Chapter I

INTRODUCTION
Introduction

This chapter discusses the history of caste in India with particular reference to the problem of social and political discrimination on the ground of religion in nineteenth and twentieth century. Caste system is a complex, exploitative and hierarchical ordering of social groups that justifies discrimination on the basis of ones position in relation to varna (social discrimination based on functions people perform) and jati (social discrimination based on origin of birth). The Vedas divided the Hindu society into four categories or varnas. These varnas were associated with privileges and well-defined social occupations. The four varnas were Brahmin (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishya (traders) and Shudra (servants) that were maintained by one’s jati. There were also the avarnas, or the ones without caste and who were outside the four fold structure of the society. They had an ambiguous position, though they were integrated in the jati, they faced discrimination in both varna and jati systems. Thus, varna and jati ensured social stability, prosperity and cosmic harmony. The idea of caste discrimination was based on notions of purity and impurity that ensured reproduction of hierarchical power. Caste and varna are for Ambedkar based on ‘ancestral calling” (“Reply To The Mahatma”, 315). As Bayly notes “Caste is not and never has been a fixed fact of Indian life. Both caste as
varna (the fourfold scheme of idealised moral archetypes) and caste as ‘jati’ (smaller-scale birth-groups) are best seen as composites of ideals and practices that have been made and remade into varying codes of moral order over hundreds or even thousands of years. The context for this fluidity has been the subcontinent's remarkable diversity in culture and physical environment, and above all the diversity of its states and political systems. Those conventions of rank and corporate essence that are often seen as the defining features of caste have been shaped, critiqued and reconstituted in all sorts of ways, both century by century and region by region” (“Caste, Society, Politics” 25). The mechanism of caste has been retained, according to Ambedkar, by the principle of ‘endogamy’ (“Castes in India”, 245).

Nineteenth and twentieth century India witnessed a number of movements to dismantle this oppressive order of the society. Most movements like Prarthana Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Ramkrishna Mission were reformist or revivalist in their approach. Ambedkar’s revolutionary struggle against the tyranny of caste order via Buddhism proposed a radical way of understanding notions of equality, unity and human dignity.

Social reform movements in India have mostly aimed at uprooting social evils, and inculcating men and women the spirit of human dignity
. Gender oppression was a major concern for most social reformists. The movements championed abolition of the cruel rites of sati and infanticide, in the condemned child marriage and polygamy and popularization of widow remarriage, in the abolition of Purdah, in provision of education facilities for women and economic openings to make them self-supporting and finally and equal share for women in the political life of the country enfranchisement. Another social evil that was a major concern of the English educated and Hindu intelligentsia was the caste restriction in Hindu society and the degrading position of the lower castes especially the untouchables.

Of these two great evils, those connected with the positions of women received greater attention in the 19th century, while the problems of the erstwhile untouchables came in sharp focus in the 20th century because of its political overtones. The problematization of caste was the outcome of the efforts and writings of Phule, Vivekananda, Narayana Guru and Ambedkar. Ambedkar’s intervention led to a renewed interest in Buddhism and identified it as an integral part of social reform.

The movements made an attempt to incept a subversive move by forming an alternative religion. It provides the salient features of religion in general and categorises religious movements as ‘reformist’ and
‘revivalist’. It is also makes a case that religious reform should precede the social reform since religion enjoys utmost importance in India. The chapter takes the stock of some early reformers who tried to rid Hinduism of its ills to show the failure of Hinduism in addressing the problem of caste. The chapter also introduces Ambedkar’s revolution of conversion as a phenomenal exodus followed as the last resort when the rigidity and conformity of Hinduism failed to accord due dignity to fellow human beings. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section critiques the Hindu foundations of Indian renaissance, the second section explains social transformation through a critique of caste and the final section explains Ambedkar’s theorizing of the Hindu caste order.

I

Hindu Foundations of the Indian Renaissance: A Critique

Nationalism and nationalist aspirations were dominated by a spirit of renaissance, revival of the lost ancient Indian antiquity, through a scrutiny of past. Reformers critically engaged with the same and found that many beliefs and practices were obsolete and needed to be discarded. Broadly, one can trace two movements, the reformist and the revivalist movement during the 19th and 20th centuries in India. Reformists included the Prathana Samaj, Brahma Samaj and the
Revivalists included Arya Samaj, Ramkrishna Mission\(^1\). Every social custom in India derived sustenance from the religious injunctions. Hence, the need was felt to socially reform the state before bring about religious reform. Caste discrimination was one of the biggest challenges to this aspiration of Indian renaissance.

Raja Rammohan Roy accepted European humanism and sought to effect a synthesis between the East and the West. He is called the father of modern Indian Renaissance, for he embodied the new spirit of rational enquiry, need for knowledge(over superstition) and broad humanitarianism. He emphasized the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and strengthening of the bond of union among men of all religions. Brahma Samaj focused on issues such gender, class and caste discrimination. Devendranath Tagore and Keshavchandra Sen, furthered the work of the Brahma Samaj. Although there was strong disapproval of caste system, they seldom prescribed a rejection of the principles of Hindu religious order.

Religious reform by the Paramhansa Mandali aimed at fighting idolatry and the caste system. Gopal Hari Deshmukh('Lokhitwadi') critiqued Hindu orthodoxy towards religious and social equality. He also said that if religion did not sanction social reforms then religion should

\(^1\) Discussions in this section are derived from Basham's *Cultural History of India* (1975)
be changed, for after all religion was made by human beings and so might not necessarily have contemporary relevance.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati’s Arya Samaj aimed to unite India religiously, socially and nationally proposed a common religion of all and a casteless and classless society. Though caste evolved in other religions, the difference with the Hindu caste social order was that it was based on associated with a proliferation of smaller jati-like birth-groups. Thus, most revivalists and reformists were content in merely dismantling oppression associate with jati and unjust religious social practices. Dayanand Saraswati criticized idolatry, polytheism, belief in magic, animal sacrifices, charms etc. He upheld that every individual has to work out his or her own salvation through right deeds. He condemned the caste system based on birth, though he subscribed to the Vedic notion of the four varna system in which a person is not born in any caste, but identified as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra according to the occupation he followed.

As upholders of social reform Hindu social reformers fought untouchability and the rigidities of the hereditary caste system in India, yet they advocated social equality and promoted social solidarity and consolidation through a reconstruction of Hindu order. But Hindu reform movements such as the Arya Samaj assumed that caste based rituals and
proscriptions did not have any religious implication. They failed to see
the connect between Hinduism and the caste system. It is for this reason
that Ambedkar maintained that “The Arya Samajists believe that the
Vedas are eternal and sacrosanct. The book shows that portions of the
Vedas at any rate, particularly the Pursha Sukta, which is the mainstay
of the Arya Samajists, are fabrications by Brahmins intended to serve
their own purposes. Both these conclusions are bound to act like atomic
bombs on the dogmas of the Arya Samajists (Ambedkar “Who are the
Shudras” 390)”

The neglect of the inherent relationship between religion and caste
became a pivotal feature of Hinduism by movements, led to an
alternative approach to social reform which took caste and its history as
central. As education and awakening spread, the so called “lower
castes” began to agitate. They became conscious of their basic human
rights and felt the need to defend these rights. In Maharashtra, Mahatma
Jyotiba Phule (born in Pune in a Mali caste) was a leader of the
underprivileged classes. Phule had a holistic approach, political and
economic as well as cultural. He visited religious and cultural themes,
critiqued Brahmanical Hinduism and attacked not only the caste
divisions but also its ritualism, legends, sacred books and festivals. His
work Shetkaryaca Asud is a scathing description of the various festivals
that occur throughout the year, as well as the life-cycle rituals of a good ‘Hindu’. He criticized the ritualistic practices of Brahminism. For him Hinduism was not a true religion at all; he used strong adjectives like self-interested (matlabi), artificial (krutrim) and counterfeit to describe the Hindu religion (banavati). For Phule, finding a true religion was a major part of the freeing of the masses from the tyranny of Brahmanic slavery. Phule’s *The Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak*, is a critique of the Vedas and suggests the need to formulate a religious alternative. Phule believed that the Brahmins tyrannized other castes and turned them into their slaves. He analysed the Hindu society as endogamous and dangerous as it infected the lower castes to imitate the closed oppressive system of discrimination.

Inspired by Phule, Ambedkar’s contribution to the philosophy of human dignity, world peace and Buddhism emerged as a radical movement to eradicate caste inequality. His philosophy not only challenged Hindu reform movements, but also articulated a notion of religion that was based on the relationship between an individual and his or her community. Ambedkar questioned orthodox Hinduism and its rootedness in caste. For him, *caste* was a way of stratifying human beings at birth. He argued that the distinction between *varna* and *jati*
was deeply problematic, as the former was the “parent of the idea of caste” (“Gandhianism”, 164).

Ambedkar’s recognition of the inherent inegalitarianism in Hinduism, led to his accepting Buddhism as the right way of life for his followers. He believed that religion can be founded on a scientific basis and reconciled with reason. In his work *Buddha and his Dhamma* he has given four characteristics of a religion as follows (i) religion in the same of morality must therefore, remain the governing principle in every society (ii) religion must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science (iii) its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity (iv) Religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty.

Ambedkar’s emphasis on rationalism, scientific outlook and humanism, sought to reform Hinduism from within and sought to purge it of superstitious practices. Yet, in eventually prescribing conversion to Buddhism, Ambedkar expresses rejection of Hindu religion as the only alternative for the oppressed. His act of conversion can be read as a silent revolution of the oppressed to seek self-esteem, identity, sense of human dignity and freedom. The next section is an exposition of the critique of caste from the perspectives of the Indian and non Indian orientalists reformists and revivalists.
II

Social Transformation through a Critique of Caste

Swami Vivekananda interpreted the teachings of Ramkrishna Paramhansa and emerged as the preacher of neo-Hinduism. He criticized untouchability and the caste system. He emphasized the fundamental postulate of his teacher that the best worship of God is through the service of humanity. In proposing universal religion, he proposed the path of assimilation of all religions into the Vedic principles of humanism and formulating one true religion. Thus, he claimed that Buddhism was an organic part of Indian culture. According to Vivekananda, and the teaching of the Buddha would play an essential part in the future India. He believed that Buddhism was not a separate religion but part of Hindu culture and founded on Vedanta. However, Vivekananda's ideas about Buddhism was controversial and invited severe criticism.

Non-Indians like Max Muller and others had also lauded the Vedas and there were several Europeans who looked to Buddhism as the true wisdom of the East. This interest and research helped to make Buddhist texts widely available. Researchers like colonel H.S. Olcott and the Russian H.P. Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society in
New York in 1875 and established contact with Asian Buddhists. The involvement of Europeans and Americans helped to give legitimacy to Buddhism. The Theosophical Movement in India was established by Blavatsky in 1875. It came to be allied with Hindu Renaissance. It aimed to work for universal brotherhood of humanity without discrimination of caste, colour, sex or creed. Under Mrs. Annie Besant, the Theosophical Society became a movement of Hindu revival. The Theosophists advocated the revival and strengthening of the ancient religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. As religious revivalists, the theosophists were not very successful.

The latter half of the 19th and early half of the 20th centuries witnessed the beginning of powerful social reform movements in India. They gave birth to powerful currents of cultural-religious radicalism which underlay the anti-caste movements of Dalits and non-Brahmans. As these moved towards an alternative religion, the Buddhist alternative became increasingly attractive. However there were also countercurrents which pulled Dalits and non-Brahmans back into a Brahmanic framework. The greatest ideological support for this backward pull was to come in the 20th century from Gandhis Hindu reformism and from Marxist radicalism which rejected all religious solutions in favour of a proletarian revolution. Mahatma Gandhi was a strong advocate of truth
and non-violence. He aimed to eradicate all types of inequalities based on caste, creed, race and sex. He worked for the uplift of the untouchables whom he called Harijans.

All his life Gandhiji kept the abolition of untouchability in the forefront of his public activities. He argued that there was no sanction for untouchability in Hindu Shashtras. Gandhiji organized the Harijan Sevak Sangh with its headquarters in Delhi. Yet, Gandhi argued for reforming the Hindu social order and championed the cause of assimilating the lowers castes within the Hindu religion. He believed caste politics to be divisive in nature. A vigorous fight against caste inequalities in South Travancore was led by the reformers like Vaikunda Swamigal, Sri. Naraya Guru, Chatambi Swamigal and Ayyankali. They revolted against Brahmin ascendancy and campaigned for the mitigation of the rigours of caste. Even though their reform movements met with strong opposition from the caste Hindus, they fought relentlessly to eradicate social evils.

Sri Narayana Guru born in 1854 in a family of peasants of the Ezhava community at Chempalanthi in Trivandrum District. The peculiar feature of the low-caste movements from the 19th century was the search for an alternate dharma. In contrast to thinkers like Gandhi they felt that the modern world required a new and rationalistic religion
that could not be provided by merely reconstructing Hinduism. Though many thinkers explored Advaita, Bhakti movement, Buddhism, Christianity, none of them defended them in their existing traditional ways. There was an attempt made to rethink religion along the lines of reform. Both Phule and Ambedkar can be located along this axis.

Narayana Guru critiqued the advocacy of the idea of universal religion (Vivekananda) and the need reformed Hinduism. Hinduism segregated people, thus causing many evils in society. Throughout Kerala, from one end to the other, he built and consecrated scores of grand Temples of Hindu deities for lower castes and encouraged others to do so. Moreover, he established *Vedic Patasalas* and invited Pulayas and other depressed classes to join in worship and study. Even though Ezhavas were highly caste conscious, they did not demur at the Guru's radical innovation. In his Mutts, he admitted all castes and creeds. He also employed Pulayas as cooks. Yet, the drawback of the movement was that it turned to Vedanta for social change and annihilation of caste. Jyotiba Phule concept of true religion was different. According to Phule, a true religion should be universal; it should be founded on reason and truth and rejection of superstition, that is, it should be suitable for a scientific age; it should be anti-ritualistic; it should be ethical; it should be equalitarian, not recognizing caste or ethnic differences, and
especially admitting the equality of women. He reinterpreted the Indian history and suggested the legend of Raja Bali as an alternative to Vedic golden age of India. In the story of the avatars, King Bali is a demon, a king who is tricked by the dwarf Waman into giving him a boon. Waman asks for all that can be covered in three steps—then puts one on the earth, the second on the sky, the third on Bali Raja’s chest to push him under the earth. Among Maharashtrian farmers, however, and in regions such as Kerala, Bali is described as an ideal beneficent king, illustrated by the Marathi saying *ida pida javo, Balica rajya yevo* (‘let troubles and sorrows go and the kingdom of Bali come!’), Phule considers Bali as a ruler of India at the time of the assumed Aryan invasion, and depicts it be such a golden age. He also suggested the name ‘Balisthan’ for India as an alternative to ‘Hindustan’. Through this conception of Raja Bali, Phule integrated many of the popular peasant deities of Maharashtra. Khandoba, Jotiba, Vithoba and others were seen as governors and feudatories and warriors in the great realm of Raja Bali.

Thus, Phule can also be read as being critical of the nationalist movement. He was critical of the Indian National Congress leaders for their neglect of the interests of the lower classes. He maintained that the Congress could not be called truly national unless it showed genuine
interest in the welfare of the lower and the backward classes. Jyotiba Phule started Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873 with the aim of securing social justice for the weaker sections of the society. He opened a number of schools and orphanages. In order to break the control of the Brahmans and raise the lower caste people, he trained non-Brahmans to perform the Vedic ceremonies for them. His movement was revived by the maharaja of Kolhapur who also reserved fifty percent civil service posts in his state for the non-Brahmins and organized schools for them. Thus, non-Brahman movement became a formidable political force. Under Ambedkar, the movement in Maharashtra for the emancipation of the untouchables became a political movement for justice.

Ambedkar started an organization in Mumbai called Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha and All India Scheduled Caste Federation for fight against caste oppression and promote moral and material progress of the untouchables. In his fight against caste tyranny, he criticised it as a system that divides people into fixed and definite units that prevented all interaction and prescribed the custom of endogamy. He explained endogamy as the peculiar feature, genesis and mechanism of caste. According to Ambedkar, a caste is an enclosed class and it existed before Manu. He describes Manusmriti as a text that codifies existing caste rules and the preaching of caste dharma. The spread and growth of
the caste system is achieved by the power and selfish interest of the Brahmin caste order. Thus, Ambedkar also advocated that Brahmans created the Caste. He stated that caste was the malicious attempt of the Brahmnis and that they were guilty of a number of a number of inhuman practices and caste was one of the most grave injustice preached and practiced by the upper class Hindu social order. The next section is an elaboration of Ambedkar’s theorizing of caste practice.

III

Theorizing Caste

According to Ambedkar, caste has killed public spirit, destroyed the sense of public charity, and made public opinion impossible. Virtue and morality were understood within the confines of caste. The only value attached to the person was in virtue of his/her caste. The roots of untouchability were in the caste system. Hence, for the eradication of untouchability, annihilation of caste was absolutely essential. According to Ambedkar, the greatest barrier to India’s progress was untouchability prescribed by Hinduism. Contrary to the socialists beliefs, according to Ambedkar, private property and capitalism were not the only source of injustice. Class inequalities were not the only source of power; a bad religion and low social status could also generate injustice. Ambedkar
maintained that an economic restructuring should be accompanied by a social one, a political revolution had to be preceded by a social revolution.

Ambedkar suggested that an ideal society should be based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He suggested education, agitation and organization of depressed comminutes and inter caste-dining and marriages as the only way to dismantle caste hierarchy. On 31st January 1920, Ambedkar started publishing a weekly paper, Mookanayak (Leader of the Dumb), to spread awareness of caste based violence and assert the need for emancipation of the depressed classes in India. In his first editorial he wrote that the existing newspapers looked after the interests of certain castes and disregarded the interest of the lower castes. Thus, India was a land of inequality. Being deprived of power, education and human dignity the non-Brahmins and the depressed classes could not make any progress.

In 1930 Ambedkar entered national politics. He demanded separate electorates for the untouchables. He was nominated as a delegate of the three Round Table Conferences in London. The Communal Award announced by the British Prime Minister on 17 August 1932 provided for separate electorates for the depressed classes. This made Mahatma Gandhi go on fast unto death; a final compromise
popularly known as Poona Pact provided for reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes in the general constituencies. Ambedkar opposed the demand for independence and wanted the British Rule to continue in India to safeguard the rights of lower classes. His works “The Untouchables”, “Marxism versus Buddhism” and his article in ‘Maha-Bodhi’ reveal his proclivity towards Buddhism.

Ambedkar realized that in Hinduism, there is no morality at all, in contrast morality is embedded in the religion of Buddhism. He felt the necessity of reorganizing Hinduism on two main principles : Equality and the absence of caste. And he said that without such an atmosphere in Hinduism there cannot be united strength of the Hindus. To him the Vedantic idealism was nothing but a Brahmin counterpoise to the liberalizing role of the Buddhist movement. Dr. Ambedkar also believed that simply education was not sufficient for the development of a human being. Character was more important than education. Further, he expressed pain in seeing the growing indifference towards religion. Religion was not opium, he believed that his good character and benefits of education came with religious beliefs. He had faith in religion but not in Hinduism which was the hypocrisy of religion.

Ambedkar upheld that religion was a necessity, but he did admit to its historically embedded character as opposed to its being esoteric or
transcendental. He also engaged in a comparative study of religion, because he thought of religion as social. For Ambedkar, human beings cannot live through the material aspect of life alone and they require religion. But religions is not governed by an esoteric vision given to a few by God. For this breeds dogmatism. Rather than have God at its centre, it is the human being and society who were at the centre of religion. Ambedkar adopted a “critical-normative inquiry” (Gokhale “Dr. Ambedkar as a Philosopher”, 9) to philosophy of religion, where he endeavoured to evaluate Hinduism from the point of view of reason and science. He worked out an approach which took the various revolutions in religion into account, using the norms of utility and justice (Ibid 9-10). The former is oriented towards society, while the latter towards the individual. Ambedkar maintained that the two could be reconciled. Hence, from this point of view he tried to argue that Hinduism fails on the grounds of liberty, equality and fraternity.

According to Ambedkar, Hinduism does not support social unity, as it is based on very individualistic notions of personhood as separate. Consequently, sensitivity to others and fraternity was missing in Hinduism. To him Hinduism was a religion of inequality. In Hinduism conscience, reason and independent thinking have neither any importance nor any scope for development. A Hindu must necessarily
be a slave of either the Vedas or the Smrutis, without reason. Hence, as long as one is a Hindu by religion, you cannot expect to have freedom of thought. It may be argued that might argue that the Hindu religion does not force one to mental slavery, yet, it has destroyed the freedom of mind and enslaved other sections of societies too.

The only way out of this atrocity was to convert, reject Hinduism and embrace Buddhism. According to him, Buddhism was revolt against such parasitic luxury and it prepared the foundations of just civilization. Religion to Dr. Ambedkar was to guide man’s life on the basis of rationalism, morality and spiritualism. It was to be secular and just. According to Ambedkar, the new religion will be an ethical order without prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices. It would be based exclusively on the principles of morality (Buddha and His Dhamma).

The first example of the active application of the social doctrines of Buddhism on the mass level was seen by the Indian people during 1950 and after independence, the revival movement took a new turn as Buddhism come to be associated with nationalism and ancient India culture. The Buddhist heritage was reflected in the national flag and national emblem which represented the glorious days of India under the aegis of the Buddhist kings. Dr Ambedkar was instrumental in
instituting the Buddhist wheel of Dharma and the lion from the capital of Asoka were adopted as National Symbols for independent India.

In February, 1953 he declared that the conflict in this world will ultimately be between the Gospel of the Buddha and that of Karl Marx. In May 1954, he was delegated to the world Buddhist conference at Rangoon. During the two week stay in Burma, Dr. Ambedkar announced the starting of a seminar in Bangalore to train preachers for the propagation of Buddhism in India. In May 1955 he founded ‘The Bharatiya Buddha Mahasabha. In December 1955, again at Mandale in Burma, Dr. Ambedkar decided that he and his followers would formally embrace Buddhism in the 2500th year of the Buddistera, that is 1956-57. On 25th December, 1955, he installed an image of the Buddha at Dehu Road in a temple build by the scheduled caste community. On 14th October 1956, he embraced formally the Buddhism at a historic ceremony in Nagpur. In November 1956, he was hailed as a Nav-Buddha at the world Buddhist conference at Kathmandu.

Ambedkar was an institutional Buddhist only for a few weeks, during that period he had done more for the promotion of Buddhism than any other Indian since Ashoka. Three quarters of a million untouchables were converted to Buddhism during this seven week period. Ambedkar provided an inspiration to the down-trodden masses of humanity to
convert to a religion that recognized no barriers of class, caste privilege riches that prevent the full attainment and growth of an individual who is determined to build his personality on patient labour, sincerity, courage and self-less sacrifice. By turning to Buddhism, he critiqued the majoritarian privilege that was associated with Hinduism. It was the effort and vision of Dr. Ambedkar that the revival of Buddhism in India and socio-economic development of ignored humanity in India took a new pace.

Ambedkar proposed Buddha’s dhamma as a true religion, which attempted to reconstruct not only the Indian society but the society at large in the world also wherein human dignity can be protected and the world peace honoured. It is thus from this point of view that Ambedkar looked upon Buddhism as wherein human dignity and values would be gracefully preserved. Ambedkar, the most important aspect of Buddhist philosophy is its emphasis on rational and logical approach. In contrast to the metaphysical and speculative traditions in Indian philosophy, Buddha takes up his rational and logical exercise. He starts from reality and through a rational analysis that mind or reason is the most primary or important truth. It is both the truth and the path to the truth. For any rational school this is the cardinal point, From this point of view, it is evident that the whole Buddhist philosophy is rationalist. The effort of
Buddha is to make philosophy realistic by trying to explain the reality and the experience of the society and human beings. No speculative answer satisfies him. He was looking for answers which would correspond to human experience. However, even in this realm it is reason or the mind which is more important than emotions. His search for the truth begins with simple human experience of suffering and follows a rational deductive logic to arrive at his conclusions. In fact he brings down Indian philosophy from the realms of metaphysics, speculation and even crude prescriptions of rituals and sacrifices. Even in this respect the Buddhist path is the middle way and may be, it is more correct to qualify it as realism.

Following Gokhale (2008a, 7-8), Ambedkar did not turn to a literal version of Buddhism of regurgitating the basic doctrines of the canon. Rather following Buddha, he mindfully engaged with the principles of Buddhism to examine whether they were compatible with experience. While doubting aspects of Buddhist teachings, Ambedkar employed his reason. Moreover, he offered a “forward-looking” version of Buddhism, where one could seek emancipation in the future. He did not waste his efforts on the debates surrounding the past karma of the human being. For such an approach would concentrate on the birth of the human being and implicate itself in the caste system.
Ambedkar struggled to eradicating caste and, more especially, for emancipating the Dalit from the oppressive social systems led him to propose radical measures like spate electorate in the political domain. In the social domain, he favoured reforms that could work at grass root level, education being his first goal and reforms by the state as prescribed from the Hindu code bill. The second chapter will examine Ambedkar’s critique of attempts to reform Hinduism as it fails address the basic problem of caste prejudice. Hence, this thesis argues that the concept of human dignity and world peace can only be addressed by Buddhism.