JPJRS 14/2 ISSN 0972-3331, July 2011 245-278

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4284280
Stable URL: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4284280

Gandhi and Ambedkar: Relevant and Divergent Approaches to the Indian Religious Scenario

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, S.J.
Faculty of Philosophy, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India

Abstract: This is an attempt to study critically the emergence and development of the new religious movement Neo-Buddhism from Hinduism, which has been facilitated by modern technology and education in India. As a powerful protest against the traditional cultural and economic order, as exemplified by caste system, and a serious effort to usher in a radically new social and cultural order, Neo-Buddhism is significant in understanding the contemporary Indian scenario. The two icons that we study are Ambedkar and Gandhi, both of whom have worked sincerely and tirelessly for the upliftment of those enslaved by the caste system. Their religious commitment and scientific openness are also discussed, with a view to understanding better the dynamics of Indian society.

This paper argues that one's social upbringing and personal experience shape, to a large extent, if not totally determine, one's religious commitment and scientific openness. Gandhi was deeply concerned about the untouchables and he wanted to uplift them by being faithful to the cultural and religious system of Hinduism. This made him rather conservative or withdrawn towards scientific and technological innovations. On the other hand, Ambedkar's passionate commitment to the cause of the untouchables made him even give up his original religion and opt for another. Their life-experiences and diverging responses, I believe, have something to teach to the Indian Church.

Where as in their lifetime Gandhi and Ambedkar were political rivals, now, decades after their death, it should be possible to see their contributions as complementing one another's. The history of Dalit emancipation, advocated by both leaders, is unfinished, and for the most part unwritten. It should, and will, find space for many heroes. Ambedkar and Gandhi will do nicely for a start. In fact, Mahatma Gandhi was not so much the Father of the Nation as the mother of all debates regarding its future. His fight with Ambedkar continues even today and Ambedkar seems to be winning in the contemporary India.

The article concludes by holding that India has sufficient space for many Gandhis, the social reformers, and many Ambedkars, the cultural revolutionaries. Together, even through their controversies, they will facilitate the emergence of a new cultural and economic order in India. The discourse of a multicultural, pluralistic and scientifically advancing India with different religious traditions will go on. This is highly desirable. The Catholic Church can contribute religiously and spiritually to such an on-going discourse in India.

Keywords: Ambedkar; Buddhism; Caste system; Dalits; Discourse; Gandhi, Neo-Buddhism.

0. Introduction

Given the dehumanising caste situation in India, how did Gandhi and Ambedkar attempt to bring about a more humane and just society in India? How and why did their methods and responses differ? What can the Catholic Church in India learn from these different but great personalities? These are some of the issues raised in this article. This is an attempt to study critically the emergence and development of the new religious movement Neo-Buddhism from Hinduism, which has been facilitated by modern science, technology and education in India. As a powerful protest against the traditional cultural and economic order, as exemplified by caste system, and a serious effort to usher in a radically new social and cultural order, Neo-Buddhism is significant in understanding the contemporary Indian scenario. The two icons that we study are Ambedkar and

Gandhi, both of whom have worked sincerely and tirelessly for the upliftment of those enslaved by the caste system. Their religious commitment and scientific openness are also discussed, with a view to understanding better the dynamics of Indian society.[1]

This paper will argue that one's social upbringing and personal experience shape to a large extent, if not totally determine, one's religious commitment and scientific openness. Gandhi was deeply concerned about the untouchables and he wanted to uplift them by being faithful to the cultural and religious system of Hinduism. This made him rather conservative or withdrawn towards scientific and technological innovations. On the other hand, Ambedkar's passionate commitment to the cause of the untouchables made him even gave up his religion and opt for another. Their life-experiences and diverging responses, I believe, have something to teach to the Indian Church.

a. The Origin of the Neo-Buddhism of Ambedkar

BabhaSaheb Ambedkar continues to stir the hearts of tens and thousands of Indians even today as the battle against caste discrimination and the indignities suffered by the Dalits ("the broken or crushed ones"), is far from over. Ambedkarism has become the mainstay of the movement of Dalit liberation as well as the broad anti-caste struggles across India. Ambedkarism is profoundly committed the socio-economic liberation of exploited people in society.

Ambedkar clearly demonstrated that the Dalits,who are still looked down in India were, not a part of the whole, but were part – apart, separated, inferiorized and dominated – by themselves. Hence, he waged a relentless war against Hinduism and the Brahminical domination. His commitment to the Indian reality made him convinced that the eradication of the evil of the caste system required the repudiation of Hinduism. This led him to seek for an alternative, which he finally found in Buddhism.

His conversion brought about a revolution and thousands of Dalits embraced Buddhism. Even today the conversion of Ambedkar (in the year 1956) draws thousands of Dalits to publicly reject Hinduism and embrace Buddhism. These developments have led some Dalits

scholars like Kancha Ilaiah to proclaim and celebrate the death of Hinduism and inaugurate the dawn of Post-Hindu India (Ilaiah 2009).

Hence, we propose to study how Ambedkar and Ambedkarism have evolved from a socio-economic condition that is deeply moulded by religion and science. The Hindu ethics, it is claimed, produced a divisive society and caused the social, spiritual, economic, political and educational deprivation of the Dalits. The conversion of Ambedkar revived Buddhism and dented the caste system in Hinduism. It revived the King Asoka's mode of evangelical Buddhism. It established a strong relationship between faith and reason. It also brought in an openness to the English language which itself became an antidote to the caste laden Sanskrit of the Brahmins.

b. The Structure and Method of the Study

In this article, we first focus on the semiotics of context of caste system in India. We attempt to trace the origin and development of the dehumanising caste system within the Hindu tradition. Then we move on the semantic choice available to confront the caste system in terms of reformation by Gandhi and revolution by Ambedkar. The hermeneutic response leading to the conversion of Ambedkar and the emergence of Neo-Buddhism is dealt with in the next section. Then we study the symbolic significance of such a venture in terms of the on-going debate in contemporary India and the tragic aspects of both these great leaders. Finally we see the different approach to the scientific openness as practised in Neo-Buddhism and classical Hinduism, one of total openness (Ambedkar) and the other of cautious tolerance (Gandhi).

The method that we follow is both historical and hermeneutical. After examining the historical context of the caste system and Neo-Buddhism, we attempt to study the significance of both Gandhi and Ambedkar and the primary role science and education have played in ushering in a new economic and social order. It may be mentioned that the author of this article is sympathetic to the Dalit aspirations, but is neither a practising Hindu nor a practising Buddhist. This enables him to be more objective.

1. The Semiotics of the Caste System

In this section we briefly see the tragic prevalence of the caste system in contemporary India and then trace its religious and social history. We see the caste system as the most powerful semiotics of contemporary religious and cultural India.

a. The Present Situation

We begin with a recent report from Chennai, India, illustrating the pervasive nature of caste system as reported in India's National Daily, *Times of India* (Saju 2011), on May11, 2011. When a group of Dalits (lowest group in the caste system) from R Palakuruchi village, near Chennai, lodged a complaint with the police, alleging the practice of the 'double-tumbler system' in the village, the non-Dalits reacted in a strange way. They hiked the rate of tea served to Dalits in village stalls.[2]

The tea stalls started charging Dalits Rs 7 for a glass of tea, while it cost just Rs 4 for a non-Dalit. Since most of the tea-stalls are run by non-Dalits, the dual price system has dealt yet another blow to the Dalits who have been facing oppression in the remote areas of Tamil Nadu for long. However, K Gowri, sub-inspector at the Ulagampatti police station, where the complaint was lodged, claimed he was not aware of any hike in the price of tea for Dalits. "We have to investigate and see whether any shop is selling tea at a higher rate to Dalits," he said.

However, social activists maintain the reason behind hiking the rate of tea is simple. They hiked the rate, so that no Dalit can come and have tea. "The poor Dalits can't afford to have tea by paying seven rupees. So instead of saying 'no' to serving tea to them, the shop owners have hiked the charge," says T L Ramu, a local activist. While every shop in R Palakuruchi keeps five 'steel' tumblers each for serving tea to Dalits, the non-Dalits are given tea in glass tumblers."We are not allowed to sit on benches. We have been facing discrimination for a long time, but with this special rate for tea, it has reached another level," he says.

It all started on April 26, 2011, when a group of Dalits complained to the police about the practice of the 'double tumbler system' in

the village. Out of vengeance, the non-Dalits allegedly assaulted and tortured two Dalits after tying them with a rope. A case was also filed in this regard and they were later rescued by the police. The decision to hike the rate for tea followed soon after this incident.

The tragedy is that such incidents are not isolated ones and they portray the caste mentality that is so deeply ingrained in the Indian populace. Now we will trace the history of such grisly caste system, which threatens to destroy the Hindu, or even Indian culture.

b. The Origin and Development of Caste System

Traditionally Hindu society is divided into four castes. These are first Brahmin (Priestly class), second Khashatriya (Soldiers or ruling class), then Vaisyas (Merchant Class) and finally, Shudras (Servant class). The Shudra category has innumerable sub-sections and at the lowest end are the untouchables, who do not even belong to this caste. These were named Harijans by M. K. Gandhi, the Father of Nation, who did not want to address them as untouchables, but chose a respectful word Harijans, meaning God's people. This term is not used now and today they are addressed as the Dalits. The first three castes which are called the upper castes have many groups and sub-groups.

According to many scholars, belonging to both high caste and low castes, the caste system has been "one of the most misrepresented, misinformed, misunderstood, and misused and the most maligned aspects of Hinduism." (Rao 2009)In order to understand the larger historical context, the original purpose behind the caste system, one must go to antiquity to study the evolution of the caste system. Many socially reformed Hindus believe that the caste system, which has been the mainstay of the Hindu social order, has no sanction in the Vedas. The ancient culture of India was based upon a system of social diversification according to spiritual development, and enlightenment, not by birth, but by his karma.

Krishna proclaimed in Bhagavad-Gita that the Lord has created the system of four *varnas* (castes) according to one's own in-born traits and *karma* (fate). Thus the Varna system has not been sanctioned by birth. However, over a period of time the system has degenerated into the present state and continues to plague society.

Further, in the course of time, the system became hereditary and over the course of many centuries degenerated as a result of exploitation by some priests, and other socio-economic elements of the society. It is also alleged that the ruling class in league with the priestly class modified the scriptures to suit them and have complete control over the lower castes (Rao 2009). The scriptures (*Smritis*) were written by Brahmins who were controlled by Kshatriyas. Brahmins by nature are averse to warfare and were thus confined to living by patronage and begging. The Kshatriya community in order to keep the most intelligent class of Brahmins in good humour patronized them, bowed to them and made them royal priests. People have to bow to them after giving alms to Brahmins. Thus their superiority was confirmed as a class and their ego was not hurt. Or else, the most intelligent community would have turned against the Kshatriyas, and this they could ill afford. There is no reference to untouchability in Vedas and it is believed that the original inhabitants of India were called *dasyas* (slaves) and were conquered by the invading Aryans and these were subsequently downgraded to the class of untouchables.

Later this system got scriptural sanction and justification. Thus the scriptures described that Brahmins were born out of the mouth of the God while Kshatriya were the outcome of the shoulders. Vaisyas were born out of the thighs and Shudras emanated from the feet of the Lord.

A positive theological interpretation asserts that the above descriptions should be considered in a metaphorical way and not taken literally. Brahmins recite the Vedas (Scriptures) through mouth and are the embodiment of knowledge. Therefore they were considered to be the facial portions representing the face of the God. It does not mean that they were born from the mouth of the Lord. The Kshatriyas live by the power of their arms and therefore represent the arms of the Lord. Vaisyas sit at one place and do trading. Therefore they are identified with the thighs of the Lord. Shudras live by serving the others by doing various jobs and trades and thus they are identified with the feet of the Lord. It is tragic that in spite of trying to interpret the verse in the metaphorical fashion most

people took it literally "causing great commotion in the Hindu society leading to hatred and sectarian fissures" (Rao 2009).

The Dalits, justifiably, are up in arms against these writings. It is a usual practice that in the demonstrations of Dalits, that the Hindu scriptures are ridiculed and even burnt (Rao 2009). Most of the Dalits would whole heartedly agree that "caste system is not just racism, but it is much more vicious, venomous, evil and cruel" (Annamalai 2001), while many non-Dalits are convinced of the evil effects of the caste-system and try to change it. That is why the government has officially banned caste-system, though it is practised unofficially. Because it is all-pervading, it is practically impossible to eliminate it from the unconsciousness of the people. Therefore it will not go away easily, even from within the Christian Churches in India.

2. The Semantic Choice: Reformation or Revolution

To respond to such a tragic and heinous system, two great personalities, with different tactics and philosophy, emerged in the last century. They have become icons in contemporary India for their response to the old economic, social and religious order, represented by the caste phenomena. After a brief introduction to Gandhi, who is sufficiently well-known, we give a more detailed history of Ambedkar, leading to varying semantics of the Indian cultural scenario.

a. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), also known as Mahatma Gandhi, was born in Porbandar in the present state of Gujarat on October 2, 1869, and educated in law at University College, London. In 1891Gandhi returned to India and two years later an Indian firm with interests in South Africa retained him as legal adviser in its office in Durban (INC 2011).

Gandhi remained in South Africa for 20 years, suffering imprisonment many times. In 1896, after being attacked and beaten by white South Africans, Gandhi began to teach a policy of passive resistance inspired by Leo Tolstoy, the teachings of Christ and the

"Civil Disobedience" of Henry David Thoreau. From South Africa, he returned to India in 1915 and became a leader in a complex struggle, the Indian campaign for home rule and independence.

Gandhi became the international symbol of a free India. He lived a spiritual and ascetic life of prayer, fasting, and meditation. So Indians revered him as a saint and began to call him Mahatma ("Great-soul"), a title reserved for the great sages. Gandhi's advocacy of nonviolence, known as "ahimsa," was the expression of a way of life implicit in the Hindu religion. In fact, one can assert that Gandhiji's life was dedicated to the ideals of Truth, Non-violence and Love. "The Bhagavad Gita is my mother" he once said. Truly, he was the architect of India's freedom (1947) and one of the greatest men of last century (Ramana Murthi 1969).

Gandhi's death (January 30, 1948) was a great tragedy. His place in humanity was measured not in terms of the 20th century, but in terms of history. The life of Gandhi came to inspire nonviolent movements elsewhere, notably in the U.S. under the civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. and in South Africa under Nelson Mandela (INC 2011)

b. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) contributed to the development of the Indian nation during the formative stages of its history in the first half of the twentieth century. Ambedkar was born into a low-caste untouchable family in Maharashtra state in Western India 14 April 1891. Because his father had been in the military service through a limited opening given by the British during the middle of the nineteenth century, young Bhimrao gained access to an education at a time when the majority of untouchables were excluded from education. He graduated in 1912 and later earned MA and PhD degrees from Columbia University in New York City and a degree in law and DSc from the University of London. His studies were facilitated by fellowships awarded in 1913 by the philanthropic king of India's Baroda state (Thorat 2008).

Ambedkar himself faced discrimination in various stages of life as a student, as a government servant and lecturer, as a lawyer, and

occasionally even when he occupied high positions of power as a minister and on other occasions in his public life. India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947 and adopted its own constitution in 1950. Ambedkar was at the forefront of Indian politics as a scholar, a civil rights activist, and a political leader from 1920 until 1956. His nation-building contributions were multiple, and included writing books and memoranda on a number of issues of national importance and serving as a chief framer of the Indian constitution and as a policymaker. Above all, he was a leader of the excluded group of untouchables (Thorat 2008).

Ambedkar began his civil rights campaigns against caste discrimination and untouchability in the 1920s, mobilizing untouchables for access to public water tanks in the town of Mahad and entry into temples in the cities of Amravati and Nasik. With these struggles and the symbolic burning of the Manusmriti in 1927, the movement spread to the countryside. In the 1930s, struggles of workers and tenants against landlords were organized.

From 1930 onward, the focus shifted to seeking adequate representation for low-caste untouchables in the legislature, public employment, and in educational institutions, as well as to seeking general economic empowerment. Ambedkar published weekly papers, created associations, and established political parties. His first organization was the Bahishkarit Hitkarni Sabha (Association for the Welfare of the Ostracized), founded in 1924. In 1936 he created the Independent Labour Party, which was renamed as the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942, and converted finally into the Republican Party of India in 1956. Ambedkar also set up a Peoples' Education Society in 1946 beginning with a college in Bombay and he organized the Indian Buddhist Council to help spread Buddhism (Thorat 2008).

Ambedkar was a scholar as well as a man of action. His aim was to use insights from various studies on Indian history and society to restructure Indian society on the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. He had differences both with contemporaries like Mahatma Gandhi and with India's leftists. In Ambedkar's view, the problem of the untouchables was rooted in the caste system, which was based on the principle of inequality, isolation, and exclusion, with an

ideological support from Brahmanic-Hindu religious phllosophy. Gandhi, in contrast, believed that the institution of untouchability had no base in Hinduism and treated it as an aberration. The leftists, on the other hand, believed that the caste system had economic foundation and could be resolved through industrialization and a move toward socialism. Solutions differed correspondingly. Gandhi emphasized moral solutions and a change of heart among Hindus. Marxists advocated economic equality for the annihilation of caste discrimination. Ambedkar, however, favoured dismantling both the religious-ideological and economic foundations of the caste system. At the social-religious level, he argued for the acceptance of the egalitarian Buddhist religious tradition in Indian society. Economically, he favoured a strong state, a democratic socialism oriented to rapid economic development, and a system of compensatory affirmative action policy that included "reservations" in legislature, public services and educational institutions to ensure equal access to economic opportunities. As a minister for energy and irrigation under the last British government, Ambedkar played a major role in initiating economic planning in India and encouraging science and technology.

Ambedkar turned toward Buddhism and converted with a large number of followers in 1956. Buddhism, in his view, was a harbinger of economic and social/cultural egalitarianism and political democracy. This perspective on the problems of Indian society had an immense impact on the issue of reform in Hindu society. Ambedkar also had a profound impact on the development of policies opposing discrimination and facilitating the empowerment of discriminated groups. He advocated for policies of social inclusion since Hindu society is discriminatory right from its inception. "The set of measures aimed at ending discrimination and increasing equal opportunity and economic empowerment included equal rights legislation, legal safeguards against discrimination and affirmative action to ensure fair participation to the discriminated and excluded groups of untouchables" (Thorat 2008) . Legal safeguards against discrimination came with the Anti-Untouchability Act of 1955, and affirmative action came with the Reservation Policy for representation in legislatures, educational institutions, and public jobs, measures that were instituted in 1935 and were finally

incorporated into the constitution of India in 1950. In support of economic empowerment, Ambedkar favoured a particular type of socialistic economic framework, which, according to him, would ensure economic equality to poor and marginalized groups. Ambedkar's contribution is, thus, valuable both in social thought and in the shaping of policies against discrimination. As chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution, he helped to create the basic political, economic, and social framework under which Indians live today. **Ambedkar died in 1956,** and the Indian state recognized his unique contributions. Therefore, he was posthumously awarded the country's highest civilian honor, the *Bharat Ratna* (Jewel of India) on April 14, 1990.

While both these icons and leaders were convinced of the need to improve the situation of the Dalits, Gandhi advocated reform of Hinduism from inside while Ambedkar opted for revolution from outside.

3. The Hermeneutic Response: Challenging or Changing Religion

'Inside every thinking Indian there is a Gandhian and a Marxist struggling for supremacy' asserts noted Indian historian and biographer RamachandraGuha (Guha 2001). Briefly, this section examines and discusses the two prominent hermeneutic imperatives confronting the life of thinking Indians today.

a. Divergent Approaches

Gandhi came from the Kathiawad peninsula which is today a part of Gujarat. He belonged to the Vaishya caste known as the ModhBania, who were wealthy, influential and took tradition seriously. Gandhi's father, grand-father and great grandfather had served as Prime-Ministers in the princely states of the peninsula. Gandhi capacity to compromise was developed during his years in South Africa (Siddhartha 2010). By compromising one helped one's opponent not to lose face. It was an honourable way of resolving problems; for the dignity of all the contending individuals or groups was preserved. Thus, for example, when Ambedkar accepted to give

up his demand for a separate electorate, Gandhi from his part responded by conceding the claim for reserved seats (Limaye 1995).

Given his nature, Gandhi disliked conflict and struggle. The style of resolving differences where the two contending parties had to fight each other so that one of them might win was abhorrent to him. It has been argued by Lloyd and Susan Rudolph that Gandhi's preference for consensus and distaste for conflict has roots in village society. There was a constant search for consensus in village affairs and opposition to partisanship. De-emphasising open clashes, victories and defeats, appeared to be a widely prevalent way of resolving disputes. We are of the opinion, however, that the dominant castes potential for coercion contributed to the success of the consensus approach. One of the references in Gandhi's autobiography deals with his firmness on the question of admitting and untouchable family to his ashram near Ahmadabad in 1915. In 1920, Gandhi said: "*Swara* [self-rule] is unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity." In 1921 he said, "I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an Untouchable" (Siddhartha 2010).

In 1937 Gandhi said, "Once born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That according to me is Hinduism." What is being implied is that all *varnas* have equal worth. Seen from another point of view, this would suggest a denial of equal opportunity: for few people will admit that a scavenger is the equal of a lawyer or a President in worldly status, Gandhi believed in *Varnashramadharma*, the religious division of society into four groups: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. This four-fold ordering of society and the associated traditional duties were important for the preservation of harmony and the growth of the soul. "The law of Varna prescribes that a person should, for his living, follow the lawful occupation of his forefathers," Stated Gandhi (Siddhartha 2010). Thus he was a convinced Hindu, ready for reformation.

We shall now look at Ambedkar's early years and the gradual hardening of his position towards Hinduism and caste-Hindu society. To start with, there was a great difference in the respective family

situations of Ambedkar and Gandhi. While the latter's forefathers had served as Prime-Ministers, the former's grandfather and father had served in the lower, rungs of the British army. Ambedkar's father, Ramji Sakpal, was an intensely religious man. He regularly recited the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to his children. Inspired by the Bhakti traditions (way of devotion to God) of poet Kabirand other saints, the family sang the praises of Krishna and Rama. Values of equality before God appear to have played some importance in this system. His followers believed that caste and rank at birth mattered little to God. While employed in the armed forces, Ramji (and his father before him) had been exposed to liberal English values and education. Ramji had picked up enough of the English language to impart it to his son, Ambedkar. The fact that the Mahars, to caste to which Ambedkar belonged, had been given their own regiment, the 111thMaḥars, contributed to the strengthening of horizontal ties among them in the army. Here they were not obliged to observe traditional practices which symbolised their Untouchability.

Life in the cantonments and in Bombay (where his father moved to during his last years of High school) permitted the space for young Ambedkar to develop ideas and attitudes which as a village untouchable youth, he could scarcely have hoped to arrive at. Thus, right from childhood, Ambedkar was influenced by the following factors: a Bhakti tradition which spoke of the individual's equality before God, the enchantment and inspiration of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and the liberal English values which filtered down to the Mahar regiment. This was also the time of the emergence of caste solidarities and the weakening traditional intercaste marriage relations. If Ambedkar had grown up in the ideological context of the untouchable Mahar quarters of a Hindu village, it is unlikely that he could have developed into the self-confident, determined and persevering youth that he became. Later in his life there were several unpleasant incidents which brutally brought home to him that he was not the social equal of caste Hindus (Siddhartha 2010).

Ambedkar's earlier attitude to Hinduism was ambivalent. On the one hand, he was slowly coming to realise that within Hinduism there could be no liberation from untouchability.On the other hand his own upbringing had been within an atmosphere where the Hindu

scriptures and epics were recited with great devotion. In the early 1920's he had some faith in the Untouchables changing their status through emulating higher caste practices. He gradually came to the conclusion that this process, which sometimes included wearing the sacred thread and celebrating marriages with Vedic rites (technically called 'Sanskritisation process), had little effect in changing the attitudes of caste Hindus. By 1927, his mind was already made up when the Manusmriti was burnt in his presence at a large public meeting. In 1935, he announced his decision to leave Hinduism (Siddhartha 2010).

On October 14th, 1956, Ambedkar renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism along with several hundred thousand of his followers. His choice of this particular religion, and not any other, was based on its rootededness to India. Furthermore, he felt that Buddhism espoused egalitarian values without resorting to the violent methods of communism (Ambedkar 1968).[3]

Thus, whereas Gandhi's path was one of rediscovering Hinduism, Ambedkar's was one of bitterness and eventual rejection of the religion of his forefathers, which will be seen more in the following section.

b. The Religious Conversion of Ambedkar

Ambedkar's change of religion is a gradual, pre-meditated and convinced one. Ever since the 1935 Depressed Classes Conference, when he had shocked Hindu India with the declaration that though he had been born a Hindu he did not intend to die one, he had been giving earnest consideration to the question of conversion. The longer he thought about it the more he was convinced that there was no future for the Untouchables within Hinduism, that they would have to adopt another religion, and that the best religion for them to adopt was Buddhism. During his years in office it had been hardly possible for him to bring about so momentous a change, but he had lost no opportunity of educating his followers in the issues involved, and it became increasingly apparent in which direction he – and they – were moving. In 1950 he not only praised the Buddha at the expense of Krishna, Christ, and Muhammad but also visited Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, at the invitation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association,

Colombo. There he addressed a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Kandy and appealed to the Untouchables of Ceylon to embrace Buddhism. Further, in 1951 he defended the Buddha against the charge that he had been responsible for the downfall of the Indian woman and compiled the *BauddhaUpasanaPatha*, a small collection of Buddhist devotional texts. Thus when his resignation from the Cabinet, and his failure to secure election to the Loksabha, finally left Ambedkar with the time and energy for his greatest achievement, the ground for which was already well prepared (Sangharakshita1986).

In 1954 he twice visited Burma (or Myanmar), in order to attend the conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955 he founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha or Indian Buddhist Society and installed an image of the Buddha in a temple that had been built at Dehu Road, near Pune, India. Addressing the thousands of Untouchables who had assembled for the occasion, he declared that henceforth he would devote himself to the propagation of Buddhism in India. He also announced that he was writing a book explaining the tenets of Buddhism in simple language for the benefit of the common people. When this book was finished, he promised that he would embrace Buddhism. The work in question was *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, on which he had been working since November 1951 and which he completed in February 1956 (Sangharakshita1986). True to his word, Ambedkar announced that he would be embracing Buddhism in October of that year. Arrangements were accordingly made for the ceremony to be held in Nagpur, and on 14 October 1956. There the untouchable leader took the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk in the traditional manner. Then he administered the oath to the 380,000 men, women, and children who had come to Nagpur responding to his call. After conducting further conversion ceremonies in Nagpur and Chanda Ambedkar returned to Delhi knowing that the Wheel of the Dharma of Buddhism had again been set in motion in India (Rajshekar Shetty 1983).

A few weeks later he travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal for the fourth conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and addressed the delegates on 'The Buddha and Karl Marx'. On his

way back to Delhi he made two speeches in Benares and visited Kusinara, where the Buddha had died. In Delhi he took part in various Buddhist functions and completed the last chapter of his book *The Buddha and Karl Marx*. On the evening of 5 December 1956, he asked for the Preface and Introduction to *The Buddha and His Dhamma* to be brought to his bedside, so that he could work on them during the night. The following morning, December 6, 1956, he was found dead. He was 64 years and 7 months old, and he had been a Buddhist for only seven weeks (Sangharakshita1986).

Still, during that period he had probably done more for the promotion of Buddhism than any other Indian since Ashoka. At the time of his death three quarters of a million Dalits had embraced Buddhism, and in the months that followed hundreds of thousands more took the same step – despite the uncertainty and confusion that had been created by the sudden loss of their great leader. So it is not surprising that when the results of the 1961 census were published it was found that in the course of the previous decade the number of Buddhists in India had risen by a staggering 1,671 per cent and that they now numbered 3,250,227, more than three quarters of who lived in the State of Maharashtra. This was Ambedkar's "last and greatest achievement" (Sangharakshita1986).

Even though it was as the Architect of the Constitution of Free India that he passed into official history and is today most widely remembered, his real significance consists in the fact that it was he who established a revived Neo-Buddhism on a firm foundation. It is therefore as the Modern Ashoka that he really deserves to be known, and the statue standing outside the parliament building in Delhi should really depict him holding *The Buddha and His Dhamma* underneath his arm and pointing in the direction of the Three Jewels of Buddhism. In order to appreciate the nature of Ambedkar's achievement, and thus the real significance of the man himself, we need to keep in background the diabolical system from which he sought to deliver the 380,000 untouchables, as well as to trace the successive stages of the road by which he, together with his followers, moved from Hinduism to Buddhism.

Thus the greatness of Ambedkar lies in leading his people to a more humanistic and liberated life and leading them to the new

religion of Buddhism. Throughout his journey and struggles, he was totally open to scientific and educational transformation and he tried as much as possible, to bring his people to an enlightened and democratic society.

4. The Symbolic Significance: Two Differing and Towering Personalities

Here we stud the on-going debate that continues even after the demise of both Gandhi and Ambedkar and its relevance for contemporary India's religious depth and scientific progress. Truly there are the two symbolic figures with wide-reaching significances in the contemporary cultural and social scene of India.

a. The Ongoing Debate

In some ways the most intense, interesting and long-running of the debates that took place during India's freedom struggle was between Gandhi and Ambedkar. "Gandhi wished to save Hinduism by abolishing untouchability, whereas Ambedkar saw a solution for his people outside the fold of the dominant religion of the Indian people. Gandhi was a rural romantic, who wished to make the self-governing village the bedrock of free India; Ambedkar an admirer of city life and modern technology who dismissed the Indian village as a den of iniquity. Gandhi was a crypto-anarchist who favoured non-violent protest while being suspicious of the state; Ambedkar a steadfast constitutionalist, who worked within the state and sought solutions to social problems with the aid of the state and of technology"(Guha 2001).

Perhaps the most telling difference between them was in the choice of political instrument. For Gandhi, the Congress represented all of India, the Dalits too. He had made their cause his own, right from the time of South Africa. Ambedkar, however, made a clear distinction between freedom and power. The Congress wanted the British to transfer power to them. According to Ambedkar to obtain freedom, the Dalits had to organise themselves as a separate bloc, to form a separate party, so as to more effectively articulate their interests in the crucible of electoral politics and power. Thus in his life time and for long afterwards, Ambedkar came to represent a dangerously

subversive threat to the authoritative, and sometimes authoritarian, equation: Gandhi = Congress = Nation. Incredibly, Ambedkar dared to take a stand even against Gandhi in his noble pursuit of freedom, since the empowerment of the Dalits, he believed, cannot be left to chance. Here then is the stuff of epic drama, the argument between "the Hindu who did most to reform caste and the ex-Hindu who did most to do away with caste altogether" (Guha 2001). In these two towering personalities we can see the living metaphors of the "Argumentative Indian" (Sen 2005).

b. Two Tragic Heroes

According to a contemporary historian both figures should be seen as heroes, albeit tragic ones.

The tragedy, from Gandhi's point of view, was that his colleagues in the national movement either did not understand his concern with untouchability or even actively deplored it. Many influential Hindu priests thought he was going too fast in his challenge to caste system. The opposition that he faced from his fellow Hindus meant that Gandhi had perforce to move slowly, and in stages. He started by accepting that untouchability was bad, but added a cautionary caveat - that inter-dining and inter-marriage were also bad. He moved on to accepting inter-mingling and inter-dining (hence the movement for temple entry), and to arguing that all men and all *varnas* were equal. The last and most far-reaching step, taken only in 1946, was to challenge caste directly by accepting and sanctioning inter-marriage itself.

The tragedy, from Ambedkar's point of view, was that to fight for his people he had to make common cause with the British. Arun Shourie(1997) has made much of this and attempts to show that Ambedkar was a political opponent of both Gandhi and the Congress, and generally preferred the British to either. That Ambedkar preferred the British to the Congress is entirely defensible, according to Guha (2001). Relevant here is a remark of the 18th-Century English writer Samuel Johnson. When the American colonists asked for independence from Britain, Johnson said: "How is it that we hear the greatest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?"Untouchability was to the Indian freedom movement what

slavery had been to the American struggle, the basic contradiction it sought to paper over. Truly, Ambedkar is a figure who commands great respect from one end of the social spectrum. But he is also, among some non-Dalits, an object of great resentment, chiefly for his decision to carve out a political career independent of and sometimes in opposition to Gandhi's Congress.

In fact, for Ambedkar to stand up to the uncrowned king and anointed Mahatma of the Indian people required extraordinary courage and will-power. Gandhi also accepted it. Speaking at a meeting in Oxford in October 1931, Gandhi said he had "the highest regard for Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter. That he does not break our heads is an act of self- restraint on his part." Writing to an English friend two years later, he said he found "nothing unnatural" in Ambedkar's hostility to the Congress and its supporters. "He has not only witnessed the inhuman wrongs done to the social pariahs of Hinduism", reflected this Hindu, "but in spite of all his culture, all the honours that he has received, he has, when he is in India, still to suffer many insults to which untouchables are exposed." In June 1936 Gandhi pointed out once again that Dr. Ambedkar "has had to suffer humiliations and insults which should make any one of us bitter and resentful.""Had I been in his place," he remarked, "I would have been as angry" (Guha 2001)

Gandhi's latter-day admirers might question Ambedkar's patriotism and probity, but the Mahatma had no such suspicions himself. Addressing a bunch of Karachi students in June 1934, he told them that "the magnitude of [Dr. Ambedkar's] sacrifice is great. He is absorbed in his own work. He leads a simple life. He is capable of earning one to two thousand rupees a month. He is also in a position to settle down in Europe if he so desires. But he does not want to stay there. He is only concerned about the welfare of the Harijians" (Guha 2001).

To Gandhi, Ambedkar's protest held out a challenging lesson to Hindus. In March 1936 he said that if Ambedkar and his followers were to embrace another religion, "We deserve such treatment and our task (now) is to wake up to the situation and purify ourselves." Not many heeded Gandhi's warning, for towards the end of his life Gandhi spoke with some bitterness about the indifference to Dalits

among his fellow Hindus: "The tragedy is that those who should have especially devoted themselves to the work of [caste] reform did not put their hearts into it. What wonder that Harijan [Dalit] brethren feel suspicious, and show opposition and bitterness"(Guha 2001).

One of the few Gandhians who understood the cogency of the Dalit critique of the Congress was C. Rajagopalachari (fondly called Rajaji). In the second half of 1932, Rajaji became involved in the campaign to allow the so-called untouchables to enter the Guruvayoor temple in Kerala, South India. The campaign was led by that doughty fighter for the rights of the dispossessed, K. Kelappan Nair. In a speech at Guruvayoor on December 20, 1932, Rajaji told the high castes that it would certainly help us in the fight for Swaraj if we open the doors of the temple [to Dalits]. One of the many causes that keep Swaraj away from us is that we are divided among ourselves (Guha 2001). Unhappily, while upper-caste Hindus thought that Gandhi moved too fast, Dalits today feel he was much too slow.

It is no wonder that a contemporary Dalit politician Mayawati has spoken of the Mahatma as "a shallow paternalist who sought only to smooth the path for more effective long-term domination" by the Brahmins. Likewise, Kancha Illiah (2005) writes of Gandhi as wanting to "build a modern consent system for the continued maintenance of Brahminical hegemony."Definitely they are unfair judgements just as Arun Shourie's on Ambedkar was!

It is our opinion that the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar are not merely personal approaches. They continue to be debated and argued within Indian society today, which is a much needed enrichment to locate its own theoretical framework. In what follows we shall briefly see the Dalit critique of Hinduism with regards to the specific issue of science and technology.

5. The Scientific Tradition: Buddhist and Hindu Approaches

Modern science is undoubtedly a contribution of the west. But it may be noted that there was a time in Indian history when Indian science was not only famous in the country, but it was so all over

the world. If the progress of Indian science would have been maintained unhindered after the sixth century A.D., claims some Dalit scholars, India would have been foremost in the scientific field. According to them the reason for the disappearance of science from India is the Brahamanic or Hindu religion (Jamanadas 2000).

Dr. Ambedkar had claimed: "It must be recognized that there never has been a common Indian Culture, that historically there have been three Indias, Brahmanic India, Buddhist India and Hindu India, each with its own culture. It must be recognized that the history of India before the Muslim invasions is the history of a mortal conflict between Brahmanism and Buddhism." From such a standpoint, we analyse the Indian scientific tradition and explore briefly and even simplistically its downfall, as suggested by Dalit critiques.

a. Golden Era of Science in India

From the ruins of the scientifically advance Harappa and Mohenjodaro (2600 to 1700 BCE) civilization it is clear that there existed a pre Aryan urban civilization of Dravidians, which went by the name of Nagas. It shows great development of town planning, water supply and urban facilities, sanitary drainage and granaries. Gold used for ornaments in Harrapan culture was from Kolar gold mines, the only source available, which is proved by a committee of metallurgical experts under Sir Edwin Pascoe, who performed chemical analysis, under the direction of Sir John Marshall. So gold mining was a flourishing industry of the time. This also shows the communicating links between south and north, Vindhyas and forests of Dandakaranya were no bar. The copper used in Harrapan civilization was imported from Rajputana, and tin from Hazaribagh. It used various types of stones quarried all over India, and some imported from outside. Both the attempts to make Harrapapan civilisation Buddhist (Biswas 1999) or Arian (Agrawal 1993 & Bisht 1999) are to be rejected, since Harrappan civilization predates both Buddhism and Arian invasion.

The modern number system of 0 to 9 with use of decimal point is the contribution of Indian mathematicians. It spread to Europe via Arab countries. Further, Mauryan India also achieved remarkable success in fields of Engineering, town planning, architecture and

art. India's first irrigation dam belongs to this era. We know the importance of Ashokan pillars for aesthetic beauty, craftsmanship and religious declarations, but it was also known for the science of polishing of stones to such an extent that it became the distinguishing mark, the structures with high polish being ascribed to Ashokan period (ca. 304–232 BC). Such gloss and polish, Marshall says, "no modern mason can produce", Vincent Smith calls it "the despair of modern masons", Tom Coryat and Whittekar described it as of brass, Chaplain Terry as a pillar of marble, and Bishop Heber as pillar of cast metal (Jamanadas 2000).

In the first and third centuries A.D., two important texts were composed on medical science, namely Charak Samhita and Sushrutsamhita, which show the advanced stage medical knowledge in India. At the time of invasion of Alexander, India was famous for medicine and surgery (Soni 2008).In Buddhist books, we find mention of Jivaka who operated on the brain of a merchant. He was appointed by Emperor Bimbisara as a physician for Lord Buddha and cured him of constipation by making use of inhaling fragrance of medication on a lotus flower. The science of Inhalers in modern medicine is pretty recent. He cured diseases of head, a fistula by ointment, jaundice and performed surgery on brain and intestinal "entanglements" as per the Vinaya texts, which Radha Kumud Mukharji calls were "not given to exaggeration like a work of fiction"(Soni 2008). Up to seventh or eighth century A.D., Indian physicians and surgeons were respectfully appointed in Baghdad.

Indian medical books were popular in China. A Chinese work composed in 455 A.D., is derived from Indian text. A number of medical books are found in Chinese Buddhist collection. A text on Children's Diseases, named "Ravana-kumara-charita" was translated into Chinese as late as 11th century. Indian Medical science and arithmetic was highly valued in the west. Greek and Iranian physicians knew Indian medical texts. It is recorded that Barzouhych, a subject from Sassanid King Khusro I's court (531-579 A.D.) visited India for study of medicine (Soni 2008).

Meharauli iron pillar, which is standing in the courtyard of Kutub Minar at Delhi, belongs to fourth century A.D. It is standing there, defying the ravages of times, for centuries but not a spot of rust or

corrosion on it. Its composition was examined by a committee of experts, who held that, it was beyond the capacity of any Iron foundry in the world of that time to manufacture such a masterpiece. From Periplus we know that the sword made of Indian steel is proverbial in Arabic literature, showing the highest skills and knowledge of metallurgy. The famous Damascus blade was made from Indian steel. (Jamanadas 2000). Ancient South Indian bronzes are praised even now in the whole world not only for their craftsmanship but also for metallurgy. Sultanguanj colossal Buddha in copper is a metallurgical masterpiece and a marvel, still preserved in Birmingham museum (Soni 2008).

The great mathematician, Aryabhatta, born in 476 A.D., flourished in the centre of Buddhist heart land, i.e. Capital of Magadhanempire, at Pataliputtra and his *Aryabhatiya* was composed in A.D. 499. He was first to treat Mathematics as a distinct subject and he dealt with evolution and involution, area and volume, progressions and algebraic identities, and intermediate equations of the first degree. He also arrived at a 'remarkably accurate value of Pi, viz. 3.1416' (Jamanadas 2000). Significantly, it was Aryabhatta, who for the first time regarded the earth was a sphere and rotated on its axis. For this, he gave a beautiful analogy that to a person travelling in a boat, trees on the shore appear to move in opposite direction, similarly because earth is rotating on its axis towards east, it appears to us as if the sun moves from east to west. He also explained that the eclipses were not the work of Rahu and Ketu or some other 'rakshasa', but were caused by the shadow of the earth falling on the moon.

One of the most important features of Aryabhatta's mathematical system is his unique system of notation (Jamanadas 2000). It is based on the decimal place value system, unknown to other ancient people, but now in use throughout the civilized world. Whether Aryabhatta invented the system or merely improved on an existing one cannot be definitely stated. But with the doubtful exception of Bakhshali manuscript, which is referred by some to c. A.D. 200, the earliest use of the system occurs in *Aryabhatiya*, and it is found in all his later mathematical works.

Thus till that time, which was the golden era of Buddhism, science and technology flourished in India. It is clear from the dates, that the

age of progress of science in India was the age of glory of Buddhism. As a matter of fact, science spreads only when it is free from the fetters of traditions. Lord Buddha had given that freedom to Indian society, that freedom of thought and action (Jamanadas 2000). Liberated from the severe caste rules, society was taking keen interest in progress of scientific pursuits.

b. Crusade against Science

It is evident that in the Middle Ages, before the coming of the Muslims and British to India, science in India was on the decline. Various reasons may be attributed to it, though we cannot be definitive about them. One of the Dalit assertions is that it is because of the Brahminic domination that science declined. According to these scholars, Brahmins opposed Buddhists, and their relations were so strained on the issue of caste supremacy, that they became bitter enemies of each other. They opposed everything in which Buddhists were experts, even the science, according to contemporary Dalit critiques.

According to them, putting themselves on the citadel of power, the Brahmins tried to eliminate all that Buddhism stood for, including science and opposition to caste. "After the fall of Buddhism, Brahmins dominated and they denounced, condemned, denigrated and maligned all those things in which the Buddhists had excelled" (Jamanadas 2000). A famous scientist of modern India, Dr. Neelaratna Dhar aptly observes that, the progress of science was obstructed by the decline of Buddhism in India. Further, thinkers like V. T. Rajshekar Shetty (1987) and Kancha Ilaiah (2009) point out that Hinduism has failed to mediate between scientific thought and spiritual thought. Contrasting it with the productive ethics of Dalit people, he celebrates the demise of Hinduism.

Without fully subscribing to such a critique of Brahminic Hinduism, we can still hold that Buddhism and Hinduism had radically different approaches to science and technology and that could be one of the reasons for the decline of science in the pre-British India. Such a claim can be safely made, since the pre-Brahminic (or Dravidian) India was highly advanced scientifically and technologically.

6. Conclusion: Many Heroes of the Discourse

In this article, we have been trying to see how the two icons of modern India have differently responded to caste system and consequently to both science (including technology) and religion. Based on our reflection we can recap our main findings as follows:

- Gandhian call for reformation of Hinduism from within was a genuine and committed one, demanding that religion be truly purified so that it realises itself in the social world around it.

- Gandhi's reformative agenda was also instrumental in taking up his cautious and organic attitude to science and religion. For Gandhi, he would encourage science and religion to a limited degree and not more. He, like many of his Hindu believers, does not believe that science can contribute anything to his spiritual quest, which is his primary duty.

- Gandhian approach to religious and social issues may not have borne fruit, as he wished them, but his political agenda has definitely been productive.

- Gandhi tried to be a man for all and from within his religious resource, he could treat Muslims, Christians and Dalits with respect and devotion. Since he tried to be a "universal leader" there is hardly anyone who will stand for him now. None really considers Gandhi as their leader.

- Ambedkar's radical approach has been successful as far as the lot of the Dalits has been concerned. But the fact remains that even his radical step has not ameliorated the situation of the Dalits fully, even after fifty years. They have not become equal citizens.

- Ambedkar is totally open to education, science and technology and for him science and technology do make a difference in his spiritual and religious life.

- Calling for total change of the system, Ambedkar tried his best to bring about radical transformation of society and he was partially successful.

- Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar's commitment was clearly to the Dalits. This makes him still the favourite and exclusive leader of the Dalits, who are ready to give up their lives for him. The price he has to pay for this devotion of his followers is that he has become exclusive and is not regarded as "a man for all."

- Religious is deeply a social phenomenon and changing one affects the other. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar realised the contextual and social dimension of religion for the cultural and economic enhancement of the people.

- One's religious conviction and commitment directly affects one's perception and appreciation of science. A conservative religious vision (Gandhi) tends to give secondary importance to science, while a liberal understanding of religion (Ambedkar) tends to take science more seriously.

- The locus of science-religion interaction for both these personalities was the life of the ordinary people, the untouchables of India, including their social, economic and cultural context.

- Compared to the "lived experience" (*Lebenswelt*) of the people, the theoretical and metaphysical issues of religion were of less significance for both these leaders, though they did occupy themselves with the conceptual framework of their own religious traditions.

- Two good and well-meaning persons (Gandhi and Ambedkar), with the same goal (reforming caste system) can undertake activities that are at odds with each other and still each one can be effective in solving the problem. Such a hermeneutical principle may be applied also to the

case of individual religions, each of trying to make human beings whole.

One crucial aspect we are concerned of in this paper is their commitment to religion and openness to science. Both Ahmedkar and Gandhi were deeply rooted in India and committed to the untouchables. Their approach to science and religion were totally different. One wanted to remain totally faithful to his own religion and reform it. The other gave it up and embraced another religion. One was reluctantly accepted science and technology. The other embraced them wholeheartedly (Rajshekar Shetty 1983). The root cause for this significant difference can be traced to their social upbringing and personal experience. Given their similar vision and shared concerns, why did they part ways and choose two different approaches to science and religion? The most important thing that separated them was their social upbringing and personal experience. Gandhi's never had to personally face the devastating pain of social segregation from the community. Nor did he experience the pain of traumatic personal rejection in his own flesh and blood, unlike Ambedkar. That, I think, was the crucial difference between these two great heroes.

Gandhi and Ambedkar are two great symbols of India's contemporary responses to science and religion. The former who was called the "half-naked fakir" focused on chakra (spinning wheel) and was not enthused with modern science and was a deeply committed and open Hindu (Pandey 1979).The latter had no difficulty in adopting to English customs and was open to modernisation and scientific progress of India. He radically gave up religion and embraced the Buddhism as a deliberate choice.

Questions are today raised about the greatness of Gandhi vs Ambedkar. "Ambedkar may not be an international figure like Gandhi – not as yet – but I think he has the potential to get there soon," said writer and social thinker, Purushottam Aggarwal. In fact, in the contemporary India, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's call for social justice has a lot more takers today and many would say that his idea of a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity is relevant now than ever before. Nilanjana Bosea contemporary critique puts it

succinctly: "The Mahatma may be the Father of the Nation, but Babasaheb is possibly the architect of a new India".

May be we can take an inclusive approach. Where as in their lifetime Gandhi and Ambedkar were political rivals, now, decades after their death, it should be possible to see their contributions as complementing one another's. A critic D. R. Nagaraj once noted that in the narratives of Indian nationalism the "heroic stature of the caste-Hindu reformer", Gandhi, "further dwarfed the Harijan personality" of Ambedkar. In the Indian Epic, Ramayana, there is only one hero but, as Nagaraj points out, Ambedkar was too proud, intelligent and self- respecting a man to settle for the role of Hanuman or Sugreeva. By the same token, Dalit hagiographers generally seek to elevate Ambedkar by diminishing Gandhi. "For the scriptwriter and the mythmaker there can only be one hero. But the historian is bound by no such constraint. The history of Dalit emancipation is unfinished, and for the most part unwritten. It should, and will, find space for many heroes. Ambedkar and Gandhi will do nicely for a start" (Guha 2001).

Mahatma Gandhi was not so much the Father of the Nation as the mother of all debates regarding its future. All his life he fought in a friendly spirit with compatriots whose views on this or that topic diverged sharply from his. He disagreed with Communists on the efficacy and morality of violence as a political strategy. He fought with radical Muslims on the one side and with radical Hindus on the other, both of whom sought to build a state on theological principles. He argued with Nehru and other scientists on whether economic development in a free India should centre on the village or the factory. And with that other giant, Rabindranath Tagore, he disputed the merits of such varied affiliations as the English language, nationalism, and the spinning wheel (Guha 2001). His fight with Ambedkar continues even today and Ambedkar seems to be winning in the contemporary India. That explains the phenomenon that the highest political positions of India (including that of the President and Chief Justice) have been occupied by Dalits. That the most populous State in India, Uttar Pradesh, is currently ruled by a Dalit women, can only be explained the resurgence of a new social, cultural and religious order, unimaginable even fifteen years ago.

India has sufficient space for many Gandhis, the social reformers, and many Ambedkars the cultural revolutionaries. Together, even through their controversies, they will facilitate the emergence of a new cultural and economic order in India. The discourse of a multi-cultural, pluralistic and scientifically advancing India with different religious traditions will go on and it is highly desirable.[4] The Catholic Church with so much of cultural, education and social space it possesses, can significantly contribute to that on-going and diverse discussion.

Notes

1. This is a modified article to suit this volume. The original article was requested by in order to study the relationship between science, Hinduism and Buddhism. Edited by Patrick McNamara and Wesley J. Wildman, both of Boston University. It is a three volume series tentatively entitled *Science and the World's Religions.* That thrust of the original article is drastically changed here, though the materials remain substantially same.
2. It is a tragedy that in spite of the Christian proclamation that we are all created in the image of God and so are equal, there is caste-system being practiced in the Indian Church. As Christians we need to take the situation realistically and respond to the tragic situation creatively.
3. Here Indian Christians have something to reflect on. The question we need to ask is: Why and how did he not find Christianity egalitarian and humanizing?
4. This is also the argument put forward by the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen about the Indian culture. See SEN, A.K. (2005). See also VATTANKY (1993), a longtime colleague of Prof Kunnumpuram..

References

Agrawal D. P. (1993) The Harappan Legacy: Break and Continuity. In *Harappan Civilization: A Recent Perspective* (Second Revised Edition) (Ed) Gregory L. Possehl. New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies. pp. 450-453.

Ahmed F, Garg S (2010) *Scientific Humanism: Repositioning Indian Education*. New Delhi: Viva Books.

Ambedkar BR (1964) *Ranade, Gandhi, & Jinnah; Address Delivered on the 101st Birthday Celebration of Mahadev*

Govind Ranade, on the 18th January 1943 in the Gokhale Memorial Hall, Poona. Jullundur City: BheemPatrika Publications,

Ambedkar BR (1968) *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi; and Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development*. Jullundur City: BheemPatrika Publications.

Ambedkar, B. R. (1979-2003) *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. 17 vols. Bombay: Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra.

Annamalai, Velu. (2001) "Caste System is Racism, Fascism and Nazism" http://www.ambedkar.org/News/Cssacndzsm.htm, Accessed January 23, 2011.

BalachandraRao S (2004) *Indian Mathematics and Astronomy: Some Landmarks*. Bangalore: Bhavan's Gandhi Centre of Science & Human Values.

Bisht, R.S. (1999) Harappans and the Rgveda: points of convergence. In *Dawn of Indian Civilisation* (Ed.) G.C. Pande. New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilisations.

Biswas, Swapan Kumar. (1999) *Buddhism, the Religion of Mohenjodaro& Harappa Cities*. 1st ed. Delhi: Orion Books.

Bose, Niranjana. (2008) "Ambedkar now bigger than Mahatma Gandhi" India: IBNCNN, April 14, 2008. http://ibnlive.in.com/news/ambedkar-now-perhaps-bigger-than-mahatma-gandhi/63247-3.html?xml.

Busi SN (1997) *Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar: Crusaders against Caste and Untouchability*. Hyderabad: Saroja Publications.

Chandra R (2000) *Dr. Ambedkar Science and Society*. New Delhi: Shree Publishers.

Gandhi (1957) *The Science of Satyagraha*. Published for Anand T. Hingorani Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Gore, M. S. (1993) *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought*. New Delhi: Sage.

Guha R (2011) *Makers of Modern India*. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Guha, Ramachandra. (2001) *An Anthropologist Among The Marxists And Other Essays*, New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Ilaiah, K. (2005) *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy.* 2nd ed. Calcuttta: Samya.

Ilaiah, Kancha (2009) *Post-Hindu India: a Discourse on Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution.* New Delhi: Sage publications.

INC (2001) "Mahatma Gandhi" Past Presidents, Indian national Congress, http://www.congress.org.in/new/past-president-detail.php?id=36.Accessed February 13, 2011.

Jaffrelot, Christopher (2005) *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Jamanadas, K. (2000) "Why Science Declined in Ancient India?" http://www.ambedkar.org/jamanadas/WhyScience.htm. Accessed February 2, 2011.

Kadam, K. N., comp. and ed. (1991) *Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Significance of His Movement: A Chronology.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

Keer, Dhananjay. (1962) *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission.* 2nd ed. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

Kharmode, C. D. (1952-1994) *Dr.BhimraoRamji Ambedkar: A Biography.* 13 vols. Bombay: Maharashtra State Department of Language Art and Culture. In the Marathi language.

Krishan A (1997) *Ambedkar and Gandhi: Emancipators of Untouchables in Modern India.*, Mumbai: Himalaya Pub. House.

Kumar R (1985) *Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Poona Pact.* New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

Limaye M (1995) *Manu, Gandhi, and Ambedkar and Other Essays.* New Delh: Gyan Pub. House.

Luce E (2007) *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India.* New York: Doubleday.

Omvedt, Gail. (1994) *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India.* New Delhi and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Omvedt, Gail. (2004). *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India.* New Delhi: Penguin.

Pandey R (1979) *Gandhi and Modernisation.* Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan.

Radhakrishnan N, Gandhi Smriti and DarshanSamiti.(2001) *Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Dalit Emancipation.* New Delhi: Gandhi Smriti & Darshan Samiti

Rajshekar Shetty VT (1978) *Crocodile Tears over Harijan Atrocities.* Bangalore: Dalit Action Committee.

Rajshekar Shetty VT (1983) *Ambedkar & His Conversion.* Bangalore: Dalit Sahitya Akademy.

Rajshekar Shetty VT (1987) *Dalit: The Black Untouchables of India.* Atlanta: Clarity Press.

Rajshekar Shetty VT (2001) *Aggression on Indian Culture.* Bangalore: Dalit SahityaAkademy.

Ramana Murthi VV (1969) *Relevance of Gandhism.* Ahmedabad: Harold Laski Institute of Political Science.

Rao, K Prabhakar. (2009) "The Evil of Caste System in Hindu Society" *Sangh Parivar.* See http://www.sanghparivar.org/blog/dr-k-prabhakar-rao/the-evil-of-caste-system-in-hindu-society. Accessed February 21, 2011.

Saju, M.T. (2011) "TN village asks Dalits to pay up more for tea" *Times of India*, May 10, 2011, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-10/india/29527392_1_Dalits-double-tumbler-system-tea. Accessed May 12, 2011.

Sangharakshita (1986) *Ambedkar and Buddhism.* Windhorse Publications; Distributed by Element Books, Glasgow: Longmead

Sen, A. K. (2005) *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Shourie, Arun (1997) *Worshipping False Gods: Ambedkar, and the Facts Which Have Been Erased*. New Delhi: ASA Publications.

Siddhartha (2010) Gandhi and Ambedkar: Divergent Preceptions in the Struggle Against Oppression, http://pipaltree.org.in/uploads/ Gandhi_and_Ambedkar_complementary _pathways.pdf. Accessed February 23, 2011.

Soni, Suresh. (2008) India's Glorious Scientific Tradition. New Delhi: Manohar Books.

Thorat, Sudkadev. (2008) "Ambedkar, B. R."International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. 2008. Encyclopedia.com. (May 11, 2011). http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045300070.html. Accessed January 26, 2011.

Thorat, Sukhadeo. (1997) Ambedkar and the Economic of Hindu Social Order: Understanding Its Orthodoxy and Legacy. In *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Re-assertion of the Subalterns*, ed. Walter Fernandes, 120-129. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.

Thorat, Sukhadeo. (1998) *Ambedkar's Role in Economic Planning and Water Policy*. Delhi: Shipra.

Thorat, Sukhadeo. (1999) Ambedkar and Nation Building: Reflection on Selected Themes. In *Nation Building in India: Culture, Power, and Society*, ed. Anand Kumar, 257-294. New Delhi: Radiant.

Vattanky, J. (1993) *Development of Nyaya Theism*. New Delhi: Intercultural Publications.

Vij, Shivam 2004."Why Gandhi Lost And Ambedkar Won," CounterCurrents, Dec 6, 2004.http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-vij061204.htm. Accessed February 15, 2011.

Zelliot, Eleanor. (1992) *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement*. New Delhi: Manohar.