

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

THE VISIONARY LEADER OF INDIA



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Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Buddhist Movement in India

BALASAHEB KSHIRSAGAR

Buddhism has dominated India for more than a thousand years since the third century BC, after the arrival of Chakravati Emperor Ashoka. This period of 1000 years was considered as the golden age in the history of India. During this period, India reached great heights of progress in many areas. It is mainly a matter of art, literature, education, limited respect for elders and religiosity. Unfortunately After the 7th century AD, the Buddhist Dhamma became extinct slowly due to various reasons. By the twelfth century, the Buddha's Dhamma had completely disappeared in the same country where he was born. Buddhism did not exist in India for the next seven centuries. The name of this great Buddha was also completely forgotten by the people, as well as the contemporary Buddhist kings, saints and many Buddhist scholars who, by their infallible deeds, took Indian culture to the pinnacle, have all passed away.

Revival of Buddha Dhamma

English archaeologists, researchers and scholars have unearthed the remains of a rich Buddhist culture hidden beneath a mound of stone. However, the revival of the Buddha Dhamma was initiated in January 1891 by the arrival of the Sinhalese Buddhist pilgrim Anagarik Dharmapala (1864-1993). He was very sad to see the situation in Sarnath. Seeing the dilapidated condition of the Buddhist sites, he settled there to give impetus to the Buddhism movement in India. He founded the Mahabodhi Society of India in 1891. Knowledge of Buddha and Dhamma he started publishing a mouthpiece called Mahabodhi from 1892. This work continued for 40 years. During this period non-citizen Dharmapalas continued to propagate and spread the Buddhist Dhamma uninterruptedly. Due to him, this Buddhist shrine got enlightenment. He started a dissemination center there. Before his death in 1933, he was fortunate enough to see the revival of the Buddha Dhamma in the birthplace of the Buddha. The greatest and most noble deed of the non-citizen Dharmapala has created 'Mulgandhakuti' Vihar at Sarnath which is the sacred place of the first discourse of Lord Buddha. In 1931, it became an important center of attraction for the world's Buddhists. Bhumiputras Dharmanand Kosambi (1902), Bodhanand (1914), Anand Kausalyayan (1928), Rahul Sankrityayan

(1930) and Jagdish Ka garments and carried th great awareness among Dhamma.

Arrival of Dr. Ambedka

Dr. Ambedkar was born society. At that time, untouchables. At that humiliation and anguish. Even though they had to endure different treatments forbidden to sit with water from public places. As a barrister, he also had colleagues in a city. In treatment, Dr. Ambedkar organized the untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar's first big Indian history the first Ambedkar's leadership second big battle was to 5 years from March 1916 nothing has happened entry into the temple. It not just a curse of untouchability and fraternity; it So on 13th October 1919 to the untouchables to harm you. On the coming get everything.

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After this. Dr religion that would fr servitude. They succeeded yoke of untouchability despised life and gained them into the mainstre

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...The Buddha - The Prince and Most Noble

(1930) and Jagdish Kashyap (1934) dressed themselves in kashaya garments and carried themselves for Dhammakarya. All this created a great awareness among the masses about the rich tradition of Buddha Dhamma.

Arrival of Dr. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar was born in 1891 into a socially exploited untouchable society. At that time, Hindus could not bear the mere touch of untouchables. At that time, Dr. Ambedkar had to endure all the humiliation and anguish that the common untouchables had to face. Even though they had the opportunity to study in school, they had to endure different treatment and humiliation. Dr. Ambedkar was forbidden to sit with other caste students and he was denied drinking water from public places. Later, when he became a professor and barrister, he also had to suffer the brunt of untouchability from his colleagues in a city like Mumbai. Unable to bear all this inhuman treatment, Dr. Ambedkar revolted against the established society. He organized the untouchables and inspired them to fight for human rights. Dr. Ambedkar's first battle took place in 1927 at Mahad. First time in Indian history the fight for human rights was fought under Dr. Ambedkar's leadership for drinking water from public reservoirs. His second big battle was to enter the Kalaram temple in Nashik. It lasted for 5 years from March 1930 onwards. Even after such a long struggle, nothing has happened yet. Hindus strongly opposed Dr. Ambedkar's entry into the temple. Now Dr. Ambedkar is convinced that religion is not just a curse of untouchability; the untouchables were denied equality, liberty and fraternity; it is better for the untouchables to leave religion. So on 13th October 1935 at Yeola conference, Dr. Ambedkar appealed to the untouchables to convert and said that leaving Hinduism would not harm you. On the contrary you will be free from bondage and you will get everything.

As soon as Dr. Ambedkar announced his decision to leave Hinduism, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs tried to persuade him to accept their religion. For that they offered a lot of financial help and material resources to Dr. Ambedkar and their followers. Since it was not his intention to acquire material resources, Dr. Ambedkar flatly refused his request without succumbing to any temptation.

After this, Dr. Ambedkar used his power to find a suitable religion that would free his Dalit-exploited brothers from slavery and servitude. They succeeded in this. Dr. Ambedkar freed them from the yoke of untouchability and made them touchable. He changed the despised life and gained the status of a distinguished citizen. He brought them into the mainstream of the nation by giving them economic, social

Dr. Babasaheb

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR


and political rights. Not only that, but the self-styled Indian Constitution kept all their rights unaffected. Therefore, when Dr. Ambedkar appealed for conversion to Buddhism, he received overwhelming support from the Dalit masses. Dr. Ambedkar's first experience of caste-based segregation happened when he was in school. Since then he grew up battling the oppressions of the caste system at every stage of his life, despite acquiring educational qualifications from across the globe. Several historians have been of the understanding that Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism needs to be seen as a product of his life experience and the cultural influences on him.

As per Dr. Ambedkar, Hinduism had failed to secure basic human rights. "The Hindu society does not give equality of treatment, but the same is easily achieved by conversion," said Dr. Ambedkar in his speech in Mumbai. (Roychowdhury, 2017)

Dr. Ambedkar chose the Buddha Dhamma after more than 20 years of in-depth study. The focus of the Buddha Dhamma is 'man' and 'morality' is its foundation. Also, since human welfare is the purpose of Buddha Dhamma, Babasaheb was very much influenced by this Dhamma. Another reason for choosing this Dhamma is that it teaches wisdom (knowledge), compassion (kindness) and equality. It is also a Buddhist religion that teaches freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Acceptance of Buddhism

Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism on 14 October 1956 at the historic Dhamma Chakra launch ceremony in Nagpur. The Dhammadiksha ceremony of Nagpur was the last stage of this Dhamma journey. Speaking in front of a large crowd after the Dhamma Diksha, Babasaheb exclaimed, "I decided to leave Hinduism in 1935 and the struggle has been going on ever since. This historic conversion to Dikshabhoomi has given me great satisfaction and unimaginable joy. I feel as if I have been liberated from hell." (Ahir 32) The Dharmakirti, a seventh-century Buddhist scholar, explains how the Buddha Dhamma differs from Hinduism. Also the Creator of the universe is the Lord, bathing in the holy river washes away sins and brings liberation through self-torture, all these concepts are not acceptable to Buddhists. The caste system is also unacceptable to Buddhism. However, Dr. Ambedkar has clarified his decision a day after he converted – on 15 October 1956. He said that he had chosen the city not for the RSS, but for the 'Nag' people, who according to history, spearheaded the movement against the Aryan people and also propagated Buddhism. Likening Dalits to the Nag people, Dr. Ambedkar reportedly said: "The Nag people spread the teachings of Bhagwan Buddha all over India. Thus we are like Nag people. It seems that the Nag people lived chiefly in Nagpur and the



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Shivaji College, Nagpur

surrounding country. So they call this city Nagpur, meaning city of Nags... Nagpur was chosen because of this." (Balsubraamian and Gopinath, 2018) He made 22 vows to the people. In the first eight of these vows, Buddhists are told not to worship Hindu deities. It has been said that Buddha should not be considered as an incarnation of Vishnu, Hindu rituals and ceremonies should not be performed. The next two vows state that all human beings are equal. The rest of the vows are that the novices should strictly follow the Arya Ashtangika path so that they can lead a happy life.

Mass Movement

The conversion ceremony at Nagpur on 14th October 1956 was a miracle. On this day, Dr. Ambedkar brought 5 lakh people with him into the stream of Buddha Dhamma. Thus Dr. Ambedkar in one fell swoop transformed the movement for the revival of the Buddha Dhamma into a mass movement. Almost 20 years before he actually converted, Dr. Ambedkar addressed the Mahars – a section of the community considered untouchable – in Mumbai, apprising them of his decision to convert. In a lengthy yet heavily influential speech, Dr. Ambedkar urged: "... religion is for man and not man for religion. For getting human treatment, convert yourselves. Convert to getting organized. Convert to becoming strong. Convert for securing equality. Convert for getting liberty." (Balsubraamian and Gopinath, 2018) On December 6, 1956, Dr. Ambedkar died suddenly. Now the guide of the Buddhist brother is lost. Nevertheless, the conversion movement continued unabated. The 1961 census showed its miraculous results. In 1951, there were 1,8,800 Buddhist people in India. According to the 1971 census, the Buddhist population was 38,12,325. Thus in one fell swoop, Buddhism became a living religion in India, especially in Maharashtra. The number of Buddhists in India has been growing slowly but steadily since 1961. According to the 2011 census, there are over 84 lakh Buddhists in India.

The growth rate of the Buddhist population in India was 36% during 1981-1991. During 1991-2001, the proportion dropped to 23.2 per cent. This meant that the Buddhist movement started by Dr. Ambedkar slowed down. Considering the rationale behind this, it appears that the so-called activists of the Ambedkarite movement, as per the message in Babasaheb's speech dated 14-15 October 1956, courageously retreated. However, there has been a significant increase in the Buddhist population in some states. For example-the Buddhist population in the state of Karnataka was 7,300 in 1991. It rose to 393,000 in 2001. Karnataka is followed by Uttar Pradesh (3,02,000) West Bengal


PRINCIPAL
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(2,43,300) and Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Sikkim are the states with a Buddhist population of over one lakh.

Among the Buddhists in India, the number of people who believe in Dr. Ambedkar is very large and they are influential. They make up 90 percent of the total population. Most of these people live in Maharashtra. The rest of the Buddhists are scattered all over India.

Influence of Buddhism


The teachings of the Buddha are the path to salvation. The change that has taken place among those who have embraced the Buddha's way of life is significant, and the reason why Dr. Ambedkar chose this Dhamma is justifiable. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar did not embrace Hinayana or Mahayana. He himself is said to have embraced a Navyana or Neo-Buddhism. Hence, his 'The Buddha and his Dhamma' also reflects his neo-Buddhist conception of Buddhism. K. David Pandya has rightly called it a Neo-Buddhist religion text. He writes: "The Buddha and His Dhamma" can be treated as the religion text of Neo-Buddhism and in it are the Doctrinal tenets. This compendium has assimilated the substance of the Buddhist literature devoid of any supernatural or tantric or Yogic experiences. Such a text should be acclaimed as an universal authority on Buddhism." (Wagh 15) In short, there has been a kind of revolution in the lives of those who have embraced the path of the Buddha. They have been freed from the crocodile clutches of Sanatani Hindus. They have created their own cultural identity. They are aware of their own rights. Even though they are financially weak but they are moving forward with patience and confidence. They do not believe in misconceptions and do not follow the old rusty traditions. He is convinced that progress is possible only through hard work, education and self-effort.

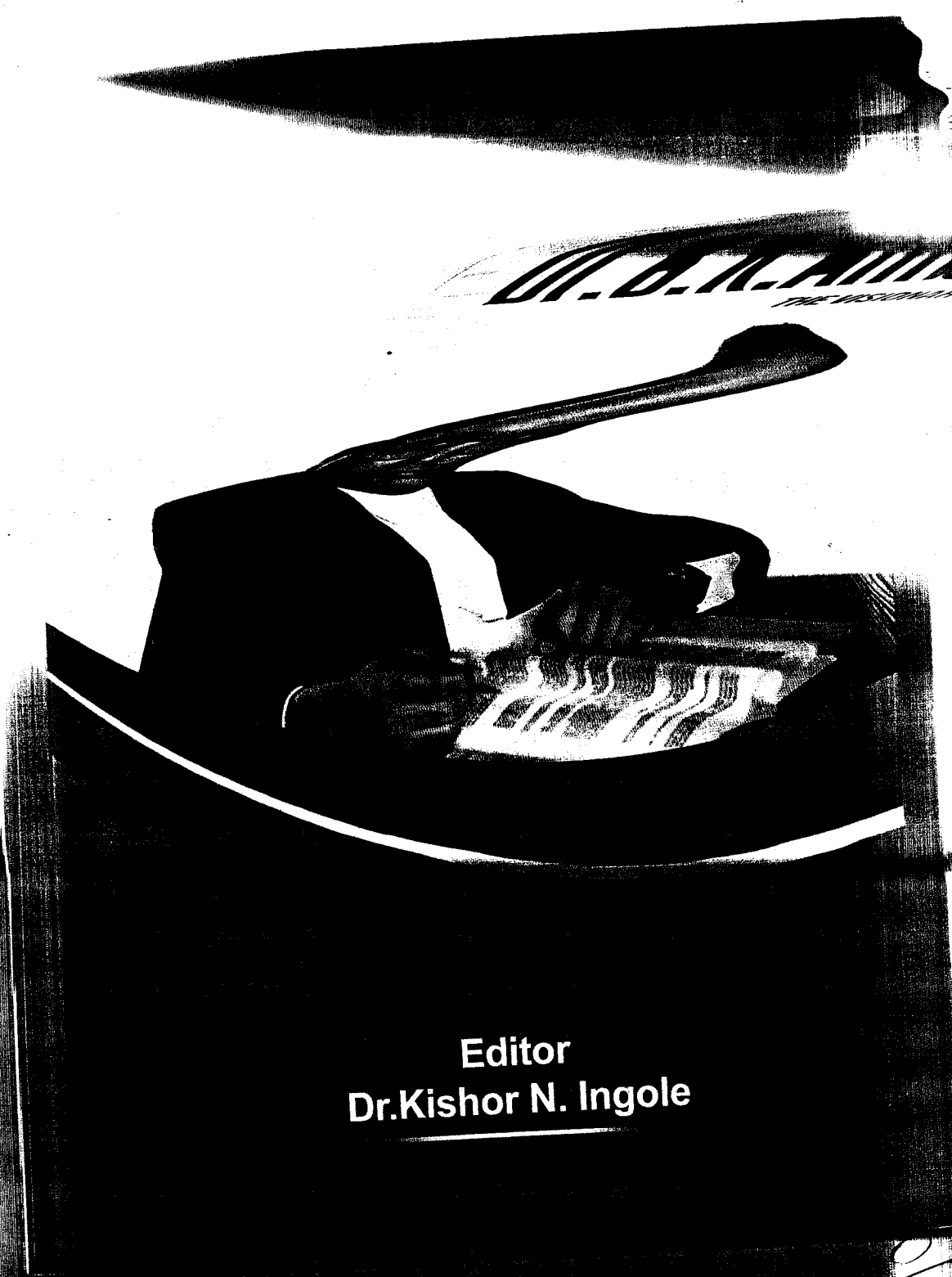
Conclusion

The Buddhist movement in India, which started in 1956, has come a long way. Dr. Ambedkar took Dhamma Diksha on 14th October 1956 at Deekshabhoomi and appealed to his millions of followers to follow the path of Buddha which has become a holy pilgrimage site for Buddhists. Every year in the month of October, on the occasion of Ashok Vijayadashami, all the roads are filled towards Deekshabhoomi. Millions of devout Buddhists from all over the country come to the land of initiation to pay their respects to their liberator. If Dr. Ambedkar is left with no leader in the world today who has been lovingly placed in the hearts of millions of people. This Dhamma movement of Indian Buddhism is constantly moving forward.

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