

RARE PREFACES

Written by

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SHEEM PATRIKA PUBLICATIONS

Nakodar Road, JULLUNDUR—144003

(Punjab). INDIA

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Published by :

L. R. Balley, Editor

Bheem Patrika Publications

Jullundur—144003 (Punjab)

[First Edition : Sept. 1980]

Price : Rs. Three only

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7. Preface to the 'Buddha and His Dhamma' written by Dr. Baba Saheb B.R. Ambedkar in March 1956 but not included in the book which was posthumously published by the People's Education Society in 1957.

Notes

Printed by :

D. S. Rana, Prop.

Phool Bharati Printing Press.

Dayanand Math, Dhan Road, Jullundur-8 (Pb).

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Baba Saheb B.R. Ambedkar wrote many books, pamphlets and articles for many papers, beside the Marathi papers which were started and edited by him. Many writers approached him for guidance and sought his advice on many matters. Some writers approached him with the request for 'foreword' or 'preface' to their works, while others desired him to go through their writing with a view to seeking his expert advice and criticism. Notwithstanding the station or stature of the author he agreed to write foreword to a new book for two reasons. Sometime it was the subject which attracted his attention and he wrote a short prefatory note. When he was Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council some people approached him because they believed that a foreword written by Dr. Ambedkar will enhance the value of their books. In such cases he wrote the preface just to encourage and help the new writer but did not fail to comment on points on which he held independent and different views. Rao Bahadur Divanji was one such person who got the foreword written by Dr. Ambedkar to enhance the value of his book.

Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a voracious reader and owned one of the biggest personal libraries in Asia. He did not boast of having read 50,000 books like Mr. T.E. Lawrence, popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia. Like Marx, Lenin, Gorky and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer he had few compeers in the matter of reading books. He read few novels but he had done extensive and intensive studies in

diverse subjects ranging from economics, commerce, banking, to law, politics, sociology, anthropology and religion. He practised law at the High Court of Bombay and after his resignation from the cabinet of Mr. Jawahar Lal Nehru, at the Supreme Court, New Delhi. He was the chief architect of free India's Constitution which has the impact of his versatility, depth of his knowledge and judicious wisdom beside his patriotism.

In this volume we have selected three 'prefaces', from three books which have become rare and there are remote chances of their being published again because the subjects dealt with, in at least two of them, are no longer relevant. They are undoubtedly of historical interest.

'Essence of Buddhism' is one of the best and very famous books on Buddhism. It is one of the few books on Buddhism which immensely influenced Dr. Ambedkar and the impact is evident in his monumental work, "The Buddha and his Dhamma" which was posthumously published by the People's Education Society, Bombay. Preface to the third edition written by Dr. Ambedkar has been selected because he had great admiration for this book and recommended it to all those who were seriously interested in the study of Buddhism. This book has not only not aged but continues to be in great demand even 73 years after its first publication in 1907. It was during those years that the interest of the Indian scholars was being awakened by the researches carried out by European scholars and archaeologists. Among the missionaries, Venerable Anagarika Dhammapala was exhorting the Untouchables to embrace Buddhism to escape the tyranny of Hinduism and to elevate themselves socially, mentally and morally. Buddhism was increasingly attracting

the attention of the scholars in South India and Bengal where it had been lingering on in the remote mountainous regions because of the proximity of Burma and Tibet.

The "Essence of Buddhism" was originally written in the form of articles contributed to many magazines published in South India. These were later collected, developed and published in the form of a book. The book was well received by the students of Buddhism and also the general readers. Second edition was brought out in 1912. five years after its first publication in 1907.

Dr. Ambedkar had heard a great deal about this book but could not lay his hands on the book for many years because by 1938 the book was again out of print and no copies were available. After the separation of Burma in 1935 there were very few Burmese Buddhists left in India.

He had been on the look out for this book. Once when he went to Calcutta on official tour, he visited the National Library which is one of the biggest libraries of India. Two copies of all the books published in India have to be sent to this library. He made enquiries about this book. Although its name appeared in the catalogue, the book was not traceable. Ultimately it was found in the heap of books earmarked for being weeded out owing to destruction by the termites. There was no arrangement for fumigation and lamination in the National Library. Be it said to our shame that in many libraries in our country there is no arrangement for proper preservation and even the members of the staff tend to handle the books carelessly. I have it on good authority that when the book in dilapidated condition was brought to Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, he almost jumped up with joy. He decided to get it re-printed. The third

edition of the 'Essence of Buddhism' was republished in 1943 by Thacker & Company, Bombay who had published most of the books of Dr. Ambedkar.

Besides the preface to the third edition written by Dr. Ambedkar, we are also publishing the preface to second edition written by Mr. P. Lakshmi Narasu in 1911 with a view to acquainting people with the trends and interest of the people in the study of Buddhism during the early decades of twentieth century.

Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar had decided to renounce Hinduism because there was no hope for the Untouchables if they continued to be slaves of Hinduism and the Hindu. He made a declaration in a conference of the 'Depressed Classes' held at Yeola, district Nasik in October 1935 that he would renounce Hinduism and embrace some other religion which ensured equality and justice. Later on in a conference of the Mahars held at Bombay in May 1936 he decided to take the first step towards liberation by completely severing all connection with Hinduism. Resolution was unanimously passed urging upon the Untouchables not to follow Hindu religion in any form, not to observe Hindu rituals and ceremonies, not to celebrate or participate in Hindu festivals, not to get the marriage and other social ceremonies performed through Brahmins or Hindu priests according to Brahminic rites. Conversion became target of criticism and ridicule by Hindu scholars and political leaders, especially those belonging to Indian National Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj etcetra. They never missed an opportunity to condemn, criticise or adversely comment on the movement for religious conversion of Untouchables. Baba Saheb Ambedkar never took kindly to this kind of criticism.

Conversion to Christianity, Islam and Sikhism had brought about tremendous psychological changes in the personality of the Untouchable. Liberated from the clutches of Hinduism which dwarfed them intellectually and made them cowards, they attained eminence in many fields. Whether or not conversion ensured mobility or recognition from Hindus, it certainly helped them gain self-confidence, courage, pride and urge to improve—essential ingredients for advancement and all round progress.

Like most Hindu scholars Dr. G.R. Pradhan had also asserted that conversion had done no good to the Untouchables. He wrote,

"Out of 905 Mahars and 12 Mang Garudi families I studied, four and six respectively are converts to Christianity. Conversion has not changed their position in any way. There is no difference between the living of these converts and that of their Hindu brethren. The convert Garudi is inclined more towards Hinduism than towards Christianity, a fact which he cannot give out lest he should lose the help of the Church."

"Such stray conversions are not due to the consciousness among them of the unfair treatment within the Hindu fold but they are rather due to earthly temptations which more often than not prove elusive. From both the speeches and the writings of Dr. Ambedkar, it is clear that he is aware of the fact that conversion would not better their condition economically but his proclamation shows the awakening amongst them and is prompted by self-respect."

This prompted the irate, though couched in polite language, observation of Dr. Ambedkar in his prefatorial note.

The third book "Indian Political Riddle" is no longer relevant but the preface is no less important today than it

was 38 years ago when it was written.

The preface to Buddha and his Dhamma' was written some nine months before his death. He was very ill even then.

Like Leo Tolostoy, who, it is said revised his famous novel the "War and Peace" as many as twenty three times before it was finally made over to the press for printing, Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar also, continued to revise the manuscript of the Buddha and his Dhamma until the last day of his life. He was a perfectionist who was never satisfied with his work. Last reading of the book was done on the fateful night of the 5th December 1956 before he went to bed. He was found dead in his bed in the morning on the 6th December 1956 by his servant who went to serve bed tea. The only persons present in the house were his wife Mrs. Sabita Ambedkar and their servant Sudama. Mr. Nanak Chand Rattu who did the typing and other secretarial work was asked by Baba Saheb to leave the final proof of the book and relevant papers on his table beside his bed before he left for his home. Dr. Ambedkar told him that he wanted to complete the work before he went to bed. Mr. Rattu left for home late in the night.

A copy of this preface included in this collection is available with Mr. Nanak Chand Rattu. I saw a copy of the preface also in the library of the Milindh Arts College, Aurangabad.

I am grateful to my friend Prof. Marc Gallantar of Wisconsin University for kindly making a zero copy of the preface to the 'Indian Political Riddle' available to me. Special thanks are also due to my friend and comrade Mr. L.R. Balley for his valuable suggestions and cooperation in bringing out this volume.

List of Books from which Prefaces have been taken...

ONE

UNTOUCHABLE WORKERS OF BOMBAY CITY

by

Dr. G.R. Pradhan, *Ph.D.*

Published by

KARNATAK PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOMBAY.

1938.

TWO

THE INDIAN POLITICAL RIDDLE

(A historical approach towards its Solution)

by

Rao Bahadur Prahlad C. Divanji, *M.A.L.L.M.*,

Retired Judge, Advocate (O.S.) Bombay.

Published by

THE NEW BOOK CO., Kitab Mahal,

Hiornby Road, BOMBAY.

1942.

THREE

ESSENCE OF BUDDHISM

by

P. Lakshmi Narasu

(Third Edition revised and enlarged)

Published by

THACKER & CO., Ltd., BOMBAY.

1948.

FOUR

BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA

by

B. R. Ambedkar

"Untouchable Workers of Bombay City"

FOREWORD

The treatise is a thesis which the author wrote in fulfilment of the requirement prescribed by the University of Bombay for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts. That it was accepted by the University should constitute sufficient recommendation in favour of its merits and no such thing as a 'foreword' from me should have been thought necessary by the author. I do not know why the author feels the necessity of a word from me. Probably that I come from the community whose life has been the subject matter of his investigation is the reason which has led him to call upon me to write a 'Foreword' and I gladly respond to his invitation.

The author had studied the life of the 'Untouchables' in the city of Bombay under various heads and thus gives a quantitative idea of the extent of over-crowding, the earnings, employment, debts etcetra that prevail among the Untouchables. He has collected data which is certainly valuable. In any statistical investigation the question that arises is whether the cases studied are topical or not. The average to be normal, the cases investigated must be typical. There is no reason to suppose that his thesis cases are not. It may therefore, be taken that the picture of the life of the 'untouchables' he has given is a true picture,

This study would have been of great value if it had been a comparative study contrasting the social condition of the Untouchables with that of the caste Hindus. But that it is

not. Such a study was all the more necessary in view of opinion expressed by the author that conversion would make no difference to the condition of the Untouchables.

A conclusion to this effect could be right only on a comparison drawn between Untouchables on the one hand and caste-Hindus on the other, if it is proved that the Untouchable does not suffer by reason of his untouchability. But if on comparison it is found that the Untouchable suffers in his earnings, in his employment and in other respects in a competitive society as against a caste-Hindu and if this disadvantage is attributable to no factor other than Untouchability, then it will have to be admitted that the case for conversion was strong.

But all that must await a comparative study. Such a study will have to be undertaken some day either by the author of this book or by some one else if the present study is to be a useful guide for understanding why the conclusions drawn by the author are what they are; and whether the difference, if any, in the condition of the touchables and untouchables is due to any such social factors as 'Untouchability'. As a preliminary to such an effort the booklet must be welcomed.

'Rajgrah'

Bombay.

10-2-1938.

B. R. AMBEDKAR

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FOREWORD

The Indian Political Riddle

Mr. Divanji is an old veteran savant and it is surprising to me that he should need someone like me to chaper on his debut in the world of political literature. But more surprising than this is that he should have fallen upon me as the person best fitted for this work.

If at all he wanted any one to do so, I think he should have approached the President of the Hindu Mahasabha ; for much that forms the basis of Mr. Divanji's brochure, is a chip of the same block which forms the creed of the Hindu Mahasabha. Since Mr. Divanji insists on my writing a Foreword—and that is I believe largely because I am now Executive Councillor—I gladly do so, more especially on account of my association with him at Bombay Bar.

There can be no exaggeration in saying that there is more talk of constitutional advancement in India, but very much less application to the problems involved in the making of the Constitution itself. In view of the bewildering multiplicity of points of view and claims for protection, there can be no doubt that safety lies in having a multiplicity of plans designed from different angles for framing the constitution.

As a new approach to the problem, this brochure will no doubt be welcomed by the public. But there is also another reason for welcoming this addition to the political

literature of the country. Mr. Divanji makes an original approach for solving what he describes as the Indian political riddle. We have altogether three approaches, for the solution of this riddle—the purely territorial, the purely communal and the purely occupational. To these Mr Divanji adds the cultural approach. I do not know how far his approach will find ready acceptance from those whose task it will be to frame the new Constitution. I have my own doubts about this plan.

Some of his concrete proposals would be regarded as retrograde by the advanced politicians whose one conserving passion is to achieve complete independence for India. For myself the cultural approach, so far as the Hindu group is concerned, may have a very deleterious effect upon the sub-merged sections of the Hindu population. Mr. Divanji in his booklet refers to the wars between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas in ancient times—wars in which each class vowed to exterminate the other. Mr. Divanji also brings out the fact that the two classes after a long and bloody struggle arrived at a compromise. This is good and sound history. But when Mr. Divanji further proceeds to state that compromise had established such harmonious relations between not only the two rival communities but also between them and the Banias (the Vaisyas) and the Sudras that never again in the long history of the Indian civilisation was there a recurrence of the internecine wars of the Vedic age above referred to, one is compelled to ask ; 'Yes, peace ! but peace of what kind ? Was it peace with honour for the Vaisyas and the Sudras or was it peace brought about by the suppression of the Vaisyas and the Sudras by a conspiracy between the

Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas who compromised their quarrels so as not to weaken their ranks and with a combined force to be better able to put down the rising tide of the Vaisyas and Sudras which was taking place under the religion of Buddha ?

This attitude is typical of the high-class Hindus. It gives the clue to a proper understanding of how the higher class Hindus coming from the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas have developed an attitude of indifference towards the Vaisyas and the Sudras have developed a self-satisfying frame of mind that there is nothing wrong with the Hindu society or with any of the numerous sections of which it is composed. In coming to these conclusions, Mr. Divanji is unconsciously exhibiting the attitude of the higher classes towards the lower classes in Hindu society. It is this attitude which one finds ingrained in the congress policy which holds to the view that for political purposes no distinction ought to be made between the high and the low and that all power may be allowed to pass into the hands of those who are higher up in Hindu society and that no means need necessarily be adopted to empower those who are lower, to protect themselves against the injustices of the higher. That has been the tragedy of Hindu India, and I have no doubt that it will be so in the future under Swaraj unless proper precautions are taken to guard against the result. Mr. Divanji's cultural approach will no doubt be examined by those who have a doubt whether it would be safe to leave the destinies of the suppressed and the oppressed in the hands of those who for centuries past have been responsible for reducing them to that status.

New Delhi,
20th August, 1942.

B. R. AMBEDKAR

Preface to the Third Edition

of

Essence of Buddhism

The author of this book was Prof. P. Lakshmi Narasu. While I have great pleasure in introducing this book to the public I confess that I had not met the author and know very little about his personal life. I have tried to obtain whatever details that could be gathered about his personal life and literary work. For this purpose, I have found Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya to be the best source. He knew Prof. Narasu personally and was a friend of his. I give below the main facts in the life of Prof. Narasu as given to me by Dr. Pattabhi.

Prof. P. Lakshmi Narasu, B.A., was a prodigy of the last century. He was a graduate in Physics from the Madras Christian College. From being a tutor and demonstrator, he rose to the position of an Assistant Professor by 1897 and was given full charge of Physics and Chemistry for the B.A. classes in 1898-99, during the absence of Prof. Moffatt, the permanent Professor of Physics on leave. Prof. Moffatt was a raw youth who was appointed to the professorship over the head of Prof. Narasu who had already won his distinction in physics in the sphere of wireless telegraphy—which in the nineties of the last century was yet in its infant stage of progress. During the years 1898 and 1899, Prof. Narasu, as he used to be called in those days, was already an Examiner

in physics and chemistry—both for B.A. and M.A. examinations. Prof. Narasu was particularly strong in Dynamics. Once when an altercation arose over the correctness of a question in Dynamics, Prof. Wilson, a hot-headed Englishman who was professor of Chemistry, in the Presidency College Madras and Chairman of the Board of Examiners in Physics and Chemistry, questioned the correctness of the view expressed by Prof. Narasu regarding some problem in dynamics. Prof. Narasu took up the challenge at once. ‘Do you want to teach me, Mr. Narasu’, asked the arrogant Wilson to which in reply Prof. Narasu retorted—after working out the problem—‘I am glad I am teaching Prof. Wilson something in Dynamics.’ The incident is of interest to us fifty years after its occurrence, because it shows that Prof. Narasu was an ‘iconoclast’. Prof. Narasu was a social reformer. He fought caste to the best of his ability and raised the standard of revolt against the tyranny in Hinduism, so early in the nineties of the 18th century. He was a great admirer of Buddhism and gave courses of lectures on the subject week in and week out. He was highly popular with his students over whom he exercised a magical personal influence so as to broaden their outlook and widen their vision. His sense of self-respect, both personal and national was of a high order and he did not stand the arrogance and sense of superiority of his European colleagues to whom he was always ready to give their due in the domain of scholarship but at whose hands he would not take insults lying down.

Prof. Narasu’s eminence as an educationist did not take long to obtain general and widespread recognition and ere long

he was promoted to the Principalship of the Pachiappa’s College.

Prof. Narasu was a highly public-spirited citizen and took active part in the organization of a body known as “National Fund and Industrial Association” under whose auspices, petty donations were being collected with which aid was rendered to students who desired to go abroad for advanced technical education.

Japan was the country which attracted the young men of the day and it was their ambition to learn the technique of various small industries and manufactures, notably soap-making, enamelling and paints manufacture and so on. But the Professor’s one sin was social reform and in Buddhism he found his solace. He was one of the earliest to discern the evil of the caste system, early marriages and prohibition of widow marriage and it was then considered in ‘reform circles’ a matter for gratification that one of his brothers was a practical ‘social reformer’ having married a widow. That was the era when Christian missionaries were not only countenancing the social reform movement but viewed it with high favour as making a half way house between orthodox Hinduism and conversion to Christianity. It did not take long for them to change their views and look upon such progressive movements as constituting a real hindrance to proselytization. Prof. Narasu was the stalwart of the 19th century who had fought European arrogance with patriotic fervour, orthodox Hinduism with iconoclastic zeal, heterodox Brahminism with nationalistic vision and aggressive Christianity with a nationalistic outlook—all under the inspiring banner of his unflinching faith in the teachings of the Great Buddha.

In recent times many people from different parts of India have been asking me to recommend a good book on Buddhism. In responding to their wishes I felt no hesitation in suggesting Prof. Narasu's book. For, I think that it is the best book on Buddhism that has appeared so far. Unfortunately, the book has been out of print for a long time. I, therefore, decided to reprint it so that the desire of those who have an interest in the teachings of Buddhism may be fulfilled and they may have in their hands a text which is complete in the treatment and lucid in its exposition. I must thank the representatives of the old firm of Vardhachari & Co., Madras who held the copyright of the original publication to reprint the book.

In writing this foreword to this reprint, it was my intention to deal with some of the criticisms which have been levelled against the teachings of Buddha by his adversaries—past and present. I have given up that intention for two reasons. In the first place, my health will not permit me to engage myself in this task. Secondly I am myself working on a Life of Buddha and I think that I could deal with this matter better in my own work wherein I could do more justice to it than in a foreword to another man's work. I have taken this decision more especially because I am sure that the reader of Prof. Narasu's book will not suffer in any way as a result of my decision.

"Raj Graha"

Hindu Colony, Dadar,
Bombay—14.

10th March, 1948.

B.R. AMBEDKAR

'Essence of Buddhism'

PREFACE

"This volume is the final form assumed by a series of essays on Buddhist subjects originally contributed to certain South Indian magazines. It has been prepared with the aim of bringing together, within a small compass, the leading ideas of Buddhism, and interpreting them in the light of modern knowledge. It lays no claim to originality. Much of the material it contains may be found in the works of well-known orientalisists. Nor does it pretend to be the fruit of Pali or Sanskrit scholarship, despite the quotations it may contain from works in those languages. It professes to be nothing more than the humble offering of a disciple in the service of his master.

"In presenting the teachings of his master it is incumbent on the disciple never to lose sight of the fundamental principles on which those teachings themselves rest. For the Buddha the voice of authority is in truth itself, and wherever the truth leads, thither the disciple must follow. Accordingly, the dictum accepted in all schools of Buddhism as the sole regulative principle is that nothing can be the teaching of the Master, which is not in strict accord with reason or with what is known to be true. In giving a conspectus of their religion all Buddhist writers of note have sought the aid of logic and psychology. Their regard for the general validity of ideas has been so great that they have not infrequently set aside the *Sutras*, which are commonly regarded as the basis of

their religion. Hence, in expounding Buddhism in the light of modern knowledge, the author has in no way swerved from his position as a Buddhist, but has only followed a practice current among the Buddhists from the very earliest times. If he has succeeded in giving Buddhism the aspect of modernity, he has done so, not by seasoning modern ideas with a little Buddhistic sauce, but by getting beneath all forms of Buddhism and bringing to light the essential truths therein contained.

“The attention of thoughtful men in Europe and America has been drawn to Buddhism. Already there are in those countries organizations for the spread of Buddhism. A branch of the Mahabodhi Society with its headquarters in Chicago is doing valuable work in the United States. A Japanese Buddhistic Mission, established in San Francisco, publishes a journal, called *The Light of Dharma*, which is said to be widely read in America. A Buddhistic Society, established in Leipzig, besides publishing a journal, called *Der Buddhist* (now *Buddhistische Watre*), is actively at work in disseminating the teachings of the Tathagata by means of popular lectures and cheap literature. Divested of certain mystical out-growths, Buddhism will doubtless attract many occidentals. Nevertheless it has been asserted that Buddhism is too chaste to win adherents where marriage is not considered detrimental to high thinking. But even on this score Buddhism has nothing to fear. There have been from the earliest times schools of Buddhism that have maintained that a laic also can attain arhatship. A religion that is supple enough to include the *Vajracharyas* of Nepal as well as the *Sthaviras* of Ceylon has certainly room in it for puritanical asceticism as well as the innocent pleasures of a conjugal life.

“The possibility of a revival of Buddhism in India has been presaged by an eminent historian. With the spread of education and independent thought it is not unlikely that the Dharma will appeal to that growing circle of thoughtful Indians, who no longer find any charm in Rama or Rahim, Krishna or Christ, Kali or Lakshmi, Mari or Mary. Nor are signs wanting which betoken a lasting interest in the teachings of one whom all India once revered as born to take upon himself the sins of all mankind. As the true *swadeci* spirit takes firmer root and grows, the immortal name of Sakyamuni, which now lurks in the garbled story of the Buddhavatar, is sure to rise above the surface of oblivion, and shine in all its eternal glory and grandeur.

“The marrow of civilized society, it has been truly said, is ethical and not metaphysical. The forces that underlie and maintain civilized society are not the belief in *atman* and *brahman*, or trinity in unity, or the immanence and transcendence of God, but truthfulness, charity, justice, tolerance, fraternity—in short, all that is summed up in the word Dharma or Buddhism. Rightly did Emperor Asoka make Buddhism the basis of his government. Not till the “white light” of the Buddha has once again penetrated into the thought and life of the Indians can they hope to regain that pre-eminence among nations that they possessed in the time of Ashoka. Not till the *Dharma* becomes the guiding spirit of all nations will their peace and safety be assured. It might be pretentious for the author to hope that this book will prove serviceable in hastening this consummation so devoutly wished. But he cherishes the hope that his book will in some measure be helpful in leading to a clearer understanding of the teachings of his Master.”

So much of the original preface I may, perhaps, be pardoned for quoting; both because I have found no new way of describing my aims and my hopes and because the favourable reception of the last edition in India and other countries encourages me to believe that the hopes are being fulfilled. Since the publication of the first edition many events have happened which prove the growing interest of all thoughtful men in Buddhism. Of these I need note only the enthusiasm evinced all over India in connection with the unearthing of the relics of the Buddha near Peshawar, the celebration of the Vaishak festival by non-Buddhists, the progress made by the Bengal Buddhist Association, the establishment of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland, the publication of the *Jagajyoti* (Light of the world) in Bengali and the *Buddhist Review* in English. It would be arrogant to suppose that my book has had any direct influence in bringing about these events, but it is no small consolation to learn from some of those connected with these movements that my book has had a persuasive influence on them.

The plan of this edition remains the same as the original but a good deal of new matter has been added to show that my Buddhist "modernism," far from being "fabricated with the collaboration of all the scientists of the Old and New Worlds," stands much closer to the spirit of the Buddha than the Indologist presentation of the teaching of Benign One. The crucial question for the Buddhist is not whether he shall be *mahayanik* or *hinayanik*, but whether Buddhism can come to terms with modern civilization which is animated, not by ideals borrowed from antiquity, but by the awakening spirit of modern science. In the earnest endeavour to answer this

question I have over-looked no hint or criticism from friends, reviewers and co-workers in the same field. On the suggestion of some friends a few illustrations of Buddhistic art have been added.

There are many whom I ought to thank for the success of my book and among them pre-eminently stands Mrs. Mary E. Foster, an enthusiastic Buddhist of Honolulu, who by a donation rendered my book accessible to places which it would otherwise have not been able to reach.

Madras,
367, Mini Street
December, 1948.

P.L.N.

—o—

Subjects Dealt with in 'Essence of Buddhism'

Chapter I	The Historic Buddha
Chapter II	The Rationality of Buddhism
Chapter III	The Morality of Buddhism
Chapter IV	Buddhism and Caste
Chapter V	Woman in Buddhism
Chapter VI	The Four Great Truths
Chapter VII	Buddhism and Asceticism
Chapter VIII	Buddhism and Pessimism
Chapter IX	The Noble Eightfold Path
Chapter X	The Riddle of the World
Chapter XI	Personality
Chapter XII	Death and After
Chapter XIII	The Summum Bonum

PREFACE

to

Buddha and his Dhamma

I was born in the community known in India as the "Untouchables." A question is always being asked of me. "How I happened to take such high degrees of education?" Another question is being asked, "Why I am a Buddhist?" This is the question which I feel that this preface is the proper place to answer

This is the way it happened. My father was a very religious person and he brought me up under a strict religious discipline. Quite early in my career, I found certain contradictions in my father's religious way of life. He was a 'Kabirpanthi'¹. As such he did not believe in "Moorti-puja" (idol worship). He read the books of his 'panth'². At the same time, he compelled me and my elder brother to read, every day before going to bed, a portion of the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata' to my sisters and other persons who assembled at my father's house for hearing the 'Katha'³. This went on for a long number of years. I passed the fourth standard Examination. My community people wanted to celebrate the occasion by holding a public meeting to celebrate the occasion by holding a public meeting to celebrate the event. They went to my father to ask for his permission. My father refused such a thing because 'it would inflate the head of the boy.' 'After all he has only passed an examination and done nothing.' Those who

wanted to celebrate the event were greatly disappointed. They, however, did not give way. They went to Dada Keluskar, a personal friend of my father and asked him to obtain his permission for holding a meeting for congratulating me. He agreed. After a little argumentation, my father yielded and the meeting⁴ was held, Dada Kaluskar presided. He was a literary person of his time. At the end of his address he gave me as a gift, a copy of his book on the life of Buddha which he had written for the Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda. I read the book with great interest and was moved by it.

I began to ask why my father did not introduce to us the Buddhist literature. After this, I was determined to ask my father this question. One day I did. I asked my father why he insisted upon our reading the Mahabharata and the Ramayana which recounted the greatness of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and the degradation of the Sudras and the Untouchables. My father did not like the question. He merely said, "You must not ask such silly questions. You are only twelve. You must do as you are told."

My father was a 'Roman patriarch' and exercised most extensive 'patria potestas'⁵ over his children. I alone took a little liberty and was bold because my mother had died in childhood leaving me to the care of my aunt. So after some time I asked again the same question. This time my father had prepared himself for the reply. He said, the reason why I ask you to read the Mahabharata and the Ramayana is this. We belong to untouchable caste and you are likely to develop inferiority complex which is natural. The value of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana lies in removing this inferiority complex. See "Drona"⁶ and "Karuna"⁷. They

were small men but to what heights they rose. Look at "Valmiki."⁸ He was Koli⁹ but he became the author of the Ramayana. It is for removing the inferiority complex that I ask you to read the Mahabharata and the Ramayana."

I could see that there was some force in my father's arguments. But I was not satisfied. I told my father that I did not like any of the figures in the Mahabharata. I said, "I did not like Bhishma and Drona, nor Krishna. Bhishama and Drona were hypocrites. They said one thing and did quite the opposite. Krishna¹⁰ believed in fraud. His life is nothing but series of frauds. Equal dislike I have for Rama. Examine his conduct in Surupnaka¹¹ episode, in the Vali-Sugriva episode and beastly behaviour towards Sita."

My father was silent and made no reply. He knew there was a revolt. This is how I turned to Buddha. It was not with empty mind that I went to him at that early age. I had a back-ground and in reading the Buddhist lore I could always compare and contrast.

This is the origin of my interest in the Buddha and his Dhamma. The urge to write this book has a different origin. In 1951 the editor of the Mahabodhi Society's¹³ Journal of Calcutta asked me to write an article for the Vaisakha Number. In that article I argued that the Buddha's religion was the only religion which a society awakened by science could accept and without which it would perish. I also pointed out that in the modern world Buddhism was the only religion which it must have, to save itself.

That Buddhism makes slow advance is due to the fact that its literature is so vast that no one can read it and it has no such thing as a Bible as the Christians' have. On the

publication of this article I received so many calls, written and oral, to write such a book. It is in response to these calls that I have undertaken the task.

How good it is I must leave it to readers to judge. As for myself, I claim no originality. I am only a compiler. All I hope is that the reader will like the presentation. I have made it simple and clear.

It remained for me to express my gratitude to those who have been helpful to me.

I am grateful to Prakash¹⁴ and Rattu for the burden they have taken upon themselves to type out the manuscript. They have done it several times. Their labour can hardly be repaid.

When I took up the task of composing the book, I was ill and am still ill. During these five years there were ups and downs. At some stage my condition had become so critical that doctors talked of me as a dying flame. The successful rekindling of this 'dying flame' is due to the medical skill of my wife and Dr. Malvankar. I am immensely grateful. They alone have helped me to complete the work.

I may mention that this is one of the three books which will form a group for the proper understanding of Buddhism. The other two books are :

- (1) Buddha and Karl Marx¹⁵
- (2) Revolution and counter-revolution in ancient India.

They are written out in parts. I hope to publish them soon.

15th March, 1956.

B. R. AMBEDKAR.

NOTES

1. Kabir did not found a 'panth' or sect. Some members of the weaver, cobbler and other lower castes of Hindus like sweepers, Kolis, Mahars etcetra adopted Kabir as their patron saint. Kabir himself was born among the 'Bunker' (Weavers) caste of Benares.

'Bunkers' were erstwhile Buddhists who under coercion had embraced Islam en-masse during the invasion of Bakhtiar Khilji. They remained for a long time imperfectly converted Moslems.

Kabir did not believe in caste, idol-worship, rituals and ceremonies followed by the Hindus and Moslems, scriptures of the Hindus or the dictates of the Mullah; He likened Sanskrit to a pool of stinking stagnant water and preferred to address people in the common language of the people spoken and understood in Northern India.

2. 'Panth' here means 'Kabir panth'.
3. 'Katha' perhaps a corruption of the word 'gatha' a Pali word. Reading of epics, puranic stories before assembly of devout Hindus.
4. A public meeting was also organised by the members of his caste on his passing the Matriculation Examination. A local paper took note of the event and commented on it in the editorial. The event was reported to the Home Department, Govt. of India. An English version of the news is available in the National Archives of India, New Delhi.
5. 'Patrica Potesta'—Father's control over his family in ancient Rome which was almost unlimited. Father had the right to starve, sell, mortgage or even kill a child under ancient Roman Law.
5. Drona—Brahmin teacher of the Pandavas who treacherously deprived the Untouchable lad 'Eklaviya' of his thumb demanding it as his tuition fee for the education and training which he had never imparted. Eklaviya had approached Drona for accepting him as his pupil. Drona refused to accede to his request. Eklaviya made an image of Drona and practised archery, in which he acquired proficiency far—surpassing the high caste pupils, Arjuna, Yudhishtra etc., Drona incapacitated him for life by asking for his thumb to save the Varanashram Dharm of the Hindus.
7. Karan—another character of the Hindu epic 'The Mahabharatha'. Karan was the half-brother of the

Pandavas born of pre-marital relations of Kunti with some 'god'. He was discarded and disowned. He was found and brought up by the 'Charioteers' a Sudra caste and treated therefore as low-born Shudra. He was upright and truthful and died upholding the noble principle at the hands of Arjuna who was guided by Krishna.

8. Valmiki—derivation from the word 'Valmika' which means white-ants. Legendary author of the Ramayana and Yog Vashist. Owned by many hunting castes like Aherias, Kolis, Chuhras of the Punjab as their patron saint. Kayasthas of Bihar, Mohiyal Brahmins with Bali Gotra also own him as their patron saint. Kolis of Bombay visit a tomb near Nasik which they believe to be the tomb of Valmiki. They call it Tato-ba-ch-math.
9. Kolis—Mahadev Koli and son Koli of Maharashtra original inhabitants of Mumbai now known as Bombay. Kolis are found throughout India starting from Himachal Pradesh where they are claiming to be second class Kshatriyas down to Rajasthan and Orissa where they are included among backward classes and tribes.
10. Krishna—The legendary author of the Gita who worked as Charioteer of Arjuna in the war known as Mahabharata and persuaded him to fight against and annihilate the members of his family in the name of Dharma. He was killed by an Untouchable lad but destroyed his own tribe by making them fight among themselves. Brahmin writers wrote numerous books in his praise and made him not only an incarnation of God but God himself. Rama and Krishna were discovered and deified by the Brahmins after the Buddha to combat the influence of Buddhism and to re-establish Chaturvarna. Bhagwat Purana, Vishnu Purana, Harivamsh, Brahmavivartha Purana and Geet Govind are the books which were written to glorify the heroic and amorous deeds of Krishna.
11. 'Surupnakha'—"Woman with beautiful nose." A character in the Ramayana. She was sister of

Ravana, the king of Lanka. Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama chopped off the nose of Surupnakh. Vali was also treacherously killed by Rama the hero of the Ramayana.

12. Bhishma : Another character of the epic 'The Mahabharata'. Celibate, patriarch. grand-uncle of the Pandavas. He was considered an authority on morality and religion. Dropadi who was staked by Arjuna, one of her five husbands, and lost, was publicly stripped before friends, elders, relatives and courtiers. In spite of his superior position and knowledge of the Dharma, Bhishma did not so much as raise a little finger against injustice done to an innocent woman. His defence was that he depended on the Kaurvas for his livelihood, and therefore could not raise his voice in protest against injustice.

13. Mahabodhi Society : Society founded by Anagrika Dhammapal of Shri Lanka for the propagation of Buddhism.

14. Prakash and Rattu : Full name Mr. Prakash Chand and Mr. Nanak Chand Rattu. Mr. Prakash Chand joined Indian Police Service and is presently posted as Deputy Inspector General of Police, Patiala, Punjab. Mr. Rattu retired as Under Secretary, Ministry of Food Agriculture, Government of India, in June 1980. He lives in Delhi.

15. 'Buddha and Karl Marx' and 'Revolution and counter-revolution' were written by Dr. Ambedkar but could not be completed. The manuscripts are lying with the Administrator, Dispute, Bombay pending decision in regard to distribution of royalty between the heirs of Dr. Ambedkar. It is a pity that even after a lapse of 30 years these books could not be published. In addition to these two books there is another book titled 'Riddles in Hinduism' which is also lying with the Administrator, Dispute, Bombay. There are many who believe entirely without justification, that the Government and the concerned parties who are responsible for the non-publication of these books.