Precepts v/s Praxis: Ambedkar’s Navayana and its Practices among the Dalit - Buddhists of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Abstract

“Buddhism is the only real religion and those who do not accept this must revise their definition of religion”

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar intended to reconstruct Buddhism not only as a religion for the untouchables but as a humanist and social religion, which combined scientific understanding with universal truth. His Buddhism projected a religion for modern, civic society.

The present study begins with an overview of Neo-Buddhism from two perspectives, that of Ambedkar himself, based on his writings and the second of followers in Lucknow. In the case of Ambedkar’s understanding of Buddhism, present study will focus mostly on the changes he made to more traditional presentations of Buddhism. In the case of Lucknow practitioners, study will attempt to draw some broad conclusions about their relationship to the relatively new religion. The centrality of the figure of Ambedkar in Navayana Buddhism, as well as Navayana Buddhist’s lack of conformity with Ambedkar’s understanding of Buddhist principles as articulated in his writings will guide me in my conclusions about the ways outside observers might want to move forward in the study of this relatively new religion. By using qualitative methods (structured interview, questionnaire, participant method).