

## Converted Marginal Man: Hinduism to Buddhism

Dr Alka, Assistant Professor

Department Of Sociology

Png Government Pg College, Ramnagar, Nainital Uttarakhand

### Abstract

*Presumably, you are interested in Mahar because they are Buddhists (Somavansha). Nevertheless, over 20% of Maharashtra's Buddhists identify as ST or OBC. Like Ambedkar, the Buddhist convert Mahar (Somavansha) motivated me to write this article. The Somavansha benefited greatly from their adoption of Buddhism. As did their forebears the Bhangi/Walmiki, Chamar, and Mang, the Somavansha no longer act as village watchmen, patrolling the streets and hunting thieves. Ambedkar was vehemently opposed to the practice of forcing untouchables to do physical labor. At a town hall gathering, Ambedkar exhorted members of the untouchable caste to forsake their subsistence existence. He cautioned that the awful conduct of the untouchables would effect everyone. The majority of Somavansha abandoned their villages for good in the nineteenth century, ultimately settling in the urban regions and becoming politically engaged. In contrast to other SC castes, the political consciousness of Somavanshas is highly developed. Somavansha who have remained in one location for an extended period of time care to the fields they have laboriously cultivated. They do not squander money on insignificant rituals such as Pooja, Path, and Karmakand. Consequently, they lack strong religious beliefs. They are light years ahead of the rest of South Carolina in terms of intellectual accomplishment. In Maharashtra, the Varna caste system is still relatively solid. Money and level of education are the most accurate indicators of a person's social position in the modern world. In Maharashtra, an extremely high number of Somavansha hold significant positions. Several highly educated young Somavansha are actively seeking spiritual development via the practice of Vipassana meditation, according to reports (the Buddhist meditation teaching). Ambedkar said that spiritual growth was equally essential. Dr. Ambedkar and his oppressed Mahar community converted to Buddhism, but this had little effect on their economic or social standing. Even after Dr. Ambedkar's whole dedication to Buddhism, the situation remained unchanged. Even if every Dalit converted to Buddhism, nothing would change. Due to their financial stability, Christian missionaries are in a stronger position to aid converts. These amenities cannot be used by Buddhist viharas. Even while North America and Europe are losing Christians, they are nevertheless doing better than other regions because to their higher per capita income. Therefore, religious conversion is permitted. However, a person's social and economic status will not increase if they change faiths. I think, however, that genuine economic empowerment, and not conversion, is the key to overcoming prejudice. A prosperous society is more likely to undergo rapid social transformation. India's economy and culture are appallingly behind those of other prosperous nations.*

*Keywords:* Buddhism, Hinduism, Marsha, Ancient India, Vedas, Gautama, liberation, Dalit, SC/ST, OBC

## Introduction

The foundation of Hinduism is a social structure that codifies social stratification. There was a rigid social order based on the four 'Varnas' (and the thousands of castes and sub-castes within them), with the lowest members of society held in disdain and the highest in fear and veneration. The idea that one was "untouchable" was fair game for the cruellest jokes. In the eyes of the privileged, the Untouchables were so filthy that not even their shadows were safe to touch. The Untouchable was so impure that not even the Gods themselves could come into contact with him without being corrupted. To better Hindu culture, Dr. Ambedkar laboured tremendously. As a result of his realisation, he converted to Buddhism from inside Hindu culture. He reasoned that Buddhist doctrines may be used to counteract Hindu beliefs. Dr. Ambedkar and his supporters converted to Buddhism in 1956, sparking a new wave of interest in the faith (Neo-Buddhism). The sudden conversion of so many individuals to a single religion is unprecedented in the annals of any faith, ours included. Dr. Ambedkar's tragic death did not stop the ongoing attempts to convert others. He wanted to reconstruct the social order of the last several centuries using democratic ideas like freedom, equality, fraternity, and social justice. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Maisaheb Ambedkar were solemnly initiated into the Buddhist religion by Mahasthvir Chandramani on October 14, 1956 in Nagpur(Maharashtra), India. To follow in Babasaheb Ambedkar's footsteps and make the switch from Hinduism to Buddhism, one should fold their hands in front of their chest and recite the "trisharan" and "panchasheela." The assembly erupted into applause at his declaration, and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar proceeded to share the first Buddhist teachings with them. To rescue his five million Buddhist disciples from Hinduism, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had them swear 22 vows. Acceptable means to effect positive societal change included embracing Buddhism. Those on the fringes of society benefited from his teachings since they prepared them spiritually for their ultimate conversion. Beginning in May 1924, he spoke on Buddhism across India till November 25th, 1956. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's enlightenment may be credited with sparking a Neo-Buddhist cultural rebirth in India. Although Buddhism formerly flourished over much of India, its popularity has lately waned for a number of reasons. In 1891, Buddhist monk Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka founded the Maha Bodhi Society, which is often credited with initiating a Buddhist revival in India. Those who could afford to join the Maha Bodhi Society tended to come from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. In the Buddhist social framework, Dr. Ambedkar was the last reformer. Knowledge and learning are the bedrocks of a successful country.

## Aim and Objectives:

The focus of this piece is on the "Converted Marginal Man" who has switched religions from Hinduism to Buddhism.

## Methodology

The material that the researcher has acquired has come from a diverse selection of sources, including websites, journals, articles, e-books, reports, commissions, and pieces that have been published in local, national, and worldwide media outlets. For the sake of this research evaluation, the many types of secondary data sources include things like books, articles, libraries, reports, personal sources, journals, newspapers, websites, and online data.

### Ambedkar's conversion

On October 14, 1956, at Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur, he became a Buddhist, more than 20 years after he first expressed an interest in doing so. He had first said that he wanted to convert to Buddhism. During this time period, over 365,000 of his followers converted to Buddhism. Around this time, a significant number of persons from the most privileged echelons of Hindu society converted to Buddhism. Following the events that took place on October 16, 1956 in Nagpur, Ambedkar sent more than 300,000 of his followers to Chandrapur, which is also referred to as Deekshabhoomi, so that they may continue their Buddhist education. An ethnic Tamil judge in Rangoon called Chan Htoon said that on October 28, 1956, 5,000 persons were driven to convert to Buddhism as a result of Ambedkar's personal dedication to the faith. Chan Htoon was based in Rangoon. Medharathi, Bhoj Dev Mudit, and Bhante Pragyanand, the Sri Lankan successor of MahastvirBodhanand, were present during the ceremony of conversion. Navayana, which is often referred to as "Neo-Buddhism," is Ambedkar's replacement for Buddhism's three primary schools of thought (Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana). Just two months after completing his magnificent treatise on Buddhism, Ambedkar passed away. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism sparked a social movement that is often referred to as "Ambedkar(ite) Buddhism" among Dalits. Recently, a large number of persons have attained the status of "Baudha" (Buddhist).

The Buddhist cause suffered a setback with the passing of Ambedkar so soon after his conversion. In contrast to what Ambedkar had anticipated, the Untouchable community did not quickly and warmly support his cause. The leaders of the Ambedkarite movement have been distracted and divided, which has slowed progress. According to the 2011 census, there are 8.44 million Buddhists in India, with at least 6.5 million of them living in the state of Maharashtra as Marathi Buddhists. Buddhists make up around 6% of Maharashtra's population, making Buddhism the sixth biggest religion in India. While Buddhism is widely practised in India, fewer than 1% of the population really identifies as Buddhist. BodhanandMahastavir, Acharya Medharthi, and their followers are headquartered in Ambedkar's home state of Maharashtra and in Uttar Pradesh, making these two states the epicentres of the modern Buddhist renaissance.

**Social Transformation** There is no room for debate on the status of the Buddha as the most influential educator in the annals of human history. The Buddha worked toward the liberation of those around him while also explaining how structural suffering arises through an understanding of the nature of persons and their thoughts as well as how different minds interact with one another and construct structures that bind them all together. This was accomplished while the Buddha worked toward the liberation of those around him. This was completed when the Buddha was working for the enlightenment of individuals in his immediate environment. He was successful in doing this while at the same time fighting for the liberation of others who were in his immediate environment. Because it may be used in any time or place, the word "Dhamma" is not exclusive to a particular age or geographical region. Buddhism offers a novel and ever-evolving method for addressing the challenges that face humans as a whole as a species. This is one of the traits that sets Buddhism apart from other religions. The inherent liberation technology of Buddhism makes it approachable to members of the general public and offers them the option to pick and choose from the many practises and teachings that were passed down by the Buddha. This makes Buddhism both relevant and approachable. Because of this, Buddhism may be approached and is also easily accessible. The concept of oppression that takes place at ever higher levels serves as the conceptual underpinning for the framework of the Hindu social hierarchy. It is possible to trace the growth of Buddhism in contemporary India back to a particular historical context, and the growth of Buddhism in modern India is being propelled by a particular yearning among the people of the nation. In addition to the four "Varnas," there were hundreds of other castes and subcastes. Each one was seen as being superior to the one that came before it, and those who were lower on the totem pole were looked down upon with contempt. This time, it must respond to the needs of millions of people living in a society that is violent and unfair to be free and without fear. These people want to be free because they want to avoid being victimised by their society. These individuals have the goal of leading lives free from constraints and untroubled by anxiety. One should not only have respect for those in higher Varna and Caste than themselves, but one should also have dread of those in higher Varna and Caste than themselves. The most base and repugnant kind of contempt was reserved for those who could not be touched in any way. Even the very existence of individuals who were considered untouchable was sufficient to bring about the deterioration of the higher castes. When members of the caste known as the "Untouchables" touched the gods or were allowed inside the temples where the gods were worshipped, even the gods themselves became polluted with the filth that the Untouchables generated. This was because the Untouchables were considered to be below the level of the gods. Dr. Ambedkar exerted an extraordinary amount of effort in the direction of the goal of bringing about a shift in the established social order of Hindu society. As a final goal in this endeavour, he had it in mind to make the current social order adhere to democratic ideals such as freedom, equality, fraternity, and social justice. This was to be accomplished by bringing it into compliance with democratic principles. And after he saw that the Hindu culture could not be changed or rebuilt from the inside, he turned to Buddhism as his favoured way of spiritual practise. This happened when he came to the realisation that it was impossible. He gave up Hinduism and converted to

Buddhism, and he encouraged his millions of followers to do the same so that they could construct a model society that was founded on equality, fraternity, and social justice, and that was free from inequality, disrespect, and ignominies such as pollution. He gave up Hinduism and converted to Buddhism. He encouraged his millions of followers to do the same. It was for the sake of establishing a society that was devoid of inequalities, disrespect, and ignominies such as pollution that he carried out his actions. He had the intention of achieving a condition of spiritual harmony by using Buddhism as an instrument in the practise of Hinduism.

### **Buddhism in Modern India: Identification of Dalits**

The Lotus Sutra considers Buddha "the most beloved two-legged creature." India/Vietnam Dalits in India created socially and politically engaged Navayana Buddhism. Despite being poorer than upper castes, the Dalits' ultimate goal was to identify the origins of sadness and remove it from their lives and society. Many people practise Dhamma because they want to eliminate suffering. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar converted Buddhist outcasts in Nagpur, India, to Hinduism to denounce caste inequality. They embraced Buddhism politically. Their actions may cause waves. All things are transient, all sensations are anguish, and everything is ephemeral, according to Buddhism's four seals. They decry "Hindu Savarnas" millennia of atrocities and injustices. According to legend, Buddha's search for life's truths began with his unhappiness. Disease, old age, and death formed his pain-centered worldview. In The Buddha and His Dhamma, Ambedkar explained Navaya Buddhism. Not karma, reincarnation, or rituals, but social justice and socioeconomic equality were his goals. In "Engaged Buddhism," he mixes science, activism, and social improvement. Religion is linked whenever the ethical or moral value of acts or circumstances is questioned, and all significant experiences need a reevaluation of the most basic principles, whether they are nominally religious or not.



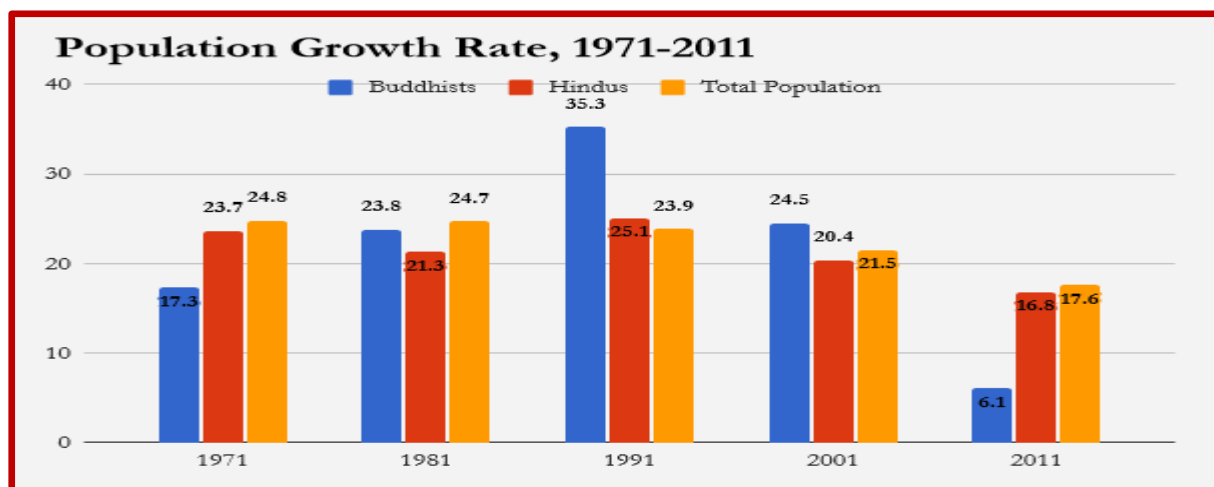
**Conversion in Uttar Pradesh** It was in 1960 that Acharya Medharthi decided to retire and settle down at an ashram in Haridwar. He became a member of Arya Samaj and travelled throughout India doing Vedic yajnas. His burial was conducted in accordance with Arya Samaj rites. Buddhupuri University faces property disputes. In 1968, Bhoj Dev Mudit, one of his students, converted to Buddhism and started teaching. In Kanpur, Dalits were headed by Rajendranath Aherwar. His whole family made the switch to Buddhism in 1961. In 1967, he established the "Bharatiya Buddh Mahasabha" in Kanpur. The Dalit Buddhist movement in Kanpur was given a boost by Chamar bhikkhu Dipankar in the year 1980. In 1981, Dipankar arrived to Kanpur to lead a large-scale Buddhist conversion effort. The event was planned by Rahulan Ambawadekar. U.P. Dalit Panthers were founded by Ambawadekar in April 1981. The event was prohibited after being criticised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad. The number of Buddhists in Lucknow increased from 73 in 1951 to 4327 in 2001. Seventy percent of Buddhists in Uttar Pradesh are from scheduled castes, according to the 2001 census. It was on the 50th anniversary of Ambedkar's birth that Sikh political figure Kanshi Ram announced his intention to become a Buddhist. He was hoping that all 20,000,000 of his followers would become Christians at the same time. There are Untouchables and members of various castes among Ram's followers, and they might help Buddhism gain more converts. After a long illness, he died 9 October 2006 and was cremated according Buddhist practise.

### **Conversion in Maharashtra**

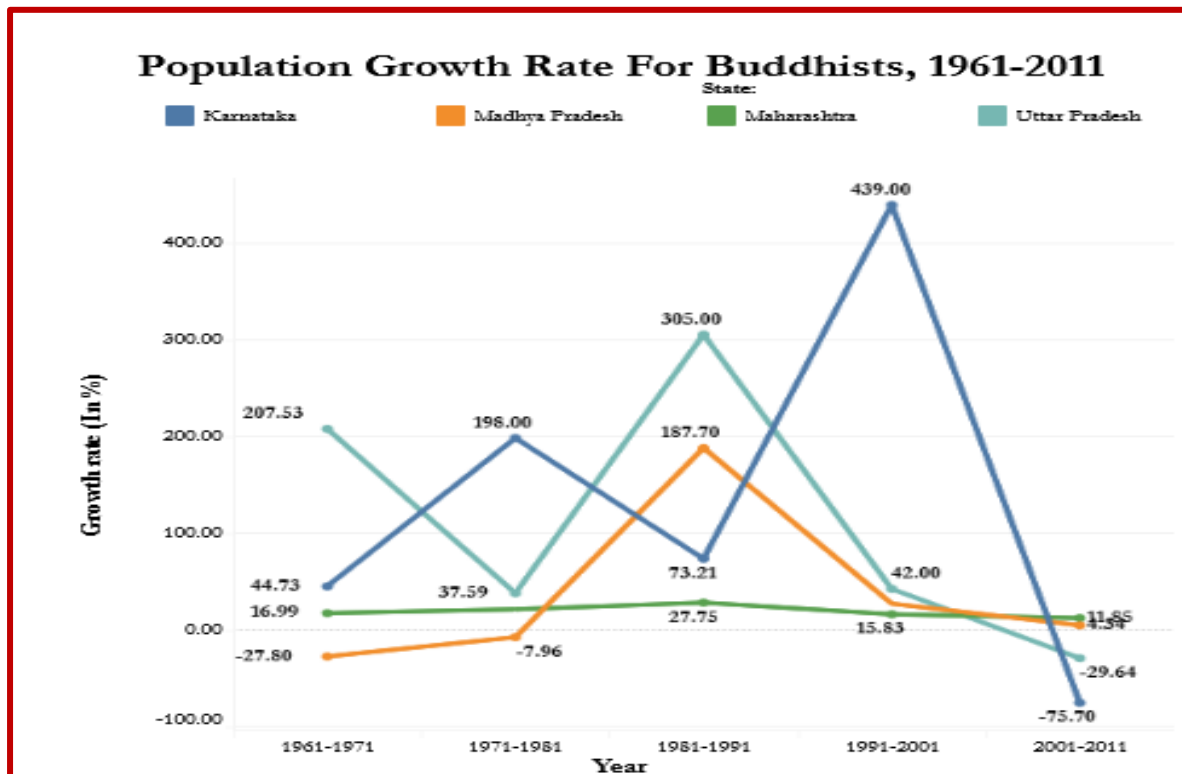
Ambedkar's conversion may be traced back to 1956 when he met Wamanrao Godbole in Nagpur. According to Sasai, he recognised Ambedkar from a picture of the guy that hung at Godbole's house. Surai Sasai had a peculiar reputation among the locals of Nagpur. He commanded them to "Jai Bhim" and then started building viharas. After a case aiming to have him deported for overstaying his visa was abandoned in 1987, he was granted Indian citizenship. Fighting to free the Mahabodhi Temple from Hindu control is being spearheaded by Sasai and Bhante Anand Agra. One may find Neo-Buddhist Triratna BauddhaMahsagha followers all across the Indian states of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh (formerly called TBMSG for Trailokya BauddhaMahasanghaSahayaka Gana). Sangharakshita established the Triratna Buddhist Community in Britain. It all began in the 1950s, when Sangharakshita would meet with Ambedkar on and off. From 1956 until 1963, Sangharakshita played a crucial role in the conversion team. Since his ecumenical movement gained traction in the West, Sangharakshita worked with Ambedkarites in India and the United Kingdom to fortify Indian Buddhism. The Bahujan Hitaj (or Bahujan Hitay) charity, established in the late 1970s on the visit of the British Dharmachari Lokamitra, combines humanitarian work with direct Dharma practise. Hundreds of Indian Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis work at the organization's 20 main viharas and organisations.

### **Dalits Are Still Converting To Buddhism, But At A Dwindling Rate**

To put it simply, Dalits are members of the lowest caste in Hindu society. In 1956, Dalits began to convert to Buddhism for the first time as a political statement. BR Ambedkar, a well-known member of the Dalit group, converted to Buddhism in this year after realising there was no other way to break free from caste. To this day, the community still uses Buddhist ordination as a form of protest. The peak of the Dalit movement coincided with an increase in the number of converts each time. In the decades after the founding of the Bahujan Samaj Organization (BSP), a major political party with a significant concentration on the Dalit population, there was another surge in the number of neo-Buddhists (also known as new Buddhist converts) who identified as Buddhists after 1956. During the decades after the BSP was founded, the number of neo-Buddhists grew significantly. Traditional Buddhists make up the remaining 12% of India's Buddhist population and are concentrated in the country's northeast and in areas close to the Himalayas. Approximately 87% of India's Buddhists are recent converts. Despite this, the growth of India's Buddhist population has slowed dramatically over the last several years. According to the Census's published data, only the slowing increase in the Jain population as a share of the overall religious community population is more significant. The Census reports that between 2001 and 2011, the number of self-identified Buddhists rose by 6.13 percent, while the number of Hindus rose by 16.76 percent. The previous decade, however, saw the opposite trend: the Buddhist population expand to 24.53 percent from the Hindu 20.35 percent.



This decline was especially noticeable in neo-Buddhist bastions like as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. The Buddhist population growth rate in Maharashtra, which accounts for 77% of all Buddhists in the country, has declined from 15.83% in the 1991-2001 period to 11.85% in the 2001-2011 period. This is a reduction from the 1991-2001 growth rate of 15.83%.



For what reason do you suppose everything has halted at once? The cyclical pattern of the conversion rate may be explained by the factors that influence the Dalit community. Understanding this helps to explain why Hindu rituals are still so widely observed. However, as Buddhist and educator Meena Srinivasan points out, "there is a huge thirst in understanding more about the spiritual and religious components of Buddhism" in this article. The "spiritual and theological components" of Buddhism, as the author calls them, are apparently of significant interest. In many cases, those who have just recently converted to Buddhism return to their Hindu practises. The intricacy of the neo-Buddhist movement in India is shown in these two potential situations.

### **Karnataka registered 75% decline in number of Buddhists**

The number of people who identify as neo-Buddhist in Maharashtra increased by 11.85% between the years 2001 and 2011, going from 5.8 million to 6.5 million. According to Sandeep Upre, the head of Satyashodhak OBC Parishad, which organises deeksha (initiation rituals) workshops throughout the state of Maharashtra, "the influence of social reformers like Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar has made people here informed and safe enough to forsake their Hindu identity." This statement was made by Upre. Between the years 2001 and 2011, there was a 75% drop in Karnataka's Buddhist population. This resulted in a contraction of 439 percent of the state's economy between the years 1991 and 2001. During the 1990s, the BSP was able to win its first assembly seat in south India with the support of an effective political campaign.



## Conclusion

According to the canonical Buddhist sutras, the Buddha saw caste as a cause of avarice, and the Untouchables are more morally upright than the rest of society. The second, internal act of regeneration is motivated by the first, exterior one. By living by the values, The Untouchable experiences a metamorphosis that ultimately leads to being valued for the person they have become rather than the label they have been given. The path to enlightenment was open and obvious to everyone, even women in the caste system. This epiphany exemplifies the Untouchable's altered sense of self and the societal viewpoint of the individual. The second external act of improving one's physique and one's comportment was performed by many Untouchables in response to the conversion movement, which was itself a political, physical performance. It began as a protest against economic and social inequality, liberal policies, and the treatment of "Untouchables" by India's higher castes. Neo-Buddhists flourished as a social group thanks in great part to Dr. Ambedkar's social philosophical principles; they were guaranteed equal safeguards against discrimination in speech, opinion, and religion practise and were compelled to actively seek out chances in government. The egalitarian principles of the NeoBuddhist movement were taken up by the Dalit movement, which represented the lowest classes.

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