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## THE ROLE OF BUDDHISM IN AMBEDKAR'S THOUGHT: ETHICS, EQUALITY AND EMANCIPATION

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### ABSTRACT

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's philosophical engagement with Buddhism represents one of the most significant intellectual and socio-religious interventions in modern India. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was not merely a religion but an ethical and rational framework capable of dismantling caste hierarchies, promoting human dignity, and establishing a just social order. This research article explores how Buddhism shaped Ambedkar's ethical vision, his critique of Brahmanical orthodoxy, and his conception of equality and emancipation. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrine—especially the concepts of Dhamma, Pragyā, Karuṇā, and Śīla—reveals a dynamic socio-moral philosophy grounded in non-discrimination, compassion, and rational humanism. Through Navayāna Buddhism, Ambedkar transformed ancient Buddhist ideals into a modern emancipatory project, enabling marginalized communities to reclaim agency, moral worth, and collective identity. This article analyses the ethical foundations of Ambedkar's Buddhism, its ideological distinctiveness, and its lasting impact on social justice movements in India.

**KEYWORDS:** Ambedkar, Buddhism, Navayana, Equality, Ethics, Emancipation, Social Justice, Dhamma, Caste, Modern Buddhism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), one of the most influential intellectuals, jurists, and social revolutionaries of modern India, stands as a central figure in the history of human rights,

social justice, and anti-caste movements. His extensive scholarship, political leadership, and philosophical contributions laid the foundation for a democratic, inclusive, and egalitarian society. A significant dimension of Ambedkar's intellectual journey was his profound engagement with Buddhism. For him, Buddhism represented not just a religious tradition but a comprehensive moral, social, and philosophical framework capable of transforming human consciousness and restructuring society on the principles of dignity, equality, and ethical responsibility.

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism on 14 October 1956 at Nagpur, along with nearly half a million followers, marked one of the most significant socio-religious events in modern India. This mass conversion was neither an emotional reaction nor a gesture of spiritual escapism; rather, it was the culmination of decades of ideological reflection and historical analysis. Ambedkar viewed Buddhism as a scientific, rational, and ethical alternative to the hierarchical caste-ridden structure of Hindu society. His choice reflected a strategic and philosophical commitment to a religion that could provide a moral foundation for building a casteless and humane social order. According to Ambedkar, Buddhism provided answers to three central issues that plagued Indian society:

- (1) The unethical nature of caste hierarchy,
- (2) The absence of genuine equality in social and religious life, and
- (3) The need for moral transformation for individual and collective emancipation.

Buddhism, in his view, upheld social equality and human dignity while rejecting birth-based discrimination. Moreover, its emphasis on compassion, non-violence, rational inquiry, and ethical self-cultivation aligned with Ambedkar's own vision for social democracy and human rights. This article examines the role of Buddhism in shaping Ambedkar's ethical thought, his vision of equality, and his ideas on collective emancipation. It analyses how Ambedkar reinterpreted Buddhism to construct a modern ethical philosophy—commonly known as *Navayāna*—which emphasizes morality, social responsibility, and liberation from injustice. Through this analysis, we explore how Ambedkar transformed Buddhist philosophy into an emancipatory tool for oppressed communities and laid the intellectual foundation for a new social consciousness.

## 2. Buddhism as Ethical Rationalism in Ambedkar's Thought

Ambedkar understood Buddhism primarily as an ethical and rational tradition. Unlike religions resting upon divine revelations, supernatural authority, or metaphysical

speculations, Buddhism—according to Ambedkar—was grounded in human experience, empirical reasoning, and moral discipline. In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar portrays the Buddha not as a divine figure but as a profound moral philosopher who discovered a practical path for ending human suffering through ethical transformation and social harmony.

To Ambedkar, Buddhism offered a philosophy of life that was scientific in method, humanistic in outlook, and moral in practice. While Buddhism, historically, contained multiple layers of metaphysical and ritualistic additions over centuries, Ambedkar sought to recover what he believed was the original ethical and rational core of the Buddha's teachings. This involved a systematic reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrines, making them relevant to the modern world. At the centre of Ambedkar's understanding of Buddhism lies the idea that **human suffering is rooted in social conditions, moral failures, and psychological distortions—not in supernatural forces or destiny**. Thus, the resolution of suffering requires ethical reform, rational awareness, and freedom from oppressive structures, especially caste. Ambedkar saw Buddhism as a philosophy capable of guiding both individual liberation and collective social transformation.

## 2.1 Ethics as the Foundation of Dhamma

Ambedkar's interpretation of Dhamma is fundamentally ethical. He firmly rejected the notion that religion should revolve around dogma, ritual, or supernatural authority. Instead, he proposed that true religion must promote morality, social responsibility, and the cultivation of human character. For Ambedkar, **Dhamma is morality in action**.

### Dhamma as a Moral Code

Ambedkar emphasized that the Buddha did not establish a religion based on divine commandments or metaphysical doctrines. Rather, he established a moral path rooted in human welfare. According to Ambedkar, the Buddha's Dhamma stands upon three key ethical principles:

#### 1. Pragyā (Wisdom)

Pragyā represents understanding, awareness, and rational insight. It is not mystical knowledge but the ability to perceive the world without distortion. Ambedkar believed that wisdom arises through critical thinking, self-reflection, and awareness of social realities such as oppression, inequality, and injustice. Pragyā, therefore, is inseparable from social consciousness.

## **2. Karuṇā (Compassion)**

For Ambedkar, compassion is not passive sympathy but active commitment to alleviate suffering. Karuṇā demands social engagement, moral courage, and dedication to justice. In Ambedkar's interpretation, compassion becomes a revolutionary force—a moral obligation to fight discrimination and uplift the marginalized.

## **3. Śīla (Ethical Conduct)**

Śīla embodies moral discipline rooted in self-control, truthfulness, non-violence, and respect for others. Ambedkar emphasized that ethical self-cultivation is necessary not only for personal growth but also for building a harmonious society. Śīla is the foundation of social cohesion and democracy.

### **Dhamma Against Social Evils**

Ambedkar argued that Buddhism provides an ethical framework capable of eliminating:

- Caste discrimination
- Untouchability
- Gender inequality
- Social and economic exploitation
- Religious superstition

According to him, moral transformation is the only sustainable solution to social injustices. Laws may be necessary, but ethical transformation ensures lasting change.

### **Rituals vs. Ethics**

Ambedkar was critical of religions that place emphasis on rituals, sacrifices, or sacred scriptures instead of ethical conduct. He insisted that:

“Religion must be judged by its social ethics, not by its rituals.”

Thus, Ambedkar's Dhamma becomes a dynamic moral philosophy, replacing rituals with ethics, dogma with reasoning, and inequality with compassion.

## **2.2 Rejection of Supernaturalism**

One of Ambedkar's most innovative contributions to Buddhist studies is his reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrines by eliminating supernatural elements. He believed that Buddhism had been historically burdened with metaphysical additions that obscured its rational core. To revive Buddhism as a modern ethical philosophy, Ambedkar sought to free it from supernatural interpretations.

### **Reinterpretation of Karma**

Ambedkar rejected the orthodox idea of karma as a metaphysical law governing rebirth. Instead, he reinterpreted karma as the moral consequence of human actions within this life. For him:

- Karma shapes psychological tendencies
- Karma influences moral character
- Karma generates social outcomes

Thus, karma becomes a symbol of ethical responsibility, not mystical fate.

### **Rejection of Rebirth in Its Traditional Sense**

Ambedkar did not accept rebirth as a literal cycle of lives. He argued that:

- There is no empirical evidence for multiple births
- Ethical behaviour should not depend on belief in future lives
- Liberation must be sought here and now

He transformed rebirth into a psychological concept referring to the continuous renewal of one's character through moral and mental changes.

### **Critique of Supernatural Cosmology**

Traditional Buddhist cosmology includes realms of gods, spirits, heavens, and hells. Ambedkar rejected these as mythological constructions that diverted attention from real human suffering. He held that:

- Heaven and hell are mental states
- Liberation is a social and ethical condition
- Moral progress is achieved by human effort, not divine intervention

### **Buddhism as a Scientific Humanism**

Ambedkar emphasized that Buddhism is consistent with scientific temper. It encourages:

- Rational inquiry
- Logical analysis
- Empirical understanding
- Ethical decision-making

Thus, Ambedkar reconstructed Buddhism as a philosophy of **scientific humanism**, where ethical reasoning replaces metaphysical speculation.

### **3. Buddhism and Equality: Ambedkar's Social Philosophy**

Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism placed equality at its very centre, making it the philosophical foundation of his socio-political vision and the ethical basis of his struggle against caste oppression. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was not simply a spiritual path but a moral and social revolution designed to restore human dignity and eliminate hierarchical discrimination. He regarded the Buddha as the first and most uncompromising champion of social equality in human history, and believed that the Buddha's rejection of caste distinctions and emphasis on universal moral worth provided a radical alternative to the oppressive Brahmanical social order. While the caste system created a world of graded inequality, where human beings were ranked in a rigid structure of purity and pollution, Buddhism, in Ambedkar's view, affirmed the moral, intellectual, and spiritual potential of all individuals irrespective of birth. This egalitarian ethos made Buddhism an instrument of social transformation capable of dismantling caste ideology at its moral root. Ambedkar understood that caste was not simply a matter of social organisation but a profound ethical failure that destroyed fraternity, corrupted human character, and dehumanised entire communities. In contrast, Buddhism maintained that true moral worth arises not from birth but from one's ethical conduct, compassion, and wisdom. Therefore, Ambedkar used Buddhism as a philosophical counter-system to Brahmanism, offering a moral universe governed by justice, dignity, and social responsibility.

#### **3.1 Caste as a Moral Problem**

In Ambedkar's analysis, caste is fundamentally a moral problem because it is rooted in exclusion, degradation, and denial of basic human dignity. He argued that caste cannot be viewed merely as a traditional social structure or an economic arrangement; it is a system that violates the moral law of humanity by denying equality of worth and equality of opportunity. Caste destroys the ethical basis of society by teaching individuals to accept inequality as divinely sanctioned and to treat fellow human beings as inherently inferior. Such a system, Ambedkar maintained, breeds contempt, hostility, superstition, and cruelty, all of which are fundamentally opposed to the moral values of compassion, fraternity, and justice. Buddhism, on the other hand, rejects all forms of hereditary superiority and insists that the only measure of human worth is ethical behaviour. The Buddha declared that a person becomes noble through conduct, not birth, and in doing so he directly challenged the foundation of caste ideology. Because Buddhism upheld social equality, universal dignity, and the brotherhood of humanity, it provided Ambedkar with the ethical tools to critique caste not only as an unjust

social institution but as a fundamentally immoral worldview. Buddhism offered a moral paradigm where human beings could relate to each other as equals, free of pollution taboos, ritual hierarchies, and birth-based privileges. Thus, Ambedkar viewed Buddhism as a moral revolution against caste, capable of rebuilding society on the foundations of justice and human dignity.

### **3.2 Sangha as a Model of Democratic Community**

Ambedkar considered the Buddhist Sangha to be one of the earliest and most sophisticated models of a democratic community, and he believed that the principles governing the Sangha embodied the values essential for a just and egalitarian society. The Sangha rejected the hereditary barriers of caste and created a moral community in which individuals were judged solely by their conduct, discipline, and ethical commitment. Kings and peasants, merchants and labourers, all entered the Sangha on equal terms, and this radical levelling of social status demonstrated the practical possibility of a casteless society. Ambedkar drew inspiration from the Sangha's emphasis on liberty, equality, and fraternity, values that he argued were essential for the survival of democracy. In the Sangha, decisions were made collectively through deliberation, consensus, and voting, indicating a participatory approach to governance long before the emergence of modern democratic institutions. Members of the Sangha enjoyed intellectual freedom, including the right to question and disagree, which Ambedkar saw as central to a healthy democratic culture. The Sangha functioned as a self-regulating ethical community in which mutual respect, moral discipline, and compassionate cooperation were the guiding principles of social life. Ambedkar believed that such a structure offered a powerful blueprint for modern India, which suffered from deeply entrenched caste divisions and lacked genuine social solidarity. By promoting dignity, participation, and moral equality, the Sangha became for Ambedkar a living example of a society built on democratic values. Thus, Buddhism not only critiqued caste but provided a concrete institutional model for creating a casteless, humane, and ethically grounded social order.

### **4. Buddhism and Emancipation: Ambedkar's Navayana Vision**

Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism into what he termed **Navayāna** was one of the most significant intellectual and socio-political innovations of the twentieth century. Unlike the traditional Buddhist schools of Theravada and Mahayana, which were shaped by monastic traditions, historical evolution, and complex metaphysical frameworks, Navayāna



Buddhism emerged as a consciously reconstructed philosophy tailored to the social, ethical, and political needs of modern India—especially the needs of oppressed communities who had suffered centuries of caste-based exclusion. Ambedkar did not simply adopt Buddhism; he redefined it, reinterpreted its doctrines, and reorganized its moral and social foundations to create a powerful emancipatory ideology. His reinterpretation offered a radical alternative to the caste-bound religious system of Hinduism and provided a liberating spiritual identity for millions. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was not primarily a religion of monastic withdrawal but a dynamic moral and social movement rooted in reason, compassion, and ethical transformation. He eliminated supernatural elements, metaphysical speculations, and ritual practices that prevented Buddhism from addressing real social problems. Instead, he foregrounded ethical conduct, moral responsibility, psychological well-being, and social justice as the central pillars of Buddhist practice. Through Navayāna, Ambedkar transformed Buddhism from a path of individual salvation into a collective struggle toward dignity, equality, and freedom, shaping it into an instrument of social revolution.

#### **4.1 Emancipation as Psychological and Social Liberation**

Ambedkar conceptualized liberation as a deeply interconnected process involving both **mental emancipation** and **social emancipation**, arguing that the two cannot be separated. Psychological liberation, in his analysis, involves freedom from fear, humiliation, inferiority, and the internalized oppression that centuries of caste discrimination had ingrained in the minds of marginalized communities. For Ambedkar, the oppressed carry not only economic and social burdens but also emotional and psychological wounds inflicted by systematic dehumanization. The caste system had conditioned people to believe in their own inferiority, to accept their suffering as fate, and to submit to the authority of those who oppressed them. This psychological enslavement, Ambedkar argued, was more dangerous than physical oppression because it robbed individuals of self-worth, courage, and the capacity to resist injustice. Buddhism, in his interpretation, provides the spiritual and moral tools to break this internal bondage. Through mindfulness, ethical self-reflection, and cultivation of wisdom, individuals learn to overcome fear, rebuild self-respect, and awaken a sense of inherent dignity. The Buddha's teachings, Ambedkar believed, empower individuals to reject the ideology of caste and to view themselves as morally equal human beings capable of growth and enlightenment. At the same time, Ambedkar argued that psychological liberation alone is insufficient without **social emancipation**, which demands freedom from structural inequality, discrimination, and the oppressive institutions that perpetuate caste hierarchy. True liberation



requires dismantling the social structures that degrade human beings and prevent them from enjoying equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal recognition. Navayana Buddhism therefore calls for active engagement in social reform, political struggle, and community empowerment. In Ambedkar's view, the Buddha was not merely a spiritual teacher but a revolutionary reformer who challenged unjust social norms and built a moral community based on equality. Thus, Navayana Buddhism becomes both a philosophy of inner transformation and a strategy for collective social struggle. It encourages individuals to cultivate moral strength while simultaneously challenging systems of injustice. Through this dual emphasis on inner and outer freedom, Ambedkar shaped a unique vision of emancipation that integrates psychological healing, ethical self-development, and social revolution.

#### **4.2 Collective Mobilization**

Ambedkar understood that the struggle against caste oppression could not succeed through individual transformation alone; it required collective mobilization, cultural revitalization, and the reconstruction of a shared social identity. The conversion to Buddhism in 1956 was therefore a transformative political event as much as a religious one. By embracing Buddhism, marginalized communities symbolically and practically broke away from the religious foundations of caste and asserted their right to dignity, equality, and self-respect. Ambedkar used Buddhism as a powerful instrument for building cultural confidence among those who had been historically denied spiritual and social status. Through Buddhist teachings, rituals, and symbols, he aimed to create a renewed cultural identity that rejected notions of pollution, inferiority, and stigma imposed by caste ideology. This cultural revitalization helped create a sense of unity, belonging, and purpose among the oppressed, building a moral community grounded in pride, compassion, and collective strength. Navayana Buddhism thus became a vehicle for community empowerment, offering a new ethical foundation upon which to rebuild social relations and reclaim human dignity. It encouraged the oppressed to organize, educate themselves, and engage in social and political movements for justice. Ambedkar believed that liberation could be achieved only when people gained both self-respect and collective agency. Buddhism, with its emphasis on equality and moral courage, provided the philosophical basis for such mobilization.

Identity reconstruction was another vital dimension of Ambedkar's project. For centuries, caste dictated one's identity, reducing individuals to predetermined categories and denying

them the right to self-definition. By converting to Buddhism, the oppressed broke free from the identity imposed upon them by Brahmanical texts and traditions. They adopted a new identity rooted in ethical values, human dignity, rational thought, and social equality. This new identity was not dependent on birth but on moral choice, ethical commitment, and collective solidarity. As a result, Buddhism became a means of rewriting social identity and asserting moral agency. It allowed communities to redefine themselves as followers of a rational, compassionate, and egalitarian religion rather than victims of an oppressive system.

Thus, Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism functioned as a comprehensive emancipatory project that combined psychological healing, moral development, social equality, political activism, and cultural renaissance. It offered a vision of liberation that transcended individual rebirth or metaphysical salvation and instead focused on the transformation of social conditions and human consciousness. Through Navayana Buddhism, Ambedkar created an ethical blueprint for achieving a just and humane society grounded in reason, compassion, and equal dignity for all. His reinterpretation remains one of the most powerful intellectual traditions of modern India, inspiring movements for social justice, democratic rights, and human emancipation across the world.

### **5. The Modern Significance of Ambedkarite Buddhism**

Ambedkarite Buddhism today stands as one of the most powerful and transformative intellectual and social movements in modern South Asia, influencing fields as diverse as Dalit rights, social justice activism, academic scholarship, and global Buddhist discourse. Its contemporary significance lies in its remarkable ability to link ancient ethical teachings with modern struggles for equality, dignity, and human rights. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism as an emancipatory philosophy has ensured that his Navayana movement remains vibrant and relevant in discussions on caste, democracy, identity, and social transformation. In post-independence India, Ambedkarite Buddhism became a foundation for the emergence of a new Dalit consciousness, offering an alternative to the deeply oppressive cultural and religious ideology of caste. For millions of Dalits, conversion to Buddhism provided a path to reclaiming dignity, self-respect, and moral agency. It created a new social identity rooted not in humiliation but in equality and ethical values. The conversion movement continues to grow, especially in regions like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, where Ambedkar's teachings are seen as essential for liberation from caste-based oppression. The annual gatherings at Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur, attended by millions of followers, symbolize

the enduring emotional and cultural resonance of Ambedkar's Buddhist vision. Ambedkarite Buddhism functions as a cultural renaissance for the oppressed, providing a shared history, a collective identity, and an ethical framework that empowers communities to resist discrimination and build solidarity.

Ambedkarite Buddhism has also become a cornerstone of contemporary social justice activism in India. Activist groups, civil society organizations, and grassroots movements regularly draw upon Ambedkarite values—rationality, equality, fraternity, compassion, and social responsibility—to challenge caste atrocities, gender oppression, economic exploitation, and systemic violence. The vocabulary of modern Dalit activism is deeply shaped by Navayana philosophy, which emphasizes human dignity as non-negotiable and equality as a fundamental moral right. In universities and public institutions, Ambedkarite student organizations have emerged as major forces advocating for equity, representation, and constitutional rights. They use Buddhist ethical principles to oppose discrimination and promote critical thinking, social dialogue, and democratic participation. Movements such as the Dalit Panthers, Bahujan Samaj Party, and contemporary human rights collectives have drawn inspiration from Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism, using it as a framework to critique injustice and mobilize marginalized communities. The emphasis on compassion and ethical responsibility provides a strong moral counter-narrative to caste-based hatred and violence. Thus, Ambedkarite Buddhism continues to serve as a living ethical resource in struggles for justice, offering both a philosophical compass and an emotional foundation for collective resistance.

Academically, Ambedkarite Buddhism has become a significant field of study in India and internationally. Scholars in philosophy, sociology, political science, religious studies, and anthropology have increasingly recognized Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism as a groundbreaking contribution to modern thought. His works have generated new debates on secularism, religious reform, democracy, and human rights. Ambedkar's transformation of Buddhism challenges conventional categories within Buddhist studies by shifting the focus from monasticism and metaphysics to ethics, social equality, and liberation from oppression. This makes Navayana unique among Buddhist traditions: it is not primarily concerned with personal salvation or ritual practices, but with societal transformation and human emancipation. Universities across the world now include Ambedkar's writings in curricula on religion and social theory. Scholars examine his ideas alongside global thinkers like Marx,

Dewey, and Phule, acknowledging him as one of the great intellectual architects of modern egalitarian thought. Academic conferences, research projects, and publications increasingly explore how Ambedkar's Buddhism intersects with feminist theory, critical race studies, postcolonial thought, and global human rights discourse. This growing academic interest shows that Ambedkarite Buddhism is not limited to a specific community but has become a major paradigm for understanding justice, ethics, and liberation in the contemporary world.

Furthermore, Ambedkarite Buddhism has reshaped global Buddhist discourse by reintroducing the inseparable role of social ethics and justice in Buddhist practice. Traditional Buddhist studies often focus on meditation, monastic discipline, and metaphysical doctrines, but Ambedkar emphasized that Buddhism is fundamentally an ethical and rational path grounded in human welfare, not supernatural salvation. This interpretation has influenced modern humanistic and socially engaged Buddhist movements worldwide. Leaders in movements such as Engaged Buddhism, founded by Thich Nhat Hanh, and Humanistic Buddhism, associated with Hsing Yun and the Fo Guang Shan movement, increasingly reference Ambedkar's work as a key moment in the evolution of modern Buddhism. His emphasis on equality, compassion, and rationality resonates strongly with global Buddhist communities that are concerned with issues such as war, poverty, racism, environmental destruction, and human rights. Ambedkar's core message—that Buddhism must address suffering not only at the individual level but also at the structural level—aligns with global concerns about systemic injustice. Through this lens, Ambedkarite Buddhism becomes an important contribution to global ethical thought, connecting Buddhist values with the universal struggle for justice and human rights.

In contemporary debates on identity politics, citizenship, discrimination, and social ethics, Ambedkarite Buddhism offers a rare and powerful combination of rationality and moral clarity. Its insistence on human dignity as the highest value challenges not only caste but all forms of oppression. Ambedkar's reinterpretation highlights that true religion must be compatible with reason, freedom, and equality, making his Buddhism a compelling model for ethical life in the modern world. It speaks directly to the crises of hatred, inequality, and intolerance that plague societies today. Ambedkarite Buddhism provides tools to cultivate critical thinking, emotional resilience, and ethical responsibility—qualities essential for nurturing democratic citizenship and social harmony. In an era marked by growing polarization, caste violence, communal conflicts, and economic inequality, Ambedkarite

Buddhism reminds us that justice, compassion, and fraternity are indispensable for the survival of democracy.

Thus, Ambedkarite Buddhism remains a dynamic, evolving, and deeply influential tradition. It continues to inspire Dalit communities, energize social justice movements, shape academic discourse, and enrich global understandings of Buddhism. Its emphasis on rationality, equality, human dignity, and collective emancipation ensures its enduring relevance. Ambedkarite Buddhism stands not merely as a religious revival, but as a profound ethical movement that seeks to transform both individuals and society, offering a vision of liberation grounded in social justice and universal human flourishing.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Buddhism played a foundational and transformative role in Ambedkar's ethical, social, and political philosophy, shaping not only his personal intellectual journey but also the emancipatory movement he inspired for millions of marginalized people in India. For Ambedkar, Buddhism was far more than a religious doctrine; it was a comprehensive moral and social framework capable of confronting the deep-rooted injustices of the caste system and offering a rational, ethical, and egalitarian alternative for modern society. He saw in the Buddha's teachings a profound commitment to human dignity, compassion, equality, and freedom—values that resonated deeply with his own lifelong struggle against oppression. By reinterpreting Buddhist principles through the lens of reason and social justice, Ambedkar reconstructed Buddhism as Navayana, a modern form of the Dhamma that spoke directly to the conditions of contemporary life. This reinterpretation involved removing metaphysical elements that inhibited social engagement and instead emphasizing the Buddha's commitment to rational inquiry, ethical conduct, and social transformation. Navayana therefore became a philosophy of liberation that sought not only inner peace but also collective emancipation from structural inequalities and social degradation. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956, along with hundreds of thousands of followers, symbolized a radical break from the oppressive religious ideology of caste and an embrace of a new identity grounded in equality and moral agency. Through this act, he transformed Buddhism into a living movement for dignity, justice, and democratic values.

The enduring relevance of Ambedkarite Buddhism lies in its ability to bridge ancient ethical insights with modern struggles for social justice. In contemporary India, Navayana continues to be a powerful intellectual and cultural force, inspiring Dalit movements, shaping public

discourse on equality, and providing a moral foundation for activism against discrimination and violence. Its emphasis on rationality and ethical responsibility also resonates strongly with global conversations on human rights, identity, and social ethics. Moreover, Ambedkar's reinterpretation has enriched Buddhist scholarship by redirecting attention to the social and ethical dimensions of the Buddha's teachings, influencing modern humanistic and socially engaged Buddhist movements worldwide. In every sphere—political, cultural, academic, and spiritual—Ambedkarite Buddhism offers a compelling vision of a just society rooted in compassion, critical thinking, and universal dignity. It challenges individuals and communities to confront injustice not with hatred or violence but with moral courage, collective solidarity, and transformative action.

Ultimately, Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism stands as one of the most impactful philosophical movements in modern India because it addresses the fundamental human need for dignity and freedom while offering practical tools for ethical living and social transformation. It continues to inspire millions who seek liberation from oppression, exclusion, and inequality. In a world troubled by division and injustice, Ambedkar's Buddhist vision remains a powerful reminder that true emancipation must integrate both inner moral development and outer social change. His reinterpretation of Buddhism thus endures as a timeless blueprint for building a society founded on justice, equality, fraternity, and compassion.

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