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Buddhism And Its Impacts on Indian Society: The Untouchables Under the Shadow of Buddhism

Banjob Bannaruji

Abstract

Over 2600 years, the caste system has lasted in Indian society. In the course of time, it has been more complicated and rigid. The complexity and rigidity has now been maintained under the Hindu norm.

Buddhism, even poses against the caste system, has never rooted out the physical system. The Buddha accepted that the caste system was an obstacle to social justices, but not to enlightenment in terms of right view. So he launched a campaign to convert people to wisdom based on morality. He won much success and was so warmly welcomed by all classes and castes that he could establish the Sangha (the Order). It was, not only the center of people from walks of life, but also the main helper to spread his teachings around India of the time. Consequently, Buddhism became a new popular choice and finally the Buddha, the founder, the rising star, too.

In the past, many times under the changing circumstances of Indian society and polity, Buddhism encountered the unexpected role losses and sometimes seemed to be forgotten. However, by voices of the Untouchables, Buddhism has been revived for their refuge. In their believes, under the shadow of Buddhism, they are human beings and receive human treatment. that is all they need. So, it is not strange, millions of the Untouchables pleasantly converted to Buddhism and more millions will follow them.

In Buddhist idea, the Law of Kamma taught by the Buddha is the Law of Justice. People get what they did, either good or bad. None can avoid his deeds as long as he remains in the circle of birth and death. Only Kamma truly decides a human value, but the caste system cannot.
Buddhism And Its Impacts on Indian Society: The Untouchables Under the Shadow of Buddhism

Nowadays, more information of the Untouchables in India is widely known to the outside world. It attracts outsiders to seek more informations concerning its status. Recently, some Untouchable activists moved to open a talk with the government of Indai in terms of their rights and failed. This is very interesting. Outsiders, especially Thai Buddhists like us, keep eyes on their movement and want to know how the India government reacts to them.

History of The Untouchable Caste

Being the aborigines, The Untouchables are the lowest group of people in Indian society. It has resulted from dividing people into four varnas or groups since an earlier Aryan invasion. According to the Indian history, in 1500 A.D., Aryans invaded northern India and brought the aborigines under control. They were quite different from each other. Aryans were of tall appearance and fair skin and had civilization in advance. They had, as a social unit, a family headed by the father. On invading, they occupied Panjab first and had no contact with the aborigines. They exercised power over them without accepting intermarriage. Very long after that, when religious practice had been necessary, professional priests were needed. Then the custom of employing professional priests appeared and the Brahmanical system was evolved. Brahmansas played an important part in literacy and learning of the rest of the community, while the rest ran their separate duties.

By doing so, the entire community of Aryans, with the aborigines under control, was divided into four varnas or groups: Brahmansas, Ksatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The first three groups were Aryans while the last was the aborigines. Aryans of each group had specific duties to the community: Brahmansas worked as teachers, Ksatriyas as warriors,
Vaishyas as traders. But the aborigines were assigned to serve Aryans and were at first called “Dasyas” (slaves) in the community. Later on, when the caste system took place, they were grouped as Shudras.

Aryans, as is said above, had no contact with the aborigines at first. When they proceeded further from Panjab, they came into closer contact with them, now called Dasyas. Due to their closer contact, K. Singh said: “As Aryans were invaders, therefore, there was scarcity of womenfolk among them. Thus they were compelled to take wives from among Dasyas.” Aryans and Dasyas were quite different from each other by nature: appearance, skin, and so on. The difference caused the so-called division. So Aryans, who took wives from Dasyas, were kept separate from Aryan society. More seriously, Aryans refused to take food cooked or offered by Dasyas and also refused to join them in religious rites and ceremonies. Following that, this attitude formed such a more rigid system that Dasyas and descendants of degraded marriages were at last entirely excluded from Aryan society and are now known as the Untouchables.

The Untouchables include, not only Shudras, but also Candalas, Mahars, and Dalits. According to the Indian tradition, the last three groups come of the degraded marriages. “Candala” is a general name for the lowest and most despised of the mixed castes originating from Shudra father and Brahmana mother. “Mahar” is the fourth of the seven worlds which rises one above the other from the earth being svar (heaven) and janas (this world). As for “dalit”, it literally means a thing that is broken, torn, split. However, the three have been used for the Untouchables.

I, as a Buddhist academic, never found Mahar and Dalit in the Buddhist scriptures, but found only Candala, which is used for those who were born of a Shudra father and a mother of any upper castes. In a series of

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3 ibid. p. 429.
4 ibid, p. 247.
Jataka stories (the Buddha’s previous birth stories), the Cittasambhuta Jataka mentions the matter of the two driven-away Candala youths, saying: “Outside Ujjeni, the capital of Avanti, there was a Candala village, where dwelt two Candala youths: Citta and Sambhuta. They both completed an Candalavansasodhana art (the purifying of the Candala lineage art). One day, they, with a desire to show a ability, showed separately the art near the city gates: the former showed at the northern gate and the latter at the eastern gate. During their shows, two girls of the Brahmana and Vaishya castes came and saw them. Because the two took hold of an auspice of what they saw in daily life, they were upset and washed eyes with perfume before hurrying home. At that time, the poor in need of donations from the two girls beat and drove them away with anger that they caused a main loss among them. The two beaten youths, being aware of the problem caused by their own caste (jata-birth), disguised themselves as Brahmanas and went to Taxila, the capital of Gandhara, to study the arts belonging to the upper castes.”

The above mentioned story suggests the untouchability by the upper castes of Candalas has been traceable to the remote past.

In my opinion, the story of Candala in the Jataka resembles that of Mahars and Dalits in India of today. They are now Hindus, being quite different from other upper caste Hindus. Mahars have to live a segregated life from and are not allowed to come into close touch with the upper castes. Mostly, they live in their own communities on the outskirts of the villages. As for Dalits, they are similar to Mahars. They are treated like animals. They are not allowed to drink water from the same well as the upper castes, nor are they allowed to enter all Hindu temples. Their homes are kept away from the main cluster of houses in a

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6 P.M. Pidhura Vainusarana, Ph.D. Thesis: The Conversion To Buddhism And Its Impact on Socio-Economic Life of The Neo-Buddhism in Marathwada, Marathwada University, India, 1988, p. 238.
village. They have no rights to appeal for any justice, because all is the Hindu norm. Nobody can oppose or violate it. Only obedience is required.\(^7\)

From the sources, we know a lasting existence of the untouchability in Indian society, the predecessors of which were Shudras, whose descendants are the members of the Untouchables at the present. **The Buddhist Position Towards the Untouchables**

Having known the history of the Untouchables and their being treated by Indian society, let us study further about the position of Buddhism on this point.

Buddhism appeared in the midst of society designated by the caste system. The Buddha, the founder, belonged to the Ksatriya caste, one of the upper castes. He accepted a physical division of the caste system in line with duty and occupation, but did not allow the caste system to decide a human value.

He had no intention to violently uproot the caste system. On the contrary, he endeavoured to convert people to reasonable thoughts and acceptance of the difference, freedom, equality, and fraternity of human beings.

In his teachings, individuals’ differences of body, mind, and wisdom are designated by Karma – bodily and verbal action originating from mind. The Buddha ascertained in a sermon: “**Beings (humans and non-humans) have Karma as their personal property, as birth-giver, as relative, as the refuge, whatever they did, either good or bad, falls upon them. Karma distinguishes beings in either fine or bad way**”.\(^8\)

Karma suggests, not only differences, but also freedom and equality. Individuals have freedom of thinking as well as bodily and verbal action under morality (sila). They also have equality of getting karma’s fruit.

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The caste system cannot change it. The Buddha said in another sermon: "Any caste who does evil receive its hot reward and goes to hell after death with no exception, and any caste who goes forth and maintains morality receives respect with no exception".9

This Karma clearly reflects the position of Buddhism towards the caste system in Indian society. Moreover, individuals have freedom and equality to attain enlightenment, in terms of five innate faculties: Faith (Sadda), Effort (Viriya), Mindfulness (Sati), Concentration (Samadhi), and Pañña (wisdom)10. Anyone who is completed with the five faculties is able to attain enlightenment. The caste system cannot block it.

To actualize his ideal, the Buddha established the Sangha or the Order. The Sangha served as the center of his disciples who came from different castes. They, after entering the Sangha (becoming monks), had no caste, and were similarly called "Samana Sakyaputtiyas"11 (monks who are the sons of the Buddha with Sakyan lineage). Another word for them was Sabrahmacaris. It means monks who join a religious life under the same teacher, the Buddha. They lived together in fraternity.

Returning to the Untouchables, during the Buddha’s life-time, among Buddhists were the Untouchables. For example, two brothers, Ven. Mahapanthaka and Ven. Culapanthaka were Candalas because of their Shudra father and Vashya mother. Ven. Upali was one of the Untouchables, who served Sakyan princes as their barber. Also, some beggars attained enlightenment after listening to the sermons.

However, after the followers of the Buddha had been increasing in number, he regrouped those in four assemblies ("Parisa" in Pali and "Parishad" in Sanskrit): the assembly of male monks, the assembly of female monks, the assembly of male householders, and the assembly of female householders. Of those, the first twos were entrusted with a main task of directly maintaining the Buddhist teachings while the last twos, giving supports.

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10 D. 3.50.85 (Pali Siamese Version).
In conclusion, there is no caste system in Buddhism. The Buddha opened a door to all castes. Just as the ocean is the melting place of rivers, just so the Sangha is the melting place of all the castes. This position had lasted for 1800 years in Indian society after the Buddha’s passing away.

**The Revival of Buddhism**

The darkest age of Buddhism in Indian history from 1800 B.E. to 2400 B.E. signified the Buddhists’ weakness and Hindus’ strength. Keneth W. Morgan related this phenomenon in his book, *The Path of The Buddha,* :”...the people today cannot recognize the Buddhist relics which are discovered there. Most of the Buddhist images which were not destroyed came to be worshiped as Hindu deities. The Buddha image of Lumbini temple, the very site of his birth, became the deity Rumindai; the holy images at Buddhagaya were converted in the five Pandava brothers; at Nalanda and Kusinara, the huge black stone images of the Gupta period became known as Teliya Baba (the oil-accepting deity) and Dheliya Baba (the stone-accepting deity).”

Morgan’s writing showed that the Buddhist belief had been distorted by Hindu heretics gradually absorbing and bringing Buddhism under the Hindu shell. In Hinduism, only image worship was practiced. The human relics worship did not exist. Thus, the Hindus regarded Buddhist images as Hindu deities though the Buddhist relics were ignored.

They regarded the Buddha as an avatar or an incarnation of their God Vishnu. Due to this, Morgan gave a reason : “...Buddha hovered so strongly in the minds of the people that they had to accept him as an incarnation of their god Vishnu and even today the Hindu priest in his daily worship the high personality of the recites,’ In this age of the incarnation of the Buddha (Buddhavatara) I offer this oblation’...”

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13 ibid.
Not only excellent Buddhist forms, like meditation and robes, were adopted in Hinduism but also main Buddhist teachings, such as Paticcasamuppada and so on.

Clouds had covered Buddhism for more than 600 years (1800 - 2400 B.E.) after the Buddha’s passing away. Around the middle of the twenty-fourth centuries (2400 B.E.), the shadow of revival appeared. Morgan illustrated: "The first glimpse of the rays of a Buddhist revival in India dawned with the enthusiastic efforts of Western archeologists and historians who contributed much to bringing to light this lost culture..."\(^{14}\)

He mentioned Babu Amar Singh, one of the heroes of the Indian War of Independence of 1857, that he started the revival of the Sangha tradition in India by going to Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka) for training as a monk and to Burma for instruction in the methods of meditation and then returning to Kusinara to establish a monastery at the death place of the Buddha. After it was established, it served as the center of the modern Buddhist movement in India, welcoming a handful of Indian monks, who were renowned scholars of Pali, sanskrit, Hindi, and English and who devoted their lives to the revival of Buddhism in India, their homeland. Their devotions resulted in a great success: the Indian government revived the Nalanda University and also gave supports to establish the Buddhist centers, the Buddhists of Ceylon sent back to Nalanda the copies of the Pali Tripitaka to be restored to the script and language of India. Scholars from all Buddhist countries came once more to Nalanda to study. They successfully revived a role of Nalanda as the unique meeting place of all Buddhist schools, with Mahayana and Theravada schools at the heads.

The revival continued. The Ceylonese Buddhist mission to India established the Maha Bodhi Society, it worked so well that it has now many organizations in Calcutta, Sarnath, and Buddhagaya and other important places in India. The main tasks of these are protecting pilgrimage places in India, assisting pilgrims and publishing books for

\(^{14}\) ibid. p. 51.
the benefit of Indian readers. After that, Buddhists of Ceylon, China, Burma, Tibet had built rest houses for pilgrims at various Buddhist places for the benefit of their people who visit the places.

**The Renewal of Untouchables’ Shadow**

During the revival of Buddhism, a caste conflict broke out in Indian society. England sparked an educational enthusiasm in the minds of the Untouchables. Among those, Bimrao Ramji Ambedkar was pushed by English hands to go for continuing his higher education in England. After finishing the study, he returned home and worked as a legislator. He was entrusted to draw the Constitution of India and completed it well. He was a contemporary of Gandhi. He, as an Untouchable, led The Untouchables to fight against the caste system. They won success. The government accepted them as Harijans (Children of God) instead of as the Untouchables and allowed their rights to be recorded in the Constitution, saying: "The Constitution of India has provided certain safeguards to all Harijan communities and to various tribes. Articles 115, 16, 17, 33 and 46 guarantees that the state will not discriminate between persons, on account of their religion, caste and place of birth. At the same time no one will be refused on the basis of his caste to enter in such public places as bathing ghats, temples, shops, wells, ponds, roads, places of public entertainment etc. No discrimination will be practiced of untouchability are clearly prohibited. The Constitution of India also demands that the state shall endeavour to raise the social status of backward classes and shall look after their economical social well being."  

To actualize this, the Central Government and the State Governments have given to Harijan community certain privileges: fixing and reserving a number of seats in State legislatures and Parliament, fixing and reserving a percentage of all vacancies occurring in Government Services, giving special scholarships and other kinds of financial assistance as well as making the First and the Second Five-Year plans for allotting a separate sum for Harijan Welfare programs. Moreover,

\[15\] K. Singh, Indian Social System, p. 68.
the Central Government, with an eager mind to enforce Article of the Constitution of India, passed an Act “The Untouchability Offences Act, 1955”. It was in effect since June 1, 1955, and its provision said: “...every person shall be free to perform all kinds of religious and social functions and do worship of its liking. He or she shall be free to use all public places like ponds, wells, rivers and roads. Any act committed against this provision was made punishable and it was proclaimed that all citizens of India shall be at liberty to purchase properties in any area he likes. This act also provides that a shopkeeper who refuse to serve a person on account of untouchability, can be prosecuted and will be punished by an imprisonment up to six months or will be fined a sum up to five hundred rupees.”\(^\text{16}\)

Following that, the Central Government set up for the Untouchables other Harijan Welfare activities: Educational Facilities, Technical and Vocational Training, Village Industries and Cooperatives, and Housing Schemes.

From the above mentioned matters, in a common sense of general people, as the law serves the Untouchables, all activities for them run well. Actually, it is not so. Phra Maha Phidhura Vainusarana, a Thai doctorate student of Marathwadi University, noticed in his theisis: “In all societies law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. But the majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the postulates and sanctions of morality”.\(^\text{17}\) In his opinion, no law completely serves justice. Only religion in the sense of morality must remain the governing principle in every society. On this point, Buddhism is generally accepted as a religion of such morality.

It was quite a good luck to the Untouchables. At that time, Buddhism appeared in its motherland once again after many hundred years of disappearance. **Dr. B.R.Ambedkar**, the prominent leader of the Untouchables, gave up Hinduism and embraced Buddhism with 500,000

\(^{16}\) ibid. p. 69.

\(^{17}\) P.M. Pidhura Vainusarana, p. 114.
members of the Untouchables. He, with them, performed the historical conversion ceremony at Dikshabhumi in Nagpur District, Maharastra State, India, on October 14, 1956. Concerning with the conversion, he reasoned: "...so far as I know the only religion which satisfies all the tests like equality, fraternity, liberty, justice and loving kindness in Buddhism."\(^\text{18}\) To those, he expressed his bitterness: "If you continue to remain within the fold of Hinduism, you cannot attain a status higher than that of a slave..."\(^\text{19}\) And at last he concluded with confidence: "To change this degraded and disgraceful existence into a golden life, conversion is absolutely necessary. You will certainly get assistance and co-operation to improve your condition from friends and well wishers."\(^\text{20}\)

Since then, Dr. Ambedkar and his followers only from the Untouchables were called "Neo-Buddhists", which means that they had just converted from Hinduism to Buddhism. They all were Buddhist by conversion, but their children, born after that, were by birth. So, such a conversion by Dr. B.Ra.Ambedkar amounts to creating a new caste, the Buddhist caste, for the Untouchables in Indian society.

Members of the Buddhist caste rapidly increased in number and covered the lands of Aurangabad District, Jalna District, Parbhani District, Nanded District, Osmanabad District, Beed District, and Latur District, in Maharastra State. Until now, they had come from all walks of life: student, doctor, teacher, engineer, clerk, politician, labourer, social worker officer, and businessman.

**Dr. Ambedkar's Background – Before and After The Conversion**

In fact, before becoming a Neo-Buddhist, Dr. R.B. Ambedkar had spent years studying Buddhism and exchanging idea with western scholars. During his graduate school years in New York City, 1913-1916 A.D., he

\(^{18}\) D.C. Ahir, **Dr. Ambedkar as Buddhism**, (Bombay: Siddhartha Publication, 1982), p. 27.

\(^{19}\) Bhagawan Das, **Thus Spoke Ambedkar, Vol. 4.** (Bangalore: Ambedkar Sahithya Prakasana, 1980), pp. 65-72.

\(^{20}\) ibid. p. 11.
got in touch with John Dewey, who was greatly regarded as a philosopher, social thinker, and educational reformer, and who influenced him very much. He, encouraged by the European Enlightenment principles of reason and experience in July 1946 A.D., founded the People’s Education Society and its affiliated colleges: Siddhartha College in Bombay and Milind College in Aurangabad, to give educational opportunities to Untouchable children.

John Dewey influenced him so much that he dared to criticize Hindu society by quoting Dewey: “Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse...As a society becomes more enlightened. It realizes that that is responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better society.” However, he never forgot the Buddha; in his first published essay in favour of the Buddha, “The Buddha and The Future of His religion”, he transferred Dewey’s sense in his words: “...who caimed no infallibility for what he taught...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. This is why he gave liberty to his followers to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required. No other religious leader has shown such courage.”

This made sure that John Dewey encouraged him to criticize conservative Hinduism and the Buddha strengthened him to embrace liberal Buddhism.

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar continued to work for his Neo-Buddhists. He founded Buddhist Organization known as Sharatiya Bouddha Maha Sabha in May 1955 (2498 B.E.), one year before the mass conversion led by him, and before his death in 1956 (2499 B.E.), at age of 65 years.


Neo-Buddhists of Later Period

After his death, Neo-Buddhists still continued the Buddhist activities. They had formed organizations such as Dalit Panther, Sakya Sangha, and Sahayak Sangha etc. within five years. Several of those, it is said, were founded in every district of Maharastra State.

A best sample was Sewagram village. There and Then, there were over 100 Mahar families. They had adopted Buddhism in his last two years. They, like other Untouchable families, regarded, not only Buddha Dramma and Sangha, but also Dr. Ambedkar as their refuge. They jointly changed a village Hindu temple to a Buddhist place. Kusumar Nair, the author of Blossoms in The Dust, with a Japanese monk, visited it and wrote: "Rev. Makino and I go to what used to be the Harijan quarter of the village. A young boy and a couple of men come to receive the bhikkhu (monk) with a lantern near the entrance to the village. A white ceramic statue of the Buddha, made in Japan, is kept on a rough wooden crate in the small one-room hut of an agricultural labourer, Shivanath. The room is lit by a lantern. The temple to house the statue has been under construction for more than two years, but only the brick walls are up; the roof is still lacking. It was begun as a Hindu temple, but then the idols were thrown into the river and it was designated to become a Buddhist place of worship. The whole group of neo-Buddhists in Sewagram is helping to build it but they are short of funds and do not know how to complete it. Already the exposed walls are cracking."23 And added: "Above the statue in Shivanath's house is a coloured photograph of the late Dr. Ambedkar and his wife..."24 The latter verifies Hindu belief, just left behind by them, of deifying respected persons like Shangkara and Sai ba ba.

Later Neo-Buddhists have still continued their role and status and some have entered the Sangha. Now, there are about 50 Indian monks in Maharastra State and about 18 monks in Marathwada region. In fact, they are few in number, mostly illiterate, and unwelltrained. So they

23 Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (ed.), p. 64.
cannot preach Buddhist teachings to locals. As for foreign monks, they are well-behaved and respected, though cannot complete teaching well because of unskillfulness in dialects.

**Now-The Explosion of The Second Buddhist Conversion**

Now, however, an idea of untouchability is banned by law, it is still alive in practice in Indian society. Evidently, in the news, a Hindu couple who were only a boy and a girl were punished to death because they, with different castes, married. The boy belonged to the upper caste and the girl, to the lower caste (referred to as the Dalit caste). Their error was the violation of a century old taboo of the caste system prohibiting any marriage between the upper and lower castes. Nobody, even the village headman, could save their lives. Finally, they were lynched to death. The incident took place in a not-so-remote village in Uttar Pradesh State, a few months ago. It was reported not to be isolated. There are several such cases every year in northern India.  

Possibly, these incidents led to the explosion by the Untouchables of the second conversion to Buddhism, as did by Dr. Ambedkar, 45 years ago. As we know, Neo-Buddhists movements still continue and grow in number while the caste system remains unchanged. An Untouchable group (a Dalit group), called “All-India Confederation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes Organisations”, was preparing to revive the spirit of conversions. Four million Untouchables belong to this body. Reportedly, it planned to convert one million Untouchables (Dalits) to Buddhism on October 14, 2001. It was the same day 45 years ago when Dr. Ambedkar—their great leader proclaimed the mass conversion. The day had been chosen with care to hammer home they rose up against the social stratification, the body said. It further revealed that they had the objective behind the mass conversion, not only to rebuff the rigid caste system and the Brahmanical order, but also to remove internal contradictions dogging the Untouchables (Dalits) from dividing into various camps representing Balmikis, Paswans and so on.

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25 Dinesh c. Shrama, p. 3.
As the spearheads of the conversion, Mr. Ramankutty and Mr. Ram Raj joined hands to express senses. The *Former* said that Buddhism was a casteless religion, that was the primary reason why they wanted to embrace it. They had no enmity with anyone. It (the conversion) was for human rights, while the *latter* termed the proposed mass conversion as the "biggest cultural event in the world". He went on that the decision had been approved by the Untouchables' leaders from almost all Indian states. Furthermore, the confederation led by them is planning to organise a series of programs, including "Rath Yatras" (Walking in Procession on Roads) to prepare the Untouch-ables for a cultural change. In his words, the confederation's target was to convert to Buddhism all 250 million populations of scheduled castes and tribes.

**Different Ideas of Different Persons**

According to the news in Bangkok Post (Sunday, June 10, 2001, p.3), after the proclamation scattered, different persons expressed different ideas as follows.

Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, even with a great pleasure to the mass conversion, when asked about this event, said: "I have always been telling the neo-Buddhists, particularly those who come from the so-called low castes, that taking to Buddhism should not result in resentment among other religions or caste systems. In order to be more equal, follow the Buddha Dharma." And he added : "I describe Buddhism and Hinduism as twin brother and sister".

Due to the equal status in Indian society after the conversion expected by the Untouchables, experts had different ideas.

Dr. Rangarajan said : "There is no guarantee that conversion will bring equality. The rest of society may just treat the converts as yet another caste, as had happened with neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra. But no major movement in the reverse direction has taken place in recent decades. This is probably because the new faith also may give the person a sense of confidence and enable better self confidence."
Dr. Anand Teltumbde, a Dalit scholar, said: "Unlike other religions, Buddhism does not have any place for rituals, gods or any permanent entity like soul, and is just a practicable moral code for living. However, in practice, all kinds of mumbo jumbo that sometimes appears to be exceeding the familiar but on the wane rituals of Hinduism, are followed, so much so that not only Buddha but even Ambedkar is not spared from godhood."

He mentioned Vipasyna or Vipassana, which is a kind of Buddhist meditation practised by the Buddha himself and caused him to attain to Supreme Enlightenment. According to him, Dalits now pay much attention to Vipassana because it helps understand things as they are and because it supported Dr. Ambedkar, their great leader, to find a way to take rationalisation and redefinition of Buddhism, 45 years ago.

"It is amusing to see this mindcentric trend growing among Dalits. In all this, Ambedkar’s attempts at rationalisation and redefinition of Buddhism are completely forgotten," he concluded.

For Dinesh C. Sharma, a Bangkok Post columnist in India, he said that it was not as if the lot of Dalits had not improved since India’s independence. They were given reservation in educational institutions, government jobs and even preference in grant of loans to start business. He furthered that reservations and the constitutional guarantees against discrimination had indeed enabled the creation of a Dalit middle class and opened the doors to high political office.

In the political arena, Dr. Rangarajan revealed that now, a new sense of awareness had been growing in western and northern India over the past two decades. This was very clear with parties like the Republican Party of India and the Bahujan Samaj Party. He warned that these were only the tip of the iceberg. There were huge social movements to enable full benefit of reservations through better education and organisation.

Sharma concluded: "Religious conversions have always been a touchy issue in India. In the past few years, it has also become a political issue. For some Hindu outfits a section of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party, coversion is a major issue that is often used to whip up Hindu feelings. If the conversiton plan comes through, it is certain to raise the hackles
of these Hindu outfits. Hindu hardliners oppose conversions, but find it difficult to answer charges that they have done little to dismantle the numerous social barriers in their religion. The conversion event in October will be seen as a further proof of their perceived failure to nurture reforms in Hinduism."

Conclusion

From the study, as we see, the Aryan invasion was the first cause of the caste system in Indian society. After that, it evolved and has become rigid since the Brahma age (600 A.D.). Then Brahmans had much power and played great roles as spiritual teachers. They were masters of religious ceremony and got much benefit. Deluded ceremonies, like life sacrifice and superstition, were established under their selfish guidance. They proclaimed a theory of human origin based on Brahma as the Supreme God, who created the world and living and non-living things in the world. Men of four castes, as living beings, are issued from body parts of Brahma, and Shudras from His feet.

Because of their lower birth (caste, jati), they are treated unjustly. The Buddha accepted human caste difference by the law of Karma and denied injustice caused by the difference. In his preaching, his goal was the freedom of all beings from suffering. Beings in his mind were human and non-human, including all castes. They all had rights to approach him and listen to his teachings as well as to attain enlightenment under their maturity of five innate faculties.

The Buddha, during his life-time, had welcomed all castes. So his followers were in diversity. This kind of his great compassion, Dr. Ambedkar appreciated and unhesitatingly converted to Buddhism. His decision of the time resulted in a new caste- "Buddhist caste" in Indian society, which has stood as a good shadow for the Untouchables until now.

Since then, the Untouchables have accepted only Buddhism which can uplift them from the bottom of the lowest status. Accordingly, they have influxed in the shadow of Buddhism. In this situation, I think, Buddhists
around the world should be proud of such a role of Buddhism, even though it is called the religion of the Untouchables in India.

Nowadays, most Indians accept that Buddhism is coming to life and looking after Indians with income based on an influx of Buddhist visitors from around the world. In the world today, just as a big tree attracts a host of birds to its big shadow, Buddhism attracts human beings to its shadow. Certainly, the Untouchables will extinguish its fire and live under the shadow of Buddhism as their ancestors did in the past.
References


M. 2. 581.376. (Pali : Siamese Version)


