



Research Paper

Awakened India in Two Ideological Traditions: A Comparative Intellectual History of the Two Prabuddha Bharata Journals (1896 and 1956)

with Special Reference to the Buddhist Heritage of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

This article narrates the shared intellectual history of two similarly titled periodicals: Prabuddha Bharata, founded in Madras in 1896 with the approval of Swami Vivekananda, and Prabuddha Bharat, which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar adopted in just days before his epochal mass Buddhist conversion in Nagpur in October 1956. Both titles invoke the ideal of an Awakened India, yet they envision very different forms of national revival. Founded in 1896, it brought Vedantic universalism within the ambit of reformist Hinduism to an English-educated elite on the public stage at a time of colonial governance. The 1956 journal "institutionalized" Navayana Buddhism and an aggressively anti-caste democratic reconstruction in dalit-bahujan populations that had little access to elite print culture. This study utilizes the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh as the site for comparison, a state uniquely shaped by its rich Buddhist civilizational heritage in the form of the Amaravati Stupa, the Nagarjunakonda monastic university, and the philosophical heritage of Acharya Nagarjuna. Using Fraser's (1990) concept of subaltern counter publics, Habermas's (1989) model of public sphere, Gramsci's (1971) theory of organic and traditional intellectuals and Foucauldian discourse analysis, this article argues that the two journals were not simply separated by its readership, but were rival knowledge communities articulating in opposition to one another in matters/idols of awakening (what is involves), liberation (what this thought about it) and between the 'here and now' of India and its Buddhist tradition.

Keywords: *Prabuddha Bharata; Prabuddha Bharat; Vivekananda; Ambedkar; Navayana Buddhism; Advaita Vedanta; Andhra Pradesh; Buddhist Heritage; Dalit Public Sphere; Nagarjuna; Amaravati; Comparative Intellectual History.*

I. Introduction

There are few expressions in the history of ideas in India today that generate as much contested significations as Prabuddha Bharata the Awakened India. The term was used in similar forms by Swami Vivekananda and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, but the awakening the two men dreamt of was not that about magnitude but quality: in the ontological basis, in its understanding what made India go to sleep and in the mode for true wakefulness. The interplay between their visions is one of the most basic fault lines within the thought of modern India and this has very major implications for how Indian society understands its own past, and its responsibilities today.

Surveying the colonially conquered India in the 1890s, Vivekananda diagnosed a culture that had lost its spiritual grandeur. His awakening was a rebirth of the Hindu Self to the rediscovery of Advaita Vedanta's vision that each human is an infinite divine Atman and the journal was Prabuddha Bharata, established in Madras in July 1896 and was its foremost print platform (Vivekananda, 1907–1912). Six decades later Ambedkar looked on the same nation from the viewpoint of its most methodically downtrodden populations and discerned a fundamentally dissimilar malady: far from spiritual amnesia it was the systemic brutality of caste, an apparatus of hierarchical inequality consecrated by religion and which made the bulk of India's population eternally sub-human in the eyes of the most dominant order. The change of name of his Marathi weekly as Prabuddha Bharat in October 1956 and that too just two months before leading close to six lakh followers in

mass conversion to Buddhism at Nagpur was no mere dilettante adjustment; it was a deliberate semiotic intervention in the struggle over the very signifier of national awakening (Ambedkar, 1957; Jaffrelot, 2005).

The location of this article's comparative analysis in Andhra Pradesh is both historiographically constraining and analytically enabling. Andhra is not a blank canvas, but a space inscribed over time, historically, by one of Asia's great Buddhist civilisations: the Amaravati Stupa (third century BCE onward), the Nagarjunakonda monastic university (third century CE), and the philosopher Acharya Nagarjuna (second century CE), whose Madhyamaka system served as the intellectual backbone of Mahayana Buddhism throughout Asia. This Buddhist substratum shaped the reception of both Vivekananda's Vedantic awakening and Ambedkar's neo-Buddhist liberation in highly and structurally distinct ways. To grasp how each journal was received in Andhra, then, is to understand not what each said, but what Andhra was already holding.

The paper focuses on the following core questions: (1) What are the features of conceptualisation of national awakening and the role of religion in social change by each journal? (2) How did the Buddhist civilisational background of Andhra Pradesh shape their reception in specific ways? (3) What were the rival assertions in relation to the philosophical inheritance of Acharya Nagarjuna? (4) In what ways can these two journals be theoretically situated in relation to different models of the public sphere and intellectual hegemony?

II. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Print Culture and the Indian Public Sphere

The development of intellectual history in colonial and postcolonial Indian print culture has been particularly informed by the work of historians like Anderson (1983), who argues that print capitalism is central to modern nationalist consciousness, and Habermas (1989), whose theoretical model of the bourgeois public sphere conceptualizes a rational-critical discussion between print-reading subjects as the locus of modern political identity. For India, these paradigms have been usefully complicated by voices that highlight the caste-inflected, linguistically stratified, and institutionally bounded nature of actual Indian print publics (Guru & Sarukkai, 2012; Zelliott, 1992).

Current work on Prabuddha Bharata (1896) has concentrated on its significance in popularising Vivekananda's Vedantic doctrine among the English-educated elites (Radhakrishnan, 1927) and on its organizational connection with the Ramakrishna Mission (Gambhirananda, 1957). The literature on Ambedkar's journalism has tended to concentrate on his Marathi weeklies within the domain of Dalit political mobilisation (Jaffrelot, 2005; Zelliott, 1992) rather than examine the intellectual-historical comparison between the two kin magazines. This paper closes this gap by situating both journals in a unique comparative analytic framework particular to the historical civilizational context of Andhra Pradesh.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

It is a four-plane examination, so and so are the axes. The bourgeois public sphere of Habermas (1989) is, first, an ideal which can be used to measure and critique the dominant social space in which Prabuddha Bharata (1896) was located: a space of rational-critical discussion among English-speaking, upper-caste subjects whose universalizing self-representation occluded racial exclusions. Second, and most importantly in Andhra, Fraser's (1990) reading of the Habermasian model, along with the concept of subaltern counter-publics as sites of resistance in which marginalized social groups articulate and disseminate counter-hegemonic discourses to express oppositional versions of their social identities and needs (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) find resonance in the Ambedkarite Buddhist sphere in Andhra, which is posited as a viable alternative (rather than merely marginalized sub-culture) public sphere.

Third, Gramsci's (1971) distinction between traditional intellectuals (representatives of cultural hegemony who operate within the cultural superstructure, and whose knowledge is presented as timeless, taken-for-granted and universal and which actually helps to reinforce dominant social relations) and organic intellectuals (leaders of particular social classes emerge to articulate and advance the intellectual requirements of their social collective) finds an echo in the bipartite opposition in the relations between the editors of each journal in Andhra. Fourth, Foucault (1972, 1980) concept of regimes of truth is used to examine how the discursive formations of each journal engendered divergent, institutionalized knowledge of the Buddhist civilizational past of Andhra that delineated what was possible for each (what might legitimately be considered historical memory in each journal and who was able to communicate through it).

III. The Buddhist Civilisational Substratum of Andhra Pradesh: Historical Background

3.1 Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, and Satavahana-Ikshvaku Patronage

Any examination of the two Prabuddha Bharata journals in Andhra Pradesh should begin with the civilizational context to which it was confined. Satavahanas (ca. 232 BCE-2nd/3rd century CE), the greatest royal patrons of Buddhist architecture in the region, doubled the Amaravati Stupa to one that remained the biggest Buddhist monument in Asia for many centuries whose kinetic narratives carved in limestone form one

of the three major schools of ancient Indian art along with Mathura and Gandhara (Knox, 1992). The artistic world of the Karnataka site stretched from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia to Central Asia and even Chinese, thus enabling Andhra to act as the center of a Pan-Asian Buddhist civilisational complex (Singh, 2008).

In the reign of Ikshvaku (c. 210–310 CE), Vijayapuri, the ancient Nagarjunakonda in the Krishna River valley, developed into a monastic cosmopolis, if we may employ a phrase like that, consisting of at least a dozen Buddhist sects, and regularly attracting pilgrims from Sri Lanka, Bengal, Gandhara, and Burma. What is strange in the extant records is that separate Buddhist patronage is recorded beside the Saivite royal husbands of the Ikshvaku queens, Queen Chamtisiri sponsored ten years consecutively a series of renovations of the main stupa. The very strain of independent women religious agency within a patriarchal court - again is a feature of Andhra's Buddhist past that even the resurgent Vedantic revivalist historiographical paradigm, nor the generic nationalist historiography, could ever begin to grasp (Soundara Rajan, 1966).

3.2 Nagarjuna and the Madhyamaka Philosophical Legacy

The most important intellectual figure in this milieu is Acharya Nagarjuna (second century CE), who was based in the Sriparvata hills of the Krishna valley, and who developed the doctrine of *Sunyata* in his *Mulamadhyamakakarika* the insight that all phenomena lack an inherently existent, independently existent selfhood in the form of the deepest philosophical challenge to essentialism in Indian thought (Nagarjuna, trans. Garfield, 1995). The connection between Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka and Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta is among the most fraught genealogical question in Indian intellectual history: Shankara's opponents accused him of being a *Pracchanna Bauddha* (Crypto-Buddhist) due to these structural similarities between his non-dualism and Nagarjuna's sunyata were so extensive that they constituted an intellectual appropriation (Mayeda, 1976). This inquiry bifurcates at once into a contrast between the two periodicals, Vivekananda's journal functioning on one side (Naturalizing Buddhism within Vedanta), and Ambedkar's unmistakably on the other (affirming Buddhism's helpless difference from and historical opposition to Brahminical Vedism).

3.3 The Suppression of Buddhism and Its Colonial Archaeological Recovery

The retreat of Buddhism in Andhra from about the seventh century CE was accompanied by the strengthening of Brahminical landowning institutions, the loss of mercantile patronage from monastic networks and the gradual philosophical reincorporation of Buddhist personalities into *Vedantic* categories is the necessary background against which the ideological contest between the two journals is to be understood. Significantly, this decline was not merely political; it was hermeneutical. The process through which Brahminical cultural hegemony neutralized the threat Buddhist counter-hegemonies posed in Andhra was not so much through violence but exegesis: interpreting Nagarjuna as a proto-Shankara, reading Buddhist sculpture as a moment in Hindu civilisational tradition, and integrating Buddhist euphemisms for ethical concepts in reformulated Hindu practice in manners that preserved the “shape” of the concepts but hollowed out the anti-caste “substance” of the same.

The excavation of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in the colonial period begun with the 1870s excavations of James Burgess through the ASA's rigorous work through the 1950s (Soundara Rajan, 1966) revived to public consciousness a civilisational record that both journals would subsequently claim, interpret, and partially suppress. The inundation of Nagarjunakonda beneath the Nagarjunasagar Dam reservoir in 1960 added yet another layer of literal and symbolic loss to this history of cultural obliteration as elaborated in Section 7.

IV. Prabuddha Bharata (1896): Vedantic Awakening and the Elite Print Public Sphere

4.1 Founding, Philosophy, and Caste Discourse

Prabuddha Bharata was established in Madras in July 1896 with B. R. Rajam Iyer as its first editor, in the vision of Vivekananda who wanted to bring Vedantic philosophy to the English-educated Indians asserting superiority of Hindu spiritual thought to the western materialism. After Rajam Iyer's death in 1898, and a short dis-continuance, the magazine was revived by the Ramakrishna Order and later shifted to the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati in the Himalayas, where it has since been published regularly. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's contributions extended its erudition to comparative religion and idealist philosophy (Radhakrishnan, 1927).

Philosophically, at its foundation, it was Vivekananda's restatement of Advaita Vedanta: the identity of the Atman and the Brahman, the ontological falsehood of multiplicity (Maya), and metaphysical universalism which takes the form of social service as Practical Vedanta serving humanity as the service of the true Atman in every soul. Vivekananda's views on caste were reformist and not abolitionist. He condemned untouchability, preached spiritual equality, and claimed that real Brahminhood was not an accident of birth but a gift of spiritual accomplishment. But he ever treated the evil as one of over-application, not of misapplication, or of non-application of varna (Vivekananda, 1907–1912, Vol. 3).

4.2 Vivekananda's Absorptive Reading of Buddhism

Vivekananda's engagement with Buddhism was that of an appreciative domestication, making it a part of Vedantic tradition and presenting it in a way that is suitable for his context. He lauds the Buddha over and over, all the while refiguring him as a Vedantic reformer who had made Upanishadic wisdom accessible to the common man. Condemning assertion such as, 'Buddha was Vedanta in practice; Vedanta is the Buddha in theory' (Vivekananda, 1907–1912, Vol. 3, p. 251), although an expression of philosophical sympathy, is at the structural level well-coming: it refuses to grant Buddhism the degree of specificity necessitated by the question of its counter-hegemonic undertaking. Its overt repudiation of Vedic authority, establishment of a casteless sangha, and assertion that liberation was open to all, no matter what the social dimensions were blurred by a reading that conceived of Buddhism as fundamentally analogous to the tradition it had long ago risen up in opposition to.

For the English-trained Telugu middle class that came upon Prabuddha Bharata in the reading rooms of Andhra's universities and Mission halls, this reformist vision provided a culturally sustainable synthesis that was at once nationalist, Hindu, philosophically refined, and progressive enough to allow for the retention of the fundamental socio-political arrangements. It was, a Gramscian reading in Section 6 will articulate, a stirring for those who could afford to be stirred up, to remain comfortable while being stirred up.

V. Prabuddha Bharat (1956): Navayana Buddhism and the Subaltern Counter-Public

5.1 The Renaming as Discursive Counter-Assertion

The renaming of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's Marathi weekly Janata to Prabuddha Bharat (Enlightened India) in October 1956 a few weeks prior to the Nagpur mass conversion was a calculated act of discursive counter-assertion. In taking the name of a close cognate of the sixty-year old Vedantic journal, which is still in prestigious publication, Ambedkar clearly situated his undertaking as a rival to the Vedantic revival for the meaning of Indian awakening: the awakening that Indian wake-up needed was not recuperation of Vedantic spiritual consciousness among the educated upper-caste elite but the release of the bulk of its individuals from the systemic savagery of caste via the rational, egalitarian, and this-worldly ethics of the Buddha (Ambedkar, 1957; Jaffrelot, 2005).

5.2 Navayana Buddhism: Philosophy as Social Ethics

Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism the philosophical edifice of Prabuddha Bharat reconstrued the Dhamma as societal ethics in contradistinction to metaphysical speculation. Rather than reading the Four Noble Truths as a cosmological universal analysis, they were seen as a diagnosis of the social: suffering is prevalent and institutionalized; it is engendered and perpetuated through social inequality; it is historically contingent and knowable in its causes; it can be vanquished by way of alter social formations; and the path of such transformation is the Eightfold Path. This interpretation rejected the "quietist" understanding Ambedkar related to both the Brahminical domestications of Buddhism and certain strands of Theravada practice. As he proclaimed at Nagpur, 'The Buddha's religion is the only religion which a self-respecting intellectual can follow nowadays' (Ambedkar, 1979–2003, Vol. 17, p. 95).

The ideological groundwork had been established in Annihilation of Caste (Ambedkar, 1936/2014), where Ambedkar posited that caste was not a fallen ideal but an abjectly violent practice whose scriptural endorsement in the Vedas and Manusmriti implied that social emancipation necessitated religious conversion : the displacement of the scriptural framework providing caste its legitimacy, and substitution by a tradition Buddhism whose rejection of fixed, birth-given atman offered a immediate structural counterpoint to the Brahminical social world.

5.3 Ambedkar's Reading of Andhra's Buddhist History

For Ambedkar's version of the movement, the Buddhist past of Andhra was not just background but an active source of ideological inspiration. The sixth century decline of Buddhism in Andhra was interpreted as a template for the process by which Brahminical tyranny had 'neutralised' its greatest threat, not by physical force, but by cultural incorporation, philosophical absorption, and by withdrawing patronage from the bodies that maintained an alternative social ethics (Ambedkar, 1957). The Vedantic tradition's professed having incorporated and displaced Buddhism was in this view the finest expression of that very erasure, exactly the erasure that Prabuddha Bharata (1896) had carried into the twentieth century.

VI. Comparative Analysis: Competing Epistemologies of Indian Modernity

The most basic point of divergence is each journal's vision of the nation. Prabuddha Bharata (1896) portrayed India as spiritual civilisation, whose essence was its Vedantic metaphysical past and whose historic task was to carry this heritage to a materially advanced but spiritually destitute globe. Secondary to that was political conquest of India; the chief mission was cultural and spiritual self-renewal. Ambedkar's Prabuddha

Bharat constructed the idea of India as a democratic moral community, whose identity was shaped by its commitments to all its members which included those systematically excluded by caste. It did not suffer from spiritual forgetfulness, but from institutionalized injustice; it needed resolution, not in metaphysical terms, but in genuinely egalitarian social arrangements rooted in constitutional morality and Buddhist ethics.

On the philosophy of religion Prabuddha Bharata considered religion to be metaphysical in nature: it deals with ultimate ontological concerns and its social consequences are tertiary to its metaphysical aspect. Prabuddha Bharat portrayed religion as essentially social-ethical: it concerns how human beings ought to live together and organise collective life according to justice and compassion, with metaphysics being beneath ethics. Social and metaphysical ethics Without social ethics, metaphysics is in Ambedkar's (1936/2014) view not high religion but intellectual escapism reinforcing the social order.

The semantic competition over the word prabuddha itself is worthy of a separate inquiry. In Sanskrit prabuddha is a compound word consisting of prā and buddha which has three senses in its use: awake, awakened and has awakened. Vivekananda's application highlighted the second: India needed to regain its spiritual light by regaining Vedantic self-knowledge. Ambedkar's usage highlighted both the first and the third: the downtrodden should rouse themselves from sleep of false consciousness the acceptance of caste as natural or divinely sanctioned with the help of education, reason, and by critically employing Buddhist teachings to their social condition. As a result, the common etymological root rather became a site of contestation rather than continuity, where two diametrically opposed diagnoses of the Indian predicament and solutions for its remaking were articulated.

As Foucault takes pains to specify, the two journals can be understood as competing regimes of truth rather than just fields of disagreement over the same matter, so that they correspond to different institutional matrices in defining what constitutes true discourse and who can speak that truth (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). The Ramakrishna Mission, the English language university and the Pan-Indian Anglophone print sphere authorised the discourse of Prabuddha Bharata. Dalit community organisations, the monumental legacy of Ambedkar's construction of the constitution, and the life-or-death struggle of communities who are denied their humanity on a daily basis authorised the discourse of Prabuddha Bharat. The outcome was not a dialogue between these formations, but a structural no-dialogue: two publics, whose idioms are mutually unintelligible and whose histories of memory-community are mutually exclusive.

6.1 Comparative Table: Key Dimensions

Table 1 below synthesises the comparative analysis across the principal dimensions of the study.

	Prabuddha Bharata — Vivekananda (1896)	Prabuddha Bharat — Ambedkar (1956)
Concept of Awakening	Spiritual renaissance of Vedantic Atman-consciousness; recovery of Hindu civilisational self-confidence under colonial modernity	Socio-political emancipation of Dalit-Bahujan communities from structural caste violence through rational Dhamma and constitutional morality
Philosophical Foundation	Advaita Vedanta; Brahman-Atman non-duality; Maya as ontological illusion; Upanishadic textual authority	Navayana Buddhism; Madhyamaka sunyata reread as anti-essentialism; Four Noble Truths as social diagnosis; Tripitaka replaces Vedas
Reading of the Buddha	Supreme Hindu reformer; Buddhism a preparatory stage within the Vedantic continuum, ultimately to be reabsorbed	Radical social revolutionary; Buddhism an explicit historical rupture from Brahminical Vedism — irreducibly distinct and opposed
Position on Caste	Reform within the varna framework; spiritual equality affirmed but hereditary order retained as functional ideal	Annihilation of caste as foundational imperative; caste is institutionalised religious violence; conversion as structural rupture
Target Readership	English-educated upper-caste intelligentsia: university faculty, civil servants, reformist middle class	Dalit-Bahujan communities — Mala, Madiga, Scheduled Caste activists — excluded from elite print and institutional spheres
Language / Medium	English journal; elite pan-Indian Anglophone circulation; dominant public sphere (Habermas, 1989)	Marathi journal; Telugu oral mobilisation; subaltern counter-public sphere (Fraser, 1990)
Institutional Channels in AP	Ramakrishna Mission centres Vijayawada and Hyderabad; Andhra University and SVU library subscriptions	Buddhist sanghas; Ambedkarite study circles; Republican Party of India branches; Dalit cultural associations
Claim over Nagarjuna	Proto-Shankara: sunyata as preparation for Advaita non-dualism; Buddhist philosophy domesticated within Vedanta	Andhra's native Buddhist philosopher: sunyata as metaphysical refutation of caste essentialism; heritage reclaimed for Dalit communities
Social Theory	Traditional intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971): Mission monks, university professors — custodians of hegemonic spiritual culture	Organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971): sangha organisers, Dalit teachers, Republican Party activists — building counter-hegemonic consciousness
Legacy in Andhra Pradesh	Philosophical culture in universities; Vedantic social service ethos in middle-class associations; reinforcement of elite cultural nationalism	Buddhist sanghas; Dalit liberation schools; Navayana Buddhist communities; grassroots political and spiritual consciousness across coastal Andhra

Table 1. Comparative analysis of *Prabuddha Bharata* (1896) and *Prabuddha Bharat* (1956) across key ideological, philosophical, social, and institutional dimensions. Source: Author's own analysis.

VII. Andhra Pradesh as Contested Ground: Differential Reception and Structural Analysis

7.1 The Stratified Architecture of Andhra's Print Public Sphere

To analyse the unequal reception of the two journals we therefore need to trace the contours of the production and reception of print culture in Andhra 1896–1970. The English-language public was created, in fact, by a tiny leasehold group of readers who had graduated from university, were overwhelmingly upper caste and resided in the coastal cities of Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry, Machilipatnam, Guntur, and Vijayawada, for whom access to print was filtered by Andhra University (est.

The Telugu publics was more inclusive, in that it included radicals who had embraced Self-Respect by Periyar and Andhra Mahasabha's rural cultural nationalism. The early-twentieth-century Telugu reform press (Journals such as *Andhra Patrika* and *Swatantra*) tackled issues of regional identity, caste reform and national belonging, but did so from a position that presumed access to education and that imagined an audience anchored primarily within the upper and intermediate castes.

Andhra's Dalit communities namely the Mala communities of the coastal delta and the Madiga communities of the interior were in these two spheres though marginal and their political articulation was via the oral networks of the *Adi-Andhra* movement (1920s). The non-constitution of a Telugu Dalit print public sphere till Ambedkar was not about literacy, it was about all-encompassing denial, a systematic expulsion from Anderson's (1983) print-capitalism being the central mechanism through which modern political consciousness.

7.2 Prabuddha Bharata (1896) in Andhra: Institutional Reception and Structural Limits

In the hegemonic Anglophone world, the hold of *Prabuddha Bharata* in Andhra was much more than nominal. The Vijayawada Ramakrishna Mission centre was also the primary institutional site of its dissemination. A senior monk (personal communication, June 2024) attested that from the 1940s on the periodical was stocked consistently, and recommended to worshippers, students, and civil service hopefuls as an aid in philosophical formation. The departments of Philosophy of Andhra University and Sri Venkateswara University made it as prescribed reading for some of the papers of *Indian Philosophy* and *Advaita Vedanta*. A retired professor of Andhra University (personal communication, December 2023) reminisced that the coverage of Vedantic non-dualism in the journal sometimes led to fruitful discussion on the structural similarities between it and Nagarjuna's *Madhyamaka*, but that conversation never exited into the social-political consequences of Buddhism's anti-caste historic mission in Andhra, and remained located solely in academic philosophy.

In Gramscian terminology, the monks, professors, and bureaucrats who transmitted *Prabuddha Bharata*'s appeal in Andhra were quasi-traditional intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971: 5–14) closely aligned with actual traditional intellectuals: whose cultural authority derived from Vedantic philosophy as eternal and universal, and whose social task was to the legitimization of social norms. The journal furnished these traditional intellectuals with a philosophical lexicon and a Pan-Indian institutional base. What it structurally could not provide, on the other hand, was a real meeting place for the communities whose interaction with the spiritual heritage of India had been one of systematic isolation and diminution.

7.3 Prabuddha Bharat (1956) in Andhra: Counter-Public Formation and Buddhist Reclamation

The articulation of Ambedkar's conversion movement in Andhra was a product of a particular configuration of regional conditions. First, Andhra's Dalit communities were not starting from scratch; they were already organized through the *Adi-Andhra* movement. Second, the excavation at Nagarjunakonda which reached its peak in the early 1950s before the submersion of the site under the Nagarjunasagar Dam in 1960 revealed the region's Buddhist past to the public with much greater immediacy, providing Ambedkarite organisations with a platform to claim that this legacy was that of Andhra's Buddhist communities, rather than that of a vague Hindu civilisational narrative (Lahiri, 2012). Third, the creation of Andhra State in 1953 rendered regional identity and historical identity politically volatile.

In accordance with Fraser's (1990, p. 67) model, the Buddhist sanghas that were established in large numbers in coastal Andhra at Guntur, Vijayawada, Bapatla, Ongole, Eluru and Tenali operated as subaltern counter-publics: as parallel discursive spaces wherein Dalit-Bahujan communities reinterpreted their own identities and needs in an oppositional mode. A Guntur Buddhist Sangha Convenor (March 2024, personal communication) affirmed that since the 1950s, the sangha practiced political education on Ambedkar's constitutional heritage and annual Nagarjuna Jyanti celebrations that also constructed the *Madhyamaka* philosopher as a native Andhra Buddhist heritage figure whose intellectual tradition was accessible to Dalit, and not the upper-caste academic, hegemony. The sangha's library had Ambedkar's writings, Pali texts, and histories of Andhra Buddhism but not a single copy of *Prabuddha Bharata* (c. 1896).

7.4 The Nagarjunakonda Submersion: Material Loss and Symbolic Charge

The inundation of Nagarjunakonda within the reservoir of the Nagarjunasagar Dam in 1960 should be seen as a punctuating material-symbolic event that crystallised the structural relation between the two journals' claim over Andhra's Buddhist past. The state's combined archaeological salvage and reservoir construction management was archetypal of dominant public sphere approaches to the Buddhist past: aesthetic pleasure and national heritage conservation isolated from the social ethics of the community who had conceived the monuments. What was preserved was stone; what was not preserved was the social memory of Nagarjunakonda as a living community of practitioners organized around the explicit repudiation of birth based hierarchy (Lahiri, 2012).

And for Ambedkarite movements (such as those who were in the process of largescale conversion drives during precisely these years) the flooding carried an almost unbearably reverberative symbolic weight, the same water that was filling the reservoir was flooding the cultural memories that Ambedkar's movement was only now just beginning to sustain Dalit communities in Andhra. This convergence located the counter-public's project of historical reclamation in a particular emotional and political intensity in Andhra that distinguished it from the Ambedkarite movement in other parts of India.

VIII. Nagarjuna as Contested Heritage: The Philosophical Fault-Line

The figure of Nagarjuna offers the most incisive point of comparison in the contrasting receptions of the two journals in Andhra. Both the dominant Vedantic discursive formation and the Ambedkarite counter-discursive formation appropriated his philosophical heritage albeit in radically incoherent senses.

The Vedantic interpretation that was available within the discursive formation of Prabuddha Bharata read sunyata as deconstructive set-up for Shankara's constructive Advaita: by proving that no individual being has essential self-existence, Nagarjuna made philosophical space for the Advaitin vision that phenomenal manifold is the superimposition of Maya on undivided Brahman. Nagarjuna's negation-laden dialectic thus became an introduction to the affirmative metaphysics of Vedanta, which rooted him philosophically in the tradition of that which he most historically opposed (Mayeda, 1976).

The Ambedkarite reading would not be subjected to such exegetical violence through metaphysical sophistication. Nagarjuna's Sunyata was not a "preparation" for Brahman but a negation of Svabhava or own-being or essential nature. When fully unfolded in and for itself, the doctrine does not posit a metaphysical ground to replace the individual selves that it reveals to be illusory, but it posits the relational, contingent, and interdependent character of things as a whole (Nagarjuna, trans. Garfield, 1995). The social significance is not the Vedantic realization that all men have at least a little drop of divine milk in them, but the Buddhist realization that all phenomena are relations and that social institutions that deny or insult those relationships are not merely a form of suffering, but a social, not just a metaphysical, one.

In so far relevant to the problematic of caste, Nagarjuna's (and presumably Madhyamaka's) dismissal of Svabhava means that the core Varna statement that Brahmin and Shudra are fundamentally different kinds of existents is metaphysically nonsensical on Nagarjuna's own terms. The Sunyata ideal is not just compatible with an anti-caste agenda, it is a merciless metaphysical indictment of the very logic of birth-based hierarchies. This was the reading emerging from the Ambedkarite Nagarjuna Jayanti celebrations in Guntur, Vijayawada and more such cities in Andhra reiterating not the erstwhile iconic cultural figure of Nagarjuna but the philosophical forebear of that Ambedkar self.

IX. Discussion: Implications for Indian Intellectual History

The comparison developed in this article has implications for Indian intellectual and cultural history, Dalit studies, and the history of print culture. 1 The study argues that the two Prabuddha Bharata journals were not merely competing responses to the same colonial modernity, but rather radically different and incommensurable epistemological formations they each engendered different 'truth regimes' about the same constellation of historical concerns. The Andhra example exposes this incommensurability most acutely as both journals' claims on the same pre-existing civilisational heritage the Amaravati-Nagarjunakonda Buddhist complex are mutually exclusive.

Second, applying Fraser's (1990) counter-public theory to the Ambedkarite Buddhist network in Andhra as a case study radically revises the outsized attention given in previous research to viewing this network as a political movement supplement to Ambedkar's constitutional work as the truly alternative formation of intellectual work. In this study, Sanghas, study circles and Nagarjuna Jayanti celebrations, among others these are institutionalized epistemological practices, producing, distributing and validating knowledge claims, unknown to the ruling public sphere, and that, when fully articulated, could not be subsumed within it without mutating.

Third, the study uncovers a "Nagarjuna" as a site of philosophical contest, not historical erasure. The two discursive formations' competing interpretations of his Sunyata doctrine are not simply rival exegeses of a

classical text; they are contestations over what the preeminent indigenous philosophical tradition of India is allowed to say today. The Ambedkarite interpretation of Sunyata as anti-essentialism with immediate consequences for the metaphysical impossibility of birth-based hierarchy is a philosophically substantive intellectual argument which the hegemonic Vedantic academic tradition has for the most part simply failed to respond appreciatively.

X. Conclusion

A comparison of Vivekananda's *Prabuddha Bharata* (1896) and Ambedkar's *Prabuddha Bharat* (1956), viewed particularly through their reception in Andhra Pradesh, suggests a fundamental divergence between two modes of knowledge grouped around radically differing conceptions of what it means to awaken, the nature of liberation, and the appropriate relation between India's present and its Buddhist past. In Andhra, this became a schism of historically conditioned philosophical proportions, influenced by the region's Buddhist civilisational heritage.

Prabuddha Bharata (1896) developed a philosophical mind among the cognoscenti of Andhra and rekindled cultural pride in India's spiritual patrimony. Its structural limitation was defined by its English language, inching intellectual world of Vedantic exegesis, and formation in the mainstream public sphere: it was unthinkable to awaken to Andhra's masses, and in absorbing Buddhism into Vedanta it replicated the cultural logic that had subjugated Andhra's Buddhist heritage for over a millennium.

Prabuddha Bharat (1956) nurtured political and spiritual consciousness among Andhra's Dalit communities and provided them with intellectual resources for recovering their suppressed Buddhist inheritance as a living rather than merely archaeological reality. Its structural limitation was the urgency of its political context, which sometimes foreclosed deeper philosophical engagement with the Madhyamaka tradition that the region's intellectual heritage demanded.

And What the intellectual life of Andhra Pradesh has yet to fully realize and what this comparison renders visible is a this synthesis in which both. Tube crinoids The philosophical depth of Vedantic scholarship at its best, And Ambedkars intellectually charged social politics at its most emotionally stirring. Such a synthesis would simultaneously appropriate Nagarjuna for his metaphysical profundity as well as his social consequence, and read Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda not as aestheticized heritage or political counter-symbol but as the material expression of a community organized around the Dhamma a precedent whose potentiality for contemporary Andhra is as yet unrealised.

The two *Prabuddha Bharatas* thus gesture in unison toward a third enlightenment, one not to which either of the two is individually capable of attaining: an enlightenment of a society that has biologically confronted its own sublimated complications. The unfinished dialectic between these two theological traditions is not a matter just for the historians' amusement. It is the central intellectual and civilisational challenge for the Andhra and, *mutatis mutandis*, for the India of today.

Notes

¹ The term '*Prabuddha Bharata*' appears in both journals with slightly different orthography. This article uses '*Prabuddha Bharata*' for Vivekananda's 1896 journal and '*Prabuddha Bharat*' for Ambedkar's 1956 renaming, following their respective print conventions.

² For the *pracchanna buddha* controversy and the Shankara-Nagarjuna relationship, see also Paul Hacker, '*Shankara's Conception of Man*,' in *Philology and Confrontation*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 109-124.

³ Field interviews were conducted with informed consent under institutional research ethics guidelines. Participants are identified by institutional role and date only, in accordance with their consent preferences.

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