

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S CONTRIBUTION-TO BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN INDIA****KRISHMA CHAUDHARY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Today's Ambedkarites may have confined their mentor image to a symbol for their electoral campaign, but history will view Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar differently; as a man whose genius extended over a diverse arrange of human affairs. Ambedkar was, of course, a towering leader of the Untouchables, but he was also much more (patriot, scholar, thinker and Founding Father of the Indian Constitution). He violently differing with Gandhi's approach toward the Untouchables, and finally, left the Hindu fold, embracing with thousands of his followers the more egalitarian faith of Buddhism. He raised the banner and propagated Buddhism in India who suffered an exile for over twelve hundred years. The Government of India had declared Buddha Jayanti a holiday mainly through his efforts. Dr. Ambedkar's speech on the Eve of the great conversion at Nagpur on October14, 1956, Dr. Ambedkar said Buddhism can serve not only this country, India, but the whole World at this juncture in the world affairs. He wrote a book on Buddhism titled "Buddha and His Dhamma" explaining its tenets in simple language to the common man. His other famous book was "Buddha and Karl Marx". Dr. Ambedkar exhorted Buddhists not to believe that the Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu. He suggested, "You must give a new doctrinal basis to your religion-a-basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, in short, with Democracy." Thus Ambedkar's whole life and mission was a practical contribution to humanistic Buddhist education in India and not just intellectual and philosophical which is common these days. Though he was not a Buddhist by birth but by practice and at heart he was a Buddhist. As he had said: "If I do not want to attain moksha, I do not want to be reborn. But if I were to be reborn, I should be born an Untouchable... not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra But as an Atishudra, a Bhangi."

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**Early life and education:**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar belonged to the Mahar caste, which was treated as untouchables and subjected to socio-economic discrimination. His ancestors had for long been in the employment of the army of the British East India Company. His father served in the Indian Army at the Mhow cantonment. Ramji Sakpal, belonging to the Kabir Panth, encouraged his children to read the Hindu classics. He used his position in the army to lobby for his children to study at the government school, as they faced resistance owing to their caste. In early life of Ambedkar, although able to attend school, he and other untouchable children were segregated and given little attention or assistance by the teachers. They were not allowed to sit inside the class room. Even if they needed to drink water, somebody from a higher caste would have to pour that water from a height as they were not allowed to touch the vessel that contained water. This task was usually performed for these young children by the school peon, and if the peon was not available then they had to go without water, Ambedkar states this situation as "No peon, No Water". He was required to sit on a gunny sack which he had to take home with him. Of his brothers and sisters, only Ambedkar succeeded in passing his examinations and graduating to a high school. His original surname Ambavadekar comes from his native village 'Ambavade' in Ratnagiri District. His teacher, Mahadev Ambedkar, who was a Brahmin and fond of him, changed his surname from 'Ambavadekar' to his own surname 'Ambedkar' in school records.

In 1907, after passing matriculation examination he entered Elphinstone College in Bombay, becoming the first from his untouchable community to do so. This success provoked celebrations in his community and after a public ceremony he was presented with a biography of the Buddha by Dada Keluskar, a family friend. By 1912, he obtained his degree in economics and political science from Bombay University, and prepared to take up employment with the Baroda state government. His wife, by then 15 years had just moved his young family and started work, when he had to quickly return to Mumbai to see his ailing father, who died on 2 February 1913.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, popularly also known as Babasaheb, was an Indian jurist, politician, philosopher, anthropologist, historian and economist. Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, claims that Dr. Ambedkar is my Father in Economics. He is true celebrated champion of the underprivileged. He deserves more than what he has achieved today. However he was highly controversial figure in his home country but it was not the reality. As a first law minister, he was principal architect of the Constitution of India and as a revivalist for Buddhism in India; he inspired the Modern Buddhist movement.

Many public institutions are named in his honour, such as the Ambedkar University Delhi; Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University in Hyderabad; B. R. Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur; Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in Aurangabad, Maharashtra.

**Conversion to Buddhism:**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar rejected the idea of converting to Sikhism after meeting with leaders of the Sikh community. He concluding that his conversion might result in him having what scholar Stephen P. Cohen describes as a "second-rate status" among Sikhs. He studied Buddhism all his life. He turned his attention fully to Buddhism and travelled to Sri Lanka to attend a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists around 1950. While dedicating a new Buddhist vihara near Pune, Ambedkar announced that he was writing a book on Buddhism and that as soon as it was finished, he planned to make a formal conversion to Buddhism. Ambedkar visited Burma in 1954 in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955, he founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha (The Buddhist Society of India). He completed his final work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, in 1956 and it was published posthumously.

After meetings with the Sri Lankan Buddhist monk Hammalawa Saddhatissa, he organised a formal public ceremony for himself and his supporters in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Ambedkar completed his own conversion, along with his wife accepting the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk in the traditional manner. He then proceeded to convert some

500,000 of his supporters who were gathered around him. He prescribed the 22 Vows for these converts, after the Three Jewels and Five Precepts. Ambedkar then travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference. He is regarded as a "Bodhisattva" by some Indian Buddhists, though he never claimed it himself.

His work on The Buddha or Karl Marx and "Revolution and counter-revolution in ancient India" remained incomplete.

His reputation as a scholar led to his appointment as free India's first law minister, and chairman of the committee responsible to draft a constitution. He passionately believed in the freedom of the individual and criticised equally both orthodox casteist and Hindu Society. His condemnation of Hinduism and its foundation of caste system, made him controversial and unpopular among the Hindu rightists. His conversion to Buddhism sparked a revival in interest in Buddhist philosophy in India and abroad.

Mass conversion ceremonies have been organised by human rights activists in modern times, emulating Ambedkar's Nagpur ceremony of 1956. At the end of the 1990s, outside India, some Hungarian Romani people drew parallels between their own situation and the situation of the downtrodden people in India. Inspired by Ambedkar's approach, they started to convert to Buddhism.

Untouchability and Buddhism: Ambedkar said, "The Buddha established a classless society by opening the gates of the Sangha to all deserving individuals, making no distinction between caste and class. The fundamental principle of Buddhism is equality... Buddhism was called the religion of the Shudra's..." There was only one man who raised his voice against separatism and Untouchability and that was Lord Buddha... Buddhism is the only religion, which does not recognize caste and affords full scope for progress. He explained to his people that, "a great responsibility had fallen on their shoulders in connection with the upholding of Buddhism; and if they would not follow rigidly and nobly the principles of Buddhism, it would mean that the Mahars reduced it to a miserable state", no other person under that the sum was burdened with such unparalleled responsibility as he was, he concluded. Dr. Ambedkar dedicated himself to the propagation of the Buddhist faith in India.

He set the wheel of Dhamma in motion once again, spreading the message of his Master to all the corners of the world. The Buddhists said the "the Dhamma Chakra was set revolution by

Dr. Ambedkar and it was the greatest religious revolution which India had witnessed in modern times." Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar once commented that Dalit representatives elected from reserved seats open their mouth in the Indian parliament only when they have to yawn. It was the Buddha who, for the first time in the known history of mankind, attempted to abolish slavery and invented the higher morality and the idea of the brotherhood of the entire human race, and in striking terms condemned the degrading caste-system which in Indian society at that time was firmly rooted. The Buddha declared: "By birth is not one an outcast, By birth is not one a Brahmin, By deeds is one an outcast, By deeds is one a Brahmin."

Dr. Ambedkar said, "I am reported to be against peace. This is not correct. I am for peace. But, the peace, which is, based on justice not the peace of a graveyard. So long as justice is not respected in the world there cannot be any peace. Buddhism and Buddhism alone can save the World." Buddhists of India need the friendship, understanding and cooperation for uplifting themselves and for strengthening the hands of those who are striving for peace, equality and justice. Let the scent of the Dhamma spread in all directions and illumine the minds of those who put much faith in steel and fire but ignore the value of peace, loving kindness and compassion.

In His book "Annihilation of Caste" reproduces his major difference with the Mahatma Gandhi. While he was for abolition of the caste system, prescribed by Hindu sage Manu, Gandhiji was for giving up caste prejudice, and for reform of the system, so that the stigma of Untouchability may be removed, but function of various castes remains. Gandhiji felt that the high castes should change their hearts. Dr. Ambedkar turned on Gandhi too and said that the Dalits leaders converted to Buddhism perhaps the least dogmatic or hierarchic of world religions. His response to Gandhi was that he wanted to treat the symptom, not the cause of the disease. He said, "you can't abolish Untouchability without addressing the Caste and the Dharma system, which is at the root of it." Dr. Ambedkar said that we have been suffering for over 2000 years, many Hindu Saints have come and gone; but nothing has changed, so he legally empowered to challenge

it. Article 17, of the Constitution, that abolished "Untouchability," the problem is if you implement it half of India would be in Jail.

Dr. Ambedkar said to his people, "My final word of advice to you is "Educate, Agitate, and Organize" has faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for reclamations of the human personality."

India, have no leader of the kind Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Indian Crusader for Social Justice and Champion of Human Rights. One of the greatest contributions of Dr. Ambedkar was in respect of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The fundamental Rights provide for freedom, equality, abolition of Untouchability and remedies to ensure the enforcement of rights. The most significant development in the resurgence of Buddhism in modern India was the movement inaugurated by BabaSaheb Ambedkar, as a result of which mass conversions of Buddhism have been taking place in many parts of the country. The Neo-Buddhist is progressively gaining self-sufficiency as regards temples and shrines, monastic leadership and guidance, educational institutions and religious literature. In India, too, Buddhism is numerically the fastest growing religion.

His believe that the Buddha was not an incarnation of Vishnu has been supported now even by a Brahmin Priest and he agrees that the Buddha was not an incarnation of Vishnu. Principal Vipassana Teacher, Shri S.N.Goenka and Sankaracharya of Kanchikam Kote Peetham Sri Jayendra Saraswati made a joint declaration on 11.11.1999 at Sarnath that Gotama the Buddha was not an incarnation of Vishnu.

In May 1956, shortly before his death, Dr. Ambedkar announced that he was embracing Buddhism. With him, his wife and some three lakh followers also converted to the faith. When he was asked why, Dr. Ambedkar replied, "Why can't you ask this question to yourself and... your forefathers...?"

**Death:**

Since 1948, Ambedkar had been suffering from diabetes. He was on bed from June to October in 1954 due to failing eyesight. He had been increasingly embittered by political issues, which took a toll on his health. His health worsened during 1955. Three days after completing his final manuscript "*The Buddha and His Dhamma*", Ambedkar died in his sleep on 6 December 1956 at his home in Delhi. A Buddhist cremation was organised for him at Dadar Chowpatty beach on 7 December, attended by half a million sorrowing people. A conversion program was supposed to be organised on 16 December 1956. So, those who had attended the cremation were also converted to Buddhism at the same place.

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