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# **DR. AMBEDKAR'S IDEA OF CONVERSION AN EVENTUAL APPROACH FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION WITH NEW IDENTITY: AN ANALYSIS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Dr. Ambedkar was one of the greatest leaders in India; his ideas provide inspiration, dignity, and a practical way forward for millions of the most oppressed groups in India. As in his first research paper at Columbia University he explicated that the caste system could not have been imposed by the Brahmins over society, but that it took shape when they were able to persuade other groups that their values were universally superior. In this order Ambedkar tried to endow the lower castes with a glorious history of sons of the soil to help them acquire an alternative not-caste based identity, to regain their self respect and overcome their divisions. Dr. Ambedkar make clear that all primitive societies have been one day or the other conquered by invaders who raised themselves above the native tribes. Dr Ambedkar did not take refuge in religion, but looked equality and social reform in religion since Buddhism was likely to endow the Dalits with a new identity and a sense of dignity. Conversion to Buddhism became the strategy of last resort. But it was not an exit option, more than sixty seven years later, his contribution to the making of modern India is possibly more substantial than that of any other leader of his generation.

Key wards: Conversion, Identity, Inclusion, Dalit

## **INTRODUCTION**

Bhimrao Ramji 'Babasaheb'Ambedkar was one of the greatest leaders that India has ever produced. Ambedkar and his ideas provide inspiration, dignity, and a practical way forward for millions of the most oppressed people in India. He was born in 1891 in an untouchable Mahar family. He was one of the first untouchables to go through college. Then, he earned a scholarship for higher studies in the United States, eventually earning Doctorate degrees from Columbia University and from the London Schools of Economics and qualifying as a barrister.

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Ambedkar's three years (1913 – 1916) at Columbia University in New York City played a crucial role in his intellectual development. He was especially influenced by Prof. John Dewey, of whom Ambedkar reportedly remarked, "I owe my whole intellectual life to Prof. John Dewey" (link). Dewey's ideas were very much in the Enlightenment tradition.

As early as in 1916, Ambedkar presented his first research paper at Columbia University and explained that the caste system could not have been imposed by the Brahmins over society, but that it took shape when they were able to persuade other groups that their values were universally superior and that they had to be emulated by others, including endogamy, a marital rule which closed the system upon itself<sup>2</sup>.

In the Ancient Regime, the Third State was able to raise itself against the aristocracy and the monarchy. In industrial societies, the working class can raise itself against the bourgeoisie. The type of inequality from which the caste ridden society suffers is of a different kind because its logic divides the dominated groups and, therefore, prevents them from overthrowing the oppressor.

## **IDENTITY BUILDING OF DALITS AS SONS OF THE SOIL**

Ambedkar tried to endow the lower castes with a glorious history of sons of the soil to help them acquire an alternative – not-caste based – identity, to regain their self respect and overcome their divisions. In *The Dalits, who were they and why they became Untouchables?* (1948), Ambedkar refutes Western authors explaining caste hierarchy by resorting to racial factors<sup>3</sup>. His interpretation is strikingly complicated. He explains that all primitive societies have been one day or the other conquered by invaders who raised themselves above the native tribes. In breaking up, these tribes as a matter of rule give birth to a peripheral group that he calls the Broken Men.

When the conquerors became stationary then, they resorted to the services of these Broken Men to protect themselves from the attacks of the tribes which remained nomadic. The Broken Men therefore found refuge, as guards of villages, in the suburbs of the latter because it was more logical from a point of view of topography and because the victorious tribes did not accept foreigners, of a different blood, within their group. Ambedkar applied this theory to India by presenting the Untouchables as the descendants of the Broken Men (Dalit, in Marathi) and, therefore, the original

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<sup>2</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, "Castes in India. Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development", *Indian Antiquary*, May 1917, vol. 61, reproduced in *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, "The Untouchables. Who were they and why they became Untouchables?" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol. 7, pp. 290-303.

inhabitants of India, before the conquest of this country by the Aryan invaders<sup>4</sup>. According to Ambedkar these Broken Men were the most constant followers of Buddha soon after he began his teachings in the 6th century BC. And they remained Buddhists when the rest of the society returned to the Hindu fold under the pressure of Brahmins.

Ambedkar drew two conclusions from it: “It explains why the Untouchables regard the Brahmins as inauspicious, do not employ them as their priests and do not even allow them to enter into their quarters. It also explains why the Broken Men came to be regarded as Untouchables. The Broken Men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism and the Brahmins imposed untouchability upon the Broken Men because they would not leave Buddhism<sup>5</sup>.”

Thus, Ambedkar did not contend himself with elaborating a theory of castes which culminated in the idea of graded inequality; he also devised an untouchable tradition susceptible to remedy the former. If they recognised themselves as sons of the soils and Buddhists, the Untouchables could better surmount their divisions into so many jatis and take a stand together as an ethnic group against the system in its entirety. Omvedt underlines that by the end of his life Ambedkar was working on a grand theory of the origin of the Untouchables and the conflict between their civilisation and Hinduism. The notion of autochthony played a key role in this theory. Ambedkar argued that if Hindu India had been invaded by Muslims, Buddhist India had been subjugated by Brahmins outsiders much before. Omvedt considers that there was ‘a racial ethnic element in all of this, in which Ambedkar identifies his heroes to some extent with nonAryans, for instance, arguing that the Mauryan empire was that of the Nagas<sup>6</sup>.

## **CONVERSION, THE EVENTUAL APPROACH**

The idea of converting to another religion in order to escape from the caste system logically ensued from Ambedkar’s analysis of Hinduism, whose originality and strength laid in its demonstration that in this civilisation social hierarchy was consubstantial to religion. To leave it was thus the only means to attain equality. The first reference made by Ambedkar to a conversion of the Untouchables dates back to 1927. During the Mahad Conference, he had indeed declared: “We want equal rights in society. We will achieve them as far as possible while remaining within the Hindu fold or, if necessary by kicking away this worthless Hindu identity. And if it becomes

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<sup>4</sup> The idea that the Untouchables were the first inhabitants of India had been already spread by Gopalnak Vitthalnak Walangkar, a former Mahar soldier who had been influenced by Jotirao Phule and who had founded, in 1886, the first Mahar association, notably to get the British to make a wider place for this caste in the army.

<sup>5</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, “The Untouchables”, art. cit., p. 317.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.134.

necessary to give up Hinduism it would no longer be necessary for us to bother about temples<sup>7</sup> 35". On 29 March 1927, during the Jalgaon (Berar) Depressed Classes Conference, which he chaired, a resolution was voted in this direction. Some days later, a dozen Mahars converted to Islam to the great displeasure of the many orthodox Hindus who acted immediately in a way that the Untouchables of the region had an access to two new water wells<sup>36</sup>. The fear of en masse conversions of the Untouchables seemed to open the possibility of an intense blackmail.

Dr. Ambedkar saw however conversion as a strategy only at the beginning of the 1930s. Dr. Ambedkar announced his decision to leave Hinduism in 1935, during the famous Yeola Conference: "The disabilities we have suffered, and the indignities we had to put up with, were the result of our being the members of the Hindu community. Will it not be better for us to leave that fold and embrace a new faith that would give us equal status, a secure position and rightful treatment? I advise you to sever your connection with Hinduism and to embrace any other religion. But, in doing so, be careful in choosing the new faith and see that equality of treatment, status and opportunities will be guaranteed to you unreservedly. Unfortunately for me I was born a Hindu Untouchable. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but, I declare that it is within my power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu"<sup>8</sup>. After comparing different religions and the willingness of their leaders in India to welcome the Untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar announced his preference for Sikhism in August 1936, because he thought "to have some responsibility as for the future of the Hindu culture and civilisation"<sup>9</sup> and did not want to break with the majority community. In September 1936, he sent a delegation of 13 of his supporters to Amritsar to study the Sikh religion<sup>10</sup>. In November, he went to England to sound out the British leaders about the guarantees which they would be ready to grant in the new Constitution to the Untouchables who would have converted to Sikhism<sup>11</sup>. The British authorities replied that these provisions would apply only to the Sikhs of Punjab, which, in his views, was an irrelevant proposition. At the beginning of 1937, negotiations continued between Dr. Ambedkar and the Sikh leaders but meetings became less frequent and by the end of the year Dr. Ambedkar ceased to mention the idea of conversion. This turnabout cannot be explained only by the response of the British to his demand of extension of the Sikh quota to the converts.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in M.S. Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology*, op. cit., p. 91

<sup>8</sup> Bhagawan Das, *Thus spoke Ambedkar*, vol. 4, op.cit., p. 108.

<sup>9</sup> Bhagwan Das, *Thus spoke Ambedkar*, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>10</sup> Exceeding their mission, they were converted before returning to Bombay where Ambedkar received them without much warmth (D. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, op. cit., p. 284).

<sup>11</sup> E. Zelliot, *Dr Ambedkar*, op. cit., p. 225.

Among the other factors accounting for his decision were first the fact that Sikh Dalits had conveyed to Dr. Ambedkar the atrocities they suffered at the hands of the Jats – which undermine all hope of emancipation<sup>12</sup> and, second, the opposition to such massive conversion among the Sikh political class: the Akalis – including Master Tara Singh – feared that the leadership of the community would be taken over or, at least, that their authority would be diluted<sup>42</sup>. The challenge that a mass conversion would have represented for the upper caste Hindus also made Dr. Ambedkar afraid of the retaliatory measures, some of which, as testified by the threats of social boycott, had already materialised in 1935-36. When Dr. Ambedkar contemplated conversion once again, in the context of the 1950s that we had mentioned above, he chose Buddhism. The familiarity of Ambedkar with Buddhism goes back up to his youth. In 1908 one of his teachers, K.A. (alias Dada) Keluskar, impressed by his aptitude, had offered him on the occasion of his success in the Matriculation examination, the biography of Lord Buddha he had published 10 years before.

This text exercised a profound influence on his mind<sup>43</sup>, even though he never referred to it for years. In 1934, he built at Dadar (Bombay) a house that he named as Rajgriha, the name of the capital of ancient Buddhist kings of Bihar. In 1935-36, during the first movement in favour of conversion, he did not envisage leaving Hinduism for Buddhism. But his interest in this religion grew in the mid-1940s, as he named his first college Siddharth, after the first name of Buddha<sup>13</sup>. In 1948, he republished *The Essence of Buddhism* whose author, Lakshman Narasu, as he emphasised it in the foreword, fought against castes and against British authoritarianism. The same year, he published *The Untouchables*, a work in which he presented Untouchables as the descendants of the Buddhists who had been marginalised when the rest of society crossed over to Hinduism. At the same time, his activities within the Constituent Assembly prepared the ground for his conversion to Buddhism and the official recognition of this religion. In May 1947, he opposed K.M. Munshi's amendment which intended to forbid the conversion of minors, thus risking to hamper all conversion<sup>45</sup>. He also contributed to get Buddha Jayanti, the anniversary festival of Lord Buddha, put in the calendar of official holidays. Lastly, he was involved in the adoption of the multiple Buddhist symbols with which the Indian Republic endowed itself between 1947 and 1950: the chakra (the wheel of Dharma) on the Indian flag, the lions of Ashoka, the Buddhist emperor of ancient India as the national emblem and the inscription of a Buddhist aphorism on the pediment of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the residence of the President of the

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<sup>12</sup> D.C. Ahir, *Dr Ambedkar and Punjab*, Delhi, B.R. Publishing, 1992, 12).

<sup>13</sup> In 1951, he named the second college he created the "Milind College", after the name of the Greek king who had converted to Buddhism.

Republic<sup>46</sup>. In 1950, he went to Sri Lanka and began a compilation of Buddha's writings and called upon the Untouchables to convert to Buddhism<sup>14</sup>.

He repeated this appeal on his return, in the autumn of the same year<sup>15</sup> and converted in October 1956, a few weeks before his death on 6 December 1956. Buddhism formed the best possible choice for Dr. Ambedkar because it was an egalitarian religion born in India – not the creation of outsiders<sup>16</sup>. The fact that Buddhism was perceived by him as an alternative to the Hindu social hierarchy is clearly reflected in the speech he made during the ceremony of his conversion in Nagpur on 14 October 1956: "By discarding my ancient religion which stood for inequality and oppression today I am reborn. I have no faith in the philosophy of incarnation; and it is wrong and mischievous to say that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu. I am no more a devotee of any Hindu god or goddess. I will not perform Shraddha (the Hindu funeral rite). I will strictly follow the eightfold path of Buddha. Buddhism is a true religion and I will lead a life guided by the three principles of knowledge, right path and compassion"<sup>17</sup>. These words reflected the anti-Hindu social motives of Dr. Ambedkar's conversion. All the more so as they were followed by 22 oaths of which the first six, the eighth and the nineteenth were directly pointed against Hinduism: Oaths Taken by Dr. Ambedkar<sup>18</sup>. I shall not recognise Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as gods, nor shall I worship them<sup>19</sup>. I shall not recognise Ram and Krishna as Gods, nor shall I worship them<sup>20</sup>. I shall not recognise Gauri and Ganapati as gods nor shall I worship them<sup>21</sup>. I do not believe in the theory of incarnation of god<sup>22</sup>. I do not consider Buddha as the incarnation of Vishnu<sup>23</sup>. I shall not perform Shraddha [a Hindu rite that one carries out for the safety of the deceased] nor shall I give offerings' to god.<sup>24</sup> I shall not do anything which is detrimental to Buddhism<sup>25</sup>. I shall not perform

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<sup>14</sup> Interviews of May 5, 1950 and of May 25, 1950 in D. Keer, Dr Ambedkar, op. cit., p. 421.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 423-424.

<sup>16</sup> As, Hinduism took over Lord Buddha by making him Vishnu's seventh incarnation

<sup>17</sup> D. Keer, Dr Ambedkar, op. cit., p. 500.

<sup>18</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, "Castes in India. Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development", Indian Antiquary, May 1917, vol. 61, reproduced in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, vol. 1, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.

<sup>19</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, "Untouchables or The Children of India's Ghetto" in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, vol.5, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, 1989, p. 101-102.

<sup>20</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, "The Untouchables. Who were they and why they became Untouchables?" in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, vol. 7, pp. 290-303.

<sup>21</sup> The idea that the Untouchables were the first inhabitants of India had been already spread by Gopalnak Vitthalnak Walangkar, a former Mahar soldier who had been influenced by Jotirao Phule and who had founded, in 1886, the first Mahar association, notably to get the British to make a wider place for this caste in the army.

<sup>22</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, "The Untouchables", art. cit. , p. 317.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.134.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>25</sup> This ambivalence explains that according to Keer, he considered both options (Dr Ambedkar, op. cit., p. 40) whereas for E. Zelliot, he prioritised "a common electorate with reserved seats" ( "Learning the Use of Political means", art. cit. p. 41).

any religious rites through the agency of a Brahmin<sup>26</sup>. I believe that all human beings are equal.<sup>27</sup>. I shall endeavour to establish equality<sup>28</sup>. I shall follow the eight fold path of the Buddha<sup>29</sup>. I observe the ten Paramitas (observances) of the Buddha [the virtues in which a follower of the Buddha has to restrain himself<sup>30</sup>. I shall be compassionate to all living beings and I shall nurture them with care<sup>31</sup>. I shall not steal<sup>32</sup>. I shall not lie<sup>33</sup>. I shall not commit adultery<sup>34</sup>. I shall not drink liquor<sup>35</sup>. I shall lead my life striving to cultivate a harmonious blend of the three basic principles of Buddhism [Enlightenment, Precept and Compassion]<sup>36</sup>. I thereby reject my old religion, Hinduism, which is

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<sup>26</sup> This attitude is all the more surprising, as at the same moment, 16 out of 18 Dalits organizations consulted by the Simon Commission in Bombay Presidency had clearly expressed themselves in favour of separate electorates. For instance, the common testimony of the Depressed India Association and the Servants of Somavamshiya Society before the Simon Commission stipulated: "experience has shown during the last two decades that it has served as a powerful lever to raise our Muslim brethren who in consequence are making rapid headway and coming into line with more advanced sections." (The Servants of Somavamshiya Society, Bombay, July 9, 1928, p. 2 in Private Papers of Ambedkar, reels 1/2

<sup>27</sup> "Evidence of Dr Ambedkar before the Indian Statutory Commission one 23rd October 1928", *ibid.* p.465. Ambedkar justified this demand of universal suffrage for the underprivileged persons (who never could reach tax quota for voting rights) because they were the first to need it to protect themselves from the dominant castes ("Report on the Constitution" *op. cit.*, p. 338). He added that in spite of their illiteracy, they are rather intelligent for it ("Evidence of Dr Ambedkar" *op. cit.*, p. 473).

<sup>28</sup> For the complete text of the pact, see R. Kumar, "Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Poona Pact, 1932", *op. cit.*, p. 153-155.

<sup>29</sup> J. Gokhale, *From Concessions to Confrontation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>30</sup> "The political demands of the Scheduled Castes - Resolutions passed by the Working Committee of the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation", App. XI to B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables*, *op. cit.*, p. 346-347.

<sup>31</sup> Resolution 8 considered that "in the absence of an alternative system, the Parliamentary system of Government may have to be accepted" but the SCF demanded that Ministers representing the minorities should be inducted in the government after being designated by the minority communities themselves. Resolution 11 demanded that the Constitution should establish a framework "for the transplantation of the Scheduled Castes from their present habitations and form separate Scheduled Castes villages away and independent of Hindu villages" - a formula already used by Ambedkar in 1942. (*Ibid.*, p. 353).

<sup>32</sup> Cited in B. Nicholas, "Below the Bottom Rung": a British Estimate of Dr. Ambedkar, 1944", in K.C. Yadav, *From Periphery to Centre Stage*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> The SCF had gained more votes than Congress in the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay and in the Central Provinces, during the primaries where only Untouchables voted. The situation in the United Provinces was even more revealing of the distortions inherent in the electoral system. In these provinces 20 seats were reserved for the Scheduled Castes, including four urban seats. The SCF decided to contest only these four seats. In the primaries, the party could get elected nine candidates as against four on the Congress side - but in the second round, the latter won all the seats thanks to the support of non Dalit voters. The most dramatic result took place in Agra where the four SCF candidates had polled 46.39% of the valid votes as against 27.1% to the four Congress candidates

<sup>34</sup> S. Bandyopadhyay, "Transfer of power and the crisis of Dalit politics in India, 1945-47", *Modern Indian Studies*, 34(4), 2000, p. 913.

<sup>35</sup> Lelah Dushkin, "Special Treatment Policy" in *The Economic Weekly*, vol. XIII, n° 43-46 and E. Zelliot, Dr Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, p. 265. In 1946, the quota of 8.33 % was increased to 12.5 % so as to be proportional to the population of the Untouchables.

<sup>36</sup> A veteran of the Constituent Assembly, R.M. Nalawade, emphasized that Nehru and Patel were hardly favorable to the allocation of a ministerial office to Ambedkar but that Gandhi imposed his name so as to associate him with the work of national construction (S.M. Gaikwad, "Ambedkar and Indian nationalism", *Economic and Political Weekly*, in March 7, 1998, p. 518). This hypothesis is accredited by a conversation of 1946 between the Mahatma and two Protestants - Muriel Lester, an English Quaker, and Miss Descher, an American missionary - during



detrimental to the prosperity of human kind and which discriminates between man and man and which treats me as inferior<sup>37</sup>. I fully believe that Buddhism is Saddhamma<sup>38</sup>. By my embracing Buddhism I am being reborn<sup>39</sup>. I hereby pledge to conduct myself hereafter in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha<sup>40</sup>.

Hundreds of thousands of Dalits – mostly Mahars – got converted along with Dr. Ambedkar on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur. The anti-Hindu dimension of these waves of mass conversions was reconfirmed, subsequently, by the elimination of the Hindu deities from the untouchable localities of Maharashtra, sometimes in a way of provoking the upper castes. The palanquin of the village goddess, generally kept with the Mahars, was returned to the upper caste Hindus. Similarly, the Untouchables rejected more and more obligations and functions attached to their ritual status, which did not go without causing violent tensions<sup>41</sup>.

The impact of conversion to Buddhism varies according to groups (even individuals) and places. In Maharashtra, the conversion of the Mahars had mixed consequences. Their break with Hinduism seemed quite relative and the converts therefore did not get emancipated from caste hierarchy. Their name changed. They now called themselves “bauddha” in Marathi, but this move was only slowly and partially reflected in the emergence of a new collective identity. E. Zelliot highlights that conversion freed the bauddha “from the sense of being a polluting person”<sup>42</sup>, but this outcome remained abstract enough because “the mass of Buddhists in the slums of cities or the landless in the rural area, live in much the same fashion as the desperately poor in any culture”<sup>43</sup>. However, E. Zelliot admits that the glass is half full too: “What has happened is that even in areas where observers report ‘no change at all’, one finds that Buddhists no longer carry out what they feel are ritually submissive, degrading, or impure duties; that some young people, far more than in other Untouchable and backward communities, become educated; and that Buddhists do not

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which he expressed the wish that Ambedkar should become a part of the first government of independent India. (M.S. Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology*, op. cit., p. 18).

<sup>37</sup>20 Quoted in G. Austin, *The Indian Constitution*, op. cit., p. 19-20.

<sup>38</sup> CAD, p. 415.

<sup>39</sup> Ambedkar was a member of the two sub-committees of the Advisory Committee (the one on fundamental rights, the other one on rights of the minorities) and of the Union of the Powers Committee.

23 Ibid., p. 494 24 Ibid., p. 494. 25 Ibid., p. 582. 26 Ibid., p. 589. 27 Ibid., p. 952. 28 Ibid., p. 1139. 29 CAD, vol. 5, Speech of April 9, 1948. 30 M. Yasin, ‘Hindu Code Bill and Dr Ambedkar’, *Towards Secular India*, 2(1), Jan-March 1996, p. 24. 20

<sup>40</sup> Cited in G.S. Lokhande, *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar*, New Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1977 [1982], pp. 255-6.

<sup>41</sup> E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, op. cit., p. 138-9

<sup>42</sup> E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 220. 55 Ibid., 56 Ibid., p. 195.

participate in the Hindu public practices so long denied to them, not now out of a prohibition but out of a sense of separateness”.

The outcome is particularly mixed because the conversion of 1956, and those which followed, concerned almost exclusively the Mahars: if, in 1956, 55 per cent of the Untouchables of Maharashtra were converted to Buddhism so that the Buddhists crossed in numbers from 2,500 in 1951 to 2.5 millions in 1961 – almost all the bauddha came from the Mahar milieu. The coincidence between this new religious community and the frontiers of caste made it more difficult, for the former, to become emancipated from the status of the latter. Above all, this phenomenon complicated the emergence of an identity common to all the Untouchables, transcending the cleavages of caste because of the reference to Buddhism. The Chambhars not only did not convert to Buddhism but opposed any project aiming to grant the benefits of the politics of positive discrimination to “bauddhas”. Besides, a number of converted Mahars continued to observe some Hindu customs, particularly when they were too poor to afford a break with their original milieu.

## CONCLUSION

Dr Ambedkar has tried all kind of strategies during his life for eradicating caste and, more especially, for emancipating the Dalit from this oppressive social systems. In the political domain, he promoted separate electorate, party building and public policies like reservations – and did not hesitate to collaborate with the ruler of the time – be it the British or the Congress for having things done. In the social domain, he militated in favour of reforms at the grass root level – education being his first goal – and reforms by the state – as evident from the Hindu code bill. None of his strategies really succeeded during his life time: he could not have separate electorate introduced, he could not build a Dalit or a labour party, he could not have the Hindu code bill passed – and he became a bitter man. As a result, conversion to Buddhism became the strategy of last resort. But it was not an exit option: Dr Ambedkar did not take refuge in religion, but looked equality and social reform in religion since Buddhism was likely to endow the Dalits with a new identity and a sense of dignity. More than sixty seven years later, his contribution to the making of modern India is possibly more substantial than that of any other leader of his generation. He has not only prepared the ground for a silent revolution, but has also played a key role in the drafting of the Constitution of India which has set the terms for the development of the world largest democracy.