

SOCIAL ACTION

A Quarterly Review of Social Trends

Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Transformation

- ❑ Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Transformation (Editorial)
S.R. Bodhi & Shaileshkumar Darokar
- ❑ The Ambedkarite Worldview Post 1956: Some Reflections on its Theoretical Content
S.R. Bodhi & Abhijit Bansode
- ❑ Dr. Ambedkar's Intellectual Engagements with Buddhism
Pranjali Kureel
- ❑ Intersections between Nation and Spiritual Democracy: A Philosophic Inquiry from an Ambedkarite Perspective
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Dinesh Chand
- ❑ Navayana Buddhism: Some Insights from Western Maharashtra
Sujit Nikalje

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Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Transformation

The question that confronts Ambedkarite Buddhist intellectuals in contemporary times is not so much about theory and content but about the problematics of epistemology, methodology, and axiology. In the light of this prevailing context, this issue brings together eight Ambedkarite Buddhist intellectuals from across the country to engage in serious academic reflections on varied subjects within the broad theme of ‘Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Transformation.’

Dr. Ambedkar reminded us that Buddhism, as a philosophy, is by nature contextual, historical, theoretically rich, clean, and simple to understand. And as a religion, Buddhism concurs with reason, can stand the test of scientific scrutiny, does not demand blind faith and belief, is self-respecting, is practical, is humanity centered, and above all else, it stands for the welfare of all. All his insights and study of Buddhism are contained in his seminal book – ‘The Buddha and His Dhamma’, which he took five years to write and was published posthumously.

Dr. Ambedkar strongly believed that it was this conception of Buddhism that would emancipate his people from historical condemnation and ostracisation. He did everything possible from his end to see that such a vision is realised. His writings on Buddhism, stemming from his own life experiences, were nothing short of prolific. The historical depth, epistemological insights, and philosophical breadth, written over years of relentless study, were theoretically articulated in such sophisticated ways that few can match his scholarship. His scholarly treatment of extremely complex issues can only be marveled at by scholars and onlookers. His writings have inspired generations of free thinkers and truth seekers and have, in itself, produced a discourse.

Dr. Ambedkar passed away in 1956, but even though he is no longer among us, his legacy and history enjoys a permanent youth. He left behind a philosophy of hope and freedom that keeps inspiring his followers. His message to his people to keep pushing the wheel of Dhamma, conveyed through his closest personal assistant on 31 July, 1956, just 5 months before he died, reads as follows:

“Tell them Nanak Chand: Whatever I have done, I have been able to do after passing through crushing miseries and endless troubles all my life fighting with my opponents. With great difficulty, I have brought this caravan where it is seen today. Let the Caravan march on and further on despite the hurdles, pitfalls and difficulties that may come in its way. If my people, my lieutenants are not able to take the caravan ahead, they should leave it where it is seen today, but in no circumstances should they allow the Caravan to go back.” (Nanak Chand Rattu: Last few Years of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, 1997).

In another discussion with friends and colleagues he had on 13 November, 1956, on his way to attend the World Buddhist Conference scheduled for 17 November, 1956 in Nepal, Dr. Ambedkar stated,

"I have been struggling throughout my life to abolish this evil practice of division based on caste and mutual hatred. In reality, I feel guilty of starting late the work of revival of Buddhism in India. But even then, I hope and believe that my people who, sacrificing their own comforts, have been faithfully following me. I hope and I trust they will continue to struggle sincerely to propagate the Buddha Dhamma in India." (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, 2003, Vol.17, Part One, pp.449-450).

Dr. Ambedkar was cordial in relationships, firm in conviction, indomitable in courage, wise in counsel, patient in practice, swift in execution, and dignified in life. Even his deeply embedded hostility against peoples and systems that historically discriminated against him and his peoples could not dither him from his entrenched commitment to the possibility of living and realizing the 'good' and the 'beautiful' in human life for everyone's wellbeing.

It is within this framework that each of the eight papers has been located. The first paper, written by Bodhi S.R and Abhijit Bansode, titled “The Ambedkarite Worldview Post 1956” dwells upon the complex idea of the frame of reference, axiological foundation, and the notion of rationality within this worldview. The second paper, written by Pranjali Kureel explores Dr. Ambedkar's intellectual engagements with Buddhism, specifically focusing on his historical explication of the 'Broken men' theory and vision of Buddhism in India as an act of epistemic mediation.

The third paper, written by Santosh Raut engages with two critical concepts in contemporary Indian society – Nation and Spiritual democracy from

an Ambedkarite point of view, touching upon Dr. Ambedkar's vision of a new India. The fourth paper written by Shaileshkumar Darokar attempts to illuminate Dr. Ambedkar's conception of the category Prabuddha Bharat, through the positioning of his various propositions in the domain of political process, democratic practice, and Buddhist vision.

The fifth paper by Utkarsh Khobragade enters the domain of theoretical intersection between the concept of social structure employed by Haslinger and the idea of Navayana as posited by Dr. Ambedkar. The sixth paper written by Preethish Raja is a theoretical exposition of Buddhism as a discourse in relation to other contradictory discourses that permeates the Indian reality through the usage of the method of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The seventh paper, written by Dinesh Chand interprets Dr. Ambedkar's conception of the "Freedom of Mind" by contextualising and locating the idea in the current Ambedkarite struggles and movements. Finally, the eighth paper, written by Sujit Nikalje, provides a glimpse into the day-to-day practices and non-compromising struggles of the Ambedkarite Buddhist community in Western Maharashtra. The final text is a review by Anuradha Bele of the book 'Navayana Buddhism: Debates, Context and Theory' written by Shaileshkumar Darokar, Subodh N.W. and Bodhi S.R., and published by The Shared Mirror, Hyderabad.

Like Dr. Ambedkar, who was vehement that no proposition in Buddhism should ever ennoble poverty, all the authors have written their papers in ways that resist dehumanizing propositions and enable an epistemological process that comes out from the shackles of historical subjugation. In these eight articles, you will find the vision of Dr. Ambedkar reverberating through every line, and in each of them, you will feel the lingering power of Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy continuing to pulsate, spread and thrive. □

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The Ambedkarite Worldview Post 1956: Some Reflections on its Theoretical Content

S.R. Bodhi *
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Abstract

This article attempts to think deeply about the Ambedkarite Worldview post-Babasaheb's Dhammakranti or conversion to Buddhism in 1956. This Worldview, or weltanschauung, it is argued, is constituted by two simultaneous epistemic processes. First, it is premised on Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts, grounded fundamentally on key theoretico-philosophical propositions asserted by him. Second, it includes the knowledge produced by his followers in their historical struggle to ontologically reconstruct and epistemologically frame their world around Dr. Ambedkar's ideas, embodying and articulating in the process their own weltanschauung. The questions addressed in this paper are broad in theoretical scope yet focused on methodological details. It unravels the Ambedkarite Worldview's frame of reference, explicates the details of its axiological foundation and discusses the centrality of rationality in its practice.

Keywords: *weltanschauung*, frame of reference, axiological foundation, rationality, welfare.

Introduction

For many of his followers, Babasaheb is revered as the single person who, through sheer struggle, brought the most historically oppressed and peripheralised peoples back into the path of Buddha and his Dhamma. This path has long been politically decimated, exterminated from social history, wiped out from people's memory, and long desecrated by theoretical distortions that made it nearly impossible to uncover and rejuvenate. In the midst of such challenging politico-historical conditions, Dr. Ambedkar singlehandedly extracted the Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha from the nadir of

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near philosophical extinction. He cleansed this framework from enormous conceptual distortions and gave it back to the world in ways it was originally intended; a rational, non-textual, humane, contextual path to historio-social transformation, arrived at through persistent self-effort and struggle to awaken the 'self' to the true nature of reality, through a relentless pursuit of the 'freedom of mind'.

Over and above the theoretical cleansing of historical distortions that Dr. Ambedkar attempted, he also did something fundamental to Buddhist theory - he brought back into Buddhism the notion of the 'social,' which he himself felt was missing from contemporary Buddhist discourse. In the text 'The Buddha and His Dhamma', Dr. Ambedkar posited, "Did the Buddha give any other Social Message? Did the Buddha teach justice? Did the Buddha teach love? Did the Buddha teach liberty? Did the Buddha teach equality? Did the Buddha teach fraternity? ... My answer is that the Buddha has a Social Message. He answers all these questions. But they have been buried by modern authors" (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 225).

Laying the Context and Frame

In the light of an intense theoretical and methodological battle taking place within Indian academia about discourse, history, society, truth, and the path to truth, it is considered judicious to revisit some of Dr. Ambedkar's foundational propositions related to the same in order to unpack the Ambedkarite Worldview and other entrenched epistemological processes embodied by his followers since 1956. It is important to note that Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism did not happen suddenly; public education led by him on the teachings of the Buddha had already begun as early as 1936, right through the period till 14 October 1956.

Of all the paths available for him, once he had decided to convert, Buddhism seemed to him the most attractive, because of its self-respecting and rational outlook. However, notwithstanding the mainstream narrative of the day, Dr. Ambedkar saw in Buddhism, not a philosophy of despair that eulogises suffering (*dukkha*), and that demands from its adherents faith, surrender, obedience, and submission, instead in Buddhism he saw a philosophy of hope that envisaged total liberation (*nibbana*), and seeks from its followers, dedicated effort (*samma vayama*), energetic action (*viriyā*) and self-discovery (*atta deepo*). When he finally decided to convert to Buddhism, he was clear that it is only this unique path, out of many, that his and his people's freedom lies. Born in a context of inequality, hate, poverty, and extreme oppression, his search for a 'bloodless revolution' to

fundamentally transform the concrete social condition was found in the teachings of the Buddha.

From his readings of the Buddha in its historical context, Dr. Ambedkar arrived at certain conclusions about what the Buddha really taught the people of his time. While he provided a detailed explication of the same in his seminal text – *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, below, we will attempt to summarise some key points relevant to the objective of this article and falling within the scope of this paper. Core to the teachings of the Buddha, Dr. Ambedkar believed, was that (i) the Buddha condemned indulgence in the speculative notion of the ‘whence, whither and what am I’ question, (ii) he challenged the theory that a God created human beings (iii) he negated the notion of the soul (iv) he rejected the fatalistic view of predestination in which ‘God predestined what should happen for man and the world’ (v) he rejected the proposition that cosmic progress had a known beginning (vi) he ‘accepted the great grand law (*paticca samupadda*) of cause and effect with its corollaries’ (the *idappaccayata* or causal principle) as fundamental to his teachings (vii) he abandoned the proposition that ‘all deeds committed in some former birth have the potency to produce suffering’ in the current life (viii) he recognised the mind as the centre of everything (ix) he stressed on the imperatives of a cultured mind (x) he believed that ‘cleaning the mind’ is ‘the essence of religion’, and above all else (xi) he held steadfast in the belief that ‘real religion lies not in the holy books but in the observance of the tenets of the religion’ (Ambedkar, 2014, pp. 103-105).

The Buddha, for Dr. Ambedkar, was a *Margadata* or one who shows the path, and as the one who has known and traversed the path, the Buddha was “deep, boundless, unfathomable, just like the mighty ocean.” (Ambedkar, 2014, p.335). His earliest followers spoke about the Buddha as “the arouser of the path unarisen before, the producer of the path not produced before, the declarer of the path not declared before, the knower of the path, the seer of the path, the guide along the path” (Majjhima Nikaya, 108). Of all the critical characteristics of the Buddha expounded above, Dr. Ambedkar, however, noted that the Buddha saw himself only as a teacher and one who pointed to his followers the way, stressing that people should liberate themselves by their own efforts and not depend on others for their emancipation. “You yourself must make an effort”, the Buddha pointed out, “the Tathagatas (Buddhas) are only preachers” (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 370; Dhammapada, 276).

The Idea of Worldview

The concept of ‘worldview’ or *weltanschauung* is a complex idea to deassemble. It is used in various ways, but generally, it is spoken of as “a comprehensive conception or image of the universe and of humanity's relationship to it.” (encyclopedia.com, 2018). It is also often referred to as the theory about the totality of the universe and the location and interconnectedness of humanity with and within it.

Many of the followers of Dr. Ambedkar, who source their *weltanschauung* from his writings and speeches, use the concept to mean guiding principles and characteristics. Dahiwale noted that for him the Ambedkarite Worldview simply means that “nobody controls this world, our own actions create the world, humans are agents of action and transformation, we create our own reality and are in control of our own destiny” (personal interview with Dahiwale, 19 May, 2022) Nagarjuna perceived the Ambedkarite Worldview as asserting that “(i) the world is full of imperfections and if you have to live in it, one have to come to terms with that imperfection, (ii) everything is subjected to fragility and change and so is oppression (iii) cultivation of mind is fundamental to growth as a human being, (iv) the world cannot be reformed till mind is reformed, and (vi) freedom of mind is the ultimate aim of human existence (Personal interview with Maitriveer Nagarjuna, 19 May, 2022).

For Kamble (2003), arguing from the point of view of Dr. Ambedkar, noted that “Buddhism is not merely a vehicle for asserting humanity of the oppressed; it also attempts to redefine foundations of Indian society.” ... “Buddhism as articulated by Ambedkar provides a critique of all hegemonic forces and argues for justice and reason as necessary principles of social organisation, without which the lasting peace and harmony will not be possible in the world” (Kamble, 2003, p.4305).

As we can observe from the articulations of the followers of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the idea of the Ambedkarite Worldview is beginning to evolve into a wholesome theory that is now taking specific shape and becoming a *weltanschauung*. In this article, an attempt is made to consolidate all of these conceptions around some key domains. We begin with a discussion on the theoretical content of the frame of reference of the Ambedkarite Worldview; and follow it up with an explication of its two premises; axiological foundation, and the notion of rationality. While the engagement looks farfetched, we state that our attempt is only to theoretically capture the Ambedkarite *Weltanschauung*.

Ambedkarite Worldview: Its Frame of Reference

The Ambedkarite Worldview, post-Babasaheb's *Dhammakranti* (conversion to Buddhism), embodies its own frame of reference. The frame is conceived to fundamentally comprise of four key components. These components have historically arisen in the context of a fierce philosophical contestation with various other contesting schools within the Indian sub-continent. In the persistent existential search of the followers of Babasaheb to unravel and understand their own Worldview, outside of the other domineering frames that overwhelm religio-social life in India today, they have tried to seek answers to four fundamental *weltanschauung* related questions. These are (i) what is the Ambedkarite theory concerning the origin of the universe? (ii) what is existence? (iii) what is reality? and (iv) what is social reality?

It must be noted that the search for answers to each of these questions has been a perpetual philosophical quest for many Ambedkarites. Interestingly, the answers to these questions are starting to dawn after years of relentless searching.

(i) On the origin of the universe: To the first question concerning the origin of the universe, it is becoming clear that the Ambedkarite answer to this is the law of Dependent Origination or the *paticca samupadda*. Dr. Ambedkar himself noted this in his book 'The Buddha and His Dhamma' while clarifying a critical point where the Buddha provided his views on the question - whether God was the creator of the universe. Dr. Ambedkar wrote "Who created the world is a common question. That the world was created by God is also a very common answer... The question is did the Blessed Lord (referring to the Buddha) accept God as the creator of the universe. The answer is, 'No.' He did not." Further, Dr. Ambedkar noted, of all the answers the Buddha gave to augment his arguments against God as creator, there was one that was "beyond doubt fatal to belief in God. This is contained in his doctrine of the *Patit Samutpad (Paticca Samupadda)* which is described as the doctrine of Dependent Origination... Belief in God as the creator of the universe is Not-Dhamma. It is only belief in falsehood" (Ambedkar, 1914, p.255).

In short, this law, the *paticca samupadda*, states that the universe arose not because of any God or Goddesses, but because of the existence of the necessary conditions premised on a principle of causality or *Idapaccayata*, often translated as 'this/that conditionality'. This causal principle operates accordingly in the following way: "When this is, that is. From the rising of this, comes the rising of that. When this isn't, that

isn't. From the cessation of this comes, the cessation of that" (Samyukta Nikhaya 12.61, 2005; Thanissaro, 2011). The Buddha arrived at this realization through his own effort of discovery by direct observation, going back and forth, and thoroughly examining each link in the *paticca samupadda*. Dr. Ambedkar quotes the sage Asanga, explaining these processes, stating "All things are produced by the combination of causes and conditions and have no independent noumenon of their own. When the combination is dissolved, their destruction ensures" (Ambedkar, 2014, 240).

The *paticca samupadda*, as propounded by the Buddha, is explained by many theorists in various ways. Most of these explanations generally draw on the idea of Dukkha as the central thesis on which the *paticca samupadda* was grounded. The law consists of twelve links of dependent origination. Dr. Ambedkar saw this law as the best explanation for the creation of the universe, as against the idea that there was a God that created it. However, while he did dwell on some of the elements within this law (please see "What is Not Dhamma", in Ambedkar, 2014, pp.259-267), he did not explain this law in great detail.

This, however, suffices to argue that within the Ambedkarite Worldview, it is the *paticca samupadda* that answers the first fundamental *weltanschauung* question concerning the origin of the universe as posited above.

(ii) On existence: In response to the question concerning the nature of what exists or what is existence? The Ambedkarite Worldview's answer lies in the concept of *Ti-lakhanna*. The *Ti-lakhanna* constitutes three sub-concepts – *Anicca*, *Anatta* and *Dukkha*. Dr. Ambedkar used these concepts at various points in his book - *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (Ambedkar, 2014, p.76; p.262; p.321; p.342; p.510; p.579; p.597)

In the *Ti-lakhanna*, the concept of *Anicca* is translated as impermanence, transitoriness, rising and passing away, in a state of flux, etc. This concept is conceived as being the most fundamental nature of what truly exists in the universe. It is embodied by all things in the universe, physical and non-physical. From an ontological perspective, it refers to a state of no-thingness, emptiness, voidness or *shunyata*. Dr. Ambedkar defines *shunyata* as "the perpetual changes occurring at every moment in the phenomenal world" (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 241).

The second concept of *Anatta* refers to 'no-self' or 'not-self' or a 'non-

substantive self' in the domains of 'form' (*rupam*), 'sensation' (*vedana*), 'perception' (*Sanna*), 'fabrication' (*sankhara*), and 'consciousness' (*Vinnanam*). In Buddhist literature, they are referred to as the *Khandhas* or aggregate or, are sometimes spoken of as a collection of smaller or simpler units. These aggregates are subjected to space-time, are internal-external, are overt-covert, are commonsensical-theoretical, and located in space-distance (*Khandha Sutta*, 22.48). It is the confluence of these five *Khandhas* that produces our human experience. Dr. Ambedkar himself noted, "a sentient being is a compound thing consisting of certain physical elements and certain mental elements," called *Khandhas*.

The last concept of *Dukkha* refers to pain, lamentation, grief, sorrow, disturbance, irritation, worry, fear, anxiety, inferiority, sickness, aging, and the decay of the body. *Dukkha* is often spoken of as being of three types (i) *dukkha-dukkha*, which is the *dukkha* arising from physical and mental pain (ii) *viparinama-dukkha*, which is the *dukkha* arising from constant change, and (iii) *sankhara-dukkha*, which is the *dukkha* experienced because of life's compositional nature. (*Dukkhatasutta*, SN. 45.165)

(iii) On reality: On the question concerning what is reality? The Ambedkarite Worldview points to the *Ti-ratana* or the interconnected entities of the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*. In Buddhism, these three realities are referred to as the triple gem. Each of these are realities with its states; the Buddha is the 'reality as it is,' the Sangha is the 'reality as it appears to one's senses,' and the Dhamma is the universal law that permeates both the Buddha and the Sangha. About the Dhamma, the Buddha was supposed to have stated, "One who sees the *Paticca Samupadda*, sees the Dhamma. One who sees the Dhamma, sees the *Paticca Samupadda*" (*Majhima Nikhaya*, 28).

(iv) On social reality: On the question of what is social reality?, the Ambedkarite Worldview relies on the Buddha's conception of what humans experience at the most fundamental level that escapes the binary rules of social life. This conception of the Buddha is found in the *ariya atthangika magga*, or the noble eightfold path. It constitutes three components – speech, action, and lifestyle. These three are clubbed together within the Buddhist precepts or *sila*. Within the Ambedkarite Worldview, social reality cannot escape speech, action, and lifestyle; all else depending on these three to produce human social imagination and experience. In the Ambedkarite Worldview, humans are not separate

from our speech, action, and lifestyle.

The Axiological Foundation of the Ambedkarite Worldview

In the domain of axiology, a few points need to be asserted before a deeper discussion on the subject is made. We opine that embodied in the Ambedkarite Worldview is a few very distinct principles that mark the Ambedkarite Buddhist path as unique. These are (i) there is no beginning, and no end, (ii) that something can come out of no-thing, (iii) morality and not God constitutes the central informing principle, (iv) the imperatives of '*atta deep bhava*' and not any text from God as the source of true knowledge, and (v) love, morality, and beauty permeates all realms of being.

In this context, it is vital to turn to one fundamental question in Buddhism that Babasaheb raised. The question is, What is central to Buddhism? On this point, Dr. Ambedkar differed from many Buddhist scholars and practitioners who prioritise *Dukkha* as central to the teachings of the Buddha. For Dr. Ambedkar, the essence and main message of the Buddha's teachings lie in two concepts – *nibanna* and *kamma*.

On *nibbana*, Dr. Ambedkar noted, "Of all the doctrines taught by the Buddha the doctrine of Nibbana is the most central one." "Nothing can give real happiness as *Nibbana*." (Ambedkar, 2014, p.233). "With Buddha, Salvation means *Nibbana*, and *Nibbana* means control of passions" (Ambedkar, 2014, p.221) said the Buddha. Three conceptions underlie the Buddha's conception of *nibbana*. The first concerns "the happiness of a sentient being," the second concerns "the happiness of the sentient being in *Samsara* while he is alive," and the third concerns "the exercise of control over the flames of the passions which are always on fire."

On *kamma*, he turned to the Buddha's answer to a question, "How is moral order maintained?" "It is the *Kamma Niyam* and God which maintains the moral order in the universe," he notes (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 243). On *kamma*, he further asserts, "This doctrine of *Kamma* and Causation is the most central doctrine in Buddhism. It preaches Rationalism and Buddhism is nothing if not rationalism." (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 250). "The law of *Kamma* was propounded by the Buddha as an answer to the question— "How the moral order is maintained?" (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 245) "Individuals come and individuals go. But the moral order of the universe remains and so also the law of *Kamma* which sustains it. It is for this reason that in the religion of the Buddha, Morality has been given the place of God." "The Law of

Kamma,” Babasaheb asserted, “has to do only with the question of general moral order. It has nothing to do with the fortunes or misfortunes of an individual” (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 244).

Dr. Ambedkar put his best efforts to explain the two interconnected concepts in Buddhist thought – *Kamma* and Rebirth. He devoted a whole section in the BAHD to extract and expound their Buddhist roots and true meanings, which he feared had been thoroughly misinterpreted by other systems of thought. He saw these two concepts as the basis for the Buddhist conception of morality. “The Buddha,” argued Dr. Ambedkar, “was not content with merely speaking of *Kamma*. He spoke of the Law of *Kamma Niyam*. By speaking of the law of *Kamma*, what the Buddha wanted to convey was that the effect of the deed was bound to follow the deed, as surely as night follows day. It was like a *Niyam* or rule.” (Ambedkar, 2014, p.243).

Within the Ambedkarite Worldview, it is essential to gain clarity on the meaning of *Kamma* and Rebirth. This was a crucial component in Dr. Ambedkar’s project to rid Buddhism of historio-theoretical distortions.

Babasaheb positioned the idea of *Kamma* as concerning morality, the law of morality, and its application to the present life in which we inherit genetic traits from our parents but are fundamentally govern by the deeds we commit subjected to the environment we live in presently.

Dr. Ambedkar approaches the notion of Rebirth by seeking answers to two simultaneous processes; the rebirth of what? And the rebirth of whom? On the first question, he noted that a number of elements come together to constitute a new body, which after death again joins the “mass of similar elements floating in space,” and even when the body dies, elements remain ever living. On the second question, he noted, “If a new body is formed after a mixture or the different elements of the different *beings* who are dead then there is rebirth but not the rebirth of the same sentient being” (Ambedkar, 2014, p.330).

It is important to point out that many other categories often make the understanding of the idea of Rebirth very complex. Concepts such as re-incarnation, transmigration, and resurrection have often confused Buddhists worldwide and much more in the Indian sub-continent. An attempt is made to clarify these concepts in order to gain the said clarity.

The idea of *re-incarnation* refers to a belief that “at birth God inserts a spirit into a human body, which is called an incarnate. At death, which is

called discarnation, the spirit is believed to separate from the body and remain as a discarnate spirit. The term “reincarnation” therefore means that the discarnate spirit re-enters a body.” The idea of *resurrection*, which is exclusively a Christian concept, “refers to a dead body coming back to life.” The notion of *transmigrations* however, refers to the belief that there is something called a soul that is distinct from the body, that traverse hereditarily from life to life through a cycle of transmigration and is subjected to “a natural law of punishment and reward for actions good and bad done during a life” and “the soul transmigrates straight away into another body after death” till such time that it is purified and “goes back to God, to whom it belongs, and where it came from.” (Punnaji, 2011, pp.8-11). Every act that a human commits “produces two-fold results. It effects the doer and secondly it produces as impress upon his soul...When a man dies and when his soul escapes, the soul is full of such impressions. It is these impressions which determine his birth and status in his future life” (Ambedkar, 2014, p.337-344; pp.348-349).

Rebirth on the other hand means “a new birth after death. It is the birth of a body and a mind, without a soul being involved.” There is “no ‘soul’ (that) leaves the body as death” and there is “no ‘soul’ (that) enters the new body at birth; yet the new body and mind is the result of the old body and mind. Buddhists do not believe in a soul” (Punnaji, 2011, p.12).

The Centrality of Rationality in the Ambedkarite Worldview

Dr. Ambedkar consistently reminded us that Buddhism concurs with reason and can stand the test of any scientific scrutiny. It also does not demand blind faith and belief, is self-respecting, is practical, is sentient-centered, and above all else, it stands for the welfare of all. These elements in the way Dr. Ambedkar located rationality are critical.

Rationality, in the Ambedkarite Worldview, is not a capacity or process that stands alone in itself, independent of other concomitant factors in the societal environment. It is instead a process away from superstition and commonsensical speculation, which envisions the attainment of a goal through the proper use of insights, knowledge, and wisdom. From an Ambedkarite Buddhist perspective, the process of rationality becomes truly rational when it is tempered by the notion of welfare for all, meaning, that true rationality is always tempered by the commitment to welfare.

Quoting from the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. X, p. 669, Dr. Ambedkar points to some important factors that have made an engagement

with the idea of rationality an imperative. Recognising the “rapid progress of scientific knowledge and thought” and the ‘widespread tendencies across the world’ to become “more ‘rational’ and ‘scientific’ and less ‘superstitious’” (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 19), he saw in Buddhism the structure and promise of a rational philosophy.

For Dr. Ambedkar, the Buddha was unique, because his first objective, among many was to lead humans towards rationalism, and by rationalism Dr. Ambedkar meant that ‘reality must rest on proof.’

It is important to note here that a deep study of Dr. Ambedkar’s writings reveals that he derived his conception of rationalism from studying Indian history. His conclusions after this extensive and expansive study led him to conclude that “India probably was one of the first countries which preached rationalism such as the kind of which the world before nowhere has seen.” He points out that the grounds on which this condition arose, noting that the question being debated among various schools of philosophy in the Indian sub-continent was “What is truth? What can be accepted as truth?” He saw these types of philosophical engagements as “the bedrock of the question with which rationalism deals.” (Ambedkar, 2016, p.334)

Dr. Ambedkar asserted that the Buddha was the first person to preach rationalist ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. It was he who propagated a rational religion in which there was no room for superstition. (Ambedkar, 2016, p. 506). Unfortunately, though, as a fact of history, Buddhism as a religion, Babasaheb pointed out, had lost a historical mortal battle, and part of this great loss was the “spirit of rationalism,” noting “Buddha’s rationalistic approach to truth had been lost.” (Ambedkar, 2016, pp.333-335).

Notwithstanding this historical fact, Babasaheb was not restraint; but instead, he saw in the Buddha a rationalist par excellence, noting, “If there is anything which could be said with confidence (about the Buddha) it is: He was nothing if not rational, if not logical.” (Ambedkar, 2014, pp. 350-351).

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, two important points need to be made. One, in today’s day and age, the Ambedkarite Worldview cannot deepen itself without engaging actively with the expansive cutting-edge knowledge produced by science. We must also be open to learning other knowledges produced from different

societies and cultural contexts. Dr. Ambedkar himself stressed on the need to seriously engage with comparative religion as a subject of study for all Buddhists. The Ambedkarite Worldview, it is important to point out, is driven by knowledge, stresses progress, values education, work toward breaking social barriers, and above all else to realise the welfare of all. We do not have the luxury of being innocent about science per se and other knowledges. We must know all these multiple knowledges to make Ambedkarite Buddhist thinking and the Ambedkarite Worldview more precise, sophisticated, and holistic.

Two, Dr. Ambedkar has shown us that there is a ‘poverty’ in any spirituality that is devoid of politics and that while pain is personal, while meaning is binary, while truth in the realm of the binary is multiple, while method and knowledge are deeply contextual, it is only values and wisdom that are the true universals. At the heart of the Ambedkarite Worldview are values and wisdom. It is these that we must persistently and earnestly search, uphold, cultivate and acquire.

The ‘Buddhist’ path, it may be pointed out, was and will always be difficult to comprehend. Buddhism is not an act of faith but an act of effort, commitment, and seriousness of purpose. These are fundamental to the Buddhist project. In this context, within the Ambedkarite *Weltanschauung*, like for any other Buddhist path across different cultures of the world, the last words of the Buddha addressed to his followers before his *mahaparinibanna* is critical. “Behold, O Bhikshus,” the Buddha stated, “all component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation.”□

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