughts. They express their loyalty to the Dhamma by propagating the Buddhist ideology and maintain their identity proudly.

3.2.3 Refusal to Worship Hindu Gods and Celebrate Hindu festivals

The Buddhists maintain their new identity very strongly by displaying their new faith viz. Buddhism. At the same time they have rejected and renounced the old faith viz. Hinduism. They not only refuse to worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses but also do not celebrate the Hindu festivals.

In the present investigation, the data show that a majority of the Buddhists do not worship Hindu Gods and do not celebrate Hindu festivals. To the question "Do you worship Hindu Gods and celebrate Hindu festivals after conversion"? about three fourths (71.9%) of the respondents said that they never worship Hindu Gods and never celebrate Hindu festivals because Dr. Ambedkar has told them to do so. It is their important way of showing strong faith in Buddhism. But one third (28.1%) of the respondents said
that sometimes they celebrate Hindu festivals and worship Hindu images. Those respondents who are practicing Hindu traditions mostly belong to the lower economic and educational groups. The Buddhists staying in the research localities said that most often they celebrate Diwali and Dassera. They explained that they celebrate Dassera because they consider Dassera as 'Dhamma Chakra Parivartan Din' i.e. the day on which Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism with his followers. Diwali is looked at as a social festival. Everybody celebrates Diwali to get pleasure. On Diwali they prepare sweets but do not perform puja. They light lamps, enjoy sweets and fire crackers in the company of children but the worship of all deities is strictly excluded.

Elites among the Buddhists maintained that they are Buddhists and therefore worshipping of Gods and Goddess does not arise. They have discarded old cultural patterns and have gone in for a new cultural pattern, i.e. Buddhist culture, which includes following Dr. Ambedkar's and Buddha's teaching and performing the Buddhist Prayer for each function, and rejecting Hindu rituals. They have discarded the Hindu religion and accepted the doctrine of humanism, rationalism and secularism as epitomized in Buddhism. This has been spelt out in Dr. Ambedkar's books 'The Buddha and his Dhamma' and "The Buddha and Future of
His Religion". But in the masses, there is an overlap because, it is difficult to erase a cultural practice of many thousands of years and is deep rooted in Indian tradition.

It is clear from the data that the rejection and negation of Hinduism and its ideology and acceptance of Buddhism is one of the important ways of maintaining their new identity. Negation of Hinduism created the sense of belonging to Buddhism and the Buddhists display their identity through their behavior and thoughts.

3.2.4 The 'we feeling'.

3.2.4.1 Residential Segregation:

Residential segregation is another important indicator of the Buddhists identity. In Pune, the Buddhists mostly live in clusters in different areas of the city. Nair (1978) noted that residential segregation around relatives, caste, language, religion and class is one of the important factors for simulation of the culture and social environment and also for maintaining the ethnic identity. Rowe (1973) stated that the basis for the choice of the residential area within the city are caste, place of origin and kinship. In the Indian society, this fact has become a potent indicator of the strength and vitality of a community. In the city,
caste communities do maintain their culture through residential segregation. Shastree (1981) reported that the Buddhists in Pune live in small residential clusters in different parts of the city. They prefer to live in areas where the Buddhists are predominant. They are concentrated in areas such as Parvati hill, Yerawada, and Pune Cantonment. Some areas have mixed population, but the houses of the Buddhists are close each other. By staying in the midst of their own people they get the feeling of status security and help at the time of difficulties.

The present study also revealed that the Buddhists live in a group. The respondents reside in Dapodi and Bopodi areas along with population comprising of other religious groups and backward castes, but the Buddhists are predominant. In the research locality of Yerawada area the respondents stay with their own community members. In this area the Government had donated land for the backward communities to build their houses. The informants have told that they like to stay close together because it is necessary for the community's progress and solidarity.

While collecting the data in Dapodi and Bopodi areas, I had experienced that, while locating a house, people used to say 'Te Buddhache Ghar Ahe'. (That is the Buddhist's house). This is a kind of identity the Buddhists
have established in the society.

3.2.4.2 Friendship and Sense of Belonging.

The Buddhists prefer to have friends from their own community. They also have a sense of belonging to their own community.

Shastree (1981) stated that most of the friends of Buddhists belong to their own group and few to the lower status group. The present findings correspond to Shastree’s study to some extent. It indicates that many respondents (55.6%) have friends from their own community. Some respondents (44.4%) have friends from other religious and regional groups and also from other backward castes. They also have friends belonging to the upper caste groups. Most of the respondents state that they feel comfortable with friends belonging to their own community, and they get a sense of 'we feeling' in their company.

My data also show that the Buddhists have a sense of belonging and warm feeling about their own community. When the question "To which community you would say that you belong to"? was asked to the respondents a large number (77.8%) of them answered that they feel a sense of affection towards their own community members. They have a strong sense of belonging for their community only. Some of them
(22.2%) said that they have warm feelings about other scheduled castes also and included other religious adherents like Muslims, Christians in their sense of belonging. But not a single respondent has a sense of belonging to the community of caste Hindus.

The cross-tabulation of "Sense of Belonging" against education, occupation, income, and age of the respondents show that respondents from all the three research localities seem to have a very strong sense of belonging to their own community. The ethnic identity appears to have been based on their religious identity. The Buddhist's elite are greatly aware of centuries old suppression and oppression by the upper caste people. These elite are now providing the leadership to the masses. They are generally active in promoting a separate identity in order to escape dis-privileges of lower castes in the Indian society. Although one would have expected that higher education, occupation, and income would reduce the parochial and communal feelings in general, in this case, it appears that higher education, occupation, income, and age did not reduce the sense of identity of the Buddhists. Middle level educational groups have a strong sense of belonging to their own community. The illiterates because of the similar socio-economic conditions, have a sense of belonging to the
other backward castes also. The highly educated also have a sense of belonging to the other backward castes as they are aware of the oppression by the upper castes. Majority of the Buddhist elite have a sense of belonging for their own community and they serve as a model for their community for its upliftment. Empathy towards the other backward caste decreases with increase in the income level of the respondents. Younger people seems to extend their identity not only to the Buddhists but also to other backward castes but also to other backward castes as compared to the older people. (See Appendix II Tables 3.21 to 3.24).

The Buddhists derive a sense of belonging, 'We' feeling, sense of security and sense of community from keeping contacts and forming friendship with their own community. The Buddhists give preference to their own ethnic group for friendships and contacts which lead to the maintenance of culture and their identity strongly.

3.2.4.3 Endogamy:

The Buddhists are a strong endogamous group. They prefer to marry within their own community. This is the most important way of maintaining and strengthening their ethnic identity.

Shastree (1981) reported that the Buddhists are ready
to maintain or keep social relationship in all matters like eating, staying, working together, etc. with other castes. But when the question of marriage comes they have restricted their choice only to their own community. This shows their norms of strong endogamy. Regarding this Patwardhan (1973) stated that the Mahar - Buddhists have no objection for marriage with other community if the spouse becomes a Bouddha.

The data show that almost all (95.6%) of respondents prefer endogamy. They were not ready for intercaste marriages. The questions, "would you give permission to your children for intercaste marriage"? If 'not' why"? were posed to the respondents. Most of the respondents (67.4%) said that they would not permit inter-community marriages. A small number of respondents (32.6%) were in favour of inter-community marriages. The informants gave various reasons for their negative attitude towards inter-community marriage:

(1) The previous oppression of their caste group by the upper caste Hindus.

(2) By marrying a girl or a boy from their own group, they would strengthen the bond within the community.
(3) They feel that marriage within the community would lead to the progress of the community and,

(4) Above all endogamy would lead to the maintenance of the new identity strongly.

The most striking feature of the Buddhists staying in the research localities is that almost all the respondents approve marriages within the Buddhist community irrespective of the caste before conversion. Three fourth (74.47%) of the respondents said that they have no objections, for marriage with people from any caste, if they are converted to Buddhism. They do not want any caste/community/regional bar for converted Buddhists.

I have also observed that the Buddhist elite favour intercaste marriage. Dr. Jogdand says: "Theoretically intercaste marriage sounds to be very viable and tenable mechanism to break the caste system. It will lessen the caste spirit of both the parties, and will strengthen the national spirit rather than casteism. This will lead to a more cohesive society, which is always good for national integration. There is no reciprocity in this regard. The upper caste or Brahmins may not like a Dalit girl to come as a bride. But they do not hesitate to marry their daughter
to a Dalit boy. In short 'hypogamy' is practised and where as we are demanding for 'hypergamy '.

In addition to the above discussion, the Buddhists elite think that it is advisable to encourage the marriage within the Buddhists converted from any caste or community. Such marriage will enhance the interaction between two different communities.

The cross-tabulations of the indicators endogamy, marriage with other Buddhists converts from the lower castes and intercaste marriages with educational, occupational, income levels, and age of the respondents, show that (1) there is no association between the preference for endogamy and education, occupation, income, and age of the respondents. They are strongly endogamous in their attitude. (2) The respondents irrespective of their level of education, occupation, income, and age also showed positive approach for marriage with other Buddhists converts from the lower caste. (3) However, some of the elite of the community showed positive attitude for intercaste marriage. (See Appendix II Tables 3.25 to 3.36).
It is clear from the above discussion that the Buddhists are a strong endogamous group. They want to maintain their identity through their norms of endogamy. Their complaint is that in their community hypogamy is practised and not hypergamy. (Details are given in Chapter VI. Section on intercaste marriages). They are encourage marriage with the Buddhists converted from any caste or community and from any region. In this way through practising endogamy they maintain their ethnic identity.

3.2.5 Participation in the Ethnic Associations.

Voluntary organisations and associations of the Buddhist community arrange various programmes. The Buddhists expressed their sense of 'we feeling' and solidarity through participating in their common religious cultural and social activities. It provides a 'sense of community' and situation for socialization. It helps in maintaining and promoting moral and cultural values, norms and patterns, and their separate identity can be preserved. Schack (1973) stated that ethnic solidarity is reinforced and expressed through participating in ceremonial cults and ethnic association.

The Buddhist Associations in the research localities arrange educational, religious, socio-cultural, entertainment programmes and celebrate the Buddhist festivals. The respondents generally participate in these
programmes.

The following socio-cultural and educational programmes for the Buddhist students have been observed during fieldwork in the research locality of Yerawada. These programmes were organised by voluntary organizations and associations such as 'Samyak Pratisthan', 'Ramamata Mahila Mandal', 'Siddharth Mandal', 'Vishakha Mahila Mandal', and 'Bhim Aadesh Sangh'.

1) Singing competition.

2) Composition Competition

Prof. C.N. Rawal, Vice Principal of S.V. Desai College was the judge for this competition.

3) Special coaching classes and series of lectures for eight days for 10th Std. students. Experts were called to guide these students. They advertised these coaching classes in the local newspapers like 'Kesari, Loksatta'.

4) Arranged a felicitation programme for successful students.

5) Special coaching classes for Maharashtra Public Service Commission, competitive examinations.

6) Organisation of 'pathnatiya' i.e. street play on the
issue of alcoholism. This programme was carried out for eight days on the occasion of 'Daru Bandi Saptah'.

7) Organised debate competition, sport competition, rangoli competition and a series of lectures on the life of Dr. Ambedkar during the Ambedkar Jayanti and Buddha Jayanti.

The survey data show a majority of the respondents (84.0%) actively participate in these socio-cultural and educational activities. Only a few (16.0%) respondents did not participate in such activities.

The Buddhist elite said that they participate in seminars, discussions, meetings and other endeavours to spread Buddhism and its ideals through publications and maintain their identity in a society.

The results of cross-tabulation of participation in ethnic association and religious, socio-cultural activities against educational, occupational, income level, and age of the respondents show that there is no specific relationship between the level of education, occupation, income and age of the respondents and their participation in ethnic associations. Most of the respondents participate in religious and socio-cultural activities to express their solidarity and sense of 'feeling'. They participate to maintain and retain the cultural solidarity. Elite of the
community show active participation, as they act as reference model for the masses. (See Appendix II Tables 3.37 to 3.40.

So it is clear from the above discussion that the Buddhists participate in religious and socio-cultural activities organised by voluntary organisations. In addition to the maintenance of identity, the Buddhists derive a sense of security and satisfaction through participation in community activities.

3.2.6 The Buddhists' Sacred Days:

The Buddhist sacred days are different from those of the Hindu's. Informants from the Yerawada area told me that Dr. Ambedkar had told them that there is no God. Whatever appears to them or to their eyes is the truth. Buddha was also a human being. He had shown them a way of life and they should follow it. In contrast, the hindu sacred days are all devoted to one or the other Gods.

The Buddhists sacred days are, Dr. Ambedkar Jayanti, Dr. Ambedkar Punyatithi, Dhamma Chakra Parivartan Din (a day on which they embraced Buddhism i.e. Dasarra), and Buddha Jayanti. The celebration of the sacred days contributes towards the expression and maintenance of their unique and separate new identity in the society. Zelliot (1992: 231-232) says: "These observances are unlike Hindu
occasions in their emphasis on teaching and their rationality. There is no one astrologically timed sacred moment, no one allowed sacred space. There is no need for a religious figure to give an auspicious presence, blessing or rite. There is no spirit possession, no religious ecstasy. These four observances are times for community spirit, for education, for remembrance."

Celebration of the following most important sacred festivals of the Buddhists were observed during the fieldwork in the research localities at the Yerawada area.

a) Dr. Ambedkar Jayanti: Dr. Ambedkar Jayanti is the birthday (14th April) of Dr. Ambedkar. Celebration of this holy day begins on 13-14th April at midnight with the Vandana, songs of Ambedkar and fire works. The Buddhists in the research localities celebrated this festival for five to ten days. This is a very important, happy and noisy festival of the Buddhists. On this day, they prepared sweets, burst fire works and wore new cloths. Most of the houses were newly painted and adorned with rangoli designs and lights. The Vihara was also adorned with rangoli and lights. The Vihara, the residential areas, roads, chowks were decorated with lights, coloured bunting, and with photographs of Dr. Ambedkar. The Buddhists visited the statue of Dr. Ambedkar and garlanded it. The Young members
of the community belonging to different organizations and associations played lezim, and drums, danced and garlanded the statue of Dr. Ambedkar. They were singing songs in praise of Dr. Ambedkar. The Local Community had also arranged socio-cultural and religious programmes on this occasion. The following programmes were observed during Ambedkar Jayanti at Yerawada.

(1) Vandana - morning and evening in the Vihara.
(2) Lectures on the life of Ambedkar, and the Teaching of the Buddha.
(3) Composition Competition
(4) Rangoli Competition
(5) Sports
(6) Dance and Drama for Children.
(7) Blood Donation Programme
(8) Distribution of Fruits to Patients in the Sasoon Hospital.
(9) Free Food for Community Members.
(10) Movie and Drama etc.

b) Dhamma Chakra Parivartan Din. Dr. Ambedkar with his followers, embraced Buddhism, on the Dassera day. The Buddhists called it as 'Dhamma Chakra Parivartan Din' meaning 'Religious Revolutionary Day'. This is also a very joyful occasion.

The Buddhists staying in the research localities had
gathered in the Vihara for Vandana in the morning. They distributed sweets and greeted each other. Some of the community members gave talks on the thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism. Sending greeting cards of Dhamma chakra parivartan Din to each other is a new phenomena observed among elite Buddhists.

c) Dr. Ambedkar’s Punyatithi; i.e. 6th December is Dr. Ambedkar’s Death Anniversary. This is a very quiet, silent and mournful gathering.

The Buddhists had gathered in the Vihara both in the morning and the evening for Vandana. They had also visited the statute of Dr. Ambedkar and garlanded it and lighted candles and essence sticks. Voluntary agencies had arranged free food and first aid for the needy. Songs on Dr. Ambedkar’s life were continuously sung during the festival.

d) Buddha Jayanti: On this occasion too, the respondents had gathered in the Vihara for Vandana both in the morning and the evening. In the evening, they had arranged cultural programmes for the children.

The above discussion indicates that the Buddhists' sacred days and the ways of celebration during these days are totally different from the Hindu festivals.
3.2.7 Expressing Devotion, Loyalty and Love to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar:

The Buddhist's most important way of maintaining the new ethnic identity is showing devotion, faith, love, respect, loyalty and great esteem to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. They express their feelings through different ways. On all important occasions, festivals and performance of sanskaras, Dr. Ambedkar’s photograph is garlanded and Buddhists rituals are performed. Zelliot (1992) reported that the Buddhists form all the socio-economic classes, illiterate to highly educated and labourers to professors in the universities; live on a common belief that conversion to Buddhism has provided freedom to them, and Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts gave them human rights, dignity and pride which they possess now. Kharat and Manohar (1978) stated that the Buddhists got the inspiration from Dr. Ambedkar’s majestic personality, his life, thought, philosophy, invaluable principles and his historic revolution. They also maintain that Dalit literature also has only one origin, ie. Dr. Ambedkar. It has emerged from the words of Dr. Ambedkar and established its own identity. Patwardhan (1973) reported that Dr. Ambedkar’s photograph is worshipped in each Buddhist house. The Buddhists have written the songs and couplets on his name ‘Jay Bhim’, They called him as ’Bodhisatva Dr. Ambedkar’ and his death is referred to àś
In the present investigation I have observed that the respondents attached great importance to Dr. Ambedkar. While collecting the data, the Buddhists families were visited in the research localities of Dapodi-Bopodi and Yerawada who welcomed me by saying 'Jai-Bhim'. They did not say 'Namste' At the time of interviewing one respondent Mr. Gaikwad, at Dapodi, three persons came, and two of them introduced themselves as Buddhists and one said that he is 'Jai-bhim'. Other informants told me that while introducing each other, they say that they are 'Jai-bhim' or Buddhists, and they feel proud to say Jai-Bhim. They also told that they feel that they have achieved today's position just because of Dr. Ambedkar. He has given them self respect, dignity and humanity.

Each and every respondent had a photograph of Dr. Ambedkar and an image of Buddha in their houses. In one respondent's house, I saw his sister's marriage invitation card infront of the photograph of Dr. Ambedkar. The respondent told me that his sister's marriage is scheduled in the next week. So, before distributing the cards, he had kept it infront of Dr. Ambedkar in order to seek his blessings. He also told me that they start their every new activities after worshipping Dr. Ambedkar and Buddha.
The Dalit had started agitation for renaming of the Marathwada University after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on 17th July 1977. Initially, it was Dr. Ambedkar’s idea to set up an University in Marathwada, which is the most backward region of Maharashtra. Mathew (1986: 77) says: “These protest denotes certain traits of caste feelings, emotionality and indifference”. The non-Dalit also started anti-renaming agitation which resulted in a caste war and continued for the past few years.

In order to know the respondent’s devotion to Ambedkar a question regarding the renaming of the Marathwada University was posed to them. Almost all the respondents (96.6%) were in favour of renaming the Marathwada University as Dr.Ambedkar University. They explained their opinion by giving different reasons as follows:

(1) Dr. Ambedkar had imparted education to the Dalits of the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. He selected the backward region of Marathwada for a new educational institution. He had established a college at Aurangabad. In the history of the Marathwada this was the pioneer institution in the field of higher education. So, the Marathwada University should be renamed after him.

(2) Dr. Ambedkar was a great educationist. He contributed
immensely in the educational field. According to him success in life depends on education. Therefore, Marathwada University should be renamed.

(3) Dr. Ambedkar was such a great man that there should not be any hesitation of giving such a Great Scholar's name to the Marathwada University.

The Buddhist elite felt that renaming of the Marathwada university would be an emotional Victory for the Dalits. It would provide a boost to the Dalit movement.

The University has now been renamed as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University.

Educational, occupational, income level, and age of the respondents is cross-tabulated against their opinion about renaming of the Marathwada University. It shows that almost all the respondents, irrespective of their level of education, occupation, income, and age show devotion to Dr. Ambedkar. This is their important way of maintaining identity. (See Appendix II Tables 3.40 to 3.44)

The Buddhists love and respect Dr. Ambedkar. They worship him like a God. Being loyal and faithful to him, the Buddhists maintain their new identity given by Dr. Ambedkar, very confidently, strongly and proudly.
3.3 CONCLUSION

We have seen that the Buddhists irrespective of their levels of education, occupation, income and age maintain their identity very strongly. They adhere to the Buddhist culture and display their cultural identity through Buddhist cultural symbols. An important way of maintenance of the new identity is adherence and propagation of the concept of Buddhism and at the same time rejection and negation of Hinduism. They have a strong sense of community, 'we' feeling and sense of belonging. They attach great importance to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and maintain the identity given by him by following his thoughts.