22 VOWS TAKEN AND GIVEN TO US BY BABASAHEB DR AMBEDKAR

1. I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, nor shall I worship them.
2. I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna, nor shall I worship them.
3. I shall have no faith in 'Gouri', 'Ganpathi' and other Gods and Goddesses of Hindu religion, nor shall I worship them.
4. I do not believe in the theory of incarnation of Gods.
5. I do not and shall not believe that the Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be, mischievous and false propaganda.
6. I shall not perform 'Shraaddha' nor, shall I give 'pinddan'.
7. I shall not act in any manner contrary to the principles and teachings of the Buddha.
8. I shall not perform any ceremony through Brahmins.
9. I believe in the equality of mankind.
10. I shall endeavour to establish equality.
11. I shall follow the Eightfold Path taught by the Buddha.
12. I shall follow the 'Ten Paramitas' enunciated by the Buddha.
13. I shall be compassionate to all living beings and nurture them with care.
14. I shall not steal.
15. I shall not lie.
16. I shall not commit carnal sins.
17. I shall not consume liquor.
18. I shall strive to lead my life in conformity with the three principles of Buddhism i. e. Pradnya (wisdom), Sheel (character) and Karuna (compassion).
19. I hereby embrace Buddhism by renouncing my old Hindu religion which is detrimental to the prosperity to the humankind and descriminate human beings and treat them low.
20. I firmly believe that the Buddha Dhamma is the Saddhamma.
21. I believe, I am entering the new life.
22. Hereafter I pledge to conduct myself in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha.

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BODHISATTVA
GLOBAL TRUST

Religion and Conversion

Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

OBJECTS OF THE BGT

a) To establish peace and harmony in the society as envisaged by Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

b) Exchange of Buddhist culture with National and International organisations which have the same objectives.

c) Establishment of Buddha Vihara with an objective to promulgate Buddhist culture.

d) Organizing of different cultural activities which propagate Buddhism and its application in daily life.

e) To spread concept of Buddhist pedagogy and its implication on ecology.

f) Economic and social upliftment of weaker section of society and woman empowerment.

g) To undertake and carry out charitable, educational and socio-economic programs for the welfare and edify the people irrespective of caste, community or creed and also to grant scholarship or donations for the said purposes.

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i) To establish a Centre for Moral and Spiritual education and study of History & Culture of Buddhism and widen and encourage the science of Buddhist education to be more universally accessible.

j) To promulgate Buddhism in solving regional and global issues.

k) To carry out integrated study of diversity in Buddhism across various regions around globe.

l) Promotion and generation of awareness on community health and its related issues.

m) Promotion of skill development program, art and culture which fulfil one's intellectual thirst.

n) To implement and promote various schemes of Government, Lateral Agencies and NGOs for upliftment of society.

o) To contribute in the area of Humanism, Realism and Rationalism in the society.

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"The duty of a Buddhist is not merely to be a good Buddhist.

His duty is to spread Buddhism.

He must believe that to spread Buddhism is to serve mankind."

Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar

PROLOGUE

Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar is the "*Bodhisattva*" who not only set the wheel of Dhamma rotating again in the 21st century but also ensured that it keeps moving for the centuries to come. For the downtrodden, backward and untouchables imbibitions into the Buddha's Dhamma has been a turning point in the history of mankind when lakhs of "*Ambedkarites*" took "*Deeksha*" along with their Moses "Babasaheb Ambedkar". The rest is history because it had religious, spiritual, educational, political, economical as well as social and cultural implications.

We in our effort to propagate the Buddha's Dhamma have tried to compile literature by Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar written/spoken by himself, into one booklet for his children to understand and evaluate his original thoughts which were going on in his mind before taking this major transformative step of taking "*Deeksha*" into the Buddha's Dhamma.

We pray,

May we all be our own guide!
May we all take refuge in reason!
May we all not listen to the advice of others!
May we all not succumb to others!
May we all always be truthful to ourselves!
May we all always take refuge in truth!
May we all never surrender to anybody!
May we all be self illuminating like the sun!
May we all not be dependent for light, like the Earth!
May we not be a satellite!
May we all be self illuminating like the lamp!
May we all evolve to be "Atta Deepa Bhava" (Be a light unto thyself)!
May we all always believe in ourselves!
BHAVATU SABBA MANGALANG!!!

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BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR, RELIGION AND CONVERSION

Content

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Speech delivered on 31st May, 1936 to the Bombay Presidency Mahar Conference, Bombay. [Translated from the Marathi "Mukti Kon Pathe" by Vasant Moon]

Dr. Babasabeh Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 17 – Part III (2003)
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee, Higher Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai-400021

WHAT WAY EMANCIPATION?

by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

A rare photo of Dr. Ambedkar
from his years as a grad student at Columbia, 1913-16.

What way emancipation?

On the background of his declaration that, "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu." at Yeola, Distt. Nasik, Maharashtra, on 13th October, 1935, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar convened a Conference on 30th and 31st May 1936 at Dadar, Bombay. The sole aim of this Conference was to assess the support of his own people for the conversion movement. It was attended by about thirty five thousand Untouchable Mahars.

In a specially erected pandal the following slogans were displayed.

* Man is not for religion, religion is for man.
* To become humane, convert yourselves.
* To get organised, convert yourselves.
* To achieve strength, convert yourselves.
* To secure equality, convert yourselves.
* To get liberty, convert yourselves.
* To make your domestic life happy, convert yourselves.
* Why do you remain in that religion which does not treat you as human beings ?
* Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from entering temples ?
* Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from drinking water ?
* Why do you remain in that religion which does not allow you to get education ?
* Why do you remain in that religion which insults you at every step ?
* Why do you remain in that religion which obstructs you from getting a job ?
* A religion which prohibits righteous relations between man and man is not a religion but a display of force.

* A religion which treats recognition of humanity as irreligion is not a religion but a disease.
* A religion which allows the touch of unholy animals but prohibits the touch of human beings is not a religion but a foolishness.
* A religion which precludes one class from getting education, forbids it to accumulate wealth, to bear arms, is not a religion but a mockery of human life.
* A religion that compels the illiterate to remain illiterate, the poor to remain poor, is not a religion but a punishment.
* Those who profess that the God is omnipresent but treat men worse than animals, are hypocrites. Do not keep company of such people.
* Those who feed ants with sugar but kill men by prohibiting them from drinking water are hypocrites. Do not keep their company.

Mr. Stanley Jones, a European missionary and Mr. B. J. Jadhav, were the special invitees. There were a number of Sikh and Muslim leaders and priests who were eager to catch any direct or indirect hint in the matter of conversion. The object of the Conference was to devise ways and means to implement the resolution passed at Yeola on 13th Oct. 1935. Mr. D. Dolas welcomed the delegates while Mr. B. S. Venkatrao, a Depressed Classes leader from Hyderabad presided over the Conference.1

Babasaheb Ambedkar said,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You must have come to know by now that this Conference has been purposefully called upon to brood over the declaration of Conversion which I made recently. The subject of conversion is very dear to me. According to me, the whole of your future depends upon this subject. I have no hesitation in saying that you have clearly understood the gravity of this problem. Had it

not been so, you would not have assembled here in such large numbers. I am very happy to see this (gathering).

Since the time of the declaration of Conversion, our men have conducted several meetings at various places and expressed their views and opinions, which I hope must have reached you. But we have had no opportunity so far to gather, and to discuss and decide the problem of conversion at one place. I was much more concerned for such an opportunity. You will all agree that planning is very necessary for making the movement of Conversion a success. Conversion is not a children's game. It is not a subject of entertainment. It deals with how to make man's life successful. Just as a boatman has to make all necessary preparation before he starts on a voyage, so also we have to make such preparation. Without preparation, it will be impossible to reach the other shore.

But just as the boatman does not collect luggage unless he gets an idea of the number of passengers boarding the boat, so also is the case with me. Unless I get an idea as to how many persons are willing to leave the Hindu fold, I cannot start preparation for conversion. When I expressed to some workers of Bombay that I would not be able to judge the public opinion unless we meet at a conference, they shouldered the responsibility of this conference voluntarily, without putting up any excuse about expenses and labour. What pains they had to take, has already been described by our revered leader and the President of the Reception Committee, Shri Rawji Dagduji Dolas, in his speech. I am extremely indebted to the Reception Committee of the Conference for arranging the meeting, after making such strenuous efforts.

Some people may raise an objection as to why the conference is called [with the participation] only of the Mahars. If the declaration of Conversion is meant for all the Untouchables,

why has a meeting of all the Untouchables not been convened? Before starting the discussion on the issues before the conference, I feel it obligatory to reply to these questions. There are various reasons for convening a conference of the Mahars alone.

Firstly, neither any safeguards nor any social rights are to be demanded from the Hindus through this conference. The only question before this conference is, what should be done for the betterment of our life? How to carve out the path for our future life? This question can be solved, and needs to be solved, by the respective castes separately, discussing it through their respective conferences. This is one of the reasons why I have not called a conference of all the Untouchables.

There is another reason for convening a conference of Mahars only. About ten months have passed since the declaration of Conversion was made. During this period, sufficient efforts have been made to awaken the public conscience. I felt that this was the proper time to judge the public opinion. In my opinion, the holding of meetings of each caste separately is the simplest way to judge the opinion. In order to materialize [=give substance to] the problem of conversion, it is very necessary to judge the public opinion. And I believe the public opinion judged through the meetings of each caste separately will be more representative and reliable than the opinion arrived at through a common meeting of all the Untouchable castes. In order to avert this situation, and to ensure the [knowledge of] public opinion, this meeting of Mahars alone has been called.

Although the other communities are not included, they will not be at a loss. If they do not intend to convert, they have no reason to regret their not being included in this conference. If at all they wish to leave their religion, nothing can come in their way simply because they have not participated in this

conference. The other communities, like the Mahars, are free to hold meetings and express their public opinion. I would advise them to hold such meetings, and whatever help is needed from me shall be extended to them to the best of my capacity.

This much is enough as introduction. Now I turn to the main subject. For a common man, this subject of conversion is important as well as difficult to understand. It is equally difficult to grasp the subject. It is not an easy task to satisfy the common man on the subject of conversion. I realise that unless you are all satisfied, it is difficult to bring the idea of conversion into reality. I shall therefore try my level best to explain the subject as simply as possible.

The Material Aspect of Conversion

There are two aspects of conversion: social as well as religious, material as well as spiritual. Whatever may be the aspect or line of thinking, it is necessary to understand at the beginning the nature of Untouchability and how it is practiced. Without this understanding, you will not be able to realise the real meaning underlying my declaration of Conversion. In order to have a clear understanding of the problem of Untouchability and its practice in real life, I would want you to recall the stories of atrocities perpetrated against you.

The instances of beating by the caste Hindus for the simple reason that you have claimed the right to enroll your children in the Government school, or the right to draw water from the public well, or the right to take out a marriage procession with the groom on horseback, are very common. You all know such instances, as they happen right before your eyes. But there are several other causes for which atrocities are committed on the Untouchables by the caste Hindus--causes which, if they are revealed, the foreigners will be surprised to hear.

The Untouchables are beaten for putting on clothes of superior quality. They are whipped because they used utensils made of metal like copper, etc. Their houses are burnt for having purchased land for cultivation. They are beaten for putting on the sacred thread on their body. They are beaten for refusing to carry away dead animals and eat the carrion, or for walking through the village road with socks and shoes on, or for not bowing down before a caste Hindu, or for taking water in a copper pot while going out in the field to ease (defecate). Recently, an instance has been noticed where the Untouchables were beaten for serving chapattis' at a dinner party.

You must have heard of, and some of you must also have experienced, such types of atrocities. Where beating is not possible, you must be aware as to how the weapon of boycott is used against you. You all know how the caste Hindus have made your daily life unbearable by prohibiting you from labour, by disallowing your cattle from grazing through the jungle [=uncultivated land], and by prohibiting your men from entering into the village. But perhaps very few of you have realized as to why all this happens! What is at the root of their tyranny? To me, it is very necessary for us to understand it.

This is a Matter of Class Struggle

The instances cited above have nothing to do with the virtues or vices of an individual. This is not a feud between two rival men. The problem of Untouchability is a matter of class struggle. It is a struggle between caste Hindus and the Untouchables. This is not a matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another. This class struggle has its relation with the social status. This struggle indicates how one class should keep its relations with the other class. From the instances given above, one thing is clear. This struggle starts as soon as you start claiming equal treatment

with others. Had it not been so, there would have been no struggle for a simple reason like serving chapatti's, wearing superior-quality clothes, putting on the sacred thread, fetching water in a metal pot, seating the bridegroom on horseback, etc. In all these cases, you lose your money.

Why then do the caste Hindus get irritated? The reason for their anger is very simple. Your behavior with them on a par insults them. Your status is low. You are impure, you must remain at the lowest rung; then alone they will allow you to live happily. The moment you cross your level, the struggle starts. The above instances also prove one more fact. Untouchability is not a timely or temporary feature. It is a permanent one. To put it straight, it can be said that the struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables is a permanent phenomenon. It is eternal, because the religion which has given you the lowest level in the society is itself eternal, according to the belief of the high-caste people. No change according to times and circumstances is possible. You are the lowest of the rungs today. You shall remain the lowest forever. This means the struggle between Hindus and Untouchables will continue forever. How you will survive through this struggle, is a main question. And unless you think it over, there is no escape.

Those who desire to behave in obedience to the wishes of the Hindus, those who wish to be their slaves, need not think over this problem. But those who wish to live a life with self-respect and equality will have to think it over. How should we survive through this struggle? For me, it is not difficult to answer this question. Those who have assembled here will have to agree that in any struggle, one who holds strength becomes the victor. One who has no strength need not expect success? This has been proved by experience, and I do not need to cite examples to prove it.

Gain the Strength

The question that follows, which you must consider, is whether you have enough strength to survive through this struggle. Three types of strength are known to man: (1) manpower; (2) finance; and (3) mental strength. Which of these do you think that you possess?

So far as manpower is concerned, it is clear that you are in a minority. In Bombay Presidency, Untouchables are only one-eighth of the total population. And that too, an unorganized [one-eighth]. The castes among them do not allow them to organize. They are not even compact. They are scattered through the villages. Under these circumstances, this small population is of no use to the Untouchables at their crucial hours.

Financial strength is also just the same. It is an undisputed fact that you have a little bit of manpower; but finances you have none. You have no trade, no business, no service, no land. The piece of bread thrown by the higher castes is your means of livelihood. You have no food, no clothes. What financial strength can you have? You have no capacity to get redress from the law courts. Thousands of Untouchables tolerate insult, tyranny, and oppression at the hands of Hindus without a sigh of complaint, because they have no capacity to bear the expenses of the courts.

As regards mental strength, the condition is still worse. The tolerance of insults and tyranny without grudge and complaint has killed the sense of retort and revolt. Confidence, vigour, and ambition have completely vanished from you. All of you have become helpless, unenergetic, and pale. Everywhere there is an atmosphere of defeatism and pessimism. Even the slight idea that you can do something, cannot peep (penetrate) into your minds.

Why this Oppression Against You?

If whatever I have described above is correct, then you will have to agree with the conclusion that follows. The conclusion is: if you depend upon your own strength, you will never be able to face the tyranny of the Hindus. I have no doubt that you are oppressed because you have no strength. It is not that you alone are in a minority. The Muslims are equally small in number. Like Mahar-Mangs, they too have few houses in the village. But no one dares to trouble the Muslims, while you are always a victim of tyranny. Why is this so? Though there are two houses of Muslims in the village, nobody dares to harm them, while the whole village practices tyranny against you though you have about ten houses. Why does this happen? This is a very pertinent question, and you will have to find a suitable answer for this.

In my opinion, there is only one answer to this question. The Hindus realise that the strength of the whole of the Muslim population in India stands behind those two houses of Muslims living in the village; and therefore they do not dare to touch them. These two houses also enjoy a free and fearless life because they are aware that if any Hindu commits aggression against them, the whole Muslim community from Punjab to Madras will rush down to protect them at any cost.

On the contrary [=by contrast], Hindus are sure that no one will come to your rescue, nobody will help you, no financial help will reach you, nor will the officers help you in any eventuality. The Tehsildar and police belong to the caste Hindus, and in cases of disputes between the Hindus and the Untouchables, they are more faithful to their caste than towards their duty. The Hindus practice injustice and tyranny against you only because you are helpless.

From the above discussion, two facts are very clear. Firstly, you cannot face the tyranny without strength. And secondly, you do

not possess enough strength to face the tyranny. With these two conclusions, a third one automatically follows. That is, the strength required to face the tyranny needs to be secured from outside. How you will be able to secure this strength is really an important question. And you will have to think this over with an unbiased mind.

Strength Needs to be Brought from Outside

Casteism and religious fanaticism, as I see it, has had a very peculiar effect on the minds and morality of the people of this country. In this country, nobody feels pain at poverty and suffering. And if at all anybody is moved, he does not try to eradicate it. People [give] help in poverty, sorrows, and suffering, only to those who belong to their caste or religion. Though this sense of morality is perverted, it cannot be forgotten that it is prevalent in this country. In the village, the Untouchables suffer at the hands of Hindus.

It is not that there are no men of other religions, and that they do not realise the oppression of Untouchables as unjust. Knowing full well that the oppression of the Untouchables by the Hindus is most unjustified, they do not rush to the rescue of the Untouchables. If you ask them why do they not help you, they would say, "What business do we have to interfere? Had you been the members of our religion, we would have helped you."

From this you will understand one thing: that unless you establish close relations with some other society, unless you join some other religion, you cannot get the strength from outside. It clearly means, you must leave your present religion and assimilate yourselves with some other society. Without that, you cannot gain the strength of that society. So long as you do not have strength, you and your future generations will have to lead a life in the same pitiable condition.

The Spiritual Aspect of Conversion

Until now, we have discussed how conversion is necessary for material gains. Now I propose to put forth my thoughts as to how this conversion is equally necessary for spiritual well-being. What is religion? Why is it necessary? Let us first try to understand. Several people have tried to define religion. But amongst all of these definitions, only one is most meaningful and agreeable to all. "That which knits the people together is religion." This is the true definition of religion. This is not my definition. Mr. Tilak, the foremost leader of the Sanatani Hindus himself, is the author of this definition. So nobody can accuse me of having interpolated [=invented] the definition of religion.

However, I have not accepted it [merely] for argument's sake. I accept it (as a principle). Religion means the rules imposed for the maintenance of society. Mine is also the same concept of religion. Although this definition logically appears to be correct, it does not disclose or clarify the nature of the rules which maintain the society. The question still remains as to what should be the nature of the rules which govern society. This question is more important than that of definition. Because the question of which religion is necessary for a man, does not depend on its definition but on the motive and nature of the rules that bind and govern the society. What should be the real nature of religion? While deciding this question, another question follows. What should be the relation between a man and the society?

The modern social philosophers have proposed three answers to this question. Some have proposed that the ultimate goal of the society is to achieve happiness for the individual. Some say the society exists for the development of man's inherent qualities and energies, and to help him develop his self. However, some

put up (maintain) that the chief object of the social organisation is not the development or happiness of the individual, but to create an ideal society.

The concept of the Hindu religion is, however, much different from all these concepts. There is no place for an individual in Hindu society. The Hindu religion is constituted on the class concept. The Hindu religion does not teach as to how an individual should behave with another individual.

A religion which does not recognize the individual is not acceptable to me personally. Although society is necessary for the individual, social welfare cannot be the ultimate goal of religion. To me, individual welfare and progress is the real aim of religion. Although the individual is a part of the society, his relation with the society is not like that of the body and its organs, or that of the cart and its wheels.Society and the Individual

Unlike a drop of water which submerges its existence with the ocean in which it is dropped, man does not lose his identity in the society in which he lives. The man's life is independent. He is born not for the service of the society, but for the development of his self. For this reason alone, one man cannot make another a slave, in the developed countries. A religion in which the individual has no importance is not acceptable to me. Likewise, Hinduism does not recognize the importance of an individual, and hence it cannot be acceptable to me.

So also, I do not accept a religion in which one class alone has a right to gain knowledge; another has only a right to use arms; the third one, to trade; and the fourth, only to serve. Everyone needs knowledge. Everybody needs arms. Everyone wants money. The religion which forgets this, and with a view to educate a few persons keeps the rest in the dark, is not a

religion but a strategy to keep the people in mental slavery. A religion which permits some to bear the arms and prohibits the rest, is not a religion but a plan to keep the latter in perpetual slavery. A religion which opens the path of acquiring property for some, and compels others to depend on these few even for the daily necessities of life, is not a religion, but an utter selfishness.

This is what is called the Chaturvarnya of Hinduism. I have clearly stated my views about it. It is for you now to think whether this Hinduism is beneficial to you. The basic idea underlying a religion is to create an atmosphere for the spiritual development of an individual. If this is agreed upon, it is clear that you cannot develop yourself at all in Hinduism.

Three factors are required for the uplift of an individual. They are: Sympathy, Equality, and Liberty. Can you say by experience that any of these factors exist for you in Hinduism?

Is there any Sympathy for you in Hinduism?

So far as sympathy is concerned, it is nil. Wherever you go, nobody looks at you sympathetically. You all have good (ample) experience of it. Not only this, but the Hindus have no sense of brotherhood towards you. You are treated by them worse than foreigners. If one looks at the relations of the neighboring Hindus and the Untouchables of the village, no one can say that they are brothers. They can rather be called two opposite armies in warring camps.

The Hindus have not the slightest affinity towards you, as they have towards Muslims. They consider Muslims closer than you. Hindus and Muslims are helpful to each other in local boards, in legislative councils, and in business. But is there a single instance of such sympathetic consideration shown towards you by the caste Hindus? On the contrary: they always cultivate

hatred against you in their minds. What dreadful effects this hatred has produced, can be heard from those who have had occasion to go to the court for justice or to the police for help.

Does any one of you believe that the court will do justice, and the police will act rightly? And if not, what is the reason for [their] cultivating such a sense of hatred? In my opinion, there is only one reason: you do not believe that the Hindus will rightly use their authority, because they lack sympathy towards you. And if it is so, what is the use of living in the midst of such hatred?

Is there Equality for You in Hinduism?

In fact, this question should not be asked. Such a living example of inequality will not be found anywhere in the world. Nowhere in the history of mankind can be seen inequality more intense than Untouchability. On account of [this] superiority-inferiority complex, one may not offer his daughter to another in marriage, or one may not dine with others. Such examples of inequality are not uncommon. But is there a system anywhere existing, except in Hindu religion and Hindu society, where a man is treated [as] so low as [for others] not to touch him? Can anybody believe that there exists an animal called man by whose touch the water is polluted, and the god becomes unworthy for worship?

Is there any difference between the treatment given to an Untouchable and to a leper? Though the people have nausea in their minds for a leper, they have at least sympathy for him. But people have nausea as well as hatred against you. Your condition is worse than [that of] a leper. Even today, if anyone hears words from the mouth of a Mahar at the time of breaking the fast, he will not touch the food. Such filth is attached to your body and your words. Some people say that Untouchability

is a stigma on Hindu religion. This statement, however, does not convey any sense at all. Nobody believes that the Hindu religion is dirty. The majority of the Hindus, however, believe that you are dirty, you are polluted.

How have you been brought to this condition? I think you have been forced to this condition because you continued to be Hindus. Those of you who have become Muslims are treated by the Hindus neither as Untouchables nor even as unequal's. The same is the case with those who became Christians. An instance recently happened at Travancore [that is] worth mentioning. The Untouchables called Thiya in that region are prohibited from walking on the streets. A few days ago, some of these Untouchables embraced the Sikh religion. All of a sudden, the ban prohibiting them from walking on the street was withdrawn. What does all this show? It proves that if there is any reason for your being treated as Untouchables and unequal's, it is your relation with the Hindu religion.

In such a state of inequality and injustice, some Hindus try to soothe the Untouchables. They say, "Get educated yourselves, be clean, and then we will touch you, we will treat you on par." In fact, we all know by experience that the condition of an educated, moneyed, and clean Mahar is as bad as that of an uneducated, poor, and dirty one. Leave aside for the time being this aspect, and consider: if one is not respected because he is uneducated, poor, and not a well-dressed person, what should a common Mahar do? How can he secure equality, who cannot gain education, achieve property, or dress highly?

The principle of equality as taught in Christianity and Islam has no concern whatsoever with knowledge, wealth, or dress, as outward aspects. Both these religions consider a sense of humanity as the mean feature of religion. They preach that the sense of humanity should be respected by all; and none should

disrespect others, none should treat others as unequals. These teachings are completely wanting in the Hindu religion. What is the use of such a religion, in which man's sense of humanity has no value? And what is the good in clinging to it?

In reply to this, some Hindus cite the **Upanishads**, and proudly say that the God is all-pervading, according to the principle enunciated in the **Upanishads**. It may be pointed out here that the religion and science are two different things. It is necessary to consider whether a particular theory is a principle of science, or a teaching of religion. That the God is all-pervading is the principle of science (philosophy) and not of religion. Religion has a direct relation with the behavior of a man. The principle of the God being omnipresent is not the teaching of religion, it is a principle of science [=philosophy]. This statement is supported by the fact that the Hindus do not act according to the above principle. On the contrary: if Hindus insist on this very point, and say that the principle of God being omnipresent is not a principle of philosophy but is a basic principle of this religion, I would simply say that nowhere in the world such meanness would be found as exists among Hindus. The Hindus can be ranked among those cruel people whose utterances and acts are two poles as under apart. They have (as in the proverb) "*Ram on their tongue, and a knife under their armpit*." They speak like saints and act as butchers.

Do not keep company with those who believe that the God is omnipresent, but treat men worse than animals. They are hypocrites. Do not keep contact with those who feed ants with sugar, but kill men by prohibiting them to drink water. Are you aware what effects their company has produced upon you? You have ceased to be respected. You have no status at all. To say that the Hindus alone do not pay you any respect is only a half-truth. Not only the Hindus, but the Muslims and the Christians too, consider you the lowliest of the lowly. In fact, the teachings

of Islam and Christianity do not create the sense of high and low. Then why do the followers of these two religions treat you as low? Because the Hindus consider you as the lowest of the low, the Muslims and Christians also consider you likewise. They fear that if they treat you on par, the Hindus will treat them also as low. Thus we are not low in the eyes of the Hindus alone. We are the lowest in the whole of India, because of the treatment given [us] by the Hindus. If you have to get rid of this shameful condition, if you have to cleanse this filth and make use of this precious life, there is only one way--and that is to throw away the shackles of the Hindu religion and the Hindu society in which you are groaning.

Have you had any Freedom in the Hindu Religion?

Some people might say that you have had a freedom of trade guaranteed by law, like any other citizen of the country. You are also said to have got the personal liberty like others. You will have to think deeply over such statements--whether they really carry any meaning. What is the good in saying, "You have freedom of trade," to a person who is deprived of any business by virtue of his birth, by the society? What is the truth in consoling with the words, "You are at liberty to enjoy your property, nobody else will touch your money," to a person to whom all the doors of means of livelihood and acquiring property are closed? To tell a person who is treated as unfit for entry into any service due to the defilement attached to him by birth, and working under whom is most contemptuous [=contemptible] for others, that he has a right to serve, is making a fun of him.

The law may guarantee various rights. But those alone can be called real rights, which are permitted by the society to be exercised by you. The law guarantees to the Untouchables the right to wear decent clothes. But if the Hindus do not allow

them to put on these clothes, what is the use of this right? The law guarantees to the Untouchables the right to fetch water in metal pots, the right to use metal utensils, the right to put tiles on their houses; but if the Hindu society does not allow them to exercise these rights, what is the use of such rights? Various instances of such types can be cited. In short, that which is permitted by the society to be exercised can alone be called a right. A right which is guaranteed by law but is opposed by the society is of no use at all.

The Untouchables are in need of social liberty, more than that which is guaranteed by law. So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by law to you is of no avail. Some persons might advise you that you have physical freedom. Of course, you can go anywhere, can speak anything you wish, subject to the restrictions imposed by law. But what is the use of such freedom? Man has a body as well as a mind. He needs physical as well as mental freedom. Mere physical freedom is of no use. Freedom of the mind is of prime importance. Really speaking, what is meant to a man by physical freedom? It means he is free to act according to his own free will. A prisoner is unchained and is set free. What is the principle underlying this? The principle is, he should be free to act according to his free will, and he should be able to make the maximum use of the abilities he possesses. But what is the use of such freedom of a man whose mind is not free? The freedom of mind is the real freedom.

A person, whose mind is not free, though he is not in chains, is a slave. One whose mind is not free, though he is not in jail, is a prisoner. One whose mind is not free, though he is alive, is dead. Freedom of mind is the proof of one's existence. What is the proof, then, to judge that the flame of mental freedom is not extinguished from a person? To whom can we say that his mind is free? I call him free who with consciousness awake, realises

his rights, responsibilities, and duties; he who is not a slave of circumstances, and is always bent upon changing them in his favour, I call him free. One who is not a slave of usage, customs, and traditions, or of the teachings because they are brought down from the ancestors; one whose flame of reason is not extinguished--I call him a free man.

He who has not surrendered himself, who does not act on the teachings of others blindly; who does not keep faith on anything unless [it has been] examined critically in the light of the cause and effect theory; who is always prepared to protect his rights; who is not afraid of public criticism; who has enough intellect and self-respect so as not to become a doll in the hands of others--I call such a man a free man. He who does not lead his life under the direction of others, who carves out his own aim of life according to his own reason, and decides himself as to how and in what way the life should be led--I call him a free man. In short, a man who is the master of his own [life], him alone I consider a free man.

In the light of the above observations, are you free? Have you any freedom to carve out your own life and your aim? In my opinion, not only you have no freedom, but you are worse than slaves. Your slavery has no parallel. In the Hindu religion, one cannot have freedom of speech. A Hindu must surrender his freedom of speech. He must act according to the **Vedas**. If the **Vedas** do not support the actions, instructions must be sought from the **Smritis**, and if the **Smritis** fail to provide any such instructions, he must follow in the footsteps of the great men. He is not supposed to reason. Hence, so long as you are in the Hindu religion, you cannot expect to have freedom of thought.

Some people might argue that the Hindu religion did not force you alone into mental slavery, but has snatched away the freedom of mind of all other communities. It is quite true that

all the Hindus are living under a state of mental slavery. But from this nobody should conclude that the sufferings of all are alike. Everyone in the Hindu religion is not equally affected by the adverse effects this mental slavery has produced. This mental slavery is in no way detrimental to the material happiness of the caste Hindus. Though the caste Hindus are slaves of the above-mentioned trio-- viz., **Vedas**, **Smritis**, and the dictates of great men--they are given a high position in the HIndu social system. They are empowered to rule over others. It is an undisputed fact that the whole Hindu religion is the creation of the high-caste Hindus for the welfare and prosperity of the high-castes.

Society, which they call religion, has assigned you the role of the slave. So that you may not be able to escape from this slavery, every arrangement is made in the structure of the society. And that is why you are more in need of breaking the bondage of the mental slavery of this religion than is any other community. Hinduism has marred your progress from all sides. It has sacked [=devastated] your mental freedom and made you slaves. In the outer world also, it has doomed you to the condition of a slave. If you want to be free, you must change your religion.

Untouchables' Organisation and Conversion

The present movement of the Untouchables has been very severely criticized. It has been said that there are several castes among the Untouchables, and every caste practices untouchability. Mahars and Mangs do not dine together. Both these castes do not touch the scavengers, and practice untouchability against them. It is therefore asked what right these people have to expect from others the non-observance of the practice of untouchability, when they themselves practice casteism and untouchability amongst themselves. The untouchables are generally advised to abolish castes and

untouchability from amongst them, and then come [to the caste Hindus] for redress.

There is a little truth in this argument. But the allegations made in this against the Untouchables are absolutely false. It cannot be denied that the castes included in the (category of) Untouchables practice untouchability. But equally, it is false to say that they are in any way responsible for this crime. Casteism and untouchability originated not from the Untouchables, but from the high-caste Hindus. And if this is true, the responsibility for this age-old tradition falls on the caste Hindus and not on the Untouchables. While practicing untouchability and casteism, the Untouchables merely follow the lesson taught by the caste Hindus. If this lesson is not true, the burden of its being untruthful falls on those who taught it, and not on those who learnt it.

Though this reply may appear to be correct, it does not satisfy me. Though we are not responsible for the causes due to which castes and untouchability have taken root among us, it will be insane not to fight them but to allow them to continue as they are. Though we are not responsible for the introduction of untouchability and castes among us, we are surely responsible for their annihilation. And I am glad that all of us have realised this responsibility.

I am sure there is no leader among the Mahars who advocates the practice of casteism. If comparison is to be made, it will have to be made among the leaders. Compare the educated class of the Mahar community with that of the Brahmins, and one will have to admit that the educated Mahars are more eager to abolish castes. This can well be proved by facts also. Not only the educated class of Mahars, but even the uneducated and illiterate Mahars, is the protagonists (advocates) of the abolition of castes. This also can be proved. Today, there is not a single

person in the Mahar community who is opposed to the inter-caste dining among the Mahars and the Mangs. I feel greatly satisfied that you have realised the necessity of the abolition of castes--for which I extend my heartiest congratulations.

But have you ever thought as to how the efforts toward the abolition of castes can be made successful? Castes cannot be abolished by inter-caste dinners or stray instances of inter-caste marriages. Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of the mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. We practice casteism; we observe untouchability, because we are asked to do it by the Hindu religion in which we live. A bitter thing can be made sweet. The taste of anything can be changed. But poison cannot be made Amrit (nectar). To talk of annihilating castes is like talking of changing poison into Amrit. In short, so long as we remain in a religion which teaches man to treat man as a leper, the sense of discrimination on account of caste, which is deeply rooted in our minds, cannot go. For annihilating castes and untouchability from among the Untouchables, change of religion is the only antidote.

The Distinction between "Change in Name" and "Change in Religion"

So far, I have placed before you the points in favour of conversion. I hope this has been good food for your thoughts. Those who consider this discussion very difficult and complicated--I propose to put up [=provide] simple thoughts in simple language for them.

What is there in conversion which can be called novel? Really speaking, what sort of social relations do you have with the caste Hindus at present? You are as separate from the Hindus as Muslims and Christians are. The same is [true of] their relation with you. Your society, and that of the Hindus, are two

distinct groups. By (our choosing) conversion, nobody can say or feel that one society has been split up. You will remain separate from the Hindus, as you are today. Nothing new will happen on account of this conversion. If this is true, then why should some people be afraid of conversion? I, at least, do not find any reason for such fear.

Secondly, though, you undoubtedly have understood the importance of a change of name. If anybody from among you is asked about his caste, he tells it as Chokhamela, Harijan, or Walmiki, but does not say that he is a Mahar. Nobody can change a name unless certain conditions demand it. There is a very simple reason for such a change of name. An unknown [=unknowing] person cannot distinguish between a touchable and an Untouchable. And so long as a Hindu does not come to know the caste of a person, he cannot have born in him the hatred of that person for being an Untouchable. The caste Hindus and Untouchables behave in very friendly ways during journeys, so long as they are unaware of their castes. They exchange betels, bidis, cigarettes, fruits, etc. But as soon as the Hindu comes to know that the person with whom he is talking is an Untouchable, a sense of hatred germinates in his mind. He thinks that he is deceived. He gets angry, and ultimately this temporary friendship ends in abuses and quarrels.

Such experiences are not new to you. Why does all this happen? The names that depict your caste are considered so filthy that even their utterance is enough to create a vomiting sensation in the heart of Hindus. Thus by calling oneself a Chokhamela instead of a Mahar, you try to deceive the people. But you know, people are not deceived. Whether you call yourself a Chokhamela or a Harijan, people understand what you are. By your actions, you have proved the necessity of a change of name. Then what objection should there be to a change of religion? Changing a religion is like changing a name.

A change of religion, followed by a change of name, will be more beneficial to you. To call oneself a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist, or a Sikh, is not merely a change of religion, but is also a change of name. That is a real change of name. This new name will have no filth attached to it. It is an overall change. No one will search for the origin of it. The change of name as Chokhamela or Harijan has no meaning at all. In this case, all the hatred, contempt, etc., attached to the original name passes to the new name. So long as you remain in the Hindu religion, you will have to change the name. [To seek change] by calling oneself a Hindu is not enough. Nobody recognizes that there is a man called a Hindu. So also, calling oneself a Mahar will not serve the purpose. As soon as you utter this name, you will not be allowed to come near. So I ask you, why should you not change your name permanently by changing your religion, instead of changing to one name today and another tomorrow, and thus remaining in the state of a pendulum?

The Role of Opponents

Since the beginning of this movement of conversion, various people raised various objections to it. Let us now examine the truth, if any, in such objections. Some Hindus, pretending to be religious preachers, advise you, saying, "Religion is not a thing that can be consumed. Religion cannot be changed as we change our coat daily. You wish to leave this Hindu religion and embrace another one. Then do you think that your ancestors who clung to this religion for so long a period were fools?" Some wise men have raised this question.

I do not find any substance in this objection. A congenital idiot alone can say that one should stick to his religion because it is ancestral. No sane man will accept such a proposition. Those who advocate such an argument seem not to have read history at all. The ancient Aryan religion was called Vedic religion. It

has three distinct characteristics: beef eating, drinking, and merry-making was the religion of the day. Thousands of people followed it in India, and even now some people dream of going back to it. If the ancient religion alone is to be adhered to, then why did the people of India leave it and accept Buddhism? Why did they divorce [themselves] from the Vedic religion?

It cannot be denied that our ancestors lived in the ancient religion, but I cannot say that they remained there voluntarily. The Chaturvarnya system prevailed in this country for a pretty long time. In this system, the Brahmins were permitted to learn, the Kshatriyas to fight, the Vaishyas to earn property, and the Shudras to serve. This way of life was the rule of the day. In those days, the Shudras had no learning, no property, and no food and clothing. Your ancestors were thus forced to live in penniless and armless (disarmed) conditions. Under these circumstances, no man with common sense can say that they accepted that religion voluntarily. Here it is also necessary to consider whether it was possible for your ancestors to revolt against this religion. Had it been possible for them to revolt, and had they still not acted upon [the possibility], only then can we say that they had accepted this religion voluntarily.

But if we try to look into the then-prevalent conditions, it will be clear that our ancestors were forced to live in that religion. Thus this Hindu religion is not the religion of our ancestors, but it was a slavery forced upon them. Our ancestors had no means to fight this slavery, and hence they could not revolt. They were compelled to live in this religion. Nobody can blame them for this helplessness. Rather, anyone will pity them. But now nobody can force any type of slavery upon the present generation. We have all sorts of freedom. If the present generation do not avail [themselves] of such freedom and free themselves, one will have to call them, most regretfully, the most mean, slavish, and dependent people who ever lived on earth.

The Difference between Man and Animal

Only a fool can say that one should cling to one's own religion only because it is ancestral. No sane person can accept such an argument. "You should live in the same circumstances in which you are living at present" may be worthy advice for the animals, but it can never be for man. The difference between an animal and a man is that the man can make progress, while the animal cannot. No progress can be made without change. Conversion is a sort of change. And if no progress can be made without change, i.e. conversion, obviously conversion becomes essential. The ancestral religion cannot be a hindrance in the path of a progressive man.

There is still one more argument against conversion. They say, "Conversion is a sort of escapism. Today a number of Hindus are bent upon improving the Hindu religion. Untouchability and caste can be eradicated with the help of these Hindu reformers. It is therefore not proper to change the religion at this juncture." Whatever opinion anybody may possess about the Hindu social reformers, I personally have nausea for them. I have no regard for them. I have had very bitter experience of them. That those people, who live in their own caste, die in their own caste, marry in their own caste, should befool the people with false slogans, saying, "We will break the caste!", is really surprising. And if the Untouchables do not believe them, they get annoyed with them! Is it not astonishing?

When I hear the slogans shouted by these Hindu social reformers, I recollect the efforts made by the American white people for the emancipation of the American Negroes. Years ago, the condition of the Negroes in America was just the same as that of Untouchables in India. The difference between the two was that the slavery of Negroes had the sanction of the law; while that of your [people], by religion. So, some reformers were

trying for abolition of the slavery of the Negroes. But can those white reformers be compared with their counterparts, the Hindu social reformers in India? The American white reformers fought battles in war with their kith and kin for the emancipation of the Negroes. They killed thousands of whites who defended the slavery of the Negro people, and also sacrificed their own blood for this cause.

When we read these chapters through the pages of history, the social reformers in India cut a very sorry figure before them. These so-called benefactors of the Untouchables of India called "reformers" need to be asked the following questions: Are you prepared to fight a civil war with your Hindu brethren, like the whites in America who fought with their white brothers for the cause of the coloured people? And if not, why these proclamations of reforms?

Now let us take the example of Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest of the Hindus who claim to fight for the cause of the Untouchables. To what extent can he go? Mahatma Gandhi, who pilots the non-violent agitation against the British Government, is not prepared to hurt the feelings of the Hindus, the oppressors of the Untouchables. He is not willing to launch a peaceful Satyagraha against them. He is not even prepared to take legal action against the Hindus. What is the good of such Hindu reformers for us? I don't see any.

Does the Fault Lie with the Untouchables Alone?

Some Hindus attend the meetings of the Untouchables and rebuke the caste Hindus. Some will advise the Untouchables from their stage, preaching, "Brothers, live clean, educate yourselves, stand on your own feet, etc. etc." Really speaking, if anybody is to be blamed for the stigma of Untouchability, it is the caste Hindus alone. It is the caste Hindu class which

commits this wrong. Yet no one will try to gather these caste Hindus and preach to them. Those who preach to the Untouchables to continue their agitation with the help of the Hindus and by remaining in the Hindu fold--I would like to remind them of a couple of illustrations from history.

I remember to have read a conversation between an American and an English soldier during the last World War. I find it most appropriate at this juncture. How long the war should be continued, was the subject of discussion. In reply to a question, the Englishman said with great pride, "We shall fight the war till the last Frenchman dies." When the Hindu social reformers proclaim that they shall fight to the last for the cause of the Untouchables, it means that they propose to fight till the last Untouchable dies. This is the meaning, as I understand it, of their proclamation. One who fights for a cause at the cost of the lives of others cannot be expected to win the battle.

If we are to die in our struggle for freedom, what is the use of fighting at the wrong place? To reform the Hindu society is neither our aim nor our field of action. Our aim is to gain freedom. We have nothing to do with anything else. If we can gain our freedom by conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility for the reform of the Hindu religion? And why should we sacrifice our strength and property for that? No one should misunderstand the object of our movement as being Hindu social reform. The object of our movement is to achieve social freedom for the Untouchables. It is equally true that this freedom cannot be secured without conversion.

I do accept that the Untouchables need equality as well. And to secure equality is also one of their objectives. But nobody can say that this equality can be achieved only by remaining as Hindus and not otherwise. There are two ways of achieving equality. One, by remaining in the Hindu fold. Mere removal of

the sense of being a touchable or an Untouchable will not serve the purpose: equality can be achieved only when inter-caste dinners and marriages take place. This means that the Chaturvarna must be abolished, and the Brahminic religion must be uprooted. Is it possible? And if not, will it be wise to expect equality of treatment by remaining in the Hindu religion? And can you be successful in your efforts to bring equality? Of course not. The path of conversion is far simpler than this. Hindu society gives treatment of equality to Muslims and Christians. Obviously, social equality is easily achieved by conversion. If this is true, then why should you not adopt this simple path of conversion?

According to me, this conversion of religion will bring happiness to both--the Untouchables as well as the Hindus. So long as you remain Hindus, you will have to struggle for social intercourse, for food and water, and for inter-caste marriages. And so long as this quarrel continues, relations between you and the Hindus will be strained, and you will be their perpetual enemies. By conversion, the roots of all the quarrels will vanish. Then you will have no right to claim temple entry in the Hindu temples, much less the need for the same. There will be no reason for you to struggle for the social rights--e.g., inter-caste dinners, inter-caste marriages, etc. Once these quarrels cease to exist, mutual love and affection will automatically develop.

Look at the present relations between the Hindus on the one hand, and the Christians and Muslims on the other. The Hindus do not allow the Muslims and the Christians to enter their temples, just as they do not allow you. They also have no inter-caste marriages or inter-dining with them. Irrespective of this, the affinity and love which these people have with the caste Hindus, is not extended to you by the Hindus. The reason for this differential or step-motherly treatment with you is that you have to struggle with the Hindus for social and religious rights,

unlike the Christians and the Muslims--only because you live as Hindus.

Secondly, although these religions have no social rights in the Hindu society, that is to say, although they have no inter-dining and inter-marriage with the Hindus, the Hindus treat them on a par. Thus by conversion, if equality of treatment can be achieved and an affinity between Hindus and Untouchables can be brought about, then why should the Untouchables not adopt this simple and happy path for securing equality? Looking at the problem from this angle, it will be seen that this path of conversion is the only right path of freedom, which ultimately leads to equality. It is neither cowardice nor escapism. It is the wise step.

One more argument is put forth against Conversion. Some Hindus argue, "Conversion is worthless if you do it out of frustration with the caste system. Wherever you may go, you will face caste. Muslims have their own castes. If you become Christians, there are also castes." This is what these Hindus plead. Unfortunately, it has to be admitted that the Caste system has crept into other religions also in this country. But the burden of nurturing this great sin lies with the Hindus alone. This disease originally started from the Hindus, and thereafter infected others. Although the castes exist among Muslims and Christians alike, it will be meaningless? to liken it with that of the Hindus.

There is a great distinction between the caste system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and Christians. Firstly, it must be noted that though castes exist among Christians and Muslims, it is not the chief characteristic of their body social. If one asks, "Who are you?" and someone says, "I am a Hindu," one is not satisfied with this reply. He is further asked, "What is your caste?" And unless this is replied to, no one can have the idea of

his social status. From this it is evident how caste has prime importance in the Hindu religion, and how minor it is in Christianity and among the Muslims.

There is one more difference between the caste system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and Christians. The caste system among the Hindus has the foundation of religion. The castes in other religions have no sanction of their religion. If Hindus proclaim [that they intend] to disband the caste system, their religion will come in the way. On the other hand, if the Muslims and Christians start movements for abolishing the caste system in their religion, their religion will not obstruct. Hindus cannot destroy their castes without destroying their religion. Muslims and Christians need not destroy their religion for eradication of the castes. Rather, their religion will support such movements to a great extent.

Even if for the sake of argument it is admitted that castes exist everywhere, it cannot be concluded that one should remain in the Hindu fold. If the caste system is useless, then the logical conclusion is that one should accept a kind of society in which the caste system has no serious adverse effect upon the person, or wherein the castes can be abolished early and easily, in a simple manner.

Some of the Hindus say, "What can be done by conversion alone? First improve your financial and educational status." Some of our people are confused and puzzled by such questions. I therefore feel it necessary to discuss it here. Firstly, the question is, who is going to improve your financial and educational conditions? You yourself, or those who argue as above? I do not think that those who advise you will be able to do anything but showing their lip-sympathy. Nor do I find any efforts toward this direction from their side. On the contrary: every Hindu tries to improve the economic status of his own

caste. His outlook is limited to his own caste alone. Brahmins are engaged in establishing maternity homes for Brahmin women, providing scholarships to Brahmin pupils, and securing jobs for the unemployed Brahmin personnel. Saraswats (one of the castes amongst the Brahmins) are also doing the same.

Everybody is for himself, and those who have no benefactor are at the mercy of God. This is the present-day condition of the society. If you yourself have to rise, if no one else is to come to your aid--if this be the situation, what is the purpose in listening to the advice of the Hindus? There is no other motive in such advice but to misguide you and kill (waste) your time. If you are to improve yourselves, then that [misguiding and time-wasting effect] is what they mean, so nobody need pay attention to their gossip. Although this may seem enough, I do not propose to leave this point here. I propose to refute this argument.

What can be achieved by Conversion Alone?

I am simply surprised by the question which some Hindus ask, as to what can be achieved by conversion alone. Most of the present-day Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians in India were formerly Hindus, the majority of them being from the Shudras and Untouchables. Do these critics mean to say that those who left the Hindu fold and embraced Sikhism or Christianity, have made no progress at all? And if this is not true, and if it is admitted that conversion has brought a distinct improvement in their condition, then to say that the Untouchables will not be benefited by conversion carries no meaning.

This statement that "nothing can be achieved by conversion" has another implied meaning, and that is that "religion is bogus and useless; there is neither gain nor loss from religion." If this be the case, then why do the advocates of this argument insist upon the Untouchables' remaining in the Hindu religion? I do

not understand. If they do not find any meaning in religion, why should they unnecessarily argue for and against conversion?

Those Hindus, who ask as to what can be achieved by conversion alone, can be accosted with the similar question: i.e., what can be achieved by self-government alone? If financial and educational progress is the condition precedent (prerequisite) for freedom, what is the good of self-government? And if the country is to be benefited by self-government alone, the Untouchables are also bound to be benefited by conversion.

After giving deep thought to the problem, everybody will have to admit that conversion is as necessary to the Untouchables as self-government is to India. The ultimate object of both is the same. There is not the slightest difference in their ultimate goal. This ultimate aim is to attain freedom. And if the freedom is necessary for the life of mankind, conversion of the Untouchables, which brings them complete freedom, cannot be called worthless by any stretch of the imagination.

Progress or Conversion--What First?

I think it necessary here to discuss the question as to what should be initiated first, whether economic progress or conversion. I do not agree with the view that economic progress should precede. This issue whether religious conversion or economic progress should precede is as dry as that which dealt with political reform versus social reform. Several methods are required to be applied for the development and progress of the society. Each of these methods has its own significance. No definite seriatim (sequence) can be applied for the application of these methods.

If however anybody insists on such a seriatum with regard to conversion and economic reform, I will place the former as the first. I fail to understand how you can achieve economic

progress so long as you have the stigma of being an Untouchable. If any one of you opens a shop, as soon as it is known that the shopkeeper is an Untouchable, nobody will purchase articles from you. If any one of you applies for a job, and it is disclosed that the applicant is an Untouchable, he will not get the job. If anyone intends to sell his land, and one of you proposes to purchase it, once it has been known that the purchaser is an Untouchable, nobody will sell the land. Whatever methods you may adopt for your own economic progress, your efforts will be frustrated due to untouchability. Untouchability is a permanent handicap on your path of progress. And unless you remove it, your path cannot be safe. Without conversion, this hurdle cannot be removed.

Some of your young ones are after education, and they are collecting money for this purpose from whatever source they find proper. Due to this temptation of money, some are inclined to remain Untouchables and make their progress [as such]. To these youngsters, I wish to ask one question. After the completion of your education, if you do not get a job suited to your qualifications, what will you do? What is the reason that most of our educated persons are unemployed today? To me, the chief cause for this unemployment is untouchability. Your caliber has no scope due to your untouchability. Because of untouchability, you have been ousted from the military services. You are not employed in the police department on account of your untouchability. Due to untouchability, you cannot secure even the post of a peon. You are not promoted to the higher rank only because you are an Untouchable.

Untouchability is a curse. You have been completely ruined and all your virtues have turned into dust. Under these circumstances, what more qualifications can you add? And even if you add them, what is the use? So, if you sincerely desire that your qualifications should be valued, that your education should

be of some use to you, you must throw away the shackles of untouchability, which means that you must change your religion.

Doubts about Conversion

So far, the arguments put forth by the critics have been discussed. Now I propose to clarify the doubts expressed by the sympathisers of conversion. In the first place, it has reached my ears that some of the Mahars are worried as to what will be the fate of their Watan (hereditary rights of a village servant). The high-caste Hindus are also reported to have threatened the Mahars that they will be deprived of their services as village servants, if they leave the Hindu religion.

All of you are aware that I am least worried if the Mahar Watan is abolished. During the last ten years, I have been advocating that if there is anything that dooms the fate of Mahars, it is the Mahar Watan alone. And the day, on which you will be freed from these chains of Mahar-ness (Maharki), I think your path of liberation will be open to you.

However, for those who need this Mahar Watan, I can assure them that their Watan will not come in trouble (be endangered) by their conversion. In this regard, the Act of 1850 can be referred to. Under the provisions of this Act, no rights of a person or his successors with respect to his property are affected by virtue of his conversion. As for those who feel this reference of law to be insufficient, their attention is drawn to the circumstances prevalent in Nagar District. A number of persons from the Mahar community in this District have become Christians. At some places, we find that in one family, some are Christians while others still remain as Mahars. However, the Watan rights of these converted Christians have not been vanquished [=removed]. This may be confirmed from

the Mahars of Nagar. So no one should fear that their Watan will come in peril by conversion.

A second doubt is about political rights. Some people express [concern] as to what will happen to our political safeguards if we convert. Nobody can say that I do not realise the importance of the political safeguards the Untouchables have achieved. Nobody else has taken so much pain and has made so much effort for securing political rights for the Untouchables as I have done. But I feel it is not proper to depend solely on political rights. These political safeguards are not granted on the condition that they shall be everlasting. They are bound to be ended sometime. According to the Communal Award of the British Government, our political safeguards were limited for twenty years. Although no such limitation has been fixed by the Poona Pact, nobody can say they are everlasting.

Those who depend upon these political safeguards must think about what will happen after these safeguards are withdrawn. On the day on which our political rights cease to exist, we will have to depend upon our social strength. I have already told you that this social strength is wanting in us. So also I have proved in the beginning, that this strength cannot be achieved without conversion. No one should think only of the present. To forget what is eternally beneficial, and to be lured by temporary gains, is bound to lead to suffering. Under these circumstances, one must think what is permanently beneficial. In my opinion, conversion is the only remedy, for eternal bliss. Nobody should hesitate, even if political rights are required to be sacrificed for this purpose.

Conversion brings no harm to political safeguards. I do not understand why political safeguards should at all come in trouble [=be endangered] by conversion. Wherever you may go, your political rights and safeguards will accompany you. I have

no doubt about it. If you become Muslims, you will get political rights as Muslims. If you become Christians, you will get your political rights as Christians. If you become

Sikhs, you will have your political safeguards as Sikhs. Political rights are based on population. The political safeguards of any society [=group] will increase with the increase of its population.

Nobody should misunderstand (wrongly think) that if we leave the Hindu society, all the fifteen seats allotted to us will go back to Hindus. If we become Muslims, our fifteen seats will be added to the seats reserved for Muslims. Likewise, if we become Christians, our seats will be added to the seats reserved for Christians. In short, our political rights will accompany us. So nobody should be afraid of it.

On the other hand, if we remain Hindus and do not convert, [think about] whether our rights will be safe. This you must think carefully about. Suppose the Hindus have passed a law whereby untouchability is prohibited and its practice is made punishable. Then they ask you, "We have abolished untouchability by law. Now you are no longer Untouchables. At the most, you are simply poor and backward. But other castes are equally backward. We have not provided any political safeguards for these backward communities. Then why should you be given such political safeguards?" What will be your reply to these questions?

The reply of the Muslims and the Christians will be very simple. They will say, "We are not granted political safeguards and rights because we are poor, illiterate, or backward, but because our religion is different, our society is different, and so on. And so long as our religion is different from yours, we must get our share in the political rights." This will be their appropriate reply.

As long as you are Hindus, you cannot take this stand--that you are entitled to political safeguards because your society, your religion, is altogether different. You will be able to take this stand on the day on which you liberate yourselves from the serfdom of Hindu society. And unless you stand on such a sound footing and claim political safeguards, your political rights and safeguards cannot be considered to be permanent and free from danger.

Looking from this perspective, conversion becomes a means for strengthening political safeguards, rather than becoming a hindrance. If you remain Hindus, you are sure to lose your political safeguards. If you want to save them, leave this religion. Political safeguards will be permanent only through conversion.

Conclusion

I have decided for myself. My conversion is sure as anything. My conversion is not for any material gain. There is nothing which I cannot achieve by remaining an Untouchable. My conversion is purely out of my spiritual attitude. The Hindu religion does not appeal to my conscience. It does not appeal to my self-respect. However, your conversion will be both for material as well as for spiritual gains. Some persons mock and laugh at the idea of conversion for material gain. I do not feel hesitant in calling such persons stupid.

The religion which preaches what will happen to your soul after death may be useful for the rich. They may entertain themselves in such religion at their own leisure (by dreaming the future of their soul after death). It is quite natural that those who have enjoyed all sorts of pleasures in their lifetime may consider such religion as a real religion, which promises to them these pleasures even after death.

But what of those who by remaining in a particular religion have been reduced to the state of dust, who have been denied the basic necessities of life such as food and clothing, who have not been treated even as human beings, and have since [=thus] completely lost the sense of being human? Are these people not supposed to think of religion from a material point of view? Are they expected to look at the sky and merely pray? What good is this superfluous Vedanta of the easy-going, self-satisfied, rich people, to the poor ones?

Religion is for Man

I tell you all very specifically; religion is for man and not man for religion. For getting human treatment, convert yourselves. Convert for getting organized. Convert for becoming strong. Convert for securing equality. Convert for getting liberty. Convert so that your domestic life should be happy.

Why do you remain in a religion which does not treat you as human beings? Why do you remain in a religion which prohibits you from entering temples? Why do you remain in a religion which prohibits you from securing drinking water from the public well? Why do you remain in a religion which comes in your way for getting a job? Why do you remain in a religion which insults you at every step?

A religion, in which man's human behavior with man is prohibited, is not religion, but a display of force. A religion which does not recognize a man as man is not a religion but a disease. A religion in which the touch of animals is permitted, but the touch of human beings is prohibited, is not a religion but a mockery. A religion which precludes some classes from education forbids them to accumulate wealth and to bear arms, is not a religion but a mockery of human beings. A religion that compels the ignorant to be ignorant, and the poor to be poor, is

not a religion but a punishment.

I have tried here, with the best of my knowledge, to analyse and explain all the probable problems arising out of conversion. This discourse might have become a lengthy one, but I had decided to be elaborate from the beginning. It was imperative for me to discuss and reply to the points raised by the opponents of conversion. Nobody should leave the Hindu religion unless he fully realises the utility of this declaration. So as to clear up all doubts, I had to discuss this problem so much in detail.

How far you will agree with my views, I cannot say. But I hope you will give deep thought to them. To speak that which pleases the audience and earn goodwill may be a convenient principle for the man in the street. But it does not befit the leader. I consider him a leader who, without fear or favour, tells the people what is good and what is bad for them. It is my duty to tell you what is good for you, even if you don't like it. I must do my duty. And now I have done it. It is now for you to decide and discharge your responsibility.

I have deliberately divided this problem of conversion into two parts. Whether to leave the Hindu religion or to remain in it is the first part of the problem. If the Hindu religion is to be abandoned, what other religion should be adopted, or whether a new religion should be established--this is the second part of the problem. Today, I wish to know your decision on the first part. Unless the first aspect is decided, it is futile to discuss or prepare for the latter. Therefore you must decide the first point. You will have no other opportunity. Whatever decision you will arrive at in this conference, it will be of the utmost use for me, to chalk out my future programme.

If you decide against conversion, this question will be closed forever. Then whatever is to be done for myself, I will do. If at

all you decide in favour of conversion, then you will have to promise me organised and en-masse conversion. If the decision is taken in favour of conversion, and the people start embracing any religion they like individually, I will not dabble in your conversion. I wish you all to join me. Whatever religion we may accept, I am prepared to put all my sincere efforts and labour for the welfare of our people in that religion.

You should not, however, be led away by emotion, and follow me only because I say so. You should consent only if it appeals to your reason. I will not at all feel [angry?] if you decide not to join me. Rather, I will feel relieved of the responsibility. This is therefore a crucial occasion. You must bear in mind that your today's decision will carve out a path for posterity, for future generations. But if you decide to remain slaves, your future generations will also be slaves. Hence yours is the most difficult task.

Be Thy Own Light

What message should I give you on this occasion? While I thought over it, I recollected the message given by the Lord Bhagwan Buddha to his Bhikkhu Sangh (Congregation of Monks) just before his Mahaparinirvan, and which has been quoted in "***Mahaparinibban Sutta.***" Once the Bhagwan, after having recovered from an illness, was resting on a seat under a tree. His disciple the Venerable Anand approached the Buddha and, having saluted, sat beside him. Then he said to the Buddha, "***I have seen the Lord in his illness as well as in his happiness. But from the beginning of the present illness, my body has become heavy like lead. My mind is not in peace. I can't concentrate on the Dhamma. However, I feel consolation and satisfaction that the Lord will not attain the Parinibban until he gives a message to the Sangh.***"

Then the Lord replied thus: "***Ananda! What does the Sangh expect from me? Ananda, I have preached the Dhamma with an open heart, without concealing anything. The Tathagata (Buddha) has not kept anything concealed, as some other teachers do. So Ananda, what more can I tell to the Bhikkhu Sangh? So Ananda, be self-illuminating like the lamp. Don't be dependent for light, like the Earth. Don't be a satellite. Be a light unto thyself. Believe in Self. Don't be dependent on others. Be truthful. Always take refuge in the Truth, and do not surrender to anybody!***"

I also take your leave in the words of the Buddha. "***Be your own guide. Take refuge in reason. Do not listen to the advice of others. Do not succumb to others. Be truthful. Take refuge in truth. Never surrender to anybody!***" If you keep in mind this message of Lord Buddha at this juncture, I am sure your decision will not be wrong.

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BUDDHA AND FUTURE OF HIS RELIGION

by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

The national symbol of India
consists of the famous Ashokan lion capital,
with a wheel or chakra.

Buddha and Future of his Religion

I

Out of the many founders of Religion, there are four whose religions have not only moved the world in the past, but are still having a sway over the vast masses of people. They are Buddha, Jesus, Mahommed and Krishna. A comparison of the presonalities of these four and the poses they assumed in propagating their religions reveals certain points of contrast between the Buddha on the one hand and the rest on the other, which are not without significance.

The first point which mark off Buddha from the rest is his self-abnegation. All throughout the Bible, Jesus insists that he is the Son of God and that those who wish to enter the kingdom of God will fail, if they do not recognise him as the Son of God. Mahommed went a step further. Like Jesus he also claimed that he was the messenger of God on earth. But he further insisted that he was the last messenger. On that footing he declared that those who wanted salvation must not only accept that he was a messenger of God, but also accept that he was the last messenger. Krishna went a step beyond both Jesus and Mahommed. He refused to be satisfied with merely being the Son of the God or being the messenger of God; he was not content even with being the last messenger of God. He was not even satisfied with calling himself a God. He claimed that he was '*Parameshwar*' or as his followers describe him "*Devadhideva*" God of Gods. Buddha never arrogated to himself any such status. He was born as a son of man and was content to remain a common man and preached his gospel as a common man. He never claimed any supernatural origin or supernatural powers nor did he perform miracles to prove his supernatural powers. The Buddha made a clear distinction between a *Margadata* and a *Mokshadata*. Jesus, Mahommed and Krishna

claimed for themselves the *Mokshadata*. The Buddha was satisfied with playing the role of a *Margadata*.

There is also another distinction between the four religious teachers. Both Jesus and Mohammed claimed that what they taught was the word of God and as a word of God what they taught was infallible and beyond question. Krishna was according to his own assumption a God of Gods and therefore what he taught being a word of God, uttered by God, they were original and final and the question of infallibility did not even arise. The Buddha claimed no such infallibility for what he taught. In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* He told Ananda that His religion was based on reason and experience and that his followers should not accept his teaching as correct and binding merely because they emanated from Him. Being based on reason and experience they were free to modify or even to abandon any of his teachings if it was found that at a given time and in given circumstances they do not apply. He wished, His religion not to be encumbered with the dead wood of the past. He wanted that it should remain evergreen and serviceable at all times. That is why He gave liberty to His followeres to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required. No other religious teacher has shown such courage. They were afraid of permitting repair. As the liberty to repair may be used to demolish the structure they had reared. Buddha had no such fear. He was sure of his foundation. He knew that even the most violent iconoclast will not be able to destroy the core of His religion.

II

Such is the unique position of Buddha. What about his religion ? How does it compare with those founded by his rivals ?

Let us first compare Buddhism with Hinduism. In the short

space available the comparison must be limited to a few important points indeed only to two.

Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has it is not an integral part of it. It is not imbeded in religion. It is a separate force which is sustained by social necessities and not by injunction of Hindu religion. The religion of the Buddha is morality. It is imbeded in religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if no morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions morality is to Buddhism.

It is very seldom recognised that He propounded a most revolutionary meaning of the word *"Dhamma"*. The Vedic meaning of the *word "Dharma"* did not connote morality in any sense of the word. The *Dharma* as enunciated by the Brahmins and as propounded in the *Purvamimansa* of Jamini meant nothing more than the performances of certain *karmas* or to use terminology of the Roman religion observances. *Dharma* to Brahmins meant keeping up of observances, i.e. *Yagans, Yagas* and sacrifices to Gods. This was the essence of the Brahmanic or Vedic Religion. It had nothing to do with morality.

The word *Dhamma* as used by the Buddha, had nothing to do with rituals or observances. In fact he repudiated the *Yagas* and *Yagnas* as being essence of religion. In place of *Karma* he substituted morality as the essence of *Dhamma*. Although the word *Dhamma* was used by Brahmanic teachers as well as by the Buddha, the content of both is radically and fundamentally different. In fact, it might be stated that the Buddha was the first teacher in the world who made morality the essence and foundation of religion. Even Krishna as may be seen from Bhagvat Geeta was not able to extricate himself from the old

conception of religion being equivalent of rituals and observances. Many people seem to be lured by the doctrine of *Nishkam Karma* other wise called *Anasaktiyoga* preached by Krishna in the Bhagvat Geeta. It is taken to mean in Boyscout sense of doing good without the expectation of reward. This interpretation of the *Nishkam Karma* is a complete misunderstanding of what it really means. The word *Karma* in the phrase *Nishkam Karma* does not mean, action in the generic sense of the word *Kanna* meaning 'deed'. It is used in its original sense in which it is used by the Brahmins and Jamini. On the point of observances there is only one point of difference between Jamini and the Bhagvat Geeta. The observance which used to be performed by the Brahmins fell into two classes :

(i) *Nitya Karmas and*
(ii) *Naimitika Kaunas*

The *Nitya Karmas* were observances which were enjoined to be performed regularly for which reasons they were called *Nitya* and as a matter of religious duty, for which there was not to be any expectation of reward. On that account they were also called *Nishkam Karmas*. The other category of *Karmas* was called *Naimitika* that is to say they were performed whenever there was occasion, that is, whenever there was a desire to perform them and they were called *Kamya Karmas* because from their performance some benefit was expected to come. What Krishna condemned in the Bhagvat Geeta was *Kamya Karmas*. He did not condemn *Nishkama Karmas*. On the other hand he extolled them. The point to be borne in mind is, even for Krishna religion did not consist of morality. It consisted of *Yagnas* and *Yagas* through of the *Nishkama Karmas* category.

This is one point of contrast between Hinduism and Buddhism. The second point of contrast lies in the fact that the official gospel of Hinduism is inequality. The doctrine of

Chaturvarna is the concrete embodiment of this gospel of inequality. On the other hand Buddha stood for equality. He was the greatest opponent of *Chaturvarna*. He not only preached against it, fought against it, but did everything to uproot it. According to Hinduism neither a *Shudra* nor a woman could become a teacher of religion nor could they take *Sannyasa* and reach God. Buddha on the other hand admitted *Shudras* to the *Bhikkhu Sangha*. He also admitted women to become *Bhikkhunis*. Why did he do so? Few people seem to realise the importance of this step. The answer is that Buddha wanted to take concrete steps to destroy the gospel of inequality. Hinduism had to make many changes in its doctrines as a result of an attack made by Buddha. It gave up *Himsa*. It was prepared to give up the doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas. On the point of *Chaturvarna* neither side was prepared to yield. Buddha was not prepared to give up his opposition to the doctrine of *Chaturvarna,* That is the reason why Brahmanism has so much more hatred and antagonism against Buddhism than it has against Jainism. Hinduism has to recognise the force of the Buddha's arguments against *Chaturvarna*. But instead of yielding to its logic Hinduism developed a new philosophic justification for *Chaturvarna*. This new philosophic justification is to be found in the Bhagvat Geeta. Nobody is able to say for certain what the Bhagvat Geeta teaches. But this much is beyond question that the Bhagvat Geeta upholds the doctrine of *Chaturvarna*. In fact it appears that this was the main purpose for which it was written. And how does the Bhagvat Geeta justify it ? Krishna says that he as God created the system of *Chaturvarna* and he constructed it on the basis of the theory of *Guna - Karma*- which means that he prescribed the status and occupation of every individual in accordance with his innate *gunas* (or qualities). Two things are clear. One is that this theory is new. The old theory was different. According to the old theory the foundation of

Chaturvarna was the authority of the Vedas. As the Vedas were infallible so was the system of *Chaturvarna* on which it rested. The attack of the Buddha on the infallibility of the Vedas had destroyed the validity of this old foundation of *Chaturvarna*. It is quite natural that Hinduism which was not prepared to give up *Chaturvarna* and which it regarded as its very soul should attempt to find for it a better foundation which the Bhagvat Geeta proposes to do. But how good is this new justification given by Krishna in the Bhagvat Geeta ? To most Hindus it appears to be quite convincing, so convincing that they believe it to be irrefutable. Even to many non-Hindus it appears to be very plausible, very enticing. If the *Chaturvarna* had depended only on the authority of the Vedas I am sure it would have long disappeared. It is the mischievous and false doctrine of the Bhagvat Geeta which has given this *Chaturvarna*-which is the parent of the caste- system-apparently a perpetual loss of life. The basic conception of this new doctrine is taken from the Sankhya philosophy. There is nothing original about it. The originality of Krishna lies in applying it to justify *Chaturvarna*. It is in its application that the fallacy lies, Kapila, the author of the Sankhya system held that there is no God, that God is necessary only because matter is believed to be dead. But matter is not dead. It is active. Matter consists of three *Gunas : Raj, Tamas and Satva*. *Prakriti* appears to be dead only because the three *gunas* are in an equilibrium. When the equilibrium is disturbed by one of the *gunas* becoming dominant over the other two, *Prakriti* becomes active. This is the sum and subtance of the Sankhya philosophy. There can be no quarrel with this theory. It is perhaps true. It may therefore be granted that each individual as a form of *Prakriti* is made up of the three *gunas*. It may even be granted that among the three *gunas* there is a competition for dominance of one over the other. But how could it be granted that a particular *guna* in a particular individual which at one time—say at the time of his

birth-happens to dominate his other *gunas* will continue to dominate them for all times, till his death? There is no ground for this assumption either in the Sankhya philosophy or in actual experience. Unfortunately neither Hitler nor Mussolini were born when Krishna propounded his theory. Krishna would have found considerable difficulty in explaining how a signboard painter and a bricklayer could become dictators capable of dominating the world. The point of the matter is that the *Prakriti* of an individual is always changing because the relative position of the *gunas* is always changing. If the *gunas* are ever changing in their relative position of dominance there can be no permanent and fixed system of classification of men into *varnas* and no permanent and fixed assignment of occupations. The whole theory of the Bhagvat Geeta therefore falls to the ground. But as I have said the Hindus have become infatuated by its plausibility and its "good look" and have become slaves of it. The result is that Hinduism continues to uphold the Varna system with its gospel of social inequality. These are two of the evils of Hinduism from which Buddhism is free.

III

Some of those, who believe that only the acceptance of the Gospel of Buddha can save the Hindus are filled with sorrow, because they do not see much prospect of the return or revival of Buddhism in India. I do not share this pessimism.

In the matter of their attitude to their religion, Hindus today fall into two classes. There are those who hold that, 'all religions are true including Hindu' and the leaders of other religions seem to join them in this slogan. There cannot be a thesis more false than the thesis that all religions are true. However this slogan gives the Hindus, who have raised it, the support of the followers of other religions. There are Hindus who have come to realize that there is something wrong with their religion, the

only thing is that they are not ready to denounce it openly. This attitude is understandable. Religion is a part of one's social inheritance. One's life and dignity and pride are bound up with it. It is not easy to abandon one's religion. Patriotism comes in "My country" right or wrong. "My religion" right or wrong. Instead of abandoning it the Hindus are finding escape in other ways. Some are consoling themselves with the thought that all religions are wrong, so why bother about religion at all. The same feeling of patriotism prevents them from openly embracing Buddhism. Such an attitude can have only one result. Hinduism will lapse and cease to be a force of governing life. There will be void, which will have the effect of disintegrating the Hindu Society. Hindus then will be forced to take a more positive attitude. When they do so, they can turn to nothing except Buddhism.

This is not the only ray of hope, there are hopes coming from other quarters also.

There is one question which every religion must answer. What mental and moral relief does it bring to the suppressed and the downtroddon ? If it does not, then it is doomed. Does Hinduism give any mental and moral relief to the millions of Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes ? It does not. Do Hindus expect these Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes to live under Hinduism which gives them no promise of mental and moral relief ? Such an expectation would be an utter futility. Hinduism is floating on a volcano. To-day it appears to be extinct. But it is not. It will become active once these mighty millions have become conscious of their degradation and know that it is largely due to the social philosophy of the Hindu religion. One is reminded of the overthrow of Paganism by Christianity in the Roman Empire. When the masses realized that Paganism could give them no mental and moral relief they gave it up and adopted Christianity. What happened in

Rome is sure to happen in India. The Hindu masses when they are enlightened are sure to turn to Buddhism.

IV

So much by way of comparison between Hinduism and Buddhism, how does Buddhism, and in comparison with other non-Hindu Religions? It is impossible to take each of these non-Hindu Religions and compare with Buddhism, in detail.

All I can do is to put my conclusions in a summary form. I maintain that:—

(i) That society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either, society is sure to go to pieces.

In all societies, law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality, must therefore, remain the governing principle in every society.

(ii) That religion as defined in the first proposition must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose its respect and therefore becomes the subject of ridicule and thereby not merely loses its force as a governing principle of life, but might in course of time disintegrate and lapse, if it is not in accord with science. In other words, religion if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science.

(iii) That religion as a code of social morality, must also stand together another test. It is not enough for religion to consist of a moral code, but its moral code must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Unless a religion recognises these three fundamental principles of social life, religion will be doomed.

(iv) That religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty. Renunciation of riches by those who have it, may be a blessed state, but poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion, to perpetuate vice and crime, to consent to make earth a living hell.

Which religion fulfils these requirements ? In considering this question it must be remembered that the days of the Mahatmas are gone and the world cannot have a new Religion. It will have to make its choice from those that exist. The question must therefore be confined to existing religions.

It may be that one of the existing religions satisfies one of these tests, some two. Question is — Is there any religion which satisfies all these tests ? So far as I know, the only religion which satisfies all these tests is Buddhism. In other words Buddhism is the only religion which world can have. If the new world—which be it realised is very different from the old-must have a religion—and the new world needs religion far more than the old world did—then it can only be religion of the Buddha.

All this may sound very strange. This is because most of those who have written about Buddha have propagated the idea that the only thing Buddha taught was *Ahimsa*. This is a great mistake. It is true Buddha taught *Ahimsa*. I do not want to minimise its importance. For it is a great doctrine. The world cannot be saved unless it follows it. What I wish to emphasize is that Buddha taught many other things besides *Ahimsa*. He taught as part of his religion, social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. He taught equality, equality not between man and man only, but between man and woman. It would be difficult to find a religious teacher to compare with Buddha, whose teachings embrace so many aspects of the social life of people, whose doctrines are so

modern and with main concern to give salvation to man in his life on earth and not to promise it in heaven after he is dead!

V

How could this ideal of spreading Buddhism be realised ?

Three steps appear to be quite necessary.

First : To produce a Buddhist Bible.

Second : To make changes in the organisation, aims and objects of the *Bhikkhu Sangha*.

Third : To set up a world Buddhist Mission.

The production of a Bible of Buddhism is the first and foremost need. The Buddhist literature is a vast literature. It is impossible to expect a person who wants to know the essence of Buddhism to wade through the sea of literature. The greatest advantage which the other religions have over Buddhism is that each has a gospel which everyone can carry with him and read wherever he goes. It is a handy thing. Buddhism suffers for not having such a handy gospel. The Indian *Dhammapada* has failed to perform the function which a gospel is expected to. Every great religion has been built on faith. But faith cannot be assimilated if presented in the form of creeds and abstract dogmas. It needs something on which the imagination can fasten—some myth or epic or gospel—what is called in journalism, a story. The *Dhammapada* is not fastened around a story. It seeks to build faith on abstract dogmas.

The proposed gospel of Buddhism should contain (i) a short life of Buddha (ii) The *Chinese Dhammapada* (iii) Some of the important Dialogues of Buddha and (iv) Buddhist Ceremonies, birth, initiation, marriage and death. In preparing such a gospel the linguistic side of it must not be neglected. It must make the

language in which it is produced live. It must become an incantation instead of being read as narrative or an ethical exposition. Its style must be lucid, moving and must produce an hypnotic effect.

There is a world's difference between a Hindu *Sannyasi* and a *Buddhist Bhikkhu*. A Hindu *Sanyasi* has nothing to do with the world. He is dead to the world. *A Bhikkhu* has everything to do with the world. That being so the question arises, what was the purpose for which the Buddha thought of establishing the *Bhikkhu Sangha* ? What was the necessity for creating a separate society of *Bhikkhus* ? One purpose was to set up a society which would live up to the *Buddhist* idea embodied in the principles of Buddhism and serve as a model to the laymen. Buddha knew that it was not possible for a common man to realize the Buddhist ideal. But He also wanted that the common man should know what the ideal was and also wanted there should be placed before the common man a society of men who were bound to practise His ideals. That is why He created the *Bhikkhu Sangha* and bound it down by the rules of *Vinaya*. But there were other purposes which He had in his mind when He thought of founding the *Sangha*. One such purpose was to create a body of intellectuals to give the laymen true and impartial guidance. That is the reason why He prohibited the *Bhikkhus* from owning property. Ownership of property is one of the greatest obstacles in free thinking and application of free thought. The other purpose of Buddha in founding the *Bhikkhu Sangha* was to create a society the members of which would be free to do service to the people. That is why He did not want the *Bhikkhus* to marry.

Is the *Bhikkhu Sangha* of today living up to these ideals?

The answer is emphatically in the negative. It neither guides the people nor does it serve them.

The *Bhikkhu Sangha* in its present condition can therefore be of no use for the spread of Buddhism. In the first place there are too many *Bhikkhus*. Of these a very large majority are merely *Sadhus* and *Sanyasis* spending their time in meditation or idleness. There is in them neither learning nor service. When the idea of service to suffering humanity comes to one's mind every one thinks of the Ramakrishna Mission. No one thinks of the Buddhist *Sangha*. Who should regard service as its pious duty the *Sangha* or the Mission? There can be no doubt about the answer. Yet the *Sangha* is a huge army of idlers. We want fewer *Bhikkhus* and we want *Bhikkhus* highly educated, *Bhikkhu Sangha* must borrow some of the features of the Christian priesthood particularly the Jesuists. Christianity has spread in Asia through service—educational and medical. This is possible because the Christian priest is not merely versed in religious lore but because he is also versed in Arts and Science. This was really the ideal of the *Bhikkhus* of olden times. As is well known the Universities of Nalanda and Taxila were run and manned by *Bhikkhus*. Evidently they must have been very learned men and knew that social service was essential for the propagation of their faith. The *Bhikkhus* of today must return to the old ideal. The *Sangha* as is composed cannot render this service to the laity and cannot therefore attract people to itself.

Without a Mission Buddhism can hardly spread. As education requires to be given, religion requires to be propagated. Propagation cannot be undertaken without men and money. Who can supply these ? Obviously the countries where Buddhism is a living religion. It is these countries which must find the men and money at least in its initial stages. Will these ? There does not seem to be much enthusiasm in these countries for the spread of Buddhism.

On the other hand time seems quite propitious for the spread of

Buddhism. There was a time when religion was part of one's own inheritance. At one time a boy or a girl inherited the religion of his or her parent alongwith the property of the parent. There was no question of examining the merit and virtues of religion. Sometimes the heir did question, whether the property left by the parents was worth taking. But no heir was there to question whether the religion of his or her parents was worth having. Time seems to have changed. Many person throughout the world have exhibited an unprecedent piece of courage with regard to inheritance of their religion. Many have, as a result of the influence of scientific enquiry, come to the conclusion that religion is an error, which ought to be given up. There are others who, as a result of the Marxian teaching, have come to the conclusion that religion is opium which induces the poor people to submit to the domination of the rich and should be discarded. Whatever be the causes, the fact remains, that people have developed an inquiring mind in respect of religion. And the question whether religion is at all worth having and if so which religion is worth having, are questions which are uppermost in the minds of those who dare to think about this subject. Time has come, what is wanted is will. If the countries which are Buddhist can develop the will to spread Buddhism the task of spreading Buddhism will not be difficult. They must realize that the duty of a Buddhist is not merely to be a good Buddhist, his duty is to spread Buddhism. They must believe that to spread Buddhism is to serve mankind.[1]

1 : Magazine 'Maha Bodhi': Maha Bodhi Society Journal, Culculta ; Vaishak Number, Vol. 58, May 1950.

3

Speech delivered on 15th October, 1956

From: Prabuddh Bharat, 27 October 1956, pp. 5-12, 18. [Translated from the Marathi by Rekha Damle and Eleanor Zelliot, August-September 1964. This previously unpublished translation was provided by Eleanor Zelliot for this website. She wants readers to be aware that Dr. Ambedkar was very ill at the time he made this speech, and was to die within two months.
Edited by Frances W. Pritchett. Editing has generally been limited to adding section numbers and correcting minor typographical errors. Annotations within square brackets are those of Damle and Zelliot. Italicized remarks in parentheses are descriptive phrases inserted by the Marathi newspaper account. The translation of the Pali passage in Section 37 was provided by Prof. Indira Peterson.]
From the website of Columbia University, New York City, New York, USA
www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_conversion.html

WHY WAS NAGPUR CHOSEN?

by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

"Diksha-bhumi" in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India
The Sanchi-like site of Dr. Ambedkar's conversion ceremony.

Why Was Nagpur Chosen?

In Nagpur, after leaving the Hindu religion and accepting Buddhism on 14th October 1956, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, on the morning of 15th October, 1956, made an explanatory, spirited, inspirational, and historic speech, which is given below in its entirety.

1 All Buddhists and guests:

Thoughtful people perhaps may find it difficult to accept the order [literally place: *stan*] of the Buddhist conversion ceremony taken and given on this spot yesterday and this morning. In their opinion, and in mine also, yesterday's program should have been today, and today's yesterday. It is necessary to inquire: why have we taken this work on ourselves? What is the necessity? What will come from it? Only if we gain understanding will the foundation of our work be strong. We should have gained this understanding before the act itself. But some things simply happen spontaneously. This ceremony, it is true, has happened as we desired. Therefore changing the day doesn't really spoil anything.

2. Why was Nagpur chosen?

Many people ask me why Nagpur was decided upon for this work. Why didn't the conversion take place in some other city? Some people say that because the great batallion of the R.S.S. was here in Nagpur, we took the meeting to this city in order to lay them flat. This is completely untrue. This program was not brought here to Nagpur because of that. Our work is so great that even one minute in a lifetime cannot be wasted. I don't have enough time to make an ill omen for others by scratching my nose!

3. The Nag People's "Nag"-pur

The reason for choosing this city is different. Those who read Buddhist history will come to know that in India, if anyone spread Buddhism, it was the Nag people. The Nag people were fearful enemies of the Aryans. A Fierce and fighting war went on between the Aryans and non-Aryans. Examples of the harassment of the Nags by the Aryan people are found in the **Puranas**. Agasti Muni helped only one Nag man to escape from that. We spring from that man. Those Nag people who endured so much suffering wanted some great man to raise them up. They met that great man in Gautam Buddha. The Nag people spread the teaching of Buagwan Buddha all over India. Thus we are like Nag people.It seems that the Nag people lived chiefly in Nagpur and the surrounding country. So they call this city Nagpur, meaning city of Nags. About 27 miles from here the Nag Nadi river flows. Of course the name of the river comes from the people living here. In the middle of the Nag habitation runs the Nag Nadi. This is the main reason for choosing this place. Nagpur was chosen because of this. In this matter, there is no question of a lie to provoke someone. This is not such a mental twist. The reason of the R.S.S. did not even come into my mind, and no one should take that explanation as true.

4. The opponents' useless cry

Perhaps one could oppose [this choice] for other reasons. I have not chosen this place just out of opposition, I tell you. This work that I began was criticized by various people and newspapers. The criticism of some people is hard. In their opinion, I was leading my poor helpless Untouchable people astray. They say, "Today those who are Untouchables will remain Untouchables, and those rights gained for the Untouchables will be destroyed," and some people among us are bewildered. To the unlearned people among us, they say, "Go by the traditional path" [*pagdandi* (Hindi), "footpath," suggests that the Mahars should use an inferior path]. On some of the old and young among us,

they may be influential. If doubt has been created in the minds of people because of this, it is our duty to remove that doubt; and to turn back that doubt is to strengthen the foundation of our movement.

5. The propaganda at that time in Kesari

Earlier we people had had a movement against eating meat. The touchables thought a bolt of lightning had hit them. They should drink living buffalo's milk; but, when that buffalo died, we should carry that dead cow on our shoulders. Wasn't this a strange practice? We tell them, if your old woman died, then why not give her to us? If you ought to give us your dead cow, then you ought to give us your old woman also, shouldn't you? At that time, some man wrote in **Kesari** that in certain villages every year fifty cattle die, so that five hundred rupees can be earned from their hide, horns, hooves, meat, bones, and tail. Leaving aside the matter of meat, these people will be deprived of all that profit, so the letter appeared in **Kesari**. Really speaking, what was the necessity of giving an answer to his propaganda? But our people used to feel that if our lord [Babasaheb] does not give an answer to this thing, then what does the lord do at all?

6. The profits of dead animals' hide, horns, hooves

Once I went to a meeting at Sangamner. An arrangement for eating in the evening after the meeting had been made. At that time a note was sent me by a **Kesari** reporter, and he asked me, "Say, you tell your people not to remove dead cattle [from the village]! Look at their poverty. No sari and blouse for their wives, no food for them, no fields for them. When their circumstances are so difficult, why do you say, throw away the 500-rupee profit every year from hide, hoof, and meat? Is this not a loss for your people?"

7. "*You* remove the dead cattle and take the profit!"

I said: We will answer you. Shall I answer here on the veranda, or in a meeting? It is good if this critical question comes before people. I asked the gentleman, "Is this all you have to say, or is there more?" The gentleman said, "Whatever I have asked you, answer that much." I asked that man, "How many children and dependents do you have"? He said, "I have five sons and my brother has five or six children children also." I said, "Then your family is large. You and your relations should certainly remove the dead cattle from the village and get that 500-rupee profit. Besides that, every year I myself will give you 500 rupees on top of that. Whatever will become of my people, whether they will get food and clothing or not, this is my affair and I will look after it. But are you putting aside such a successful thing? Why do you not take it on? If we do the work and get the profit, won't there be a profit if you do it? Why don't *you* remove the dead cattle?"

8. "Become Mahars and get reserved seats!"

Yesterday a Brahmin boy came to me and asked, "In Parliament and the Assemblies, your people have been given reserved places. Why are you giving those up?" I said to him, "You become a Mahar and fill that place in Parliament and the Assemblies. If there is a service vacant, then that place fills in no time. How many applications from Brahmins and others come for that place! As places in service are filled in that way, why don't you Brahmin people, as Mahars, fill those reserved seats?"

9. Honor is dear, profit is not dear

If *we* have suffered a loss, why do *you* weep? This is my question to them. Truly it means honor is dear to mankind; profit is not dear. A woman of good qualities and good behavior

knows that there is profit in prostitution. There is a locality of prostitutes in our Bombay. When those women get up at eight in the morning, they order breakfast from a nearby hotel and say (*Dr. Ambedkar at this time, giving an imitiation in a different voice, said*): "Suleman, you bring a pound of bread and a plate of minced meat." That Suleman brings it. Besides, he brings tea, bread, cake, and other things. But my depressed-class sisters do not even get ordinary chutney-bhakri. However, they live with dignity. They live piously.

10. Leave aside childishness; be mature

We are fighting for honor. We are getting ready to lead mankind to perfection. For this, we are ready to do any sacrifice necessary. These newspaper people (*turning toward them*) have pestered me for the last forty years. How much criticism have they given me, even up to this day! I say to them, however: Think! Today, leave aside immature speech; use mature speech.

11. We will certainly get our rights again

If we accept Buddhism, even then I will get political rights. I am absolutely sure of this (*Cries of "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar" and loud clapping*). I cannot say what will happen on my death. Much important work must be done for this movement. What will happen because we have accepted Buddhism? If difficulties come, then how can they be removed? What strategy, what preparations should be made? --To all this I have given much thought. My bag of tricks is full of all kinds of things. How it got to be full, I know very well. I myself got those rights for my people. The one who got those rights in the first place will be able to get them again. I myself am the giver of those rights and concessions, and I will get those concessions again, I am sure. At least for the present, you should continue to have faith in me. I will prove that there is no truth in the opposing propaganda.

12. Delivered from hell

I am surprised at only one thing. Much discussion has been going on everywhere. But not even one man has asked me, "Why did you accept Buddhism?" Putting aside all other religions, why was this religion accepted? In any movement to change religion, this is the main question. When one makes a change of religion, one has to test: which religion [should we take]? Why should we take it? The movement to leave the Hindu religion was taken in hand by us in 1935, when a resolution was made in Yeola. "Even though I was born in the Hindu religion, I will not die in the Hindu religion" --this oath I made earlier; yesterday I proved it true. I am happy; I am ecstatic! I have left hell --this is how I feel. I do not want any blind followers. Those who come into the Buddhist religion should come with understanding; they should consciously accept that religion.

13. Karl Marx's sect and we

Religion is a very necessary thing for the progress of mankind. I know that a sect has appeared because of the writings of Karl Marx. According to their creed, religion means nothing at all. Religion is not important to them. They get a breakfast in the morning of bread, cream, butter, chicken legs, etc.; they get undisturbed sleep; they get to see movies; and that's all there is. This is their philosophy. I am not of that opinion. My father was poor, and therefore we did not get comforts of that kind. No one has ever lived a life as hard as mine! How hard a man's life can be without happiness and comforts, that I know. I agree that an economic elevation movement is necessary. I am not against that movement. Man must progress economically.

14. Buffalo, bull, and man

But I note an important difference in this matter. There is a difference between buffalo, bull, and man. Buffalo and bull must have fodder daily. Man also must have food. But between

the two the difference is this: the buffalo and bull have no mind; man has, along with his body, a mind. Both have to be cared for. The mind should be developed. The mind should become cultured, and that culture has to be developed. I want no sort of relationships with people from a country where it is said that there is no connection between man and his cultured mind except for his body. I do not need any such relationship. Just as a man's body should be healthy, the mind also should be cultured.

15. The origin of energy [*utsah*] is a cultured mind

Why is there illness in man's body or mind? The reasons are, either there is bodily pain, or there is no energy in the mind. If there is no energy in the mind, then there will be no progress! Why is there no energy there? The first reason is this: man is kept down in such a fashion that he does not get an opportunity to come up, or he has no hope of climbing. At that time, can he be ambitious? He is a diseased person. A man who gets the fruit of his own work will be energetic. Otherwise, in school, if the teacher begins to say, "Hey, who is this? Is this a Mahar? And will this wretched Mahar pass with a first class? Why does he want first class? Stay in your fourth class! To get into first class is Brahmins' work!" --in these circumstances, how can that child be ambitious? What will be his progress? The place of creation of energy is the mind. The person whose body and mind are healthy, who is courageous, who feels that he will overcome all circumstances, in that kind of person energy will be created, and that kind of person alone excels. In the Hindu religion, such an extraordinary philosophy is found in the writings that one can't get any sense of possible achievement at all. If a man is left for a thousand years in poor circumstances, discarded, made hopeless, then at the most they will have no more ambition than to fill their stomachs with a minor job. What else can happen? There must be a big clerk to secure the protection of these little clerks.

16. I put on a *langoti* and got my education

Man's spirit is created in the mind. You know the owner of the mill. He appoints a manager over the mill, and through the manager the work in the mill gets done. These mill owners have a few bad habits. The culture of their minds has not been developed. We had to think actively with our minds, so we started a movement. At that time education was started. I put on a *langoti* [the scantiest possible Indian garment] and began my education. In school I did not even get drinking water. How many days dragged by without water! Also in Bombay, even at Elphinstone College, conditions were the same. If the atmosphere is like this, how will different conditions be created? Only clerks will be created.

17. Hindu, Mussalman, and we

When I was on the Executive Council at Delhi, Lord Linlithgow was Viceroy. I told him, "You spend the normal budget, and in addition you pay three lakhs of rupees for Aligarh University for education for the Moslems." Then Linlithgow said, "Write out a memo about that and bring it in." Accordingly, I wrote a memorandum. That memorandum is still with me. European people were very sympathetic. They accepted what I said. But the hitch was that they didn't know what to spend the money on. They thought, our girls are not educated: education should be given to them, their boarding should be arranged, and the money should be spent on that. But if our girls were to be educated and taught to cook different foods, where at home was the material to make those same dishes? What was the end result of their education? The government spent the proper amounts on other things, but the amount for education was not spent.

18. Men sitting on the pinnacle of the palace

So I went one day to Linlithgow and said, concerning the expense of education, "If you will not get angry, I want to ask a question. I am equal to fifty [high school] graduates, am I not?" He had to agree to that. Then I asked, "What is the reason?" He said, "I don't know the reason." I said, "My learning is so great that I could sit on the pinnacle of the palace. I want such men. Because-- from the top, one can survey everything. If our people are to be protected, then such sharp-eyed, able men should be created. What can a mere clerk do?" Immediately my words convinced Linlithgow, and that year sixteen students were sent to England for higher education. If those sixteen, some came out raw and some mature, just as some water jugs are half-baked and some are finished... leave aside the consequences. Later Rajagopalacarya cancelled this plan for higher education.

19. A thousand years of hopeless conditions

In this country, the situation is such that we can be kept in a hopeless state for a thousand years. As long as such conditions prevail, it is not possible to begin to produce ambition to progress. We have not been able to do anything about it by staying in the Hindu religion. The Chaturvarna is found in **Manusmriti**. The hierarchy of the Chaturvarna is very dangerous for the progress of mankind. It is written in the **Manusmriti** that Shudras should do only menial services. Why should they have education? The Brahmin should get education, the Kshatriya should take up arms, the Vaishya should do business, the Shudra should serve-- who can disrupt this precise arrangement? There is profit in it for the people of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya castes. What of the Shudra? Can any ambition develop in the lower castes? The Chaturvarna system was not created haphazardly. It is not just a popular custom. It is religion.

20. Chaturvarna, Gandhi, and bad religion

There is no equality in the Hindu religion. One time when I went to see Gandhi, he said, "I respect Chaturvarna." I said, "Mahatmas like you respect the Chaturvarna, but just what is this Chaturvarna? (*Dr. Ambedkar stretched out his hand horizontally, and then turned it over, so the four fingers were in vertical order.*) Is this Chaturvarna up or down? Who created the Chaturvarna, and who will end it?" Gandhi did not answer the question. And what could he say? Those people who destroyed us will also be destroyed because of this religion. I do not accuse this Hindu religion without reason. Because of the Hindu religion, no one can progress. That religion is only a destructive religion.

21. If we were allowed to use arms...

Why did our country go under the domination of another? In Europe, there were wars until 1945. Whenever a soldier was killed, a recruit took his place. No one said, "We have won the war" [before it was won]. In our country, everything is different. If Kshatriyas are killed, we are doomed. If we had been allowed to bear arms, this country would not have gone into slavery. No one would have been able to conquer this country.

22. 22 = Progress will come only through the Buddhist religion

Remaining in the Hindu religion will bring no kind of progress to anyone. For some, the hierarchy of the Hindu religion brings profits; this is true for the superior classes and castes. But what of the others? If a Brahmin woman delivers a child, from then on her vision is on any high court judge's place which might fall vacant. If one of our sweeper women is brought to bed, her vision turns toward the place of a sweeper. Such strange arrangements the Hindu religious class system has made. What improvements can come from this system? Progress can come only in the Buddhist religion.

23. Buddha's message on equality

In the Buddhist religion, 75% of the Bhikkhus were Brahmin; 25% were Shudra and others. But Bhagvan said, "O Bhikkhus, you have come from different countries and castes. Rivers flow separately in their own countries, but do not remain distinct when they meet in the sea. They become one and the same. The Buddhist brotherhood of monks is like the sea. In this Sangha all are equal. It is impossible to know Ganga water from Mahandi water after both have merged in the sea. In that way, after coming into the Buddhist Sangha, your caste goes, and all people are equal. Only one great man spoke of equality, and that great man is Bhagvan Buddha.

24. Mine is a great responsibility

Some people say, "Why did you take so much time to get converted? What have you been doing all these days?" This question is important. The task of teaching religious understanding is not easy. It is not the work of one man. An understanding of the task will come to any man who thinks about religion. No man in the world has as much responsibility as I. If I get a long enough life, I will finish my appointed task. (*Cries of "Long live Dr. Babasaheb!"*)

25. As Mahar Buddhists, don't defame us

"If the Mahars become Buddhists, then what will happen?" Some people will speak this way. They should not, I tell them. It will bring calamity upon them. The superior and wealthy class will not feel the necessity of religion. Among them, those having offices have a bungalow to live in, servants to do all the work; they have money and wealth and respect. Men of that sort have no reason to give thought to religion, or to be anxious about it.

26. Religion is necessary for the poor

For the poor, religion is a necessity. Religion is necessary for people in distress. The poor man lives on hope. 'Hope!' [in

English]. The source of life is hope. If this hope is destroyed, then how will life go on? Religion makes one hopeful, and to those in pain, to the poor, it gives a message: "Don't be afraid; life will be hopeful, it will be." So poor and distressed mankind clings to religion.

27. What does the history of the Christian religion tell?

At the time the Christian religion entered Europe, the condition of Rome and the neighboring countries was one of utter distress. People didn't get enough to eat. A simple dish of rice and pulao was distributed to poor people [to keep them alive]. At that time, who became the followers of Christ? Poor, miserable people only. In Europe, all poor and inferior people became Christians. This Christian religion is for beggars, Gibbon has written. How this Christian religion became the religion of all Europe, Gibbon is not alive today to tell us. If he were alive today, he would be required to answer that question.

28. The world respects only the Buddha

Some people will say, "This Buddhist religion is a religion for Mahars and Mangs." Brahmins used to say, "Hey, you!" [*Bho Gautam*] to Bhagvan. Brahmins thus spoke slightingly of the Buddha. But if they take their images to a foreign country to sell them, they will find not many images of Ram, Krishna, Shankar will be sold. But if they take images of the Buddha, not a single image would be left. (*Loud clapping.*) There has been enough talk by the Brahmins about India. They should show their worth outside! Only one name is proclaimed throughout the world, and that name is "Buddha." How can the Buddhist religion be stopped from spreading?

29. Our way is the way of the Buddha

We will go by our path; others should go by their path. We have found a new way. This is a day of hope. This is a way of success, of prosperity. This way is not something new. This path was not

brought here from somewhere else. This path is from here, it is purely Indian. The Buddhist religion has been in India for two thousand years. Truly speaking, we regret that we did not become Buddhists before this. The principles spoken by Bhagvan Buddha are immortal. But the Buddha did not make a claim for this, however. There is an opportunity of making changes according to the times. Such open-mindedness is not found in any other religion.

30. Milinda and Nagasena

The chief reason for the destruction of Buddhism is the Moslem invasion. The Moslems in their onslaught broke and destroyed images. They at first encroached on the Buddhist religion in this way. Fearing the invasion, the Buddhist Bhikkhus disappeared. Some went to Tibet, some went to China, some went wherever they could go. For the protection of religion, laymen are required. In the Northwest Frontier state there was a Greek Raja. His name was Milinda. This king used to hold discussions regularly. Great delight was taken in these discussions. He used to say to the Hindus, whoever is an expert at debate should come to these forums. Many were at a loss for an answer [when they participated]. One time he thought he should have a discussion with Buddhist people; and he said, any Buddhist expert at debate should be brought to him. Therefore Buddhist people asked Nagasena to go: "You should take up the cause of the Buddhists." Nagasena was learned. He was a Brahmin. The discussion that took place between Nagasena and Milinda is famous throughout the world as a book. That book's name is **Milinda Punha**. Milinda asked this question: "Why does religion languish?" Nagasena gave three reasons in his answer.

31. Three reasons for religious decline

(1) The first reason is that some religion is immature. In that religion, the basic principles have no depth. That makes for a temporal religion, and the religion will hold fast only if it

suits the times.

(2) The second reason is that there may be no learned men to spread the religion. If there are none, the religion languishes. Learned men should preach religious wisdom. If the propagandists of a religion are not ready to hold discussioan with opponents, the religion will die.

(3) The third reason is this: [if] religion and religious philosophy are only for the learned [, the religion will not survive]. For common ordinary people, there are temples and shrines. They go there and worship supernatural power. [If this is the case, the religion languishes.]

32. The only generous religion

We should remember these reasons as we take the conversion to Buddhism. No one can say that Buddhist principles are temporal. Even today, two thousand five hundred hears afterwards, all the world respects the principles of Buddhism. In America there are two thousand Buddhist institutions. In England, at an expense of 300,000 rupees a Buddhist temple has been build. Even in Germany there are three or four thousand Buddhist institutions. Buddhist principles are immortal. Nevertheless the buddha did not make the claim that this religion is from God. The Buddha said, "My father was a common man, my mother was a common woman. If you want a religion, then you should take this religion. If this religion suits your mind, then accept it." Such generosity is not found in any other religion.

33. The work of Buddhism is to lessen the suffering of the poor

What is the original foundation of Buddhism? Other religions and the Buddhist religion are very different. In other religions, change will not occur, because those religioins tell of a relationship between man and God. Other religions say that god created the world. God created the sky, wind, moon, everything.

God did not leave anything left over for us to do. So we should worship God. According to the Christian religion, there is, after death, a Day of Judgment, and all depends on that judgment. There is no place for God and soul in the Buddhist religion. Bhagvan Buddha said there is suffering everywhere in the world. Ninety percent of mankind is distressed by sorrow. Suffering mankind should be freed from sorrow-- this is the basic work of Buddhism. What did Karl Marx say that was different from the buddha's sayings? [However,] what Bhagvan said, he did not say via a crazy, crooked path.

34. My brothers' work

Brothers, what I have had to say, I have said. This religion is fully formed in every way. There is no stain on it anywhere. The principles of Hinduism are so peculiarly arranged that it is impossible to create happiness from them. From thousands of years ago until just the other day, not even one man from our society could be a graduate or a learned man. I do not hesitate to tell you that in my school was a sweeper woman. She was Marathi. She would not touch me. My mother used to tell me, "Call a grown-up man 'Mama'." I would call the Postman, "Mama." (*Laughter.*) In childhood, in school, once I was thirsty. I told the master. The master, for my protection, called a chaprasi and told him to take me to the tap. We went to the tap. The chaprasi then started the tap and I drank water. Usually all during the week at school I did not get to drink water. Later I was given some service as a District Judge. But I did not get stuck with that sort of binding job. Who will do the work of my brothers? This was the problem before me, so I did not get stuck in that bondage.

35. The burden on your head

Nothing is impossible for me as an individual in this country. The burden [a word meaning a graduated series of pots carried on the head] on your head-- the burden of Vaishya, Kshatriya, Brahmin-- how that burden will be tumbled down is the true

question. It is my duty to give you in all ways knowledge of this religion. By writing a book, I will remove all doubts and suspicions and will try to lead you to a stage of full knowledge. Today at least you should place faith in me.

36. Regenerate yourself and the world

Your responsibility, however, is great. Your actions should be such that other people will honor and respect you. Do not believe that this religion means we have got stuck with an albatross [a word meaning the burden of a corpse] around our neck. The Indian earth today is of no account, as far as Buddhism is concerned. We should be determined to observe the Buddhist religion in the best way. It should not happen that the Mahar people would bring Buddhism to a low stage. We should make a firm decision. If we accomplish this, then we save ourselves, we save our country-- and not only that, but the world also. Why? Because the Buddhist religion will be the savior of the world. As long as the world does not achieve justice, there will be no peace in the world.

37. Make a decision to give a twentieth part of your earnings

This new way is one of responsibility. We have made some resolutions, have expressed some desires. The young should remember this. They should not become only petty officers for the sake of their stomach. We should make this decision: "I will give at least one-twentieth of my earnings to this work." I want to take all of you with me. In the first instance, the Tathagat gave initiation to some individuals, and gave them this advice: "Spread this religion." In that way, Yesha and his forty friends were converted to Buddhism. Yesha was from a wealthy family. Bhagvan said to him, "What is this religion like? It is [in Pali:] '*for the welfare of many people, for the friendship of many people, for compassion for the world; dhamma is welfare in the beginning, welfare in the middle, conducive to welfare in the end*'." In the conditions of that age, in that way, the Tathagat made ready the way for the spreading of his religion. Now we

also must make ready the way [a word meaning mechanism]. After this function, each one should give initiation to each one. Every Buddhist man has the authority to give initiation, this I proclaim. (*Applause. In this way Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar finished his two-hour speech.*)

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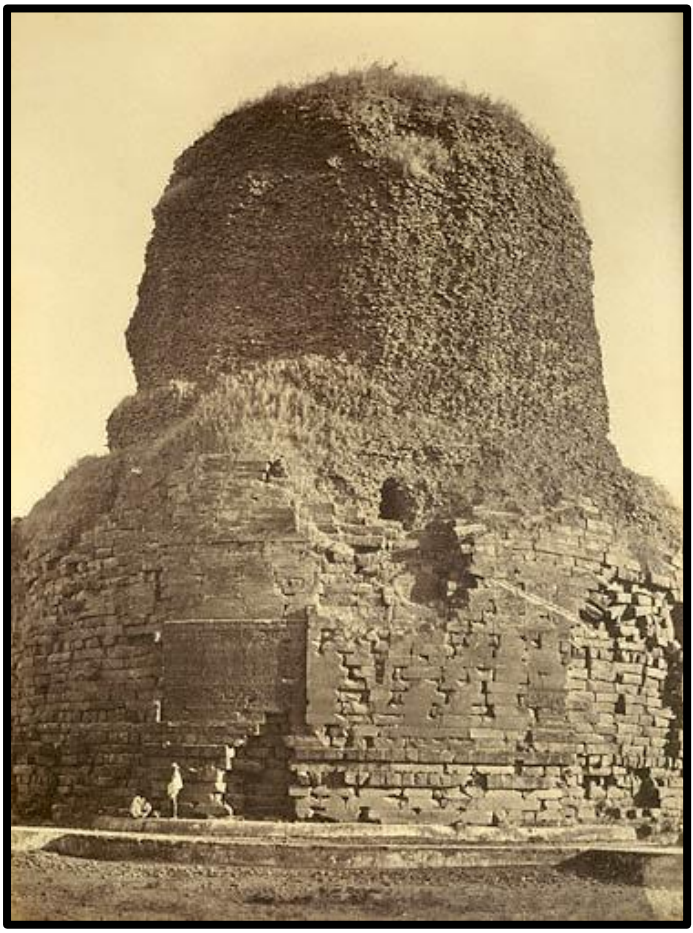
Completed on 6th April, 1956

[Text provided by Eleanor Zelliot, as prepared by Vasant Moon]
From the website of Columbia University, New York City, New York, USA
www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_buddha/00_pref_unpub.html

UNPUBLISHED PREFACE to "The Buddha And His Dhamma"

by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar



The Great Stupa at Sarnath, near Varanasi,
is said to mark the site where the Buddha preached
his first sermon.

Unpublished preface to "The Buddha and his Dhamma"

A question is always asked to me: how I happen[ed] to take such [a] high degree of education. Another question is being asked: why I am inclined towards Buddhism. These questions are asked because I was born in a community known in India as the "Untouchables." This preface is not the place for answering the first question. But this preface may be the place for answering the second question.

The direct answer to this question is that I regard the Buddha's Dhamma to be the best. No religion can be compared to it. If a modern man who knws science must have a religion, the only religion he can have is the Religion of the Buddha. This conviction has grown in me after thirty-five years of close study of all religions.

How I was led to study Buddhism is another story. It may be interesting for the reader to know. This is how it happened.

My father was a military officer, but at the same time a very religious person. He brought me up under a strict discipline. From my early age I found certain contradictions in my father's religious way of life. He was a Kabirpanthi, though his father was Ramanandi. As such, he did not believe in Murti Puja (Idol Worship), and yet he performed Ganapati Puja--of course for our sake, but I did not like it. He read the books of his Panth. At the same time, he compelled me and my elder brother to read every day before going to bed a portion of [the] **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** to my sisters and other persons who assembled at my father's house to hear the Katha. This went on for a long number of years.

The year I passed the English Fourth Standard Examination,

my community people wanted to celebrate the occasion by holding a public meeting to congratulate me. Compared to the state of education in other communities, this was hardly an occasion for celebration. But it was felt by the organisers that I was the first boy in my community to reach this stage; they thought that I had reached a great height. They went to my father to ask for his permission. My father flatly refused, saying that such a thing would inflate the boy's head; after all, he has only passed an examination and done nothing more. Those who wanted to celebrate the event were greatly disappointed. They, however, did not give way. They went to Dada Keluskar, a personal friend of my father, and asked him to intervene. He agreed. After a little argumentation, my father yielded, and the meeting was held. Dada Keluskar presided. He was a literary person of his time. At the end of his address he gave me as a gift a copy of his book on the life of the Buddha, which he had written for the Baroda Sayajirao Oriental Series. I read the book with great interest, and was greatly impressed and moved by it.

I began to ask why my father did not introduce us to the Buddhist literature. After this, I was determined to ask my father this question. One day I did. I asked my father why he insisted upon our reading the **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana**, which recounted the greatness of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and repeated the stories of the degradation of the Shudras and the Untouchables. My father did not like the question. He merely said, "You must not ask such silly questions. You are only boys; you must do as you are told." My father was a Roman Patriarch, and exercised most extensive Patria Pretestas over his children. I alone could take a little liberty with him, and that was because my mother had died in my childhood, leaving me to the care of my auntie.

So after some time, I asked again the same question. This time my father had evidently prepared himself for a reply. He said,

"The reason why I ask you to read the **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** is this: we belong to the Untouchables, and you are likely to develop an inferiority complex, which is natural. The value of [the] **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** lies in removing this inferiority complex. See Drona and Karna--they were small men, but to what heights they rose! Look at Valmiki--he was a Koli, but he became the author of [the] **Ramayana**. It is for removing this inferiority complex that I ask you to read the **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana**."

I could see that there was some force in my father's argument. But I was not satisfied. I told my father that I did not like any of the figures in [the] **Mahabharata**. I said, "I do not like Bhishma and Drona, nor Krishna. Bhishma and Drona were hypocrites. They said one thing and did quite the opposite. Krishna believed in fraud. His life is nothing but a series of frauds. Equal dislike I have for Rama. Examine his conduct in the Sarupnakha [=Shurpanakha] episode [and] in the Vali Sugriva episode, and his beastly behaviour towards Sita." My father was silent, and made no reply. He knew that there was a revolt.

This is how I turned to the Buddha, with the help of the book given to me by Dada Keluskar. It was not with an empty mind that I went to the Buddha at that early age. I had a background, and in reading the Buddhist Lore I could always compare and contrast. This is the origin of my interest in the Buddha and His Dhamma.

The urge to write this book has a different origin. In 1951 the Editor of the Mahabodhi Society's Journal of Calcutta asked me to write an article for the Vaishak Number. In that article I argued that the Buddha's Religion was the only religion which a society awakened by science could accept, and without which it would perish. I also pointed out that for the modern world Buddhism was the only religion which it must have to save

itself. That Buddhism makes [a] slow advance is due to the fact that its literature is so vast that no one can read the whole of it. That it has no such thing as a bible, as the Christians have, is its greatest handicap. On the publication of this article, I received many calls, written and oral, to write such a book. It is in response to these calls that I have undertaken the task.

To disarm all criticism I would like to make it clear that I claim no originality for the book. It is a compilation and assembly plant. The material has been gathered from various books. I would particularly like to mention Ashvaghosha's **Buddhavita** [=**Buddhacharita**], whose poetry no one can excel. In the narrative of certain events I have even borrowed his language.

The only originality that I can claim in [=is] the order of presentation of the topics, in which I have tried to introduce simplicity and clarity. There are certain matters which give headache[s] to the student of Buddhism. I have dealt with them in the Introduction.

It remains for me to express my gratitude to those who have been helpful to me. I am very grateful to Mr. Nanak Chand Rattua of Village Sakrulli and Mr. Parkash Chand of Village Nangal Khurd in the district of Hoshiarpur (Punjab) for the burden they have taken upon themselves to type out the manuscript. They have done it several times. Shri Nanak Chand Rattu took special pains and put in very hard labour in accomplishing this great task. He did the whole work of typing etc. very willingly and without caring for his health and [=or] any sort of remuneration. Both Mr. Nanak Chand Rattu and Mr. Parkash Chand did their job as a token of their greatest love and affection towards me. Their labours can hardly be repaid. I am very much grateful to them.

When I took up the task of composing the book I was ill, and [I]

am still ill. During these five years there were many ups and downs in my health. At some stages my condition had become so critical that doctors talked of me as a dying flame. The successful rekindling of this dying flame is due to the medical skill of my wife and Dr. Malvankar. They alone have helped me to complete the work. I am also thankful to Mr. M. B. Chitnis, who took [a] special interest in correcting [the] proof and to go [=in going] through the whole book.

I may mention that this is one of the three books which will form a set for the proper understanding of Buddhism. The other books are: (i) **Buddha and Karl Marx**; and (ii) **Revolution and Counter- Revolution in Ancient India**. They are written out in parts. I hope to publish them soon.

B. R. Ambedkar
26 Alipur Road, Delhi
6-4-56

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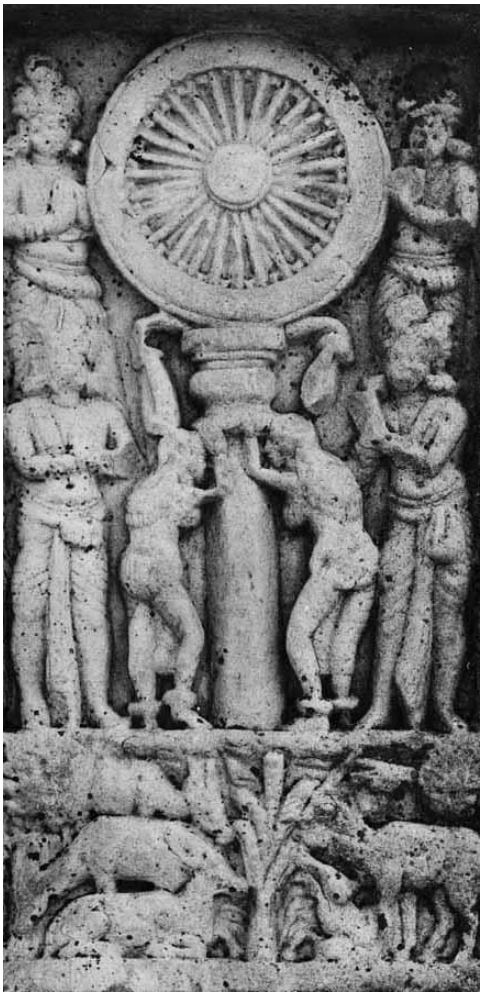
Published in: Prabuddha Bharat: dated 17th Nov, 1956. [Translated by Bhagwan Das]

Dr. Babasabeh Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 17 – Part I (2003)
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee, Higher Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai-400021

I BELIEVE, MY PEOPLE WILL SACRIFICE EVERYTHING TO ESTABLISH BUDDHISM IN INDIA

by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar



2nd-1st century BC; 199-100 BCE;
Buddhist; India; Torana; Raisen; Sanchi;
White sandstone; west pillar, north face detail;
gateway; Southern gateway; Stupa 3;
AIIS Photo Archive

I believe, my people will sacrifice everything to establish Buddhism in India

"Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Mrs. Ambedkar accompanied by Mr. B. H. Varale and Dr. Mavalankar left for Nepal to participate in the World Buddhist Conference scheduled to take place on the 17th November 1956.

While leaving for Nepal, on November 13th, 1956, Mr. Y. C. Shankaranand Shastri very respectfully enquired at the Air Port, New Delhi, "Baba Saheb, in view of your failing health how far will it be possible for you to tour India to propagate the Dhamma ?" Baba Saheb felt slightly irritated but strongly asserted, for the task like propagation of Buddhism I am not at all ill. I am prepared to utilise every moment of my remaining life for the great task of revival and propagation of Buddha's Dhamma in Bharat.

"I am going to administer "Deeksha" to lakhs of people in Bombay in the month of December. The kind of great revival meeting took place in Nagpur on the 14th October 1956 will also be arranged in Bombay where millions of people will be converted to Buddhism. Conversion meeting like the one which took place in Nagpur will also be organised in other cities of India."

"Not only the people treated as Untouchables but all people, irrespective of caste or religion, who believe in the teachings of the Buddha should participate in this Deeksha ceremony and embrace Buddhism."

During the course of conversation with people present there, Baba Saheb Ambedkar strongly asserted, "It is very wrong to believe that Buddha is incarnation of Vishnu. This is a false and mischievous propaganda". The preachers of this diabolical

theory are none other than the followers of Brahminism. Their sole aim is to maintain the stratification based on inequality and mutual hatred in order to maintain their hold on the society. I have been struggling throughout my life to abolish this evil practice of division based on caste and mutual hatred. In reality, I feel guilty of starting late the work of revival of Buddhism in India. But even then I hope and believe that my people who, sacrificing their own comforts, have been faithfully following me. I hope and I trust they will continue to struggle sincerely to propagate the Buddha Dhamma in India."[1]

[1]: Prabuddha Bharat : dated 17th Nov. 1956. Translated by Bhagwan Das

BODHISATTVA GLOBAL TRUST (BGT)®

CALENDAR

2025

January

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"In regard to the preparation of Buddha's Gospel care must be taken to emphasize the social and moral teachings of the Buddha.

What is emphasized is meditation, contemplation and abhidhamms.

This way of presenting Buddhism to Indians would be fatal to our cause."

Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar