

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's View on Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

In the critical approach of Dr. Babasaheb R. Ambedkar to religion and his subsequent conversion to Buddhism as an ethical and social philosophy, this essay examines his understanding of the concept of untouchability. It argues that the criticism of untouchability made by Ambedkar was based on an advanced moral interpretation of caste as a social practice and ideology supported by religion and not limited to the legal and economic sense. Dr. When Ambedkar recognised untouchability as a cultural and ethical problem that could not be eliminated only through constitutional means, he showed how the Brahmanical Hinduism structure fulfilled the need to justify graded inequalities. Thus, it was the rejection of a religious institution that denied human dignity, moral equality, and social fraternity and not the rejection of religion as such.

The essay proceeds to demonstrate how Dr B.R. Ambedkar felt the need to reconstruct religion into a rational, egalitarian and humanistic form of moral order that could transcend the issues behind untouchability. By understanding Buddhism as a social ethic and a social democracy, which is grounded in equality and compassion and in reason, it converted Buddhism into a foundational element of social democracy and moral citizenship. Navayana Buddhism made conversion a less spiritual choice but a community action of self-liberation. This paper highlights the enduring importance of the Buddhist vision of Dr B.R. Ambedkar in addressing the long-standing social injustice and establishment of the democratic culture founded on liberty, equality, and fraternity by situating his views in broad deliberations on caste, democracy, and moral philosophy.

KEY WORDS: Caste System; Buddhism; Navayana; Dhamma; Social Justice; Social Democracy; Constitutional Morality; Religion and Ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

The conversion of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to Buddhism in 1956 was one of the biggest intellectual and political transformations that took place in Indian history. This conversion was not merely a personal or spiritual act; it was an outcome of the lifetime struggle of Dr B.R. Ambedkar against caste injustice and untouchability, or a calculated philosophical action to transform the society. Through his conversion to Buddhism, Dr B.R. Ambedkar reaffirmed a moral tradition of equality, reason and human dignity and abandoned a religious order in which discrimination was sanctified. The reason behind his conversion is that he thought that there is nothing like religion to man and nothing like man to religion, as he expressly stated [1].

Consequently, there is a need to decipher the engagement of Dr B.R. Ambedkar with Buddhism as the opposition of religion as social philosophy and religion as blind faith. To him, Buddhism was a moral system that could support libertarianism, equality and fraternity, which he viewed as vital to democracy and not to metaphysical faith or rites. Buddhism was one of the solutions that he sought to find to suitably deal with the structural brutality of untouchability that he knew was not merely a legal quirk but a social and cultural issue.

This essay seeks to explore the Buddhist approach of untouchability as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar saw it. The primary objectives of the study are to: (1) examine how Dr B.R. Ambedkar criticised the Hindu social order and how it justified untouchability; (2) examine how Buddhism was a conscious ethical and political alternative; and (3) examine how the Buddhist philosophy of Dr B.R. Ambedkar could be applied to social justice and democratic morality. Some of the main issues of the study include: What was the perception of Dr B.R. Ambedkar of untouchability as a social and moral problem? How come he thought Buddhism was so easily suited to its destruction? More so, how does his interpretation of Buddhism integrate social democracy into a non-religious paradigm?

The methodology of the study is the close textual and interpretative analysis of the key writings of Ambedkar, especially *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, *Annihilation of Caste*, speeches, and essays, which is supplemented by the selective use of Buddhist canonical sources in the interpretation of the former by Dr B.R. Ambedkar [3]. It is not strictly a doctrinal comparison but a normative and contextual one, which utilises the social philosophy, political theory, and sociology of religion.

The paper is structured in the following way: the second section provides an overview of the body of research and scholarly debates on the role of Dr B.R. Ambedkar in contact with Buddhism, the third part presents the analysis of his critique of the Hindu faith, his redefinition of the Buddha and the Dhamma, and the fourth section outlines the evolution of the Navayana Buddhism as a social emancipation project; the fifth section analyses the applicability of the Dr B.R. Ambedkar Buddhist thought in the contemporary society, and its implications to social justice and democracy. It is under this framework that the study attempts to contextualise the views of Dr B.R. Ambedkar on the subject of untouchability into a broader context of ethics and philosophy, which is still very relevant to contemporary India.

2. Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Critique of Hinduism

The interest of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in Hinduism was not incidental, but the resultant product of long historical study, philosophical argument, and personal experience of caste discrimination applied to himself in politics; it was not simply antagonistic. The way he criticised Hinduism should be viewed as a stepping stone to his eventual conversion to Buddhism. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar criticised a religious system that, in his reasoning, blessed social stratification, institutionalised inequality and denied a large segment of humanity the dignity of person-to-person relatedness

instead of religion as such. Dr B.R. Ambedkar felt that the tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity were simply irreconcilable with the Hindu religion as organised by the Brahmanical authority and scriptural tradition.

2.1 Brahmanism and Caste Ideology

The foundation of his criticism is the description of Brahmanism by Dr B.R. Ambedkar as an intellectual system that supported and maintained caste domination. Dr B.R. Ambedkar drew a strict line between Brahmanism and the Hindu society and realised that the latter was the theoretical power that offered the varna-jati system to construct the Hindu social order. He argued that caste was among the elements of Hinduism and not a social vice or deviancy. By ranking the society with inequality of grade, he said that the varna-jati order brought a regime of climbing adoration and descending disdain as each caste was positioned over and under the other caste [4].

Dr B.R. Ambedkar emphasised that caste was differentiated in terms of its moral severity and rigidity because it did not allow human choice and social mobility. People were fixed in the caste by birth, unlike the systems of classes that allow people to move with the change in merit or economic status. This obsession was not a chance event but had the blessing of religion. The theological principles of the Hindu books, such as the Manusmriti, justified hereditary hierarchy, job segregation, and exclusion of so-called untouchables in social and religious, as well as civic life. Dr B.R. Ambedkar discovered that the caste system is not just a division of labour, but he explained it as a division of labourers [5].

Significantly, Dr B.R. Ambedkar argued that Hinduism by displaying hierarchy as reinforced by divinity, turned social injustice into a moral value. The concept of dharma also developed into caste-related requirements, which obliged individuals to predestined roles, whether just or not, and whether reasonable or not. To this school of thought, inequality was a religious obligation that had to be obeyed and not a social injustice that had to be resolved. Consequently, Dr B.R. Ambedkar was forced to conclude that Hinduism did not tolerate caste, but it actively built and sanctioned it.

Due to this, he reached the radical and provocative conclusion that the inner reform in Hinduism was, in essence, impossible. Dr. The caste was central to Hindu theology, as argued by Ambedkar, unlike reformers who believed that caste was a distortion of an egalitarian religion. He argued that efforts to alter the Hindu religion without compromising its scriptural position would never be successful. You cannot make anything out of the foundations of caste, he said bluntly. It is impossible to build a nation and impossible to build morality [6].

2.2 Search for an Ethical Alternative

Dr B.R. Ambedkar rejected Hinduism, but no form of atheism or moral nihilism followed. On the other hand, it increased his search of a moral and religious system that could support a reasonable social order. Since religion affected moral behaviour, the societal ideals and interpersonal

relationships, Dr B.R. Ambedkar was of the view that religion was a vital social institution. Nevertheless, he argued that a sound religion must be grounded on human dignity, moral equality and reason. Any religion that did not accept such values, however old and popular, was not fit to form the core of a democratic society.

One element of this search was the rejection of scriptural authority that promoted hierarchy by Dr B.R. Ambedkar. He did not agree with the idea that moral truth could be deduced from religious texts that cannot be subjected to reasoning. In his view, the use of Hindu scriptures was a weapon of power because they blessed social inequality in heaven. Thus, Dr B.R. Ambedkar challenged the epistemological basis of the Brahmanical authority, arguing that morality ought to be evaluated according to its impact on human welfare as opposed to its observance of custom. He made the statement that reason must concur with religion. One will not need it unless it is [7].

This religious view compelled Dr B.R. Ambedkar to find an alternative in other faiths than Hinduism that could provide social liberation and moral direction. He sought a religion that advocated the moral equality of every human being, frowned upon inherited privilege, and advocated both reason and rational thinking instead of blind faith. More importantly, he turned to the Indian intellectual past to find an obscure counter-tradition instead of reaching out to an alien or imposed heritage. Eventually, this search led him to Buddhism as he regarded it as a religion of people and not hierarchy, a religion of ethics and not doctrine.

Hence, the fact that Dr B.R. Ambedkar criticised Hinduism is a necessary philosophical rupture and not an end per se. He enabled the transformation of the notion of religion into a social justice force by unveiling the Brahmanical Hinduism's moral and structural constraints. His conversion to Buddhism, therefore, should be regarded as the positive ending of this critique - an effort on his part to reconstruct religious life upon the foundations of compassion, equality, and reason.

3. Turn to Buddhism as an Indigenous Counter-Tradition

The conversion of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to Buddhism should be seen as a deliberate attempt to revive an ancient Indian moral culture that has long been suppressed by the forces of history, and not as an abandonment of the Indian civilisation. Dr B.R. Ambedkar had always held that Buddhism was an Indian-born and Indian-concerned religion and expressed the concepts that were basically opposed to the caste system, defeating the suggestion that conversion was an alienation of culture. Consequently, his conversion to Buddhism was a restoration of an indigenous counter-tradition that once resisted Brahmanical domination but still possessed the moral resources needed in modern society to provide a renewal of modern social life.

3.1 Buddhism as an Indigenous, Egalitarian Tradition of India

Dr B.R. Ambedkar disapproved of the notion that Hinduism is the sole or original religion of India. He believed that Buddhism was an Indian tradition deeply rooted in Indian culture and emerged as a

religious and social protest against Brahmanism and not an importation and an outside culture, which is supported by historical and literary evidence. Dr B.R. Ambedkar said that the Buddha was a social educator who forcefully opposed priestly authority, ritualism, and injustice as opposed to being a metaphysical mystic. Buddhism therefore presented an alternative view of the Indian culture which was founded on compassion, logic and equality of morals.

In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Dr B.R. Ambedkar emphasized that the Buddha did not approve the moral legitimacy of the caste as well as the authority of the Vedas. Buddhism practised social equality more practically than merely teaching it as theory since anybody could become a member of Sangha, irrespective of gender, occupation, and place of origin. Claiming that the Buddha was the representative of a society founded on the principles of reason and morality, rather than tradition and heredity, Dr B.R. Ambedkar believed that it was a historically important statement [8]. Religion Buddhism also focused on the ability of every individual to be ethical, unlike Brahmanical Hinduism, which defined human value through birth.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar claimed that early Buddhism was the earliest and most unified egalitarian movement in Indian historical records. Social justice and brotherhood were based on the fact that it focused on the Dhamma as a universal moral principle, not as a caste duty. Dr. This indigenous tradition was viewed by Ambedkar as a reason that hierarchy was a result of a certain religious supremacy and not an intrinsic feature of Indian society.

3.2 Suppression of Buddhism by Brahmanical Dominance

The historical realisation of Buddhism did not perceive the death of Buddhism as an ordinary and natural event as Dr B.R. Ambedkar saw it. Instead, he argued that systematic subjugation of Buddhism and the eventual supplantation of the latter by the revival of Brahmanism was a highly political and theological displacement. Feared by the fact that Buddhism took away the privilege of caste and performance of rituals, Brahmanism restored the social order and the scriptural supremacy.

According to Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the move of Buddha being absorbed into the Hindu pantheon as an incarnation of Vishnu was a political move of neutralisation and not recognition. The emancipatory possibility of Buddhism was undermined through the adaptation of Buddhism into Brahmanism; thus, Buddha was taken to his heart and the radical social aspect of his teachings was eliminated. Dr B.R. Ambedkar argued that Hindus strangled Buddhism with repression and assimilation rather than through argument [9]. Buddhism as an active social phenomenon was practically destroyed in the process of consolidation of the varna-jati system and in the process of restoration of Vedic authority.

This past repression had its long-term effects. The ideology of caste became established in the form of graded inequality when Buddhism was wiped out, leaving the oppressed people without an

indigenous moral basis to challenge their oppression. Thus, the restoration of Buddhism, which was undertaken by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, was also an act of historical justice- an effort of reinstating back into history the tradition that had once given the oppressed a sense of equality and dignity.

3.3 Buddhism as Historical and Moral Continuity

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar made a point to make his conversion to Buddhism look like an extension of Indian moral tradition and not a renunciation of Indian tradition. The process of conversion to Buddhism showed the recovery of the Indian suppressed moral heritage, unlike the conversion to Christianity or Islam, which were often represented as a cultural transformation. Buddhism was part of the Indian people just like the Brahmanical Hinduism, or even more so, according to Dr B.R. Ambedkar. His conversion to Buddhism was therefore a statement of continuity of ethics, culture and history.

Amid the modern context, such as democracy, social equality, and constitutional morality, Dr. Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar was also reinterpreting Buddhism. He thought that this rework rendered the original spirit of Buddhism and not corrupt it. He considered that this insistence on equality (samata), compassion (karuṇa), and reason (prajna) of the Buddha was perfectly in line with the ideals of a modern democracy. Thus, Buddhism was not an outdated system of ethics but a living one, which could address contemporary types of injustice.

Therefore, the conversion of Dr B.R. Ambedkar to Buddhism combined moral reconstruction and historical recovery. He challenged the Brahmanical Hinduism dominion of the Indian identity by considering Buddhism as an indigenous counter-tradition and gave a new basis upon which the downtrodden would enjoy collective self-respect. By doing so, Buddhism was a civilisational alternative to much as a religion, which declared social equality, dignity of human beings and morality using reason as the pillars of Indian society.

4. Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Interpretation of the Buddha

Unlike traditional religious images, where a large focus is made on mysticism, supernaturalism, and philosophical conjecture, the outlook of the Buddha as seen by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is a major alteration. Instead, Dr B.R. Ambedkar redefined Buddha as a rational, moral and socially minded individual whose primary objective was to reduce human suffering. This reinterpretation was driven by the lifetime struggle of caste injustice and the search of a moral basis that could support social democracy that Dr B.R. Ambedkar was waging, and it was not just religious but coincidental. Dr. The Buddha was viewed by Ambedkar as a human reformer whose teachings served as a handy guide on transforming society, but not a divine saviour.

4.1 Buddha as a Social and Moral Reformer

The Buddha was a very rational teacher, according to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, whose primary concern was dukkha, or human suffering as understood not only in the form of existential anguish

but also as a social construct due to the different forms of injustice, inequality, and ignorance. Dr. In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar emphasised the fact that the teachings of the Buddha were not about philosophical dilemmas but about practical human problems. What the Buddha wrote was that he was concerned with the happiness of man in this world, and not his salvation in another world. This focus was sharply opposed to religious practices, which excuse misery here and now and postpone justice to the next life.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar claims that the Buddha was a very rational teacher whose major concern was dukkha, or human misery perceived as existential agony, and also suffering that was imposed by social institutions, which were based on injustice, inequity and ignorance. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, pointed out that Buddha's teachings focused on practical human issues and not philosophical enigmas. As he has written, Buddha cared about the happiness of man in this world, but not his salvation in a different world. This focus was very different to religious traditions that delay justice to the afterlife and excuse suffering in the present.

The Buddha reform institutions were also highlighted by Dr B.R. Ambedkar. Sangha was a living model of a casteless social order, the principles of which were equality, discipline, and group discussion. Everybody was welcome in the monastic community, irrespective of his or her social status, which applied moral values to real social behaviour. This matter was significant to Dr B.R. Ambedkar, as the Buddha provided institutions reflecting equality instead of merely teaching them. This was the message which Dr B.R. Ambedkar emphasised himself, that moral values had to be maintained through institutional and social institutions [10].

Particularly critical of such images of the Buddha as a remote ascetic and indifferent to social life were depictions of the Buddha as mystical and supernatural, and Dr B.R. Ambedkar especially rejected them. He asserted that these interpretations were meant to bring to nought the immense social implications of the Buddha's teaching and the historical Buddha had been misperceived. Dr Ambedkar held that the Buddha was a philosopher who focused on eliminating the cause of suffering, which encompassed economic hardship, social humiliation, and moral degradation as opposed to offering spiritual comfort, which was not linked to the material world.

4.2 Rejection of Supernaturalism

The systematic rejection of supernaturalism by Dr B.R. Ambedkar is one of the important elements of his knowledge. He insisted that the Buddha never used miracles to build his authority and prove that he was divinely revealed. Instead, the Buddha addressed experience, reason and moral judgment. Dr B.R. Ambedkar often emphasised that Buddhism is a religion without God, and that the power of Buddhism was based upon moral truth and not some supernatural decree [11]. Dr B.R. Ambedkar claimed that this humanistic orientation was what separated Buddhism from religions rooted in transcendental approval.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar was highly doubtful about philosophical theories when they were constructed in a deterministic way. He warned that theories such as karma and reincarnation might serve to maintain the inequity in society by creating the perception of oppression in past lives as opposed to the present-day injustice, should the theories be taken to indicate present-day misery. Consequently, ethical action became more important to Dr B.R. Ambedkar than conjectural metaphysics. He insisted that following the principles such as equality (samata), wisdom (prajna), and compassion (karuṇa) were of greater significance than faith in otherworldly realities.

In his opinion, Dr B.R. Ambedkar considered Buddhism to be close to both modern scientific and democratic sensibilities as it emphasised ethical behaviour over speculative philosophical principles. Dr. A broader criticism of blind tradition made by Ambedkar resonated with the Buddha, stressing that people needed to reason and experience what they believed and not have faith. He interpreted the famous Kalama Sutta as an indication that the Buddha advocated moral independence and critical reasoning, both of which the liberated society needed.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar did not secularise Buddhism in a literal sense by rejecting supernaturalism; rather, he returned Buddhism to what he considered the fundamental nature of the religion as an ethical, logical system. Due to this knowledge, Buddhism could act as a moral ground to social democracy and promote equality, respect, and brotherhood without divine intervention. Through this, Buddha by Dr B.R. Ambedkar was not only a historical figure but also a moral example whose teachings offered a timeless guidance on how to establish a society that was not only just but also caring.

5. Concept of Dhamma in Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Thought

In the perspective of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on Buddhism, it is founded on the ethical and philosophical concept of Dhamma. Unlike the traditional religious interpretations, which focus on metaphysics, ritualism, or supernatural authority, Dr B.R. Ambedkar redefined Dhamma as a social, moral and intellectual philosophy, geared towards better human relationships. The lifelong struggle of his caste oppression and his search for a moral foundation that was able to support the social democracy should be closely associated with the development of the Dhamma. Dr B.R. Ambedkar thought that Dhamma was aimed at creating a just and humane social order within this world as opposed to redemption beyond it.

5.1 Dhamma as Moral Law

The Dhamma, according to Dr B.R. Ambedkar, is basically a code of morality governing social interactions and human behaviour. In the Buddha and His Dhamma, he explicitly opposed the idea that morality requires supernatural authority or approval by a deity. Instead of using revelation or priestly comprehension, he asserted, the Buddha was one of the rare ones who founded ethics in human reason and social need. Dr B.R. Ambedkar [12] pointed out that dhamma was not about God

and soul; it was all about man and his relations with other men. This statement is summed up as his radical departure from theistic and ritualistic religious traditions.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar said that the authority of the Dhamma was based on its rationality and capacity to reduce suffering and promote harmony in society. The morality standards were not to be assessed based on their compliance with the holy scripture but on their impacts on human welfare. This emphasis on reason distinguished Buddhism from Brahmanical Hinduism, the moral duties of which were 100% tied to caste-specific duties, and introduced it to the modern ethical theory. Ethical duty was rendered by Dhamma, a general and non-hereditary obligation by eliminating divine authority as a source of morality.

It was also significant when Dr B.R. Ambedkar denied the role of clergymen. He argued that the monopolisation of moral power that a sacerdotal caste had was being intentionally destroyed by the Buddha. None of the priests in Buddhism had the right to prescribe behaviour based on either genetic origin or ritual status, or to declare him/herself as the sole bearer of the truth. This aspect of Dhamma had far-reaching consequences in society since it openly criticised the ideological pillars of the caste system. Dr B.R. Ambedkar argued that all people, regardless of their class origin, equally had moral agency [13].

He thought that ethics could not be reduced to internal spirituality or personal virtue. Dhamma had to engage with the social realities of suffering, poverty, inequality, and marginalisation. Dr. By putting morality within the social relationships, evolved the Dhamma into an ethical system of collective existence as opposed to individual salvation.

5.2 Core Ethical Values

Dr B.R. Ambedkar employed three principles (interrelated), such as *prajna* (wisdom), *karuna* (compassion), and *samata* (equality) to explicate the ethical content of the Dhamma. He insisted that these principles were direct attacks on the caste ideology and the foundation of moral Buddhism.

The reason-based critical understanding was called *prajna* or wisdom. Dr B.R. Ambedkar believed that *prajna* is the capacity to perceive social injustice, to renounce superstition and to defy tradition. Wisdom was an ethical-intellectual value, which enabled individuals to realise the irrationality of traditional systems as opposed to abstract knowledge. *Prajna* was thus necessary to liberation since it liberated the mind of beliefs that advocated injustice [14].

Karuna or compassion was one of the most important aspects of the moral philosophy of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. He, however, did not mean compassion to be mere altruism or sympathetic affection. Instead, *karuna* implied an active commitment to alleviate suffering of other people and in particular that due to social structures. Buddhism as Dr B.R. Ambedkar understood it was a recognition that suffering was a societal reality that often arose out of exploitation and alienation

and not a result of personal vice. Hence, compassion requires societal transformation and social responsibility.

The most essential ethical implication of the Dhamma as proposed by Dr B.R. Ambedkar was equality or samata. He also insisted that Buddhism advocated the moral equality of all men. Samata did not agree with the concept that birth can establish moral value, as contrasted to the Hindu concepts of a graded hierarchy. Dr B.R. Ambedkar maintained that political equality, without social equality, would be empty, as he directly attached this moral equality to his concept of democracy. Democracy in its turn must be considered as a way of comitatus coexistence, which is founded on respect and fraternity as he once remarked elsewhere [15].

These principles were then collectively assembled to create the Dhamma a guide to communal social life, and Dr B.R. Ambedkar believed that the Dhamma was civic and moral and did not want the commercialisation of religion. It encouraged the ethical principles of compassion, equality and reason, which are fundamental to the equal social structure. By doing so, Dhamma balanced the constitutional morality through the provision of the moral culture that is needed in the practical implementation of the legal rights.

Consequently, the concept of the Dhamma as developed by Dr B.R. Ambedkar means that the concept of religion in general has been reconsidered meaningfully. It is a social morality that seeks to reconstruct human relationships on fairness and dignity as opposed to theology or metaphysics. Dr. By so interpreting Dhamma, Ambedkar transformed Buddhism into a modern moral philosophy capable of combating caste injustice to achieve social democracy.

6. Navayana Buddhism and Social Emancipation

The Navayana (the New Vehicle) Buddhism of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is one of the most radical reformulations of a religious tradition in the history of contemporary intellectual thought. The aim of Navayana was neither the restoration of classical Buddhism in its historical type nor a new sect in doctrinal respects. Rather, it constituted a highly artificial re-interpretation of the ethics and social philosophy that was meant to address the realities of caste oppression in modern India. Buddhism must be a means of social liberation and not confined to monasticism or philosophical speculation, according to the views of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. In such a way, Navayana shifted the focus of Buddhist philosophy to the creation of an egalitarian moral community, caste abolition and human dignity.

6.1 Reinterpretation of Karma and Suffering

Navayana Buddhism of Dr B.R. Ambedkar can be defined by an extreme reconsideration of karma and dukkha (suffering). Dr B.R. Ambedkar strongly opposed the idea of karma based on birth and determinism, a commonly used concept in the justification of caste oppression. He argued that the concept of suffering in this life was the effect of moral failures in past reincarnations, and this gave

a strong intellectual defence of social injustice. He claimed that these interpretations deprived the oppressed people of moral agency and fighting against injustice and reduced tyranny to destiny.

In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Dr B.R. Ambedkar clearly distinguished Buddhist teachings of the Buddha against the fatalistic interpretation of karma. He emphasised that instead of promoting the tolerance of suffering, the Buddha aimed at identifying its sources in the context of society and human actions. Dr B.R. Ambedkar [16] said that the Buddha was not interested in the origin of the world but rather the origin of suffering and the way to eliminate it. Dr To this change of emphasis, Ambedkar was able to re-theoretically rearrange suffering as purely socially constructed, but no longer metaphysically justified.

By finding pain in social structures such as economic exploitation, caste discrimination and deprivation of dignity, Dr B.R. Ambedkar transformed Buddhism into a criticism of structural injustice. In so doing, Navayana did not like the idea that social hierarchy was not only obligatory in the cosmic sense but also morally acceptable. Instead, it asserted that pain had been created by human institutions and not by divine or karmic laws and that community action could change these institutions.

The far-reaching emancipatory implications of this reinterpretation were important. It justified the resistance to injustice and transferred moral responsibility to society instead of the victim. Navayana Buddhism postulated the ideological foundation of caste at once and provided the chance to transform the moral and political order by denying the morality of suffering connected with birth.

6.2 Conversion as a Collective Political Act

In 1956, Dr B.R. Ambedkar and hundreds of thousands of his disciples were publicly converted to become Buddhists, during the historic mass conversion in Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur. This was not merely a religious ritual but a great political thing that people did collectively. Dr B.R. Ambedkar ensured that he was converted because of the stigma of untouchability that he believed was inseparably connected with the Hindu social system. He is quoted as saying; I was not born a Hindu and I will not die a Hindu [17].

Conversion was a matter of self-respect and dignity as theorised by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. It was an indication of rejection of a religious structure that did not acknowledge the moral equality of a good number of its people. Previously untouchable groups disavowed the identities imposed by caste society upon them and proclaimed a new level of morality founded on equality and rational morality by uniting in adopting Buddhism.

Despite their importance, Dr B.R. Ambedkar emphasised that caste stigma could not be removed only through the conversion of individuals. It was needed to bring about a collective conversion that could create a new social identity. Therefore, the Navayana Buddhism was a moral community that replaced the idea of equality, fraternity, and compassion with the logic of caste. Dr. This collective

aspect made the conversion by Ambedkar unlike a simple spiritual or individualistic religious change.

The reinterpretation of Buddhism by Dr B.R. Ambedkar provided the liberty from caste-based stigma by not only providing a new social belonging but also a new belief. Beyond the context of the Brahmanical order, it allowed Dalits to rebuild their sense of self and moral worth in the past. Through this manner, Navayana was able to implement political aggression coupled with moral reformation with the aim of being both a religion and a social movement.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar was sure that the pledge of the Navayana Buddhism was not a salvation in another world but a restoration of the social relations in the present world. Conversion was a form of social emancipation, therefore, a deliberate rejection of a dehumanising experience of the past, and an egalitarian future.

7. Buddhism as the Moral Foundation of Social Democracy

Due to his Buddhist membership, B.R. Ambedkar came up with a unique form of social democracy that is based on a common moral culture as opposed to being an institution entirely based on political institutions. Dr B.R. Ambedkar even argued that democracy could never be constrained to the formal equality under the law, constitutional patterns, or even the electoral processes. Instead, he always insisted that democracy should be regarded as a lifestyle- a cohabiting style, which is supported by morality, human relations, and respect. Buddhism, in his opinion, gave the right moral and ethical base on which the social democracy in India could thrive.

7.1 Democracy as a Way of Life

The most important definition of democracy is that of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who said that political democracy could not be sustained without social democracy. In his address to the Constituent Assembly, he once said that democracy is not a form of government, but a way of associated existence, of comfort communicated experience [18]. In this sense, social relationships between citizens are more important than institutional structures.

The ideas of liberty, equality and brotherhood are the building blocks of the democratic vision of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. However, these values could not be maintained through legislation alone, though included in the constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar tended to underline repeatedly that they had to be implemented through legislative acts. Although freedom without equality would lead to tyranny, equality without freedom would lead to forceful conformity. Fraternity, the moral cement that held equality and liberty in a working democracy, was thus of prime focus to his thinking.

The fact that Indian society was based on caste and that there were no social circumstances needed to create brotherhood was of particular concern to Dr B.R. Ambedkar. According to him, caste was anti-national in that it killed the spirit of collective identity that was essential to democracy by

separating the society into ranks of superior and inferior classes [19]. Without fraternity, which is a feeling of moral duty and common humanity, democracy will be weak and insincere.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in this case. He found a moral teaching that gave precedence to fellowship, observance of human dignity and compassion (karuṇa) in the Dharma of the Buddha. Dr B.R. Ambedkar suggested that it was the social consciousness that caste society was suppressing regularly that was given a boost by Buddhism. Buddhist fraternity was a moral recognition of unity on the basis of shared humanity as opposed to romanticism. Consequently, Buddhism offered a moral basis that could justify democracy as a way of life rather than a form of government.

7.2 Buddhism and Constitutional Morality

Buddhism and social democracy are also described by the concept of constitutional morality by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, defined constitutional morality as an acquired respect of constitutional principles and constitutional institutions and practices supported by moral restraint and commitment to the common good. He warned that without an appropriate moral culture, constitutions, however progressive, could not work. Constitutional morality, he said, was no natural sentiment. It must be cultivated [20].

Dr B.R. Ambedkar thought that the moral standards of constitutionalism were closely congruent with the Buddhist ethics. Both advocated civic obligations rather than personal privilege, ethical conduct rather than ritual conformity and rationality as opposed to blind obedience to religion. Dr B.R. Ambedkar was secularly minded and a proponent of rational civic living, which aligned with the Buddhist religion that rejected the authority of God and the mediating actions of priests. The Buddha was consistent with the constitutional justice, equality and dignity, which emphasised the moral behaviour (sila), wisdom (prajna), and compassion (karuṇa).

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar argued that a society that still ethically defended the presence of hierarchy and exclusion was not able to embrace the constitutional goals, such as equality before the law and fundamental rights. Buddhism gave a moral resistance to these tendencies since it is an egalitarian and non-theist moral system. It made individuals espouse democratic values because they believed in it and not because they were afraid of being punished.

By doing this, the social democracy that was developed by Dr B.R. Ambedkar was based it on Buddhism as a moral standpoint. It offered the ethical training that was needed in order to transform constitutional ideals into real social practices. Dr. Unless such a moral basis existed, Ambedkar feared the democracy in India would become either authoritarian or dominated by the majority [21]. Therefore, by instituting democracy in Buddhist morality, Dr B.R. Ambedkar propounded an exceedingly individual mixture of religion, morale and politics. Buddhism to him, was the moral accomplishment of contemporary constitutionalism and not an avoidance of it. It spoke of the

ethical deficiency of caste society and provided the cultural capital needed to topple inequality, liberty and fraternity in everyday social life. In so doing, Dr B.R. Ambedkar transformed Buddhism into a living moral theory, which could be used to underpin social democracy in an incredibly unequal nation.

8. Critiques and Debates on Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Buddhism

The reinterpretation of Buddhism by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has been a subject of continuing scholarly debate in many different disciplines, such as social history, political theory, religious studies, and philosophy. Even though his conversion to Buddhism and the formation of Navayana have been hailed by many as a tremendous intervention in Indian social thought, it has been questioned by others on his philosophical legitimacy, interpretive selectivity, and the integrity of his doctrine. Nevertheless, these types of criticism also provoke a more thorough analysis of the main objective of Dr Ambedkar, who wants to reconstitute Buddhism as a moral and social philosophy that will be able to challenge systemic injustice and inequality.

8.1 Allegations of Selective Interpretation and Doctrinal Departure

Buddhism, as conceived by Dr B.R. Ambedkar is commonly accused of a biased and revisionist view of the doctrines of the Buddha. According to them, Dr B.R. Ambedkar deliberately downplayed or ignored key doctrinal ideas such as rebirth, metaphysical cosmology, kamma (karma), and the highest end nibbana. Rather, Buddha emphasised moral conduct, social equity and reasoning that transformed Buddhism to be a soteriological religion, to be an ethical humanism as some scholars call it [22].

Traditional Buddhism scholars, particularly Theravada and Mahayana schools of thought, have criticised the approach of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, claiming it reduces the spiritual depth of Buddhism to the present-day social problems. As per this perception, Buddha is re-constituted in the book by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, as a social reformist, rather than a liberator of samsara, the enlightened Buddha [23]. Accordingly, the charge of theological exodus is founded on the claim that Dr B.R. Ambedkar altered Buddhism and made it fit the contemporary egalitarian ideals and thinking in the Enlightenment era.

Nevertheless, such criticisms often assume that only one version of Buddhist doctrine is right. Historical research has demonstrated that Buddhism has evolved many schools and traditions of interpretation due to the continued process of adaptation to numerous social and cultural contexts. In this perspective Dr B.R. Ambedkar Buddhism is not an exception but a long-planned re-articulation that is affected by the historical caste system and social marginalisation of India.

8.2 Responses to Critiques from Orthodox Buddhist Perspectives

Dr B.R. Ambedkar came out to face the traditional objections to his reinterpreting of Buddhism directly and indirectly. He stated that the main aim of the Buddha was to mitigate human suffering

under particular social circumstances, and it is not true that Buddhism should be identified specifically on a metaphysical level. According to Dr B.R. Ambedkar [24], Buddha was more interested in the question of social life rather than in the question of metaphysics and the soul.

The ideas, such as karma and reincarnation, according to Dr B.R. Ambedkar, were used in Indian society too often to justify social stratification and suffering as morally or spiritually necessary. Dr. By reminding people of the original, emancipatory spirit of the Buddha's teaching, which he believed was lost, Ambedkar sought to restore this teaching by reasserting the importance of ethical action in the current life. Thus, he denied supernaturalism not due to his denying spirit but because he did not want Buddhism to be used by socialist powers to restrict the individual and their spirit.

Most contemporary Buddhist scholars have supported Dr B.R. Ambedkar with these reasons. According to them, even Buddha himself discouraged the metaphysical speculation in Favor of practical ethics, compassion, and rational investigation [25]. In this respect, the perspective of Dr B.R. Ambedkar fits in a practical understanding of early Buddhism that puts the focus on human suffering and harmonious community life rather than on intellectual conjectures. Consequently, it can be expected that the dispute is not so much one of integrity vs deviation but rather one of contrasting hermeneutical aims in the tradition of Buddhism.

8.3 Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Buddhism as a Purposive Social Philosophy

Buddhism in the works of Dr B.R. Ambedkar can be thought of as a purposive social philosophy rather than a doctrinal system, and then it can be more easily assessed. Dr B.R. Ambedkar was not a traditional Buddhist monk or even a theologian but was a social thinker, constitutionalist and moral philosopher. His primary worry was how to establish a moral system that would support equality, dignity, and fraternity in the sharply stratified society, and not how to sustain the orthodoxy of his own doctrine.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar expressed it very clearly that religion needs to be judged with its implications on society. And yet he wrote [26], The test of religion is not what it believes in, but what it does to human society. Buddhism, according to his analysis, met this requirement by virtue of the fact that it held to the dignity of humans regardless of divine authority, denounced inequality and laid a lot of emphasis on the ethical obligation. Consequently, his Navayana was normative and utilitarian with a purpose, and aimed at being a collective moral force to change society.

The objections of doctrinal variance are weaker when considered in the light of this. Dr Ambedkar aimed to offer the underprivileged and, more so Dalits a moral pathway that was not covert in their daily lives, and thus needed an ethical theme of religion that was only concerned about justice and not transcendence as such. It was not meant to overtake the traditions of pre-existing Buddhism. Consequently, scholars have called the Buddhism of Dr B.R. Ambedkar as engaged Buddhism, which is founded on political and social responsibility [27].

Accordingly, Buddhism as envisioned by Dr B.R. Ambedkar has its peculiarities and audacity reflected in the arguments and criticisms. They keep on accusing them of doctrinal deviation and choice, but they often overlook the declared purpose of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who wanted to bring the moral reconstruction of society through the impartial and rational ethical system. He makes his Buddhism a success, as a socially driven philosophy aimed at human liberation in this world, although this may not be in accordance to the conventional expectations. In this respect, the reworking of Buddhism by Dr B.R. Ambedkar is a historically contextualised and ethically inspired reworking of the Dhamma of the Buddha and not a distortion.

9. Contemporary Relevance of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Buddhism

There was nothing idolatrous about Dr. B.R. Ambedkar involving himself with Buddhism; it was an intellectual aspect of politics and ethics that existed and has grown in importance in contemporary India. Buddhism as advocated by Dr Ambedkar still offers an essential paradigm of understanding injustice, articulating social ethics and protecting democratic ideals against the vested systems of caste domination in a social structure where constitutional safeguards exist alongside enduring systems of caste dominance.

9.1 Persistence of Caste Discrimination despite Legal Safeguards

Article 17 of the Constitution abolished the system of untouchability; however, even today, caste prejudice can be in both overt and covert forms. These practices reflect the weakness of legal reform in the absence of ethical change, which include social segregation, economic marginalisation, caste-based violence and lack of access to shared resources. This was a paradox that Dr B.R. Ambedkar had very clearly predicted. He more than once warned that political democracy could not be stable nor morally sound without social democracy.

Since it is filling this gap between the law and the lived reality, Buddhism as understood by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar remains relevant to this day. Unlike the external redress of the law, Dhamma is intended to transform the moral consciousness and attitudes of society. Dr B.R. Ambedkar believes that caste was a moral and cultural problem, which is backed by inculcated beliefs regarding hierarchy and purity, and not a legal problem. In this connection, Buddhism is a kind of counter-ethic that weakens the moral basis of caste. According to Dr B.R. Ambedkar, you cannot construct anything on the principles of caste. Nor can either a nation nor morality be developed [28]. This insight is preserved by the fact that the issue of caste oppression still remains prominent.

9.2 Buddhism as a Framework for Social Justice and Ethical Politics

Buddhism as presented by Dr B.R. Ambedkar is a different vision of ethical politics that is founded on justice, responsibility and brotherhood within a contemporary context where politics is at times diminished to competition against one another or mobilising identity. Dr B.R. Ambedkar considered Buddhism as an attempt to reorient the politics and not retreat. The Dhamma offered a moral

foundation of social justice by focusing on equality (samata), compassion (karuṇa) and reason (prajna) as the principles of the collective existence.

The manner in which Dr B.R. Ambedkar reformulated Buddhism shows a lot of reflection on the modern issues of human dignity and moral rule. Dr. Moral authority was a source of human reason and social responsibility that worked against supernatural sanction and mediation. This is a move in line with the contemporary trends that seek to establish politics on moral accountability instead of cultural or nationalism based on religious dogmatism. Scholars state that Buddhism, as described by Dr B.R. Ambedkar is a precursor of a form of moral secularism where morals take the place of religion in the conduct of people [29].

In addition, Buddhism as taught by Dr B.R. Ambedkar focuses on the idea that social justice requires the establishment of moral mindsets that dismiss dominance in all its forms, not only redistribution or recognition. By so doing, Buddhism continues to be of value in rethinking ethical citizenship, equality, and dignity in plural societies.

9.3 Relevance to Debates on Religious Majoritarianism and Democracy

One of the most pressing problems of contemporary India is the emergence of religious majoritarianism and its impact on democratic pluralism. A strong criticism of any political system that attempts to tie religious affiliation with state power can be identified in the Buddhism of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. His opposition to the religious order that supported inequity and suppressed opposition was the foundation of his opposition of Hindu orthodoxy and not an aversion to religion in general.

Since it does not support birth, community or numerical domination as the basis of moral legitimacy, the Buddhism of Dr B.R. Ambedkar is radically opposed to the ideologies of majoritarianism. Instead, it promotes universally moral values, which are common to every individual. Dr. Democracy also means that fraternity, i.e., a feeling of common brotherhood of all Indians, is required, as would be suggested by Ambedkar [30].

Moreover, the commitment to nonviolence, rational dialogue and peace by Buddhism offers ethical justification to the emphasis on constitutional morality by Dr B.R. Ambedkar. The Buddhism proposed by Ambedkar is a wakeup call in the current issues of nationalism, religious freedom and minority rights. Democracy must possess a moral culture that upholds equality without necessarily demeaning diversity. Even his warning that democracy in India would become a top-dressing on Indian soil, which is fundamentally undemocratic, is applicable in present times [31].

Hence, Buddhism today exhibits relevance due to Dr B.R. Ambedkar since Buddhism is a vibrant system of moral politics and democratic living, which combines morality and social criticism. Dr. The Buddhism of Ambedkar remains an ethical challenge to establish an equal, decent and fraternité society in an era of permanent inequity and ideological polarisation.

CONCLUSION

The engagement of Buddhism by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is one of the most radical and inventive discoveries in Indian modern social thought. By reconstructing Buddhism as a rational, ethical and humanistic philosophy, it liberated the Buddhist religion from philosophical abstraction and refocused it on the issue of social rebuilding. Rather than becoming involved in a revivalist doctrine, his interpretation of the Buddha and the Dhamma was a deliberate effort at coming up with a modern-day moral philosophy that could deal with the degradation, inequality, and discrimination of caste in society.

Since it struggled against hierarchy at its moral and cultural roots, the Buddhism developed by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a powerful tool used to eliminate caste. The Buddhist religion provided an ethical system founded on egalitarianism, sympathy, and rationality by denying the influence of priests, birthright, and deity. Dr. By changing the conversion to a self-emancipation in a collective form, Navayana, Apha Behn transformed the oppressed people to have their dignity, agency and a new moral identity without relating them to the Brahmanical social order.

The Buddhism of Dr B.R. Ambedkar will never be a minor matter because it is also applicable to the democratic and ethical future of India. Buddhism and social democracy can be regarded as a strong vision of justice founded in moral reform in the context where constitutional rights are still accompanied by socioeconomic exclusion and the erosion of moral values by democratic institutions. His Buddhism reminds him that democracy requires ethical fraternity and equality, and mutual humanity to succeed. Hereby, Buddhism, according to Dr B.R. Ambedkar remains an ethical venture to establish a just, accommodative, and humane society as opposed to merely caste-reactionary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses gratitude to my guide Dr. Sandesh M Wagh, whose inspiration encouraged the pursuit of this work and my family member who supported my research Work.

Declaration of competing interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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