PREFACE

Philosophy cannot be restricted to metaphysics alone. It is also the critical analysis of popular and scientific concepts and discovery of their relations to one another. It is a rational attempt to integrate scientific knowledge as well as interpret and unify human experience. Therefore the philosophers make sincere efforts to speculate the facts and try to hypothetically co-relate them to human existence. Philosophers, like scientists, formulate hypotheses which ultimately must answer to reason and evidence. But philosophers go beyond scientists in investigating the validity of facts, rather than just state them. They do so in the light of reason and the dignity of human life. It is in this sense that Dr Ambedkar is a philosopher. He examined several phenomena in a critical way: society, politics, religion, law, economics et. His range of interests are wide just like his mentor, the philosopher John Dewey. However, in this research the focus will be on Ambedkar as a philosopher with reference to his views on religion. There have been scant treatment of Ambedkar as a philosopher. However, such a treatment is the need of hour. For his philosophical contribution has an abiding significance.

The present research makes an attempt to study Buddhist philosophy from Ambedkar’s socio-political and religious perspective. Ambedkar turned to Buddhism because the Buddha expounded harmony
and egalitarianism for the first time in the history of humankind. He raised his voice against separatism and untouchability. He established a classless society by opening the gateway of the Sangha to all deserving folks, making no discrimination between caste, gender and class. Thus, the fundamental principle of Buddhism is equality. From Ambedkar’s point of view Buddhism becomes central to engaging in a social criticism of the malaise of caste in Indian society. Besides the Buddhist approach to religion and culture encourages harmony, which Ambedkar saw as the need of the hour in a society that is plagued by religious dogmatism. It tries to build world peace and harmony among the Nations.

Hence, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar a great scholar, thinker and freedom fighter along with hundreds of thousands of untouchables, converted to Buddhism and changed the face of Buddhism in India. His conversion was a symbolic protest to the oppressions of caste inequality. His conversion was a rational decision based on the need for transforming Indian society into an egalitarian and tolerant one. As a crusader for social justice and human rights, Ambedkar saw the role of human dignity in the quest for social justice. Buddhism for him was a way to the acquisition of human dignity. Thus, his conversion to Buddhism is linked to his articulation of the Fundamental Rights and Directive
Principles of State Policy as the architect of the Indian Constitution. The fundamental Rights provide for freedom, equality. Hence the abolition of untouchability and conversion to Buddhism enforce rights.

The study focuses on the link between Buddhist philosophy and Dr. Ambedkar’s contribution to it. Dr. Ambedkar’s whole life and mission was a practical contribution to humanistic Buddhist education in India. Though he was not a Buddhist by birth but by practice and at heart he was a Buddhist. Dr Ambedkar also connected the notion of human dignity with the cultural identity of Buddhism. Buddha, whose life and movement Ambedkar had studied, was a believer of the creativity and morality of the people. Under the influence of those teachings, the most rejected people of India had once risen and uplifted their life as well as that of the whole society. Ambedkar critiqued mainstream Buddhism and reconstructed it with a contemporary perspective.

The focus of this study is on Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophical and practical approach to the banner of Buddhism which brought back to his motherland the Buddha who suffered an exile for over twelve hundred years. Dr. Ambedkar, a man of provocative learning, challenged opponents of Buddhism to hold discussions with him, and was confident that he would defeat all Pandits. He propagated Buddhism in India. Dr. Ambedkar was the greatest Pioneer of Buddhist revival in India. He
carefully examined the world’s major religions as well as Communism, eventually concluding that only Buddhism was fully in accordance with his most valued principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. The Buddha’s emphasis on ethics, loving kindness, altruism, rationality, and individual responsibility appealed to him. Through Buddhism Dr. Ambedkar saw the possibility of a peaceful social revolution. The proposed research makes an attempt to investigate various aspects related to it.

The study also endeavours to analyse Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophical works compiled in quest of knowing the real doctrine of Buddha Dhamma compiled on the basis of canonical and non-canonical literatures in the different languages. In contrast to all other scholars of Buddhist literature who gave more importance to the religious, socio-political aspects, Dr. Ambedkar emphatically put forward its philosophical importance. Attempts will also be made to evaluate the cross references and critical approaches of other philosophers and critics on the philosophy of Buddha and Dr. Ambedkar. The study deals with various philosophical aspects related to the work.

The research is significant as it imports the revival of Buddhism in India as a religion, a way and philosophy of life. The ability to theorize, to derive knowledge by a process of reasoning, struck the earliest
thinkers like Dr. Ambedkar. It was therefore necessary to channelize the new converts into a proper Dhamma and to guide them in regard to the philosophy of Buddha and his Dhamma. Dr. Ambedkar wanted one religion for all people in India. To show the new path of social equality, unity and oneness, he prepared to embrace Buddhism as it accepts all people into its fold. And as such, he felt a need to present to his followers to Buddhism in the new and modern form. The study shows religion and its philosophy which stands for test of the modern times.

The hypothesis of this research work is that Ambedkar’s Buddhism emerges from the quest for social justice. It is a struggle towards human dignity. However, it will also prove that for Ambedkar Buddhism is relevant wherever there is discrimination. Hence, Ambedkar Buddhism is helpful in the critique of prejudices based on class and gender as well. Further, Ambedkar’s reconstruction of Buddhism is also against religious fundamentalism given his critique of religious dogmatism and commitment to pluralism. Hence, this thesis also maintains that Ambedkar Buddhism is a step towards world peace during these troubled times of communal disharmony.

The research work refers to the data in social sciences- i) data of suffering of unprivileged castes on grounds of religion even in 21\textsuperscript{st} century. ii) recordings of fundamentalism and absence of peace.
Normative paradigm to solve these problems in the data. A plural and non-hierarchical religion; Ambedkar’s Buddhism towards textual analysis, critique, interpretation and reconstruction.

The primary objective of the research work is to make a philosophical study of Dr Ambedkar’s discourse on Buddhism. The aim of the research is also to bring forth the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar to the upliftment of the downtrodden through non-violent Buddhist philosophy and evaluating his appeal to restore the human dignity. Its objective is also to show how Philosophy is an expression, perhaps the ultimate expression, of human freedom as Ambedkar and John Dewey believed. Ambedkar wanted a noble, religious life and freedom for his followers. Therefore he questioned the origin, the growth and development of the caste system in Hinduism. He also believed that religion can be founded on a scientific basis by shaking ourselves free from all assumptions and preconceived ideas.

This research work is a monograph that attempts to achieve the above academic objectives through a philosophical book length study of Ambedkar. It is thus a contribution to the field of Ambedkar studies and philosophy. This research will be relevant to teachers and students in both philosophy (philosophy of religion and socio-political philosophy) and social sciences (political science, sociology and history). This
contribution is unique because there has been no book length philosophical study of Ambedkar so far. Yet such a study is the need of the hour.

The thesis touches upon a variety of philosophical concerns of Dr. Ambedkar. The study also throws light on the philosophical dimensions of both Buddhism and Dr Ambedkar’s thoughts. The study helps to understand religion and philosophy as inseparable part of human life to restore human dignity.