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## EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASES OF NAVAYĀNA: AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF NATION, IDENTITY AND JUSTICE

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**Abstract:** Navayāna or neo-Buddhism emerged in the 1950's as a new branch of Buddhism and was first promulgated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in 1956. For Ambedkar the situation in India was a unique one in comparison to other nations since slavery here was linked with religion or religious identity as the downtrodden achut or untouchable dalits were part of a particular religion. Ambedkar argued for the 'psychic unity' of mankind and rejected the crude idea of the biological weakness of the shudra in the brahmanical religion and thereby developed his own postcolonial religious doctrine which he used as the political device against untouchability.

The topic of this paper addresses an essential period in the history of postcolonial India where one of its founding fathers developed a new religious system altogether for the downtrodden and oppressed. Despite a growing body of literature on Ambedkar as the father of the dalit movement in south Asia, scholars largely neglect his religious philosophy which he used as a political tool for the betterment of the community. This paper will explore how he attempted to rewrite Indian history with his religious credo of navayāna as an abstract philosophical solvent against all religious and social hierarchy. This paper will argue how Dr. Ambedkar developed his own sense of 'nation', 'identity' and 'justice' for the new postcolonial nation

of India by reinventing an existing religion – Buddhism. This study examines Ambedkar’s original writings and interviews along with several legislative reports, petitions, letters, and legal documents to construct the epistemological bases of Ambedkar’s *navayāna* or neo-Buddhism.

**Keywords:** Nation and the narrative, Culture and identity, Postcoloniality

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*Navayāna* or neo-Buddhism emerged in the 1950’s as a new branch of Buddhism – in addition to traditionally recognized branches of *Theravada*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana*. This term neo-Buddhism or *navayāna* was first promulgated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in 1956 upon his conversion to Buddhism. As he said in a press interview on 13th of October 1956,

“I will accept and follow the teachings of Buddha. I will keep my people away from the different opinions of Hinyana and Mahayana, two religious orders. Our Bouddha Dhamma is a new Bouddha Dhamma, called Navayāna.”<sup>1</sup>

Now to understand the epistemological base of *navayāna* first we need to understand why Ambedkar in 1956 in the first place get converted to Buddhism along with his some 380,000 followers. Ambedkar was born on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1891 into a poor low caste *dalit* (Mahar) family, who were treated as untouchables and subjected to socio-economic discrimination. Hence he grew up painfully conscious of the distance at which caste society kept the untouchables in India. At first Ambedkar got influenced by his mentor John Dewey, who was a pragmatic liberal philosopher but later on he denied many of his ideas at least in the Indian scenario. Dewey argued for the importance of gradually changing informal social relations through schooling and was not very interested in political campaigns against racism. But Ambedkar

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<sup>1</sup> Navayan: Homeland of Ambedkarite Buddhism, Official Website. (Navayan.com is the homeland of all Ambedkarite organizations all over the world.)  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20110208224554/http://www.navayan.com/navayan.php?about-navayan>

argued that in India state schooling was minimal, and changing social attitudes would take generations. What was needed was radical and positive social recognition by a powerful state. State recognition, therefore, had to precede social recognition. Another context for Ambedkar's early intellectual development was the anthropology of Franz Boas and his colleagues, such as A. A. Goldenweiser, in Columbia University after 1900. Boas argued for the 'psychic unity' of mankind and rejected the crude application of Darwinian evolutionism to social and cultural development. He believed that all human beings had the same mental capacity. And thus, the temporary European predominance over Africans was not the consequence of any inherent racial weakness. This type of position was naturally congenial to Ambedkar, who already rejected the idea of the biological weakness of the *shudra* and 'untouchable' and was uncomfortable with social evolutionary arguments.<sup>2</sup>

Ambedkar's forensic arguments on the behalf of the disempowered from the 1920s onward were vividly illustrated with examples of the inhuman treatment of outcastes in India by the higher castes. This was slavery, but slavery compounded by perverted religiosity and a sense of physical revulsion against the poor and oppressed who were driven to suicide or madness by their exclusion. Ambedkar needed therefore to start 'before' liberalism and argue for that common humanity even before he asserted the need for positive discrimination by the state in their favour.<sup>3</sup> Now to answer the question: *Why did Ambedkar become a Buddhist and mass convert his followers?* We can say that for Ambedkar the situation in India was a unique one in comparison to other societies since slavery was linked with religion or religious identity. Since the downtrodden *achut* or untouchable dalits were part of a particular religion i.e., Hinduism. Although he physically took the step in 1956, but his conclusion that the best method of destroying *caste* is complete annihilation of the Hindu religion itself and since that

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<sup>2</sup> . Bayly, Christopher A., *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New Delhi, 2012, p.299

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.300

will neither be possible nor accepted by the majority members of the religion hence the only logical conclusion for the *untouchables* remain is to change the religion. In the famous undelivered speech meant for the 1936's annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore and later a printed monologue of Ambedkar titled *Annihilation of Caste*, for the first time in depth discussed his views on the Hindu religion in relation to the caste system and the untouchables. In the text more than once he clearly states that he had decided to walk out of the fold of the Hindus and attacked the morality and reasonableness of the Vedas and other religious books of the Hindus – and in the last portion he argued in favour of the complete annihilation of the Hindu religion as it is the only way to annihilate the caste. He argued,

“Caste may be bad. Caste may lead to conduct so gross as to be called man's inhumanity to man. All the same, it must be recognized that the Hindus observe Caste not because they are inhuman or wrong-headed. They observe Caste because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing Caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of Caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy you must grapple with is not the people who observe Caste, but the Shastras which teach them this religion of Caste. Criticising and ridiculing people for not inter- dining or inter-marrying, or occasionally holding inter-caste dinners and celebrating inter-caste marriages, is a futile method of achieving the desired end. The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras [...] Reformers working for the removal of untouchability, including Mahatma Gandhi, do not seem to realize that the acts of the people are merely the results of their beliefs inculcated in their minds by

the Shastras, and that people will not change their conduct until they cease to believe in the sanctity of the Shastras on which their conduct is founded.”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore for Ambedkar the conclusion was clear that it is not possible to reform the caste system within the Hindu religion hence to secure the equality and freedom of the untouchables, changing the religion was the only way. Thus, he first attempted to take the academic and intellectual course by publishing such brilliant pieces to make his point but later physically turned to Buddhism as an abstract philosophical solvent in order to destroy all arguments in favour of religious and social hierarchy and to foster a notion of the common good among a fragmented and humiliated population.<sup>5</sup> But at this very juncture there are several questions that might arise for example why Ambedkar converted into another religion when he himself ensured that the untouchables or the *dalits* are recognized in the Indian constitution as the *scheduled castes* – and make sure that they get certain reservations to compete with the upper class advantages in the Indian rather Hindu society. During the discussions on the *Hindu Code Bill* in the Indian parliament on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1951 Ambedkar as the law minister of India argued that,

“We have for long number of years waited to see whether Hindu society would, as a result of the absorption of the doctrines preached by great men who have been born in this country or great men born outside the country, change its social structure. Most of us, speaking for myself, have been completely disappointed. Whatever else Hindu society may adopt, it will never give up its social structure for the enslavement of the Sudra and the enslavement of women. It is for this

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<sup>4</sup> Ambedkar, B. R., *Annihilation Of Caste With A Reply To Mahatma Gandhi*, Third Edition, Amritsar: Ambedkar School of Thoughts, 1945, pp.58-59

<sup>5</sup> Bayly , Op. Cit., p.300

reason that law must now come to their rescue in order that society may move on.”<sup>6</sup>

From this we can understand that Ambedkar’s vision of ‘identity’ for the dalits or untouchables was to give them strong laws of the ‘nation’ so that they can define and defend themselves. And the Hindu society if not reformed by years of academic intellectuals and reformers – now must change by the push of the law of the land. Now, Ambedkar in his interview to the British Broadcasting Corporation or BBC in 1955, one year prior to his conversion to *navayāna* Buddhism said,

“There are two things about the schedule caste, we want untouchability to be abolished you see, but we also want that we must be given equal opportunity so that we may rise to the level of other classes, mere washing of untouchability is no concept at all [...] they should have the same status in the country and they should have the opportunity to hold high offices so that not only their dignity will rise but also they will get what I call strategic positions from which they could then protect their own people.”<sup>7</sup>

From this it becomes clear that the very intention of Ambedkar to incorporate the untouchables or the *dalits* in the Indian constitution as the scheduled castes was to give them a firm constitutional recognition in the newly independent nation so that the community can compete with the caste Hindus along with other forward people on a fair ground and secure in his own words the ‘strategic positions’, where probably without the constitutional backing the caste Hindus would never let them to hold irrespective of adequate educational or professional qualifications. But still the question remains that after securing the state

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<sup>6</sup> Moon, Vasant (Ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol. 14 (Part-2)*, New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 2014, p.1160

<sup>7</sup> dhandora, madiga. "Dr Ambedkar Speaking truth about Gandhi and Netaji in BBC Interview 1955." *YouTube video*, 5:28-6:36. February 1, 2017.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omGcgEstVIE&ab\\_channel=madigadhandora](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omGcgEstVIE&ab_channel=madigadhandora)

recognition as the scheduled castes for the untouchables why Ambedkar converted himself and his followers into Buddhism rather seek social recognition? In that same interview to BBC Ambedkar very effectively clears why by giving two ground level examples, he said:

“The temple entry [...] is of no consequence at all, you see you will live in the untouchable quarters just the same, whether you went into the temple or whether you did not go into the temple. People just say for instance at one time would not allow untouchables to travel by railways because of pollution, but now they don't mind because the railways won't make any separate arrangements. But because they travel together in the train it does not follow you see, that their life in the villages viz-a-viz the Hindus has changed, whenever the hindu and the untouchable allied at the railway train you see they assume their old robes.”<sup>8</sup>

So it is pristine from this that although Ambedkar secured a firm 'identity' in the Indian constitution for the untouchables but he believed that becoming equal only in the eyes of law was not at all adequate – as even if the law makes untouchability illegal or give reservations as the scheduled castes but on the ground level the plight of the untouchables will be the same in the hands of the Hindu society or the caste Hindus i.e. state recognition does not guarantee social recognition. Therefore apart from the laws to secure the future of the untouchables and on ground zero to change the fate of the lot it was necessary to leave the Hindu religion itself and to accept a religion other than Hinduism, which will give the untouchables a completely new *identity* in the newly independent *nation*.

Dr. Ambedkar after the publication of *Annihilation of Caste* received some fierce criticism from his political opponent M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi in his essay, titled "A Vindication of Caste" published in his journal *Harijan* in 1936, criticized Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 6:43-7:41

on several points. Gandhi argued that the texts cited by Ambedkar in the monologue were not authentic along with several other criticisms including on Ambedkar's argument of annihilation of Hindu religion, he remarked that Hinduism would be tolerable if only many were to follow the example of the Hindu saints whose interpretations of the Hindu *shastras* should be considered final in which *shastras* do not support caste and untouchability. He further argued that the standards by which Ambedkar judged Hindu religion and its followers were too rigorous and by those criteria and standards if every known living religion is judged then they will fail the test as well.<sup>9</sup> Ambedkar in his second edition of *Annihilation of Caste* published in 1937 replied Gandhi and answered all his criticisms and at the end of the reply attacked Gandhi of duplicitous acts while preaching his philosophy or interpretations. Ambedkar wrote,

“Does the Mahatma practice what he preaches? One does not like to make personal reference in an argument, which is general in its application. But when one preaches a doctrine and holds it, as dogma there is a curiosity to know how far he practices what he preaches. [...] the double role, which the Mahatma wants to play - of a Mahatma and a politician. As a Mahatma he may be trying to spiritualise Politics. Whether he has succeeded in it or not Politics have certainly commercialized him. A politician must know that Society cannot bear the whole truth and that he must not speak the whole truth; if he is speaking the whole truth it is bad for his politics. The reason why the Mahatma is always supporting Caste and Varna is because he is afraid that if he opposed them he will lose his place in politics. Whatever may be the source of this confusion the Mahatma

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<sup>9</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, 'A Vindication of Caste', in Thind, G. S., *Caste and World Conference against Racism Durban 2011*, Cedar Publications, 2002, p.195-201

must be told that he is deceiving himself and also deceiving the people by preaching Caste under the name of Varna.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Ambedkar in his arguments not merely criticised M. K. Gandhi but also criticised Gandhi and Indian National Congress's soft stance regarding untouchability in India who in the fear of losing the support of majority Hindus never took a firm stance and opposed Ambedkar and his straight to-the point ideas and solutions to the problem of caste system in India. Gandhi in one of his essays published in his journal *Harijan* in 1933 argued that,

“It (caste system) has its limitations and its defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability, and, if it is a bye-product of the caste system it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcastes as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it, or a crop because of the weeds. The outcasteness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore, to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this ‘high-and-low’ness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified”.<sup>11</sup>

The above lines show the stark difference of opinions between the two stalwarts of their times. Gandhi's position on the caste system was completely different from Ambedkar who argued for the annihilation of the entire Hindu religion to annihilate the castes whereas Gandhi believed in the caste system and treated the untouchable question as a bad growth which if surgically removed, he believed the castes will be good again. Throughout his life

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<sup>10</sup> Ambedkar, Op. Cit., Appendix-II pp.17-24

<sup>11</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Electronic Book, Vol. 59: 13 January, 1933 - 9 March, 1933, New Delh: Publications Division Government of India, 1999, p.228

Ambedkar never lost his disgust and contempt for Gandhi who according to him was no Mahatma but a mere politician who in existence was an orthodox Hindu but as an politician tried to balance the act and preached against the caste system and untouchability. Even after Gandhi's tragic assassination Ambedkar didn't changed his opinion about him and his doctrine, in his 1955 BBC interview Ambedkar said the same,

“I always say that as I met Mr. Gandhi in the capacity of an opponent I have a feeling that I know him better than most of the people, because he had opened his real fangs to me, you see, and I could see the inside of the man. While others who went there as devotees saw nothing of him except the external appearance, which he had put up as a Mahatma! [...] he was all the time double dealing [...] he was absolutely an orthodox Hindu, he was never a reformer – he has no dynamics in him. All this talk about untouchability were just for the purpose of making the untouchables drawn into the Congress. That was one thing and secondly he wanted that the untouchables should not oppose his movements of Swaraj. I do not think beyond that he had any real motive of uplift. [...] He was never a Mahatma. I refused to call him Mahatma. You see, I never in my life called him Mahatma, he didn't deserve that title, not even from the point of his morality”.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore there is no surprise that Ambedkar's vision of nation, identity and justice for the untouchables in India was completely different from the majority strand of the Congress and M. K. Gandhi. And probably this disgust of the caste Hindus and the Hindu religion itself forced him to think out of the situation to secure a future of equality for the dalits by accepting Buddhism and moulded it accordingly to the cause of the untouchables as *navayāna*. In his book *The Untouchables: A Thesis on the Origin of Untouchability* (1948),

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<sup>12</sup> dhandora, Op. Cit., 1:09-21:40

he stated that the untouchables in the Hindu caste order are in fact none other than former Buddhists. untouchability as an institution was the way in which Hindu society both destroyed Buddhism in India and incorporated its erstwhile enemies, the Buddhists, into its own social order, as servants and slaves. For modern-day untouchables, then, to become Buddhists meant that they would be making a return to Buddhism and not a fresh entry into a religion with which they had no prior historical contact.<sup>13</sup>

Hence in his counter-historicism, Ambedkar depicts a history of “mortal conflict” between Buddhism and Brahmanism. He argued that when today’s untouchables’ ancestors, adopted Buddhism they did not revere Brahmins or employ them priests. They even regarded them as impure. The self-imposed isolation of these Buddhist angered the Brahmins, who responded by preaching against them contempt and hatred with the result that they came to be regarded as untouchables. At this stage then, presumably pre-Asokan, Untouchability was assigned to an isolated tribe of Buddhists on the basis of religious competition. Subsequently, however, the Mauryan Empire marked the pinnacle of Buddhist authority in political and religious spheres. That the Brahmins lived as the suppressed and depressed classes, during this period is shown, Ambedkar claims, by Asoka’s restrictions of sacrificial activity. Brahmanical subordination to the Buddhist Mauryan Empire was followed, according to Ambedkar, by a Brahmanical revolution waged by Brahmins against the principles of Buddhism which had been accepted and followed by the masses as the way of life. Buddhist principles were so well established at this point according to Ambedkar, that Brahmin challengers were forced to promulgate *Manusmṛti* in order to embody the principles of this Brahmanical revolution. For Ambedkar, the introduction of this text marks a crucial shift in the Brahmanical understanding to Hindu society and social identity. *Manusmṛti* codifies a newly hereditary caste system, distinct from the more flexible *varna* system which characterized pre-Buddhist

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<sup>13</sup> Vajpeyi, Ananya, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India*, Harvard University Press, 2012, p.213

Aryan society, and represents the antithesis of the Buddhist Mauryan social order. After the Brahmanical revolution as Brahmins attempted to counter Buddhist principles established during the Mauryan Empire, Buddhist untouchables were further stigmatized on the basis of meat-eating. Brahmins, realizing the power of Buddhist ideals, attempted to challenge Buddhism by adopted an extreme form of Buddhist asceticism as standard behavior. Buddhists, by now Buddhist untouchables, continued meat-eating since, in their peripheral relationship to Brahmin village life, they did not kill the animals and could therefore preserve the Buddhist precept of *ahimsa* or non-injury to sentient beings.<sup>14</sup> Hence, as Christopher A. Bayly noted that one term for an 'untouchable' or 'caste', *Antya*, which had formerly been taken to mean 'the end people' hence the lowliest of God's creatures, was translated by Ambedkar to mean 'the people who lived at the end of the village' i.e., the Buddhist untouchables.<sup>15</sup>

Ambedkar was taken with the idea of 'social endosmosis' which means an organic interaction between all the members inhabiting in a society. He had hoped that social endosmosis would help attain the coveted social recognition for the untouchables. However, Ambedkar realized that this can only be achieved through 'social participation'.<sup>16</sup> Ambedkar make clear that he does not accept the Four Noble Truths, the very foundation of Buddhism. The insistence on the Four Noble Truths, according to Ambedkar, is one of the additions by the later Buddhist scholars. Another major reason for Ambedkar's turn to Buddhism was his understanding of the priority of *duḥkha* i.e. misery or sorrow. Therefore, Ambedkar's interpretation of *duḥkha* explains his rejection of the Four Noble Truths which is not an individual-karmic suffering, but collective-social suffering. In other words, through the rejection of the Four Noble Truths,

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<sup>14</sup> Blackburn, Anne M., 'Religion, Kinship and Buddhism: Ambedkar's Vision of a Moral Community', The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Volume 16, Number 1, 1993, pp.6-7

<sup>15</sup> Bayly, Op. Cit., p.301

<sup>16</sup> Arun Mukherjee, *B.R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy*, New Literary History, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2009, pp. 345-47

Ambedkar questioned the very notion that all human beings, of whatever caste, class, creed or gender, need to confront and surpass their suffering. And according to him, suffering had to be seen from the social point of view rather than from an individual's, hence suffering for him is socially constituted and historically specific in every case. So the only way to fight this social suffering was through a communion which will put suffering at its very center of belief. Thus, even after not accepting the Four Noble Truths, it was Buddhism that would best protect the untouchables from their very specific *duḥkha* or misery, which was discrimination and calumny at the hands of the higher caste Hindus.

Another reason why Ambedkar chose Buddhism was not due to an attraction toward Buddhism, but due to his rejection of other religions. Ambedkar announced in the mid-1930s that he wanted to leave Hinduism, and then proceeded to test the idea of converting to several other faiths, notably Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam. In the end, he rejected all these options in favor of Buddhism. Sikhism in his assessment was not sufficiently distinguished or distant from its parent Hinduism; Christianity and Islam, on the other hand, were too foreign relative to India as a whole. Christianity, which might have had the right values in the abstract, had, within Indian history, been tainted by its association with colonialism. Ambedkar was simply not interested in helping British and European missionaries do their work in India, and most certainly not at the very moment when India was being decolonized at long last. The reasons for Ambedkar's rejection of Islam, too, are more complicated than simply its putative foreignness. The fact was that regardless of its land of origin, Islam had been thoroughly incorporated into the life of the subcontinent over a period of nearly 1,200 years. In addition to having a long history in India, Islam also offered strong tenets of equality and justice. Ambedkar's real reason for deciding against Islam, then, was that he learned a lesson, as it were, from Partition. India's Muslims had made, and partially won, an argument in favor of a separate homeland. Millions of Muslims had left for Pakistan during Partition. Millions had

stayed behind, as well, but they remained as a numerically and politically diminished minority, present on sufferance, no longer—and possibly never again—properly integrated into the idea of India, which was secular in nature. Ambedkar wanted inclusion and parity for the untouchables, not a complete and utter divorce between untouchables and Hindu India. For him, opting for Islam presented the danger of further estranging caste Hindus and untouchables from one another on a political plane rather than philosophical. Hence his last remaining option, of any seriousness, was Buddhism.<sup>17</sup>

The question that then arises is, if Buddhism was the best and only choice, and if a thorough conversion to Buddhism was to be undergone by the entire Mahar community, if not all untouchables, then why did Ambedkar change Buddhism so much as to make it almost unrecognizable? Why did he create a neo-Buddhism, his Navayana? We noted already that he did not accept the Four Noble Truths as the foundation of Buddhism. This was a radical enough departure, tempered somewhat, in my reading, by the fact that he retained the category of *duḥkha*, reinterpreted as social suffering, even while dismantling the fourfold structure: *duḥkha— duḥkha samudāya— duḥkha nirodha—Nirvana* that defined an individual's quest for liberation from suffering in classical Buddhism. But Ambedkar's deviation from the *mārga* (the doctrinal highway, as it were) of Buddhism did not stop at his profound revision of the central category of suffering. He remained unimpressed by the widely disseminated account of the reasons behind the Śākya prince Gautama's renunciation—the first step in his journey to attaining enlightenment and becoming the Buddha. Ambedkar described the Buddha as a *mārga-dātā* (giver of a path, guide) and not a *mokṣa-dātā* (giver of transcendental emancipation, deliverer). He thought the Buddha to be more worthy of being followed than Jesus, who claimed to be the Son of God; Muhammad, who claimed to be the Prophet of God; and Krishna (a historical personage, according to

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<sup>17</sup> Vajpeyi, Op. Cit., pp.214-216

Ambedkar), who claimed to be not just a god himself, but an avatar of the Supreme Godhead. Ambedkar found all these claims to be distastefully hyperbolic, megalomaniacal. The Buddha, he said, was a man and acted like one, knowing his limitations, recognizing that the knowledge he had attained might or might not be helpful for others, and never gesturing toward any kind of superhuman infallibility, he was human: a mortal.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, with time we can see that the role of Buddhism becomes clearer for Ambedkar. Ambedkar in his later life after selecting Buddhism as the appropriate religion for the untouchables, tried to analyse Buddhism with other modern 'isms' and the personality of Buddha with modern philosophers and thinkers. Like in one of his essays titled *Buddha or Karl Marx* he made a comparative study between the two personalities who are divided by 2381 years. Ambedkar after careful study and analysis of the Buddhist doctrine argued that the *ashtanga mārga* of Buddha's doctrine accepts the existence of 'class-conflict' far before Marx and his doctrine and recognizes class conflict as the actual cause of misery or *duḥkha*. He further argued that "if for misery one reads exploitation Buddha is not away from Marx."<sup>19</sup> He further argued that the aim and objective of Buddha's gospel is to remove the misery and unhappiness i.e. *duḥkha* and the means through which he propounded to bring *communism* of modern sensibilities were in all respects definite. To eliminate misery i.e. equivalent to 'exploitation' in Marxist doctrine, Buddha asks to observe the *Pancha Silas*<sup>20</sup>.

The Panch Silas of Buddha comprise the following observations:

1. To abstain from destroying or causing destruction of any living being/thing.
2. To abstain from stealing i.e. acquiring or keeping by fraud or violence, the property of another.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp.227-229

<sup>19</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, 'Buddha or Karl Marx', in Moon, Vasant (Ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol. 3*, New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 2014, p.446

<sup>20</sup> *Panch* means five and *Sila* is moral temperament i.e. not to do evil and the disposition to do good. So, *panch silas* means five moral temperaments.

3. To abstain from telling untruth.
4. To abstain from lust.
5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks.

Further Ambedkar argued that according to Buddha the main reason of misery and unhappiness in the world is due to “man’s inequity towards man” – so here he is equating the Marxist doctrine of exploitation of man or a class of men i.e. the *proletariat* by another class, the *bourgeois*. And he laid down the solution of this inequity as per Buddha or the Buddhist doctrine the ‘Noble Eightfold Path’ or *āryāṣṭāṅgamārga* which are– ‘Right Views’, ‘Right Aims’, ‘Right Speech’, ‘Right Conduct’, ‘Right Livelihood’, ‘Right Perseverance’, ‘Right Mindfulness’ and ‘Right Contemplation’. Ambedkar noted that according to Buddha by observing this path humanity can establish a realm of righteousness on earth, thus the banishment of misery and unhappiness or *duḥkha*, thereby equality among men.<sup>21</sup> Thus he draws a conclusion that Buddha and his doctrine is far superior to Karl Marx and his gospel of socialism, *Das Capital* – as to achieve equality in society Marx aims for a proletariat revolution which in itself will bring violence i.e. misery or *duḥkha*. Therefore he said,

“Society has been aiming to lay a new foundation was summarised by the French Revolution in three words, Fraternity, Liberty and Equality. The French Revolution was welcomed because of this slogan. It failed to produce equality. We welcome the Russian Revolution because it aims to produce equality. But it cannot be too much emphasized that in producing equality society cannot afford to sacrifice fraternity or liberty. Equality will be of no value without fraternity or liberty. It seems that the three can coexist only if one follows the way of the Buddha. Communism can give one but not all.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.447

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.462

From the above discussion it is clear that even before his endorsement of conversion to Buddhism as a social tactic for the 'untouchables' in the 1950s, Ambedkar had been attracted to it for its emphasis on social harmony. Buddhism, he thought, promoted *maitri*, or reverence, rather than worship. It was a rational pragmatic religion of mankind, not a domineering faith. Hinduism, by contrast, was a 'gospel of darkness', denying liberty, equality and fraternity in favour of separatism and exclusion. So Ambedkar positioned Buddhism as a religion of equality. Ambedkar specifically saw in it a purified version of the ideals of the French and Russian revolutions. But Buddhism's status as an ancient ideological enemy of Brahmanism and a modern antidote to Vedantism also made it irresistible to him.<sup>23</sup> In other words, what Ambedkar does to Buddhism that has not been done before, in many centuries of argumentation, hermeneutics, and exegesis, is to redefine its purpose, from Nirvana to Equality; from the transcendence of the social to the amelioration of society; from "I must be free" to "Everyone must be equal."<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, in conclusion we can say that Ambedkar reinvented Buddhism in the form of *Navayāna* to give a social recognition to the untouchables, in which according to him a religion plays an important role. And he choose Buddhism due to its vast and connected history with the sub-continent and its continuous struggle with the Brahmanical religion made it the revolutionary religion suitable towards his goal of freeing the untouchables from the shackles of suffering that is inflicted upon them by the higher caste Hindus.

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<sup>23</sup> Bayly, Op. Cit., p.303

<sup>24</sup> Vajpeyi, Op. Cit., p.212

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