

The Spiritual Dimension of India's Dalit Buddhist Movement:

The Untouchables' Self-Renewal

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In loving memory of Venerable Master Jue Zhen ^{上覺}真長老 (1933 ~ 2015)

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INTRODUCTION

On August 15, 1947, India erupted into celebratory mode as India's Prime Minister, Jawarharlal Nehru, proudly raised the country's national flag above the Red Fort in Delhi. It was one of the most defining moments in Indian history for it marked the country's liberation after almost a century of British rule and symbolically, the glory of its powerful unity and Indian nationalism at that time against their one common enemy, the British. Subsequent to the post-independence years, India drafted the Indian Constitution which promulgated and protected every Indian's rights and freedom, elements that were denied pre-independence.

However, Independence Day was only the beginning of a new era of internal oppression, a transfer of power from the British to the upper and middle classes of Indian society. Freedom has nurtured a desire to gain power and amplified the voice of the traditional caste and class elites that make up India's booming middle class today. In its composition and its desire for power, we notice a reinforcement of India's caste hierarchies, leaving those at the bottom of India's societal hierarchy to suffer from perpetual internal oppression and social stigma.

According to Hindu scriptures, India's caste system is officially built upon the idea of pollution and purity articulated in the fourfold *varna* system. Brahmins, the "purest", are at the apex while Shudras, slaves are at the bottom of the hierarchy. However, there is another group deemed to be separate from the hierarchy – the lowest of the lowest, *Chandalas*, according to the Hindu scriptures or those more commonly known as the Untouchables. Due to their "polluting"¹ occupations which include but not limited to, street-cleaning, scavenging, hauling carcasses, corpses and assisting at cemeteries, the Untouchables are severely discriminated against by the upper castes, their rights as a human being are continually denied and as a consequence, they begin to develop an inferiority complex².

On October 14th, 1956, B.R. Ambedkar, lawyer, principal drafter of the Indian Constitution, an Untouchable himself and also the most prominent Untouchable leader, publicly converted to Buddhism and encouraged the Untouchables community to do so in order to escape the throes of caste. Through the conversion, the Untouchables rid their names as “Untouchables” and renamed themselves as “Dalits”. Many scholars describe this Dalit Buddhist movement as the Dalit liberation movement from persistent internal colonialism. Out of all religions, Ambedkar revived Buddhism firstly because it embraced liberty, *samuna* (equality) and *karuna* (love and compassion) and secondly, for the religion’s origin in India. Although Ambedkar was not fond of Hinduism for its caste prejudice, he still wished to embrace the essence of Indian culture by converting to a religion that had its roots in India.

To Ambedkar, conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism was aimed to create “a new identity, a new image as that of a self-willed, self-propelled and dignified individual”³. The movement was the beginning of a new identity creation for Dalits. Despite the movement’s name and the Buddhist philosophies of immeasurable love which it embraced, the movement was not a revival of Buddhism for it leaned towards socio-political reforms and less so on religious faith. More accurately speaking, it was only the revival *and* transformation of the word, Buddhism. Instead of its religious connotations, Ambedkar politicizes the term for the title of his Dalit emancipation movement. The Buddhist philosophies were merely used as political strategies to fight for equal rights and Shakyamuni Buddha himself was seen as a reformer more than a spiritual leader.⁴ Many scholars have debated whether Ambedkar’s Buddhism was true to traditional Buddhism. Some argued that Ambedkar couples Buddha’s philosophy with “an emphasis of rationalism to create a vision of a secular, egalitarian society”⁵ while other scholars

such as Eleanor Zelliott argued that the social emphasis of the movement “led to exclude or distort some teaching fundamental to traditional and canonical Buddhism”⁶.

While a lot of literature focuses on the political dimensions of Ambedkarite Buddhism, there is little discourse that examines its spiritual influences and compares Ambedkarite Buddhism with Buddhist scriptures in traditional Buddhism. Part of the reason why the latter is not seen is due to the stark disparities between Ambedkarite Buddhism and traditional Buddhism, thus making the comparison irrelevant. Despite the fact that Ambedkarite Buddhism is argued to deviate from traditional Buddhism, there are connections between the spiritual motivations of the conversion and messages in the Buddhist sutras that enable readers, especially devout Buddhists like myself to better understand the significance of Buddhist philosophies that are conveyed in the sutras. Rather than contribute to the incessant debate about the differences of both religions, and the political dimensions of the movement, I will examine the spiritual aspects of the conversion movement. I hope to explore how much importance Ambedkar had attached to the spiritual dimension of the conversion and examine the process with which Buddhism facilitates the internal transformations and leads to what Ambedkar had envisioned the self-renewal and dissipation of the Untouchables’ inferiority complex. In this thesis, I argue firstly, that the movement was equally spiritual as it was political, and secondly, that the public, external act of conversion which includes abiding to the vows, facilitates the process of the spiritual, internal transformations of the Untouchables.

This paper not only looks at the spiritual dimension of the movement which is rarely analyzed in the current academic discourse, but also attempts a new methodology, challenging the idea that two seemingly different types of Buddhism cannot be compared when in fact, they can complement each other’s understanding.

METHODOLOGY

This paper will be broken down into two parts. Using his book, the *Buddha and His Dhamma*, which serves as the Buddhist gospel to Dalit Buddhists, I will investigate in the first part how Ambedkar understands Buddha's teachings and interprets Buddhism as a religion. I will also peruse through a collection of Ambedkar's essays on caste and religion to understand his motivations behind the conversion movement. In order to support my analysis of primary source materials, I will also look at books such as *Outside the Fold* by Gauri Viswanathan for a secondary analysis on Ambedkar's motivations. In the second sub-section of this first part, I will look at the spiritual motivations of the movement can be reflected in the dilemmas and complicated scenarios encountered by Dalits. My analysis in this section will be supported by quotes from Dalit biographies such as *Growing Up Untouchable in India* by Vasant Moon and ideas through a secondary analysis from Buddhist masters.

The second part of my thesis will compare Ambedkar's interpretations of caste and the spiritual importance of Buddhism to my interpretations of Buddhist sutras from traditional Buddhism. I will be looking at the stories and philosophies cited in the Chinese translated versions of the Surangama Sutra (楞嚴經 *lengyanjing*), the Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching (佛遺教經 *foyijiaoing*), the Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經 *modengjiaing*) and the Sutra on Matangi's daughter (佛說摩鄢女經 *foshuomodengnvjing*). Through this comparison, I hope to examine throughout the process how Ambedkar's interpretations inform my interpretations of caste. I hope to understand how the Buddhist sutras which I grew up familiar with, can be used to understand Ambedkar's intended spiritual dynamics behind the conversion movement.

PART I: SPIRITUAL IMPORTANCE IN THE CONVERSION

Ambedkar and Caste

Ambedkar defines caste in India as “an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy”⁷. Much of the dynamics of caste within the Hindu society such as endogamy were originally fashioned by the Brahmin caste and later, pervaded the rest of the caste pyramid through what Ambedkar calls, “the infection of imitation”⁸. Through his work, *Castes in India*, which was written in 1916, Ambedkar lists how many factors of the caste system were in fact molded by Brahmins who utilized the authority of their vantage point in the system. In effect, when the Hindus had created a caste for themselves, they had created the non-Brahmin castes, not only closing themselves in, but also closing others out⁹. In Hinduism, the caste which one was born in is attributed to the amount of sins one had committed in past lives. Caste is characterized by the idea of pollution where those at the apex are least polluted and those at the bottom, the Untouchables are most polluted with the name reflecting social attitudes towards this bottom caste. “Stink”¹⁰ is embedded in the name, Untouchable, connoting repulsion, disgust, filth that makes the individual, as the name so blatantly states, untouchable. As a consequence, the Untouchable can never garner value and respect from others regardless of their individual merits. By accepting the name, Untouchable, they submit themselves to the wrath and injustice that was put in place by the upper caste Hindus.

Ambedkar criticizes that the caste system is also a product of the desire of Brahmins to maintain their superiority as “the Hindu made no effort for the humanitarian cause of civilizing the savages [and] have deliberately prevented the lower castes who are within the pale of Hinduism from rising to the cultural level of the higher castes”¹¹. One feature that reinforces this

structure is the fear of exclusion should an individual fail to conform to the rules of society. In the *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar describes caste as “ever ready to take advantage of the helplessness of a man and insist upon complete conformity to its code in letter and in spirit”¹². While a man asserts his independence, this independence is constrained from his fear of societal exclusion in the absence of conformity and for desire to “have the society of his fellows on his terms”¹³. As a consequence, Ambedkar condemns caste for deploring the ethics of the Hindus, for killing public spirit and the sense of public charity¹⁴. Caste as a consequence creates social solidarity within a caste that reinforces the inequalities between those at the apex and those at the bottom of the caste structure. Feelings of isolation, alienation, discrimination and unfriendliness as a consequence of the caste system submits the Untouchables into what Ambedkar calls, an “inferiority complex”¹⁵, a pessimistic psychological state that makes them feel inferior like “a degraded worthless outcaste”¹⁶ rather than a human being.

It is because Hinduism is solely responsible for the degradation and stigmatization of Untouchables, and “inconsistent with the self-respect and honor of the Untouchables”¹⁷ that Ambedkar proposed a religious conversion to break the chains of Hinduism. In his work, *Away from The Hindus*, Ambedkar had questioned:

“Why should Untouchables adhere to Hinduism which is solely responsible for their degradation? How can the Untouchables stay in Hinduism? Untouchability is the lowest depth to which the degradation of a human being can be carried. To be poor is bad but not so bad as to be an Untouchable.”

(*Away from the Hindus*)

In the same work, Ambedkar also questioned whether Hinduism was able to view Untouchables as human beings, whether it would stand for their equality, guarantee their liberty,

and whether it would forge relations of brotherhood between them and Hindus. These were all questions which the Hindus could not “dare to give an affirmative answer to”¹⁸. Hinduism had ascribed the name, “Untouchable”, which had an immense psychological impact on holders of this name. By understanding the importance of one’s name in the determination of status, value and self-confidence, Ambedkar proposed a religious conversion away from Hinduism and towards Buddhism that would rename these former Untouchables as Dalits. Even as unpractical as the conversion may seem to others¹⁹, leaving the Hindu fold would represent liberation from the chains of Hinduism and Untouchability, which were so inextricably linked.

Redefining religion and Dhamma

With Ambedkar’s frustration towards caste, this leads to the discussion of why Ambedkar had chosen Buddhism after many years of research and consideration. According to Gauri Viswanathan, it was due to the “spiritual impoverishment of brahmanical Hinduism [which] produced not metaphysical despair but a profound sense of injustice, [and was what] Ambedkar clearly saw as the heart of the Buddhist conversion experience”²⁰. In his essay “Buddha and Future of His Religion”, Ambedkar identifies morality or *Dhamma* as the key element which distinguishes Buddhism from Hinduism, indicating “the Buddha was the first teacher in the world who made morality the essence and foundation of religion”²¹. In making his comparison to Buddhism with other non-Hindu religions, his summarized differences include “the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together”, an accord with science, a code of social morality that “must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity”²² and a religion that does “not sanctify or ennoble poverty”²³. Ambedkar regards Buddhism as the ideological tool and catalyst in his Dalit emancipation movement for

deconstructing social barriers associates with his views of religion as realizing the “tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity”²⁴, which coincidentally is also the national motto of France and quoted from the French Revolution²⁵. It was through conversion to Buddhism that would “restore to Dalits an agency that Untouchability had eroded”²⁶. It dissolves their inferiority complex and allows them to feel “himself the equal of every other human being”²⁷.

What is particularly notable is how Ambedkar chose to use the term “Dhamma” instead of “Dharma” despite both refer to the Buddha’s teachings²⁸. However, the former represents pronunciation in Pali whereas the latter is pronunciation in Sanskrit²⁹. This may be Ambedkar’s intention not to be involved in the process of Sanskritization, which is “the process by which individuals or entire lower caste groups seek to emulate the practices of higher *varna*, particularly Brahmins, in order to make their behavior seem purer or more orthodox.”³⁰ By choosing to use the term “Dhamma” such as in his book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, it suggests his desire to be detached from anything that is associated with Hinduism. It reflects that he does not wish to convey that the conversion was to emulate the practices of the higher castes through the use of the word “Dharma”, but that it is indeed a movement completely independent from the higher castes.

Despite his spiritual and psychological emphasis, when one associates Ambedkarite Buddhism to the present today, it is mainly political in nature and was also one of the primary criticisms of the conversion by opponents against the conversion³¹, arguing that it was political, that the Untouchables would receive gains, that conversion of the Untouchables is “not genuine as it is not based on faith”³² and that because “all religions are true, all religions are good, to change religion is a futility”³³. However, in *Away From the Hindus*, Ambedkar had denied the existence of political gains for Untouchables in the conversion movement³⁴, arguing there is

neither gain nor loss and that in fact, they will “lose the political rights that are given to the Untouchables”³⁵. More important than a political gain was a social gain that would give hope to Untouchables and introduce them to a “community whose religion has universalized and equalized all values of life”³⁶. It was through conversion with which hope, equality and opportunity had a meaning again. In his work, *Castes in India*, Ambedkar proposed giving “a new doctrinal basis to religion – a basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, in short, with Democracy. It means a complete change in outlook and in attitude towards men and things. It means conversion.”³⁷ Democracy is capitalized to underline his interpretation of democracy not only as a form of government, but “primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience [where there is] an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.”³⁸ Despite his many followers preferred a politically charged, organizational movement that promoted social mobility using constitutional methods³⁹, Ambedkar had chosen the non-violent method of conversion to Buddhism. While Ambedkar intended to leave the Hindu fold “due to his frustration of failing to secure self-representation for Untouchables”⁴⁰, it is not my intention to argue in this thesis that the conversion movement was not political. Instead, I hope to stress that the meaning of “self-representation” was *equally* spiritual as it was political and social.

Buddhism and The Moral Community

In *the Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar concludes with his emphasis that Buddhism is a religion that preaches equality and also makes a distinction between Religion and *Dhamma* (morality or social law). Ambedkar’s interpretation of Religion and *Dhamma*, which he again utilizes sayings in the Buddhist doctrine the *Digha Nikaya* to support his claims, is that the

former explained the beginning of the world, while “the purpose of *Dhamma* is to reconstruct the world”⁴¹. To Ambedkar, religion is a process of rationalization that focuses less on the supernatural factors. Instead, religion “universalizes social values and brings them to the mind of the individual who is required to recognize them in all his acts in order that he may function as an approved member of the society”⁴². Far from saving souls, religion preserves society and the welfare of the individual⁴³.

It is this concept of religion that Ambedkar used to address the ambivalence of leaving Hinduism and abandoning one’s national identity for Buddhism. Hinduism had become so deeply entrenched that calling oneself a Hindu was no longer only in the religious sense, but also became part of one’s national identity. According to Ambedkar, the conversion to Buddhism strengthened his role as a loyal Indian for he was restoring India back to being “a rational, modern nation state”⁴⁴ through the conversion. Values of brotherhood, equality and freedom were propagated by the Buddha and King Ashoka yet had disintegrated with the emergence of Brahmanism, which prevented India from becoming more moral and which had prevented the consolidation of moral communities⁴⁵. With this line of reasoning, the departure from Hinduism is not seen as a “withdrawal into an autonomous space but as a prerequisite to reclaiming India as the nation from which Untouchables had been severed by political disenfranchisement.”⁴⁶ While some argue that Ambedkar had failed to “negotiate the split between religious and national identity”⁴⁷, his emphasis however is the construction of a moral, spiritual community.

In his conversion vows to uphold the Buddhist Five Precepts⁴⁸, the Noble Eightfold Path⁴⁹ and Buddha’s *paramitas*⁵⁰, Ambedkar does not ‘superstitiously’ worship the Buddha but regards Buddhism as the philosophy towards a dignified, moral life. In essence, it advocates the code of social morality – living a righteous life – of Ambedkar’s understanding of religion.

When a Dalit converts to Buddhism, they must abide by the Twenty-Two vows⁵¹ which Ambedkar established. While a large proportion of the vows refer to abandonment of Hinduism, a few of the vows which are of interest in this thesis are the ones that emphasize the Buddhist precepts:

(11) I shall follow the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha

(12) I shall follow the *paramitas* prescribed the Buddha.

(14) I shall not steal.

(15) I shall not tell lies.

(16) I shall not take intoxicants like liquor, drugs, etc.

(18) I shall endeavor to follow the Noble Eightfold Path and practice compassion and loving kindness in everyday life⁵².

These were Buddhist precepts that served as guidelines towards a moral, blissful, harmonious and dignified life. While the conversion vows which emphasize an abandonment of Hinduism are understandable considering the motivations behind conversion was indeed, to leave the Hindu fold for practicing Hindu rituals would only once again submit Untouchables to Untouchability again. Yet, why of all Buddhist philosophies did Ambedkar choose to emphasize in the vows these precepts that are guidelines and perfections towards a 'right' moral life? Perhaps this was to suit the purpose of the conversion for it was after all, a conversion to Buddhism. However, could these conversion vows regarding the Buddhist precepts perhaps have served more than just that?

Among the Buddhist concepts, Ambedkar also particularly stresses the importance of *karuna* (compassion) and *prajna* (understanding). Ambedkar cites from the Buddha that one must not “stop with *karuna* but go beyond mankind and cultivate the spirit of *maitri*”⁵³. While *karuna* and *maitri* are defined as compassion, the former is compassion for human beings while the latter extends towards all living or sentient beings. According to Ambedkar and his interpretations of Buddha’s theories, loving kindness is the freedom of heart that “glows, shines and blazes forth”⁵⁴. Ambedkar also compares one to the lotus who untouched by water – envy, hatred, narcissism – will experience joy, peace and bliss, and that “the bliss of a religious life is attainable by everyone who walks in the Noble Eightfold Path”⁵⁵. In a way, this elucidates a spiritual liberation inherent in any religion, and suggests Ambedkar’s intent to promote the Buddhist way to a blissful lifestyle for his intended audience, devoid of any socio-political purposes which he was frequently criticized for. By extending kindness to one another can one experience bliss. Along with abiding to the *paramitas*, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Buddhist Five Precepts as iterated in the vows, this parallels with what the Buddha had said about the power of discipline to cultivate inner peace, bliss and stability.

Religion is deeply entrenched in the idea of moral disposition, which for Ambedkar, “was closely intertwined with notions of rational choice, cultural identity and self-renewal”⁵⁶. The above analysis highlights Ambedkar’s equal emphasis on the spiritual and psychological elements in the Buddhist conversion, but also introduces the hidden importance of the conversion vows that stress the Buddhist precepts. As briefly mentioned earlier, these vows along with the practice of compassion (*karuna* and *maitri*) purportedly led to inner peace and bliss. Ambedkar had also proposed that conversion was not only liberation from Hinduism, but would also help to dissolve the inferiority complex of the Untouchables. Prior to examining the Buddhist precepts in

the conversion vows, I will firstly step back and examine in the following section, the importance of the conversion vows that necessitate the abandonment of Hinduism to better understand the spiritual transformations intended behind the conversion.

In the Dalits: The Dilemma of Buddhist Conversion

The significance of the spiritual aspects of conversion can be seen in the Dalits encountered dilemmas and complicated scenarios when they embrace Buddhism because of the social context which they are situated in. Aside from the vows which emphasize the precepts and conversion, there are also five that stress the renunciation of Hinduism, mandating absolutely no worship of Hindu deities, which created complicated scenarios for the Dalits⁵⁷. Firstly, as the caste system and Untouchability – one of the primary causes of their inferiority complex and social stigma – are deeply rooted within Hinduism, to embrace both Hinduism and Buddhism would defeat the purpose of religious conversion in the first place. One is to note though that, when they abandon their duties and attempt to leave the caste system, they are detached from society as well due to the integral nature between Hinduism and society⁵⁸. As Venerable Jueya, a monk at the Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Taiwan wrote, even though Dalits are discriminated against and the caste system is unfavorable to them, their position in society albeit low and stigmatized, gives them a sense of security for they are still part of the system⁵⁹. When world-renowned Dalit novelist Ajay Navaria was asked whether he would identify himself as a Hindu⁶⁰, he mentioned “how he cannot say he is not a Hindu” for it is in his birth certificate and therefore an inherent part of his identity. The quest for equality can be achieved “without losing the roots and traditional identity of a devoted Hindu”⁶¹. Regardless of the social stigma that was created, Hinduism has been at the heart of every Indian across all castes and therefore, the Dalit struggles

with this sudden abandonment of what was inherent to them in favor for an unfamiliar religion. Hinduism was what made them Indian. Thus, despite Ambedkar chose Buddhism to remain patriotic to India, to the Dalits, Hinduism was what gave them their Indian identity despite this very religion was also what had caused their inferiority complex. Although Ambedkar had intended conversion to be equally psychological as it is social, Buddhist conversion became a dichotomy of liberation and alienation.

As conveyed in the flag-raising song at the Buddhist conversion, “a new spirit filled their bodies/A new confidence filled the air”⁶². Dalits did undergo a spiritual transformation where they gained self-confidence and saw themselves as equal counterparts in society. Eleanor Zelliot cites from the *Times of India* that the “Buddhists seem to have got rid of their age-old inferiority complex. They have a fresh sense of identity and a newly acquired confidence.”⁶³ This confidence and abandonment of their inferiority transpires across all genders, and can be seen for example, in the account of Vasant Moon’s mother. In his story of his childhood, *Growing Up Untouchable in India*, Dalit activist Vasant Moon, had recounted several instances where his mother showed her new gained confidence from conversion, a confidence that Moon was impressed with and later in life, became her legacy. His mother, Purnabai, had a strong sense of dignity, “get[ting] very furious if anyone calls [her] a thief”⁶⁴ and had left her job when she was accused for stealing. Furthermore whenever Ambedkar came to Nagpur, Purnabai “went to processions, [and] also attended meetings”⁶⁵, actions which Moon used the word “independent-minded” to describe. As Moon had written at the beginning of his book, his mother had “taught [them] the new alphabet: the A of “aspiration”, the B of “Bahasaheb”, and the C of “confidence”⁶⁶. The spiritual transformation of Purnabai was particularly notable as Dalit women are considered to be those who encounter a triple-fold discrimination of their caste, their

economic situation and their gender. Purnabai's newly found confidence was the spiritual transformation from Ambedkarite Buddhism which Dalits underwent.

Yet as purported earlier with the dichotomy, the Dalit community often faces a dilemma between practicing Hindu traditions and the spiritual transformation which Buddhism had inspired in them. As Hindu traditions are so entrenched in one's national identity, it becomes harder to find the dividing line between what rituals are allowed and why they could not be practiced when Buddhism had already injected the confidence that had liberated them from their inferiority complex. Despite Dalit Buddhists have begun to adapt Buddhist spiritual practices thereby evoking an ideological discontinuity from Hindu beliefs and practices, this discontinuity is juxtaposed with their selective continuity in certain Hindu traditions⁶⁷. According to Kenta Funahashi, a researcher from Kyoto University and the observational field study which he conducted at a Buddhist-Dalit family in Uttar Pradesh, Buddhist Dalits still celebrate Diwali for a sympathetic reason to "maintain their relationships with Hindu relatives"⁶⁸. This dichotomy can also be seen in action in the same book, *Growing Up Untouchable in India*. For example, when Vasant Moon's mother had converted, she "had bought a small framed picture of the Buddha and began to do *puja* before that"⁶⁹ yet one day when Moon returned from town, he noticed a small picture of Sai Baba, a Hindu saint next to the Buddha's picture. As iterated in the former section, Dalit Buddhists were not allowed to worship Hindu gods. Moon had deliberated for a moment before carrying out his following action.

I thought for a little while. Should I hurt Mother's feelings? Would she be upset? Then I made a sudden decision. Facing us there was a tiled house. I hurled the picture of Sai Baba at that house. I said, "You know, in this house we don't do any *puja* besides the Buddha's. Not to Sai Baba or Gajanan Maharaj or whoever.

(Moon, 2011:171)

Moon's hesitation in this passage is particularly interesting for it is a stellar example of the sticky situation where Hindu traditions and Buddhism intersect. This stickiness is even clearer in the dialogue between Ambedkar and Moon about Hindu traditions. When Moon had asked Ambedkar whether they were going to have a new marriage ceremony after converting to Buddhism to replace the rituals of marriage from earlier times, Ambedkar responded, "Oh, whether you put a paper hat on your head or on your knees, does it make any difference? Yes, even so, for the common people, some rituals are necessary.'...while skimming through the magazine"⁷⁰. Firstly, Ambedkar's act of "skimming through the magazine" while replying to Moon's questions suggested nonchalance and secondly, his response suggests a loosening of the vow that Dalits are not supposed to worship Hindu gods or engage in Hindu traditions. This suggests a possibility to embrace the spiritual transformation from Buddhism and Hindu traditions which as a culture itself, is what makes Dalits Indian.

The analysis in this subsection thus suggests that abandonment of Hindu rituals was not as important as it portrayed, which brings one to the significance of the Buddhist precepts in the second part of the conversion vows. The analysis of Ambedkar's works and the Dalits' dilemma highlights Ambedkar's equal emphasis on the spiritual and psychological elements in the Buddhist conversion, which leads to the next questions: what is the purpose of the Buddhist precepts in the conversion vows? How does this spiritual importance of the conversion renew the individual and dissolve their inferiority complex? What was the plausible purpose of the conversion being both political and spiritual?

PART II: BUDDHISM IN THE SUTRAS

Although Ambedkar insisted abandoning all which had to do with Hinduism, the religion which had subscribed Dalits to their inferiority complex, the previous analysis on Dalit literature reveals his nonchalance towards his followers who continue their customary practices of Hindu rituals. At first glance, Ambedkar's attitude contradicts the Twenty-Two vows which he had explicitly devised in the conversion movement. However it also highlights once again, the importance of Ambedkar's idea of moral disposition which was, as Viswanathan argues, "closely intertwined with notions of rational choice, cultural identity and self-renewal"⁷¹. It also introduces a spotlight on the conversion vows on the Buddhist precepts. Hinduism was inextricable from the contemporary notion of national identity, and his attitude towards the continued practices of Hinduism rituals, suggests a possibility to maintain one's cultural identity and still attain self-renewal. The attached spiritual importance suggests firstly, that Ambedkar believed Buddhism was an engine to this process of self-renewal and that there was something which Buddhism offers that led Ambedkar to advocate for its spiritual importance. This leads to a crucial question – how? How is Buddhism an engine to this process of self-renewal? After examining how the vows on abandonment from Hinduism were not as crucial as seemed, the attention refocuses back to the vows on the Buddhist precepts. How do these vows which require an external transformation – a change of one's comportment and actions – lead to a transformation that is more spiritual, intimate and internal?

The Buddha and Caste

In order to explore and understand how Buddhism can be an engine to this process of self-renewal in the context of caste, one has to step back and first complicate a main assumption

which Ambedkar had made, albeit after many years of study in Buddhism. Ambedkar claimed that Buddhism was a religion which embraced “liberty, equality and fraternity”⁷² and thus, through this reasoning, was purportedly a religion that did not believe in caste. While Ambedkar had cited many stories from Buddhist sutras in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, they were merely insinuations of Buddha’s disregard for caste. In light of this, it is worth directly examining the sutras to understand how the Buddha truly thought about caste.

According to the Aggañña Sutra, caste arose from greed to become better than others. The Aggañña Sutra describes a conversion which Buddha had with his two disciples, Vasettha and Bharadvaja who were reprimanded by society for leaving their Brahmin caste. The Buddha began by explaining that initially “beings were reckoned just as beings only”⁷³ which suggests a pure state of equality among all individuals. When earth began to spread out into the waters, some “being of greedy disposition”⁷⁴ tasted the earth and “craving entered into him”⁷⁵. As these beings consumed more of the earth for a long time, “their bodies become solid... some beings were well-favored...and despised [those] that were ill favored, thinking: ‘We are more comely than they; they are worse favored than we.’”⁷⁶ As they became more proud and vain of their beauty, the earth had disappeared. Finally, the Buddha concluded that irrespective of caste, the enlightened individual far surpasses the caste system.

“Whosoever of these Four classes becomes, as a bhikkhu, an arahant, who has destroyed the intoxicants, who has done that which it behoved him to do, who has laid down the burden, who has won his own salvation, who has wholly destroyed the fetter of re-becoming, who through knowledge made perfect is free, - he is declared chief among them, in virtue of a norm, not in the absence of a norm.”⁷⁷

From the Aggañña Sutra, one can deduce that rather than birth which determines one's worth and value, it is spiritual cultivation such as destroying cravings, desires and upholding oneself, which is the defining factor. It restores the spiritual community to the purest, initial stage where "beings were reckoned just as beings"⁷⁸. Spiritual cultivation also describes the process where one "has won his own salvation", suggesting the autonomy and right to power over oneself that is not contingent upon external factors such as the caste system.

To examine the discussion of caste in traditional Buddhism even further, I will analyze the encounter of Ananda and Matangi's daughter - an encounter that gave birth to the Surangama Sutra (楞嚴經 *lengyanjing*), which was translated into Chinese by Shramana Paramiti⁷⁹ during the Tang dynasty (750 AD). Unlike the references to Upali, a Shudra and one of Buddha's Ten Greatest Disciples where most sutras cite his experiences of spiritual cultivation, this encounter between Ananda and Matangi occurs in lay society and encompasses an overwhelming amount of details that indirectly address Buddhist philosophies of caste. In this subsection, I will analyze this story in the Sutra on Matangi's daughter (佛說摩鄧女經 *foshuomodengnvjing*) which was translated into Chinese by An Shigao⁸⁰ and the Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經 *modengjiaying*) which was translated into Chinese by Zhu Jiangyan⁸¹.

According to the Matangi Sutra, Ananda, one of Buddha's Ten Greatest Disciples went to the city to beg for food and encountered Matangi's daughter by the river⁸². Matangi's daughter came from the *chandala* (旃陀羅 *chantuoluo*) or Untouchable caste⁸³. Ananda asked her if she could kindly offer him water. The moment Matangi saw Ananda, she was swept by his dignified behavior and immediately fell deeply in love with him⁸⁴. She followed him to seek his place of rest before returning home, weeping to her mother that she wanted to marry him. Despite Matangi had told her daughter that he was Buddha's disciple and thus was not allowed to marry

after visiting him, Matangi's daughter persisted with her wails, insisting that she would commit suicide if Ananda could not be her husband⁸⁵. Matangi knew a form of black magic, *gudao* (蠱道)⁸⁶ where she used venomous creatures such as worms and caterpillars to manipulate Ananda into marrying Matangi's daughter. Because of the Buddha's spiritual cultivation, the Buddha was able to feel that Ananda was in danger and asked a *bodhisattva*⁸⁷, Manjushri (文殊菩薩 *wenshupusa*) to recite the Surangama Mantra (楞嚴咒 *lengyanzhou*) to save Ananda⁸⁸⁹. Matangi's daughter was dissatisfied and insisted that she wished to marry Ananda. The Buddha told her to shave her head like Ananda did, if she wished to marry him⁹⁰. When she returned with her shaven head, the Buddha later preached to Matangi's daughter about the polluted body and the Four Noble Truths. Upon hearing his words, she became enlightened.

Such was the story of Ananda and Matangi which arouses many thoughts, particularly a seemingly blatantly obvious question: why did the Buddha save Ananda? From my upbringing, the traditional, unanimous consensus was that Ananda would breach monastic vows, a deleterious sin that would create bad karma for him and make him stray from the right path. Ananda had vowed to abide to the precepts⁹¹, practice spiritual cultivation and abandon greed, desire and love⁹² thus he was not allowed to marry⁹³. As controversial as it may seem to those who practice traditional Buddhism, was it truly because Ananda would break the monastic precepts that the Buddha saved Ananda or was it possibly, even slightly, because a breach of societal norms through inter-caste marriage, should Ananda, a Kshatriya⁹⁴ marry Matangi's daughter, that was the underlying problem? More specifically, why was it that the Matangi Sutra chose to emphasize that Matangi's daughter, the girl by the river was an Untouchable (池側有女 梅陀羅種)⁹⁵?

The mention of caste in the Chinese translations of the sutras does not seem to be attributed to the controversies surrounding the plausibility of an inter-caste marriage, but instead, *challenges* stereotypical conceptions by suggesting that female Untouchables, who experience the triple discrimination of caste, gender and economic situation⁹⁶, are capable of being enlightened. When the Buddha summoned Matangi's daughter to see him, he asked her why she loved Ananda so deeply. She exclaimed how much she was infatuated by Ambedkar's eyes, nose, mouth, ears, voice and footsteps. The Buddha then replied, "The eyes have tears, the nose has mucus, the mouth has saliva, the ear has dirt, the body has feces"⁹⁷ and that after marriage and birth of children, one has to experience aging, death and sorrow. Matangi's daughter pondered Buddha's words and realized just how dirty and impermanent the human body was. Seeing how Ananda's body was dirty like every human body was, that the body was just an impermanent shell, there was nothing else she could love. Her lust and intense desire disappeared, and she gained enlightenment⁹⁸. This suggests that even though she was a female, an Untouchable and was consumed by intense love for Ananda, she was still capable of being enlightened after hearing Buddha's words.

Not only does this story elucidate that even the most socially stigmatized individual can be enlightened, but also that the Buddha is indiscriminate in his compassion to preach and save all individuals. In the Matangi Sutra, the Buddha preached that the consequences of greed, cravings, desire were like a moth throwing itself into a fierce flame, destroying itself⁹⁹. The Buddha preached to Matangi's daughter about the Four Noble Truths of *dukkha* or suffering (四真諦法)¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹: cravings and desire that gave rise to *dukkha*, the need to end *dukkha* due to its impediments to rebirth and the way to leave *dukkha*. The act of preaching to Matangi's daughter about the Four Noble Truths can be interpreted as his compassion to leave *samsara*¹⁰²¹⁰³, initiate

her into spiritual cultivation so she can leave *dukkha* and no longer have to suffer. When Matangi's daughter heard the Buddha's words, "she was enlightened and immediately understood His wisdom on the Four Noble Truths, the way something pure and white is easily touched by colors. She gained Arahant hood¹⁰⁴, prostrated in front of the Buddha and repented"¹⁰⁵. What is particularly important is that her enlightenment was described as "something pure and white [that] is easily touched by colors"¹⁰⁶ (豁然意解悟四聖諦譬如新淨白[疊*毛]易受染色), where white suggests a state of purity, innocence and cleanliness, contrary to the qualities of filth, dirtiness and "stink"¹⁰⁷ which is used to describe Untouchables. Secondly, the color white that can be easily colored once again reinforces the Buddha's belief that caste and gender are not impediments, and that any individual can easily access, understand and achieve enlightenment from His Dharma. This therefore, reaffirmed Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism as a religion that does not judge one's worth by caste and thus is equal, liberating and accessible religion to the Untouchables.

Not only so, the description of her enlightenment as "something pure and white [that] is easily touched by colors"¹⁰⁸ can also be interpreted as the process of self-renewal which Ambedkar believed Buddhism could initiate. The process described in the sutra where color infiltrates whiteness is also seen as a transformation from white to another color – a renewal. Once something white is dyed with even the faintest of another color, it is no longer white but something else. The impression and mark is far more prominent than another color such as brown that is dyed with another color. Most importantly, the color on whiteness stays. Metaphorically, such was the conveyed power of Buddhism that was capable of initiating a pure, complete and prominent transformation where the individual's consequent state of self-renewal is impactful and everlasting. Bearing in mind that this sutra is accessible to Buddha's disciples

and anyone in lay society, this description thus not only illustrates what the Buddha perceived as the true, pure state of the Untouchable and the power of Buddhist philosophy in the process of self-renewal, but also signals a renewal of one's perception of the Untouchable. Like myopia that is corrected with the right glasses, it corrects perceptions that Untouchables are degraded, unclean and impure individual because of their caste and that because of this, they are incapable of being enlightened. This description thus is reflective of the internal and external process of renewal – the internal process of self-renewal that was experienced by Matangi's daughter and the external process where societal misperceptions are corrected and renewed.

This process of corrected misperceptions is external as it is a renewal of other's perceptions that is external to one's internal process of self-renewal. Yet, this idea of external and internal processes of self-renewal and transformation in Buddhism is reminiscent of the political and spiritual aspects of Ambedkar's religious conversion, where the former is an external process and the latter is internal. In the previous parts of the thesis, I had argued that the religious conversion was equally spiritual as it was political. However, it leads one to question why Ambedkar would have chosen to have a religious conversion that was *both* political and spiritual instead of it being either political or spiritual.

A plausible answer to this can be seen through the encounter between Matangi's daughter and the Buddha, when the Buddha had asked her to shave her head if she wished to marry Ananda. The Buddha could have preached Matangi's daughter when she insisted that her desire to marry him. However, why did the Buddha ask her to shave her head before preaching to her? What was the purpose of this bodily performance? As mentioned earlier, when Matangi's daughter returned with her shaven head, the Buddha preached to her the impermanence of the body. Ananda's body was dirty like every other human body where his eyes would have tears,

the ear has dirt¹⁰⁹ and thus, there was nothing else she could love if the body was just an impermanent shell, an illusion. The bodily act of shaving her head, so she could be like Ananda¹¹⁰, could plausibly be interpreted as her indirect initiation into the *sangha* or Buddhist community, considering that *bhikkunis* or female nuns need to shave their heads when taking the monastic vows¹¹¹. Secondly, considering that hair is one of the defining features of a woman's beauty, her shaven head could be rendered as a naked exposure of herself to herself. This physical transformation of being beautiful with her hair, and less beautiful without, helps to reinforce the Buddha's teaching to her about the pollution and impermanence of the shell which is our body. In essence, this bodily act of shaving her head can be interpreted as a platform that leads her to understand the Buddha's teachings and thus be enlightened. It is an internal process that is initiated by an external act.

This thus offers an explanation as to why Ambedkar may have wanted the religious conversion movement to be both political and spiritual. As described in Part 1, the conversion movement which Ambedkar propagated was to publicly demonstrate a regained sense of self-worth, an identity, the breaking away from the chains of Hinduism which had subjected his caste to centuries of discrimination and social stigma. Seeing how conversion to Buddhism would restore confidence and a new identity for them, the Untouchables followed suit. It was perceived as a public act of defiance to the Hindu community and made them believe that they were truly reborn¹¹². Like the shaven head of Matangi's daughter, this could be interpreted as an external bodily performance, a footstep into the door that initiated the Untouchables into the internal process of self-renewal. Part of this external bodily performance of the conversion was obeying to Ambedkar's Twenty-Two vows which, aforementioned, consist of vows to abandon Hindu practices and worship as well as vows to abide to Buddhist precepts such as the *paramitas* and

the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. In light of this, there are two external processes: the public conversion itself which initiated the Untouchables into the doorstep of Buddhism, which in itself, encompassed the external transformation and cultivation of one's comportment through abiding to the Buddhist precepts which supposedly, would lead to the internal process of spiritual cultivation. The link between the latter two leads to the final question: how does this external process of cultivation or asceticism transform one's internal climate? How does this transition the process of self-renewal and transformation from the external to the internal?

Diligent Asceticism

In order to further explore this process of cultivation that starts from the external (cultivation of the body) and moves to the internal (cultivation of the mind), I will analyze a form of law in Buddhism – diligent asceticism – by examining Upali's experience. In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar dedicates a whole chapter to describe the Buddhist conversions which took place across different castes, from Brahmins to the Untouchables. Among these conversions was the story of Upali, a famous story in the Buddhist scriptures¹¹³, which coming from a devout Buddhist family, I have heard of too. Upali was born in the lowly Shudra caste, worked as a barber and was eager to become Buddha's disciple yet due to the criticisms from Brahmins and princely families, he was initially unaccepted. However, the Buddha said that all are born equal and accepted Upali as his disciple ranking him above the prince converts according to the order in which they joined the *sangha*. Today, Upali is known in Buddhism to be one of Buddha's ten chief disciples, notable for upholding the Buddhist precepts.

According to the Buddhist sutras, discipline and asceticism purifies the body and the spirit. In this section, I analyze the Chinese version of the Surangama Sutra (楞嚴經 *lengyanjing*)

translated by Shramana Paramiti¹¹⁴ during the Tang dynasty (750 AD), aforementioned which originated from the encounter of Ananda and Matangi's daughter. The section of interest in this analysis, however, is the fifth section. This is where the Buddha asked his twenty-five disciples to share each of the different methods¹¹⁵ which they used to cultivate themselves, to access the true wisdom of the Dharma and to purify their Six Roots¹¹⁶, all three of which are categorized under the term *yuantong* (圓通)¹¹⁷. When Upali stood up, he praised the merits of asceticism and responded, “The Buddha asks of *yuantong*. I focus on the body, on cultivating right conduct and right behavior to attain inner bliss and tranquility. Cultivating my body through right actions cultivates my heart. My heart and mind¹¹⁸ become clear and purified. This to me, is the best way to attain *yuantong*“(佛問圓通，我以執身，身得自在，次第執心，心得通達，然後身心一切通利，斯為第一。). From this, one can see that discipline through asceticism is not merely a transformation of physical behavior, but more importantly, the effect of this physical transformation is heavily spiritual by changing one's spirit and inner climate.

In the Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching (佛遺教經 *foyijiaojing*), the Buddha explained that when He passes away, the *sangha* community should respect the Buddhist rules and precepts for they will be their teacher¹¹⁹. Abiding to the Buddhist precepts helps one to achieve inner stability and peace, but also enlightens one with the wisdom to ease the troubling mind. The Buddha says respecting the precepts is like darkness meeting light, the poor receiving treasures (如闇遇明，貧人得寶). As quoted in the Surangama Sutra, Upali told Buddha that he had “abided to the 3,000 rules of deportment and the 80,000 minute moral rules¹²⁰¹²¹, where his habits and actions were purified. His body and spirit experienced calm and relief¹²², and he attained enlightenment”(如是乃至三千威儀，八萬微細，性業遮業，悉皆清淨。身心寂滅，成阿

羅漢). Asceticism requires rigor yet, as elaborated in the Buddhist sutras, discipline of actions and behavior purifies the body and the spirit, helping one to attain enlightenment, dignity and immeasurable bliss. It is also reflective of the Three *Sikkhas* or Threefold Training in Chinese, 戒定慧 (*jiedinghui*)¹²³ where 戒 (*jie*) refers to discipline, 定 (*ding*) refers to inner stability and 慧 (*hui*) refers to wisdom and enlightenment. The *sikkhas* are recited in this order for it is discipline that leads to inner stability and thus cultivates wisdom. Due to the purifying nature of asceticism, the internal processes of enlightenment and inner peace can be considered as the effect of asceticism – the external spiritual cultivation of oneself, which not only provides a preliminary understanding to why monastic discipline was valued so highly by Upali, and the Buddha, but secondly also illustrates how cultivation moves in from the external, the cultivation of the body to the internal, the cultivation of the heart and mind.

As cultivating right conduct and right behavior is a mutual process with transforming the mind, this once again signals how abiding the conversion vows of following the *paramitas*, the Five Precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism, all of which are rules that govern behavior transitions from the external to an internal transformation. The internal transformation was important. Throughout *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar emphasizes many times the importance of the mind. In the first chapter, “How a Bodhisatta became the Buddha” where he begins with a comprehensive overview of the Buddha and his teachings, he particularly highlights Buddha’s distinguishing feature of his teachings that “the mind [is] the centre of everything”¹²⁴. Ambedkar quotes from the Dhammapada that the “cleaning of the mind is, therefore, the essence of religion”¹²⁵, that if “one speaks or acts with a polluted mind, then affliction follows him as the wheels of the cart follow the feet of the bullocks who pull the cart”¹²⁶. Aforementioned in the previous sections, “stink” was deeply embedded in the name,

Untouchable which submitted Dalits to what Ambedkar called, an inferiority complex, a feeling that they were worthless, degraded, dirty who were not considered as human beings. The idea of “stink” and “untouchable” submits the individual to think that they are polluted. By understanding that one’s worth is not attributed to their birth but rather their actions which are governed by the mind, the heart and mind become purified (身心一切通利). Reflecting one of Ambedkar’s Twenty Two vows, “Dalits believe that [they] are having a re-birth”¹²⁷.

While this transformation was a transition from the external to the internal – how the movement which was a public and political encompasses cultivation of the body, both of which acted as a pathway into the internal change – the transformation that occurred internally is reflected back as an external transformation. Like the common saying that actions speak louder than words, good conduct creates a charisma, an inexplicable quality that arouses respect from others. An individual who follows the rules of deportment (威儀 *weiyi*) carry themselves well, are mindful, solemn and dignified¹²⁸. The word “dignified” was chosen carefully to evoke the same meanings which the Chinese word *zhuangyan* (莊嚴) evokes. A dignified person is defined as “having or showing a composed or serious manner that is worthy of respect”¹²⁹. In light of the Buddha’s sayings, holding the precepts cultivates the body and the spirit, purifying the heart and ultimately emanating a dignified quality that makes one worthy of respect. It is important to highlight that such respect is different from the type of respect which the low caste are supposed to have to the high caste, for example. The latter is aroused through an institution or societal system that makes this respect obligatory yet may not be heartfelt by the individual. The former however, is a form of ineffable respect that is aroused involuntarily, like a gravitational pull or gut feeling akin to love at first sight. Because the former, unlike the latter, is not forced and is a heartfelt feeling that does not require reason to justify, it is more sustainable and everlasting. In

light of the type of respect from the dignified aura that a person of discipline and good conduct cultivates, asceticism is a means for the lower castes to redeem themselves within the *sangha* and in society. As the Buddha said in the Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching, diligent asceticism can "conquer one's sense of shame and is foremost in cultivating one's dignity" (慚恥之服，於諸莊嚴，最為第一。)

One can draw from Upali's story as an example. One who converts to Buddhism before the other is considered to be the elder and thus, the latter is supposed to pay respects to those who converted before him/her. In the Vinaya-Matrka Sutra (毘尼母經 *pinimujing*), Upali had converted before the Buddha's brother of the royal family. When he realized he had to pay his respects to Upali, his sense of self and pride immediately emerged. The Buddha's brother exclaimed angrily why he should bow to Upali when he used to work for him as a barber.¹³⁰¹³¹ The Buddha later preached and told them that all sentient beings are born equal, and that once they enter the *sangha*, the fourfold *varna* system of caste does not exist anymore¹³². As suggested in the Vinaya-Matrka Sutra, there are people of different castes in the *sangha*. Although he had repented for his misconduct after hearing the Buddha's words and let go of his self to pay his respects to Upali, as with any religious community, it is realistically possible that new converts generally still carry habits or belief systems from their lay society and thus, may still ostracize Upali for his previous caste status even though they had once understood the Buddha's words. While epiphanies do happen, spiritual transformations do not occur overnight and often times, it takes time for Buddha's teachings to replace old habits with new ones. In light of the two types of respect which were previously discussed, the respect which a new convert should make to their elders is something that they should do but may not wish to do, as with the possible case of the Buddha's brother and Upali. Thus, as actions are stronger than words, it is

through holding the precepts that one nurtures an irresistible dignified aura that instills respect in others. Upali was foremost among all of Buddha's disciples in holding the precepts and we can therefore purport that the dignified, silent way with which he carried himself through the precepts garnered true, heartfelt respect from the *sangha*, thus emanating and actualizing Buddha's words that all are born equal.

With the above analysis, one sees that the external act of cultivation initiates an internal transformation that is then emanated as a new form of external transformation. Such is the process of self-renewal that was initiated by Buddhism and the conversion movement. Right behavior and right conduct which the movement itself had initiated through the Vows, not only transforms their internal climate and helps them attain enlightenment, but more importantly, right behavior makes them worthy of respect, a respect that is reactive and more powerful than those demanded from instituted value systems. The effects of such spiritual cultivation become indestructible and powerful to both the individual and the society. These processes allow us to understand the spiritual dynamics behind Ambedkar's religious conversion.

CONCLUSION

Despite Ambedkar's followers wished for a more politically charged representation, he in the end chose to organize a religious conversion to emancipate and liberate the Untouchables, highlighting that the conversion was equally spiritual as it was political. Ambedkar had chosen to convert to Buddhism as he perceived it as a religion that promoted tenets defined in the French Enlightenment – liberty, equality and fraternity. In the Twenty –Two Vows, Ambedkar had insisted to his followers to abandon Hinduism, such as worship of Hindu gods and rituals as well as to practice the Buddhist precepts. Yet through analysis of Dalit biographies, in fact, Ambedkar

was nonchalant towards his followers practicing certain Hindu rituals as he understood it was something which was part of the Indian culture and identity. The first part therefore highlights that the conversion was in fact equally spiritual as it was political.

Through analysis of Buddhist sutras in traditional Buddhism, one sees that the Buddha perceived caste as a cause of greed and believed that far from being polluted and unclean, Untouchables are in fact clean and pure at heart. Not only could the most discriminated individual within society – female Untouchables – were capable of being enlightened, but furthermore, the process of enlightenment was equal among all. This process of enlightenment describes a pure, complete transformation of the self for the Untouchable yet at the same time, also signals a renewed perception which society has on the individual. Such categorization of internal and external transformations resonates with the conversion movement where the movement in itself is a political, bodily performance (external) that initiated many Untouchables to the second external act of cultivating the body and one's comportment through the precepts. It is through the latter process that was induced by the former external act of the movement itself, which then leads to the process of self-renewal. The internal transformation which the Untouchable experiences through abiding to the precepts is then reflected back as a renewed external transformation – a radiant, confident, dignified and renewed individual that garners respect for not their labels, but for who they are.

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¹ Freeman, 50

² Ambedkar, 1994:17. Ambedkar outlines that the inferiority complex of Untouchables results from isolation, discrimination and unfriendliness of the social environment. This creates a feeling of helplessness and cost the person the power of self-assertion.

³ Punalekar, ed. by Shah, 245

⁴ Pandey, 1783

⁵ Religion, Kinship and Buddhism: Ambedkar's Vision of a Moral Community by Anne Blackburn, 14

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ambedkar, *Castes in India*, ed. by Rodrigues, 245

⁸ Ibid, 247

⁹ Ibid, 260

¹⁰ Ambedkar, *Away From the Hindus*, ed. by Rodrigues, 236

¹¹ Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, ed. by Rodrigues, 271

¹² Ibid, 274

¹³ Ibid, 274

¹⁴ Ibid, 275

¹⁵ Ambedkar, *Away From the Hindus*, ed. by Rodrigues, 235

¹⁶ Ibid, 234

¹⁷ Ibid, 229

¹⁸ Ibid, 228

¹⁹ Ibid, 228

²⁰ Viswanathan, 230

²¹ Ambedkar, 1950

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Embassy of France in Washington D.C. (<http://www.ambafrance-us.org/spip.php?article620>)

²⁶ Viswanathan, 232

²⁷ Ambedkar, *Away From the Hindus*, ed. by Rodrigues, 235

²⁸ Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism

²⁹ Buddhist Studies, Dharma (<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/dharmadata/fdd41.htm>)

³⁰ Johnson, W., A Dictionary of Hinduism

³¹ Ambedkar, *Away From the Hindus*, ed. by Rodrigues, 219

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ambedkar, *Away From the Hindus*, ed. by Rodrigues, 221

³⁵ Ibid, 230

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Viswanathan, 234

³⁸ Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, ed. by Rodrigues, 276

³⁹ Viswanathan, 224

⁴⁰ Ibid, 211

⁴¹ Ambedkar, 2011, 171.

⁴² Ambedkar, *Away From the Hindus*, ed. by Rodrigues, 226

⁴³ Ambedkar, *Away From the Hindus*, ed. by Rodrigues, 238

⁴⁴ Viswanathan, 232

⁴⁵ Viswanathan, 232

⁴⁶ Viswanathan, 239

⁴⁷ Viswanathan, 235

⁴⁸ The Buddhist Five precepts are: not killing or harming other living beings, avoiding sexual misconduct, avoiding false speech, abstaining from drink and drugs that cloud the mind and not stealing.

⁴⁹ The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to cease suffering. It is composed of 8 elements: right view, right concentration or *samadhi*, right mindfulness, right effort, right livelihood, right action, right speech and right intention.

⁵⁰ The *paramitas*, translated as the highest state or completeness, is the 10 virtues that purify karma and guide one to reach the goal of Buddhahood. They are *dana* (generosity), *sila* (morality), *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *panna* (wisdom), *viriya* (energy, diligence), *khanti* (patience), *sacca* (truthfulness), *adhitthana* (resolution), *metta* (loving kindness) and *upekkha* (equanimity).

⁵¹ The Twenty-Two vows: (1) I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh nor shall I worship them. (2) I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnation of God nor shall I worship them. (3) I shall have no faith in 'Gauri', Ganapati and other gods and goddesses of Hindus nor shall I worship them. (4) I do not believe in the incarnation of God. (5) I do not and shall not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be sheer madness and false propaganda. (6) I shall not perform 'Shraddha' nor shall I give 'pind-dan'. (7) I shall not act in a manner violating the principles and teachings of the Buddha. (8) I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins. (9) I shall believe in the equality of man. (10) I shall endeavor to establish equality. (11) I shall follow the 'noble eightfold path' of the Buddha. (12) I shall follow the 'paramitas' prescribed by the Buddha. (13) I shall have compassion and loving kindness for all living beings and protect them. (14) I shall not steal. (15) I shall not tell lies. (16) I shall not commit carnal sins. (17) I shall not take intoxicants like liquor, drugs etc. (18) I shall endeavor to follow the noble eightfold path and practice compassion and loving kindness in everyday life. (19) I renounce Hinduism which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion. (20) I firmly believe the Dhamma of the Buddha is the only true

religion. (21) I believe that I am having a re-birth. (22) I solemnly declare and affirm that I shall hereafter lead my life according to the principles and teachings of the Buddha and his Dhamma.

⁵² 22 Vows of Ambedkar, Ambedkar.org (<http://www.ambedkar.org/impdocs/22Vows.htm>)

⁵³ Ambedkar, 2011: 159

⁵⁴ Ibid, 161

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Viswanathan, 230

⁵⁷ The vows refer to: (1) I will not regard Brahma, Vishnu or Mahadev as gods and I will not worship them; (2) I will not regard Ram or Krishna as gods and I will not worship them; (3) I will not honor Gauri, Ganpati or any god of Hinduism and I will not worship them; (4) I agree that the propaganda that the Buddha was the avatar of Vishnu is false and mischievous; (5) I renounce the Hindu religion which has obstructed the evolution of my former humanity and considered humans unequal and inferior.

⁵⁸ Venerable Jue Ya 觉亚, Research on Ambedkar and Navayana Buddhism 安贝卡与其新佛教运动之研究, Hong Kong Po Lin Monastery

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Jaipur Literate Festival, Panel Discussion “God as a Political Philosopher: Dalit Perspectives on Buddhism

⁶¹ Shah 2001: 203

⁶² Moon, 67

⁶³ Omvedt, G., 1992: 218

⁶⁴ Moon, 2011: 75

⁶⁵ Moon, 2001:52

⁶⁶ Moon, 2001

⁶⁷ Kenta Funahashi, 2013

⁶⁸ Kenta Funahashi, 2013: 35

⁶⁹ Moon, 2001: 171

⁷⁰ Moon, 2001:148

⁷¹ Viswanathan, 230

⁷² Ambedkar, 1950

⁷³ Davids, T. W. R. & Davids, A.F.R., 1921, pp. 82

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid, 83

⁷⁷ Ibid, 93

⁷⁸ Davids, T. W. R. & Davids, A.F.R., 1921, pp. 82

⁷⁹ Shramana Pramiti was a monk from India during the Tang Dynasty. He travelled to China in 750 AD and translated the Surangama sutra before returning to India without a trace.

⁸⁰ An Shigao was an early Buddhist missionary to China who was allegedly formerly the prince of Parthia in 148 – 180 CE.

⁸¹ Zhu Jiangyan was an Indian monk who translated many Buddhist sutras during the Three Kingdoms Period from 222 – 228 CE.

⁸² From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “一時佛在舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園。時阿難持鉢行乞食。食已阿難隨水邊而行。見一女人在水邊擔水而去。阿難從女[曷-曰]水。女即與水。女便隨阿難。視阿難所止處。女歸告其母。母名摩鄢。女於家委地臥而啼。母問女何為悲啼。女言。母欲嫁我者莫與他人。我於水邊見一沙門從我[曷-曰]水。我問何字名阿難。我得阿難乃嫁。”

⁸³ Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Electronic Texts

⁸⁴ From the Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經): “此女便取阿難容貌音聲語言威儀等相”

⁸⁵ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “我女不得卿為夫者便自殺”

⁸⁶ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “母閉門以蠱道縛阿難”

⁸⁷ An enlightened being

⁸⁸ CT World, Ananda and Matangi's daughter (http://www.ctworld.org.tw/sutra_stories/story160-gb.htm)

⁸⁹ Xuefo.net, Lessons from the story of Matangi's daughter: Romance and Karma (<http://www.xuefo.net/nr/article7/70248.html>)

⁹⁰ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “佛告女言。阿難沙門無髮。汝有髮。汝寧能剃汝頭髮不。我使阿難為汝作夫。女言。我能剃頭髮。佛言。歸報汝母。剃頭髮來。女歸到母所言。母不能為我致阿難。佛言。剃汝頭髮來。我使阿難為汝作夫。母言。子我生汝。護汝頭髮。汝何為欲為沙門作婦。國中有大豪富家。我自能嫁汝與之。女言。我生死當為阿難作婦。母言。汝何為辱我種。女言。母愛我者。當隨我心所喜。母啼泣下刀剃女頭髮。女還到佛所言。我已剃頭髮。”

⁹¹ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “我持戒不畜妻”

⁹² CT World, Ananda and Matangi's daughter, http://www.ctworld.org.tw/sutra_stories/story160.htm

⁹³ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “我持戒不畜妻”

⁹⁴ Ananda was the Buddha's cousin and thus was a Kshatriya.

⁹⁵ Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經)

⁹⁶ Overcoming Violence, Now We are Fearless: *Facts about Dalit Women*, <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources/campaigns/women-against-violence/now-we-are-fearless/dalit-fact-sheet.html>

⁹⁷ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “佛言。眼中但有淚。鼻中但有涕。口中但有唾。耳中但有垢。身中但有屎尿臭處不淨。”

⁹⁸ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “於是身有何益。女即自思念。身中惡露。便自正心即得阿羅漢道。”

⁹⁹ From the Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經): “眾苦積聚。其味至少。過患甚多。譬如飛蛾。為愚癡故。投身猛焰。而自燒害。凡夫顛倒。妄生染著。為渴愛所逼如逐焰之蛾。是故智者捨而遠之”

¹⁰⁰ Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Electronic Texts

¹⁰¹ The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism

¹⁰² From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “先世時五百世為阿難作婦。五百世中常相敬相重相貪相愛。同於我經戒中得道。”

¹⁰³ The repeating cycle of birth, life and death.

¹⁰⁴ An Arahant is someone who is an enlightened individual who has perfected his/her wisdom.

¹⁰⁵ From the Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經): “爾時世尊。知比丘尼心意柔軟。離諸惱障。即為廣說四真諦法。所謂是苦。是苦習。是苦滅。是苦滅道。時比丘尼。豁然意解悟四聖諦譬如新淨白[疊*毛]易受染色。即於座上。得羅漢道。更不退轉。不隨他教。頂禮佛足。白佛言。世尊。我先愚癡。欲酒所醉。擾亂賢聖。造不善業。唯願世尊。聽我懺悔。”

¹⁰⁶ The Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經)

¹⁰⁷ Ambedkar

¹⁰⁸ From the Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經): “豁然意解悟四聖諦譬如新淨白[疊*毛]易受染色”

¹⁰⁹ From the Sutra on Matangi's Daughter (佛說摩鄢女經): “佛言。眼中但有淚。鼻中但有涕。口中但有唾。耳中但有垢。身中但有屎尿臭處不淨”

¹¹⁰ From the Matangi Sutra (摩登伽經): “若汝欲得阿難比丘以為夫者。宜應出家學其容飾。答曰。唯然敬承尊教佛言善來便成沙門。鬢髮自落。法衣在身”

¹¹¹ Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia

¹¹² Vow 21: “I believe that I am having a rebirth”

¹¹³ Vimalakirti Sutra, a Mahayana Buddhist sutra famously heard of in both China and South Asia

¹¹⁴ Shramana Pramiti was a monk from India during the Tang Dynasty. He travelled to China in 750 AD and translated the Surangama sutra before returning to India without a trace.

¹¹⁵ Surangama sutra

¹¹⁶ The Six Roots of Sensation, also known as Ayatana in Sanskrit refers to the six sense bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. They are usually paired with the six sense objects: visible objects, sound, odor, taste, touch and mental objects.

¹¹⁷ Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Electronic Texts

¹¹⁸ In Chinese, the word 心 (xin) not only refers to the physical heart, but also the spirit and mind.

¹¹⁹ 汝等比丘，於我滅後，當尊重珍敬波羅提木叉，如闇遇明，貧人得寶。當知此則是汝等大師，若我住世，無異此也。

¹²⁰ The 3000 rules of deportment and 80,000 minute moral rules (三千威儀八萬細行) are rules which Buddhist disciples have to follow. They govern daily behavior such as sitting, standing, sleeping, thinking and talking.

¹²¹ Blyth, 1960

¹²² The translation of the Chinese word, 寂滅 is vyupasama in Sanskrit, which refers to the state where one no longer experiences fear of life and death, who has seen through worldly illusions and experiences immeasurable, everlasting bliss.

¹²³ The Three Sikkhas (<http://book.bfn.org/books2/1507.htm>)

¹²⁴ Ambedkar, 2011, 62

¹²⁵ Ibid, 63

¹²⁶ Ibid, 63

¹²⁷ 22 Vows of Ambedkar, Ambedkar.org (<http://www.ambedkar.org/impdocs/22Vows.htm>)

¹²⁸ Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Electronic Texts definition of 四威儀

¹²⁹ Oxford Dictionaries

¹³⁰ Chief Sun 千佛山, Venerable Upali 優婆離尊者,
http://www.chiefsun.org.tw/tw/7_summon/2_detail.php?MainID=4&ID=12&num=8

¹³¹ Vinaya-Matrka Sutra

¹³² Vinaya-Matrka Sutra