



Research Paper

## Buddha Dhamma and Its Relevance to Ambedkarite Thought: A Path to Social Justice and Equality

G. Sravanthi

PhD Research Scholar  
Dept of Philosophy, Osmania University.

Dr Ch. Vamseedhar

Head Department of Philosophy  
Osmania University

---

### Abstract

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's engagement with Buddhism was a revolutionary act aimed at dismantling caste oppression and establishing an egalitarian society. His reinterpretation of Buddha Dhamma—often referred to as Navayana Buddhism—was not just a spiritual transformation but a socio-political movement against Brahmanical dominance. This research explores the core principles of Buddhism, including Dhamma (righteousness), Sila (morality), and Prajna (wisdom), and their relevance in addressing caste-based discrimination. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism emphasized rationality, social equality, and justice, making it a powerful tool for Dalit empowerment and anti-caste movements. The study examines the impact of Ambedkarite Buddhism on contemporary social justice initiatives, particularly in India, while also assessing its global significance. Additionally, it explores the challenges faced by Ambedkarite Buddhists in the context of Hindu nationalism and caste-based violence. By integrating Buddhist ethics with modern democratic principles, Ambedkarite thought continues to inspire marginalized communities in their struggle for dignity and rights. This paper argues that Buddha Dhamma remains a vital framework for addressing social injustices, offering a transformative path toward equality and human liberation in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Ambedkarite Buddhism, Caste System, Social Justice, Dalit Empowerment and Buddha Dhamma

---

### I. Introduction

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was one of the most influential social reformers, political leaders, and intellectuals in modern Indian history. Born into an untouchable Mahar family in 1891, he faced caste-based discrimination from an early age. Despite these obstacles, he pursued higher education, earning degrees from Columbia University and the London School of Economics. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar played a crucial role in shaping India's democratic framework, ensuring fundamental rights and social justice for marginalized communities. However, he remained deeply dissatisfied with the persistence of caste-based discrimination within Hindu society, which led him to seek an alternative social and spiritual path.

Ambedkar's engagement with Buddhism was rooted in his critique of Hinduism and its rigid caste system. He believed that Hinduism, through its religious texts and traditions, legitimized caste-based oppression, making it impossible to achieve social equality within its framework. Throughout his life, he explored various ideological alternatives, including Western liberalism and socialism, but ultimately found Buddhism to be the most effective means of achieving social justice. He viewed the teachings of Gautama Buddha as inherently rational, ethical, and egalitarian—offering a strong moral foundation for the upliftment of the oppressed.

His engagement with Buddhism was not merely philosophical but deeply political. In his seminal work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar reinterpreted Buddhist teachings to align with his vision of an egalitarian society. He emphasized that the Buddha's rejection of the caste system and priestly dominance resonated with his own struggle for Dalit emancipation. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was not just a religion but a revolutionary social movement aimed at eradicating inequality and injustice.

On October 14, 1956, Ambedkar, along with hundreds of thousands of his followers, formally embraced Buddhism in a historic mass conversion ceremony in Nagpur. This marked the birth of Navayana Buddhism, or "New Buddhism," which sought to reinterpret Buddhist teachings in the context of social justice. He formulated 22 vows for his followers, rejecting Hindu gods, scriptures, and rituals, reinforcing the idea that Buddhism was a path of liberation from caste-based oppression. His conversion was not just a personal spiritual decision but a collective act of defiance against the oppressive Hindu social order.

Ambedkar's engagement with Buddhism has had a lasting impact on Indian society. The Ambedkarite Buddhist movement continues to inspire Dalits and other marginalized communities to seek dignity, self-respect, and equality. His vision of Buddhism as a tool for social transformation remains relevant today, as struggles against caste discrimination and inequality persist in contemporary India.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the relevance of Buddha Dhamma in the context of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's socio-political thought and its impact on caste abolition and social justice in India. Ambedkar's engagement with Buddhism was not limited to personal faith; rather, he saw it as a tool for the emancipation of Dalits and other oppressed communities. By critically analyzing Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism, this study aims to highlight how Buddha Dhamma serves as an ideological alternative to Hinduism and the caste system.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to bridge religious philosophy and socio-political movements. While Buddhism is often studied as a spiritual tradition, its role as a force for social transformation remains underexplored, particularly in the context of Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism. This research will contribute to the growing discourse on Ambedkarite thought and its relevance in modern India. It will also help in understanding how Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhist teachings has influenced contemporary Dalit movements, policies on social justice, and debates on caste-based discrimination.

Furthermore, this study is crucial in the present context, as caste discrimination continues to persist in various forms despite legal protections. Understanding Ambedkar's vision of Buddhism as a means of achieving social equality can provide valuable insights into ongoing struggles for justice. The study will also examine the impact of Ambedkarite Buddhism beyond India, as the movement continues to inspire marginalized communities globally. By analyzing the intersection of religion, politics, and social justice, this research will shed light on the transformative potential of Buddha Dhamma in shaping an equitable society.

### **Research Objectives**

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism
2. To examine the role of Buddhism in caste abolition and Dalit empowerment
3. To assess the influence of Ambedkarite Buddhism on modern social movements
4. To evaluate the relevance of Ambedkar's Buddhist principles in contemporary India
5. To compare Navayana Buddhism with traditional Buddhist interpretations

### **Understanding Buddha Dhamma**

Buddha Dhamma, or the teachings of Gautama Buddha, is a philosophy centered on ethical living, wisdom, and liberation from suffering. It provides a framework for achieving spiritual enlightenment while also offering principles that can be applied to social justice and equality. At the heart of Buddhism are the concepts of *Dhamma* (righteous path), *Sila* (morality), and *Prajna* (wisdom), which together form the foundation of an ethical and mindful life. *Dhamma* refers to the natural law and truth discovered by the Buddha, which guides individuals toward a path of righteousness. *Sila* emphasizes moral conduct and ethical behavior, ensuring that actions are based on compassion and non-harm. *Prajna* represents wisdom and insight, which help individuals understand the nature of suffering and attain enlightenment.

One of the most fundamental aspects of Buddha Dhamma is the Four Noble Truths, which form the core of Buddhist philosophy. The first truth, *Dukkha*, acknowledges that suffering is an inherent part of life. The second, *Samudaya*, explains that suffering arises from desire and attachment. The third, *Nirodha*, asserts that suffering can be ended by overcoming these desires. The fourth, *Magga*, outlines the Eightfold Path as the means to liberation from suffering. The Eightfold Path consists of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This path is designed to cultivate ethical behavior, mental discipline, and wisdom, enabling individuals to achieve enlightenment and inner peace.

A significant aspect of Buddha's teachings was his rejection of social hierarchy and caste-based discrimination. Unlike the rigid Brahmanical order that categorized individuals into castes based on birth, Buddha emphasized that a person's worth should be determined by their actions, not their lineage. He openly challenged

the authority of the Brahmin priests and opposed the idea that certain groups were inherently superior to others. In his teachings, he declared that all human beings are equal and that anyone, regardless of caste or social status, could attain enlightenment through righteous living.

Buddha's rejection of caste was not merely theoretical but was also reflected in his monastic community. He allowed people from all backgrounds, including untouchables, to join the Sangha (monastic order), breaking the barriers of social discrimination. This inclusive approach was revolutionary in ancient India, where caste distinctions dictated every aspect of life. His teachings provided a spiritual and ethical foundation for social equality, a principle that later became central to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism. By advocating for a society based on merit, compassion, and wisdom rather than caste hierarchy, Buddha Dhamma continues to inspire movements for social justice and equality.

### **Ambedkar's Interpretation of Buddhism**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism was deeply rooted in his lifelong struggle against caste-based discrimination and his quest for a just and equal society. His engagement with Buddhism was not simply a personal spiritual choice but a deliberate political and social movement aimed at liberating Dalits from the oppressive structure of Hinduism. Ambedkar saw Buddhism as a religion of rationality, morality, and social justice, making it the ideal alternative to the caste-ridden Hindu social order. His decision to embrace Buddhism was influenced by his extensive study of world religions and his firm belief that Hinduism, with its rigid caste system, was incompatible with the principles of equality and human dignity.

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism on October 14, 1956, along with nearly half a million of his followers, was a historic moment in Indian history. This mass conversion was not just a religious shift but a powerful statement against the social injustices perpetuated by Hinduism. Ambedkar had long argued that political and legal reforms alone were insufficient to eradicate caste discrimination; a radical social transformation was necessary, and that could only be achieved by adopting a new religion that upheld human dignity and equality. He saw Buddhism as a means to reclaim self-respect for Dalits, offering them an identity free from the stigmas imposed by Hindu society. By converting to Buddhism, Ambedkar sought to dismantle the religious legitimacy of caste and provide his followers with a new ethical framework based on liberty, equality, and fraternity.

One of the most significant contributions of Ambedkar to Buddhist thought is his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, which presents his reinterpretation of Buddhism in the context of social justice. Unlike traditional Buddhist texts, which often focus on metaphysical aspects, Ambedkar's work emphasizes Buddhism as a practical philosophy aimed at addressing social inequalities. He argued that the Buddha was not merely a religious figure but a revolutionary social reformer who challenged the hierarchical structures of his time. Ambedkar rejected the supernatural and ritualistic elements of traditional Buddhism, instead highlighting its rational and ethical dimensions. He portrayed Buddhism as a religion of action and transformation, emphasizing that true liberation could only be achieved through moral conduct, social engagement, and the rejection of oppressive structures.

In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar presented a unique interpretation of Buddhist teachings that aligned with his vision of an egalitarian society. He rejected the notion of karma and rebirth as a means of justifying social hierarchy, arguing that such beliefs had been misused to enforce caste oppression. Instead, he redefined Buddhist principles in a way that prioritized social responsibility and ethical living. He also introduced the concept of *Navayana* or "New Buddhism," which sought to modernize Buddhist thought by removing elements that he believed were inconsistent with reason and social progress. This reinterpretation allowed Dalits to embrace Buddhism without being confined to traditional monastic practices, making it a practical and inclusive faith that empowered marginalized communities.

Ambedkar's emphasis on rationality in Buddhism was a crucial aspect of his reinterpretation. He viewed Buddhism as a religion based on reason and logic, in contrast to what he saw as the dogmatic and superstitious nature of Hinduism. He argued that the Buddha encouraged free inquiry and critical thinking, allowing individuals to question and understand reality rather than blindly following religious authorities. This rational approach made Buddhism particularly appealing to Dalits and other oppressed groups who had long been subjected to blind faith and social exploitation under Hindu orthodoxy. By promoting a rational and scientific outlook, Ambedkar sought to liberate his followers from the mental shackles of caste-based oppression and enable them to take control of their destinies.

Morality was another key component of Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism. He believed that ethical conduct, rather than ritualistic practices, was the true essence of religion. Unlike Hinduism, which maintained rigid social hierarchies through religious injunctions, Buddhism, according to Ambedkar, offered a moral code based on universal human values. He stressed that Buddhism promoted virtues such as compassion, non-violence, and justice, which were essential for creating an egalitarian society. His 22 vows, which he prescribed during the mass conversion, explicitly rejected Hindu gods, scriptures, and practices, emphasizing ethical living and social responsibility instead.

Social equality was the most defining element of Ambedkar's Buddhism. He saw the caste system as the greatest barrier to democracy and human rights in India, and he believed that Buddhism provided the most

effective means to dismantle it. By rejecting Brahminical supremacy and advocating for a casteless society, Ambedkar redefined Buddhism as a movement for social justice. He emphasized that Buddhism's core principles—compassion, equality, and fraternity—aligned with the ideals of democracy and human rights. His interpretation of Buddhism provided a spiritual foundation for the struggle against caste discrimination, empowering Dalits to demand dignity and self-respect.

Ambedkar's vision of Buddhism continues to influence contemporary social movements in India and beyond. The Ambedkarite Buddhist movement remains a vital force in the fight against caste oppression, inspiring Dalits to seek empowerment through education, activism, and community organization. His reinterpretation of Buddhism has also attracted global attention, with scholars and activists recognizing its relevance in addressing social injustices worldwide.

In conclusion, Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism was a radical departure from both traditional Buddhism and Hinduism. By emphasizing rationality, morality, and social equality, he transformed Buddhism into a movement for liberation and justice. His legacy continues to shape the lives of millions of Dalits who find in Buddhism a path to dignity, self-respect, and freedom from caste oppression. Ambedkar's Buddhism is not merely a spiritual doctrine but a call to action—a vision for a just and equal society rooted in the principles of liberty, fraternity, and human dignity.

### **Buddhism as a Response to the Caste System**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism and his embrace of Buddhism were deeply rooted in his critique of the caste system and the social inequalities perpetuated by Hindu religious traditions. He argued that Hinduism was fundamentally based on a hierarchical structure that legitimized and institutionalized caste oppression. The caste system, as sanctioned by Hindu scriptures such as the *Manusmriti*, divided society into rigid social groups, with Brahmins at the top and Dalits at the very bottom. Ambedkar saw this system as inherently unjust, as it denied basic human rights to lower-caste individuals and reinforced social exclusion. He contended that Hinduism provided religious justification for discrimination, making it impossible for Dalits to achieve dignity and self-respect within its framework. His lifelong struggle was not just against caste discrimination but also against the very ideology that upheld and maintained these divisions.

Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism was based on its textual and institutional foundations. He argued that Hindu scriptures promoted inequality and subjugation, making caste an inescapable reality for those born into lower social groups. The *Manusmriti*, in particular, was a major target of his criticism, as it explicitly prescribed the inferior status of Shudras and untouchables while granting privileges to the Brahmin class. Ambedkar believed that any attempt to reform Hinduism from within was futile, as its core philosophy was built on the idea of caste-based stratification. This led him to conclude that the only way to achieve true social justice was to abandon Hinduism altogether and adopt a religion that upheld equality, rationality, and moral progress.

Buddhism, in contrast to Hinduism, provided a radical alternative that rejected caste-based hierarchies. Gautama Buddha's teachings emphasized ethical living, personal morality, and social harmony without distinctions based on birth or social status. Unlike Hinduism, which maintained a hereditary priestly class, Buddhism promoted the idea that all individuals, regardless of their origins, could attain enlightenment through their own efforts. Ambedkar saw this as a direct challenge to the Brahminical order, which relied on exclusivity and inherited privilege. He pointed out that Buddha openly opposed the idea that social status should determine a person's spiritual or moral worth. In Buddhist philosophy, the concept of *Dhamma* (righteousness) was universal and accessible to all, irrespective of caste or social background.

Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism was therefore not just a spiritual choice but a political act aimed at dismantling caste oppression. His reinterpretation of Buddhist teachings placed strong emphasis on their social implications. He believed that Buddhism's moral framework could serve as a foundation for building an egalitarian society. By promoting compassion, justice, and fraternity, Buddhism could counteract the divisive and discriminatory tendencies of Hinduism. Unlike Hindu religious practices that reinforced caste divisions, Buddhist philosophy encouraged collective well-being and rejected rituals that perpetuated inequality.

A crucial aspect of Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism was his assertion that it was fundamentally opposed to the caste system. Traditional Hinduism maintained a hierarchical social order based on *varna* (class) and *jati* (caste), whereas Buddhism rejected such classifications. Buddha himself challenged Brahminical authority by welcoming individuals from all castes into his monastic order (Sangha), allowing even those deemed "untouchable" by Hindu society to participate equally. This inclusive approach stood in direct opposition to the rigid exclusivity of Hinduism. Ambedkar highlighted this aspect of Buddhism as a model for creating a society based on equality rather than inherited privilege.

When comparing Buddhist egalitarianism with the Hindu social order, Ambedkar emphasized that Buddhism provided a moral and philosophical basis for social justice. In Hinduism, social status was dictated by birth, and the caste hierarchy was maintained through religious doctrine and social customs. People born into lower castes were denied access to education, economic opportunities, and even basic human dignity. The system was designed to maintain the dominance of the upper castes by restricting social mobility. In contrast, Buddhism

promoted a merit-based approach where individual actions, rather than birth, determined one's spiritual progress. The Buddha's rejection of caste distinctions was not only revolutionary in ancient India but also deeply relevant to modern struggles for equality.

Ambedkar saw Buddhism as a progressive force that could counteract the injustices of caste-based discrimination. By converting to Buddhism, Dalits could reject the social stigma imposed upon them by Hinduism and reclaim their dignity. His concept of *Navayana* or "New Buddhism" sought to modernize and adapt Buddhist teachings to address contemporary social issues. Unlike traditional Buddhist sects that focused primarily on spiritual enlightenment, Ambedkar's Buddhism emphasized social activism and collective responsibility. He believed that by adopting Buddhist principles, marginalized communities could empower themselves and challenge systemic oppression.

The legacy of Ambedkar's Buddhist movement continues to shape Dalit activism in India today. His vision of Buddhism as a tool for social justice has inspired numerous Dalit organizations and movements advocating for equal rights, education, and political representation. The conversion of millions of Dalits to Buddhism in the decades following Ambedkar's mass conversion in 1956 reflects the ongoing relevance of his ideas. For many, Buddhism remains not just a religion but a symbol of resistance against caste discrimination and a path toward social transformation.

In conclusion, Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism and his advocacy for Buddhism were deeply intertwined with his fight against caste-based oppression. He saw Hinduism as a system designed to sustain inequality and Buddhism as the only viable alternative that upheld the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. By promoting Buddhism as a response to caste discrimination, Ambedkar redefined it as a movement for social justice. His vision continues to inspire marginalized communities in their quest for dignity and equality, demonstrating the enduring power of Buddha Dhamma as a force for change in Indian society.

### **Impact of Ambedkarite Buddhism on Social Justice Movements**

The impact of Ambedkarite Buddhism on social justice movements has been profound, particularly in its role in empowering marginalized communities and challenging caste-based discrimination in India. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism, often referred to as *Navayana* or "New Buddhism," was not just a spiritual movement but a revolutionary act aimed at dismantling the oppressive caste system. Unlike traditional Buddhism, which focused primarily on individual enlightenment, *Navayana* Buddhism emphasized social activism, collective liberation, and the pursuit of justice. This movement provided Dalits and other oppressed groups with an ideological and ethical foundation for resisting discrimination and asserting their dignity. Since Ambedkar's historic mass conversion to Buddhism in 1956, Ambedkarite Buddhism has played a central role in the fight for social justice and equality.

The rise of the *Navayana* movement marked a major shift in the religious and social landscape of India. Ambedkar rejected many traditional Buddhist beliefs, such as karma and rebirth, arguing that they had been used to justify social hierarchies. Instead, he reinterpreted Buddhism as a rational and ethical system centered on human dignity and social justice. His 22 vows, which he administered to his followers during the mass conversion, explicitly rejected Hindu gods, rituals, and caste-based distinctions. These vows emphasized moral conduct, rational thinking, and the rejection of superstition, making Buddhism a tool for social and political transformation.

*Navayana* Buddhism became a powerful alternative to Hinduism for Dalits, offering them a path to self-respect and liberation from the stigma of untouchability. This movement led to the establishment of numerous Buddhist organizations, educational institutions, and social welfare programs aimed at uplifting Dalits. Over the years, *Navayana* Buddhism has grown into a significant force, inspiring millions to embrace a casteless identity and fight against social inequalities. The movement continues to evolve, incorporating contemporary issues such as gender justice, economic empowerment, and political representation into its framework.

One of the most significant impacts of Ambedkarite Buddhism has been its influence on Dalit empowerment and anti-caste movements. By rejecting Hinduism and embracing Buddhism, Dalits were able to challenge the very foundation of caste oppression. The conversion to Buddhism was not just a religious shift but a political statement against centuries of discrimination. Ambedkarite Buddhism provided Dalits with a sense of pride and solidarity, helping them organize and mobilize for their rights.

The Dalit Buddhist movement has been instrumental in advocating for policies such as reservations in education and employment, land reforms, and legal protections against caste-based violence. Organizations inspired by Ambedkarite Buddhism, such as the Dalit Panthers, have played a crucial role in highlighting issues of caste discrimination and demanding social justice. These movements have also influenced mainstream politics, leading to the rise of Dalit-led political parties and the increased representation of marginalized communities in government.

Ambedkarite Buddhism has also contributed to the spread of education among Dalits. Ambedkar believed that education was the most powerful tool for empowerment, and Buddhist principles of knowledge and wisdom reinforced this idea. Many Dalit activists and intellectuals have used Buddhist teachings to promote literacy, critical thinking, and self-awareness within their communities. Educational initiatives inspired by Ambedkarite

Buddhism have helped break the cycle of oppression by providing Dalits with the skills and confidence to participate in public life.

Beyond India, Ambedkarite Buddhism has influenced social justice movements worldwide. It has inspired marginalized communities in other parts of South Asia, including Nepal and Sri Lanka, where caste-based discrimination persists. International human rights organizations have also recognized Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism as a model for using religion as a force for social justice. The principles of Navayana Buddhism, such as equality, compassion, and social responsibility, resonate with movements advocating for racial justice, indigenous rights, and economic equality across the globe.

Buddhist teachings continue to play a crucial role in contemporary struggles for equality. The principles of *Dhamma* (righteousness), *Sila* (morality), and *Prajna* (wisdom) align with modern human rights discourses, making Buddhism a valuable framework for addressing social injustices. Many Dalit activists draw upon Buddhist philosophy to advocate for issues such as gender equality, environmental justice, and workers' rights. The emphasis on non-violence and compassion also makes Buddhism a powerful tool for resisting oppression through peaceful means.

In recent years, the revival of Ambedkarite Buddhism has gained momentum through cultural expressions such as literature, music, and art. Dalit poets, writers, and filmmakers have used Buddhist themes to narrate their struggles and aspirations. This cultural renaissance has further strengthened the movement by spreading awareness about Ambedkar's vision and the transformative power of Buddhism. Public events such as *Dhamma Diksha* (mass conversions) continue to be held across India, reaffirming the commitment of Dalits to Ambedkar's teachings and the path of Buddhism.

Despite its successes, the Ambedkarite Buddhist movement faces challenges. Resistance from upper-caste groups, political opposition, and economic hardships continue to hinder the full realization of Ambedkar's vision. However, the resilience of the movement and its ability to adapt to changing social conditions ensure its continued relevance. The ongoing struggles against caste discrimination, violence, and exclusion highlight the need for Ambedkarite Buddhism as a guiding force for justice and equality.

In conclusion, Ambedkarite Buddhism has had a lasting impact on social justice movements, particularly in empowering Dalits and challenging caste-based oppression. The rise of Navayana Buddhism provided a new religious and ideological identity for Dalits, allowing them to break free from the chains of untouchability. The movement has played a crucial role in advocating for education, political representation, and human rights. By integrating Buddhist teachings into contemporary struggles, Ambedkarite Buddhism continues to be a powerful force for equality and social transformation. Its legacy remains a beacon of hope for millions striving for dignity, justice, and a caste-free society.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Buddha Dhamma in Ambedkarite Thought**

Buddha Dhamma remains highly relevant in contemporary socio-political struggles, particularly within the framework of Ambedkarite thought. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism was not merely a religious transformation but a strategic move to dismantle caste-based oppression and establish an egalitarian society. In present-day India, Ambedkarite Buddhism continues to provide a moral and ideological foundation for marginalized communities, offering them a means to resist discrimination and assert their dignity. Its principles, such as non-violence, equality, and rationalism, align with modern human rights discourses and are increasingly being applied to address pressing socio-political issues.

One of the key aspects of Ambedkarite Buddhism's contemporary relevance is its application to modern socio-political issues. The core tenets of Buddhism—*Dhamma* (righteousness), *Sila* (morality), and *Prajna* (wisdom)—serve as guiding principles for social movements advocating justice and equality. The emphasis on rationality and ethical governance resonates with democratic ideals, making Buddhism a strong philosophical basis for challenging systemic inequalities. For instance, Ambedkarite Buddhists actively engage in struggles against caste discrimination, gender inequality, and economic exploitation. They advocate for policies such as affirmative action, land redistribution, and equal educational opportunities, aligning Buddhist values with constitutional rights and social justice initiatives.

Buddhism's principle of non-violence (*Ahimsa*) is particularly relevant in contemporary activism. Many Dalit-led movements have adopted peaceful methods to resist caste-based atrocities and systemic marginalization. Inspired by Ambedkar's philosophy, activists use legal frameworks, mass mobilization, and educational initiatives to challenge casteist violence and discrimination. Movements such as the Bhim Army, which fights for Dalit rights, draw inspiration from Ambedkarite Buddhism to advocate for self-respect and empowerment. Similarly, Buddhist ethics inform protests against social injustices, including labor rights violations, environmental degradation, and political corruption.

Despite its growing influence, Ambedkarite Buddhism faces significant challenges in present-day India. One of the major obstacles is the persistent dominance of caste-based structures within society. Although caste discrimination is constitutionally prohibited, it continues to manifest in various forms, including social exclusion, economic disparity, and political marginalization. Many Dalits who embrace Buddhism still encounter caste-based

prejudices in daily life, limiting their social mobility and access to opportunities. Additionally, the political landscape in India has seen a resurgence of Hindu nationalist ideologies, which often seek to undermine Ambedkarite movements and reinforce upper-caste dominance. The promotion of Hindu cultural nationalism poses a direct challenge to the spread of Buddhism as an alternative social philosophy.

Another challenge is the internal fragmentation within the Ambedkarite Buddhist movement. While the movement has been instrumental in mobilizing Dalits, it has struggled to maintain a unified front. Differences in interpretation, organizational leadership, and strategic approaches have sometimes weakened its collective impact. Some factions emphasize religious practices, while others focus on political activism, leading to ideological differences within the movement. This fragmentation has made it difficult to achieve large-scale social transformation, despite widespread support for Ambedkar's vision.

Additionally, economic hardships and lack of institutional support hinder the growth of Ambedkarite Buddhism. Many converts come from historically oppressed backgrounds, facing significant financial and educational barriers. Unlike Hindu religious institutions, which receive substantial state and private funding, Buddhist organizations often lack the resources needed to establish schools, temples, and social programs. As a result, many Dalits who convert to Buddhism struggle to access the social and economic benefits associated with religious institutions. The absence of widespread Buddhist infrastructure also makes it difficult for followers to fully integrate Buddhist teachings into their daily lives.

Despite these challenges, Ambedkarite Buddhism holds significant prospects for the future. Its emphasis on education and self-empowerment has led to the emergence of a new generation of Dalit intellectuals, activists, and leaders who are using Buddhist principles to push for social change. Digital media and global networking have further strengthened the movement, allowing for the exchange of ideas and solidarity among marginalized communities worldwide. Platforms such as social media, podcasts, and online publications have played a crucial role in spreading Ambedkar's message and raising awareness about the transformative potential of Buddhism.

Beyond India, Ambedkar's Buddhist revivalism has had a global influence, inspiring social justice movements in different parts of the world. In countries such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Japan, Buddhist activists have drawn upon Ambedkar's teachings to challenge discrimination and promote equality. His reinterpretation of Buddhism as a tool for social justice has also resonated with human rights movements advocating for racial and indigenous rights. International organizations, including Buddhist institutions in the West, have recognized Ambedkar's contributions to modern Buddhism, integrating his ideas into discussions on religious ethics and social reform.

In the United States and Europe, scholars and activists have increasingly engaged with Ambedkar's vision of Buddhism, examining its relevance to issues such as systemic racism, economic inequality, and refugee rights. Some progressive Buddhist communities in the West have incorporated Ambedkarite perspectives into their teachings, emphasizing social responsibility alongside personal spiritual practice. This global recognition not only validates Ambedkar's contributions but also strengthens the movement's ability to address contemporary injustices on an international scale.

In conclusion, the contemporary relevance of Buddha Dhamma in Ambedkarite thought is evident in its application to modern socio-political struggles, its challenges in present-day India, and its growing global influence. By aligning Buddhist principles with social justice movements, Ambedkarite Buddhism continues to inspire marginalized communities to resist oppression and advocate for equality. While challenges such as caste-based discrimination, political opposition, and economic hardship persist, the movement's resilience and adaptability ensure its continued significance. Through education, activism, and global solidarity, Ambedkarite Buddhism remains a powerful force for transformative social change, carrying forward Ambedkar's legacy of justice, dignity, and liberation.

## **II. Conclusion**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's engagement with Buddhism was not merely a religious shift but a revolutionary movement aimed at dismantling the caste system and establishing social equality. His reinterpretation of Buddhism, known as Navayana or Ambedkarite Buddhism, rejected traditional notions of karma and rebirth while emphasizing rationality, morality, and social justice. Through this vision, he provided a philosophical and ethical foundation for Dalits and other marginalized communities to assert their dignity and resist oppression. Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism, his rejection of caste-based hierarchies, and his advocacy for an egalitarian society continue to shape social justice movements in India and beyond.

The legacy of Ambedkar's Buddhist vision is visible in the ongoing struggles for Dalit rights, affirmative action policies, and educational empowerment. His mass conversion to Buddhism in 1956 sparked a movement that continues to inspire millions seeking liberation from caste-based discrimination. The rise of Ambedkarite organizations, legal reforms such as reservations for Scheduled Castes, and the increasing visibility of Dalit voices in politics and academia all testify to the enduring impact of his ideas. Furthermore, Ambedkarite Buddhism has

gained international recognition, influencing social justice movements advocating for racial and economic equality.

Looking forward, Ambedkar's Buddhist vision provides a powerful blueprint for caste abolition and social justice. The continued relevance of his ideas in combating discrimination, promoting education, and ensuring equal rights demonstrates the need for broader acceptance of Buddhist principles in governance and social policies. While challenges persist, the resilience of Ambedkarite movements offers hope for a future where caste-based oppression is dismantled, and true equality is achieved. His teachings remain a guiding light for those striving for justice, dignity, and a more inclusive society.

## References

- [1]. Aloysius, G. *Nationalism Without a Nation in India*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- [2]. Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Verso Books, 2014.
- [3]. ---. *Buddha and His Dhamma*. Government of Maharashtra, 1957.
- [4]. ---. *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*. P.S. King & Son, 1923.
- [5]. ---. *Thoughts on Linguistic States*. Government of Maharashtra, 1955.
- [6]. Barnes, Nancy J. "Buddhism." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., Macmillan Reference, 2005, pp. 1121-1134.
- [7]. Beltz, Johannes. *Mahar, Buddhist, and Dalit: Religious Conversion and Socio-Political Emancipation*. Manohar Publishers, 2005.
- [8]. Beteille, Andre. *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*. University of California Press, 1971.
- [9]. Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Stree, 2003.
- [10]. Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, 1993.
- [11]. Contursi, Janet A. "Political Theology: Text and Practice in a Dalit Panther Community." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1993, pp. 320-339.
- [12]. Das, Bhagwan. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar Vol. 1-4*. Navayana, 2010.
- [13]. Dhananjay Keer. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, 2005.
- [14]. Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton University Press, 2001.
- [15]. Dube, Saurabh. *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950*. SUNY Press, 1998.
- [16]. Duncan, Marian. *Buddhism and Dalits: Social Philosophy and Social Transformation*. Rawat Publications, 2012.
- [17]. Freeman, James. "Untouchable Mobility: The Social and Spatial Mobility of a Dalit Caste in North India." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1996, pp. 122-139.
- [18]. Geetha, V., and S. V. Rajadurai. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Samya, 1998.
- [19]. Gopal Guru, ed. *Humiliation: Claims and Context*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- [20]. Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System*. Columbia University Press, 2005.
- [21]. ---. *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*. Permanent Black, 2003.
- [22]. Jayaprakash, Narayan. *Social Justice and Political Change in India*. Manohar, 1999.
- [23]. Kamble, N.D. *Rise of Buddhism in India: From Buddha to Ambedkar*. Criterion Publications, 1990.
- [24]. Kumar, Ravinder. *The Making of a Nation: Essays in Indian History and Politics*. Manohar, 2002.
- [25]. Lochtefeld, James G. *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Rosen Publishing, 2001.
- [26]. Mendelsohn, Oliver, and Marika Vicziany. *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty, and the State in Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- [27]. Moon, Vasant. *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- [28]. Narayan, Badri. *The Making of the Dalit Public in North India: Uttar Pradesh, 1950-Present*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- [29]. Omvedt, Gail. *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*. Sage Publications, 2003.
- [30]. ---. *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*. Orient Longman, 1995.
- [31]. ---. *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*. Orient BlackSwan, 2011.
- [32]. Pai, Sudha. *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*. Sage Publications, 2002.
- [33]. Queen, Christopher S. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Wisdom Publications, 2000.
- [34]. Rawat, Ramnarayan S. *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India*. Indiana University Press, 2011.
- [35]. Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*. Penguin Books, 2005.
- [36]. Sharma, Arvind. *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- [37]. Teltumbde, Anand. *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid*. Zed Books, 2010.
- [38]. Thorat, Sukhadeo, and Katherine S. Newman, eds. *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination and Social Exclusion in Modern India*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- [39]. Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana, 2013.