

Dr. Ambedkar: The Hero of the Mahars, Ex-Untouchables of India*

INDIRA Y. JUNGHARE
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455

DR. AMBEDKAR: BACKGROUND AND PERSONALITY

The Mahars of Maharashtra are particularly important because it was with this group that the Untouchable Movement in India began in the early twentieth century. Under the leadership of Bhimrao Ambedkar, this movement won political and social rights for the Untouchables.

The term "untouchable" is used to designate castes which are considered polluting. For this reason, Untouchables are not allowed to enter temples of the high-caste Hindus. In Maharashtra the Mahars constitute about 70% of the total untouchable population and also represent about 9% of the state's population (Zelliot 1969, 18). Traditionally, the Mahars had no special skill or craft. Some worked as general village servants, performing the duties of watchman, street sweepers, wall-menders, caretakers of the cremation ground, and removers of dead cattle from the village. With the coming of the British and industrialization, many Mahars left the village and found work in the towns and cities, factories, shipping docks, railways and the army. The majority, however, have remained in the villages. Not only do the Mahars remain less urbanized than Maharashtrians as a whole but also remain less urbanized than other "untouchables," such as the Mangs (basket and rope makers and also village musicians) and the Chamhars, the leather workers (Zelliot 1969, 39). Those Mahars remaining in villages have been forced to abandon many of their traditional occupations due to economic and technological changes. Some Mahars in response to changing times work in towns and cities and keep their families in the villages.

The Untouchable Movement led by Dr. Ambedkar first began with the urban Mahars and came to affect the position of Untouchables all over India. Through the Government of India Act of 1935, as well as special educational programs and reserved government posts, the Untouchables won full scale representation at all levels of government. As a further result of the movement, certain social reforms were enacted. One of these reforms was a ban on excluding Untouchables from wells used by high-caste Hindus—though, as Eleanor Zelliot (1969, 112) notes this reform has been largely unrealized. In 1956, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism,¹ a move followed by a majority of the Mahar community (Zelliot 1969, 112). This conversion movement seems to have been confined most to Maharashtra.² Although the Mahar movement was primarily an urban movement, it created a strong political consciousness among village Mahars. The anthropologists Karve and Damle in their 1963 study of three Maharashtrian villages point out that the untouchable castes appear to be more politically conscious and better informed about world affairs than the rest of the people in the villages.

Out of this movement a new literature has emerged. This literature falls into three categories: 1) political essays and tracts; 2) a sophisticated literature in the form of novels, poetry, and short stories, characterized by the term “Dalit literature”; and 3) popular songs which will be presented in this paper.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold. Primarily, several songs of the Untouchables from Maharashtra, collected in the Vidarbha region, have been translated from Marathi and Hindi and then analyzed in a way which reveals the various images of Dr. Ambedkar. Secondly, the paper discusses two phenomena or processes that make Dr. Ambedkar a special hero. One process is exaltation,³ which can be referred to as ‘ascension’ through which a person is uplifted to the status of a deity, and the other process is *avatāra*⁴ or descending of a deity to the earth in the form of a human. These two processes provide a link between Dr. Ambedkar and the God.⁵ These processes have been a part of Hinduism since Vedic times and are very much alive in Modern Hinduism.⁶ Finally, the paper explores the implications of the new literature of the Mahars and their making of the Ambedkar deity for their new religion, Neo-Buddhism.

Being born an Untouchable, Dr. Ambedkar faced caste discrimination of the worst kind. He was treated like a leper and was shown his way out of hairdressing salons, hotels, temples and offices. Despite this stigma he worked his way forward fighting academic discrimination at every step and achieved the highest degrees from world-famous universities.⁷ This was no ordinary achievement for an impoverished Un-

touchable. Dr. Ambedkar also faced bitter political opposition, favored neither by a family fortune, nor by a political adoption. Yet he grew in name, fame and national prominence without being lifted by the support of a party press or caucuses. He served on important committees relating to the development of Franchise and Economics. The drafting of the Indian Constitution brought him recognition as its Chief Architect. He released a suppressed people from the stigma, shackles and slavery under which they had groaned for ages. Dr. Ambedkar stands out as an educationalist, economist, professor, scholar, lawyer, leader, fighter, law-giver, law-maker, and liberal (Keer 1954, 519-520). Keer (1954, 519) also comments that: "No man in this country or perhaps in any other country, could equal Ambedkar in his career . . ."

As a scholar, Dr. Ambedkar wrote books on economics and sociology, history and politics. As a mass leader, he led social, political and labor movements. He founded political parties and colleges. To express it in Keer's words (1954, 520-521), "He displayed the wisdom of a statesman, the qualities of a leader, the courage of a hero, the endurance of a martyr and the erudition of a savant . . . that in such a span of life the son of an Untouchable could crowd such varied interests, distinctions, and scholarship is an unparalleled achievement in the modern world."

Dr. Ambedkar's life constituted a proof and ideal for the suppressed caste in India. That is, if a person is determined to succeed, no caste or class barrier can stop him. Dr. Ambedkar tackled the caste barrier and sprung forth from the dust. He rose from a family whose forefathers for generations were treated worse than animals, whose touch was taken to be polluting and whose shadow unauspicious.

Ambedkar achieved what was virtually impossible for his people to achieve. He obtained what was beyond the dream of his community. Taking a vow of ridding untouchability and inhuman injustice, he rebelled against Manu, Ancient India's lawmaker, the supporter of the caste system, and dethroned him. Ambedkar insured by his efforts that untouchability was abolished in the Constitution of Independent India. This was a victory unparalleled in the history of India. This 'modern Manu,' by being a savior of the oppressed, made an impression on time. The vow was fulfilled; the dream was realized. Moulding the lives of eighty million people, he left a print in the history of human freedom.

Keer appropriately concludes the biography of Dr. Ambedkar (1954, 521) in the following words: "The unique life of Ambedkar has become a new source of learning and a new source of inspiration for devotees. From it has emerged a new deity and the lamp that will

be burning in its temple in this land of temples. A new academy of knowledge, a new inspiration for poetry, a new place of pilgrimage and a new opportunity for literature have sprung!"

Keer was right. Indeed, a great deal of folk and popular songs have sprung up centering on Dr. Ambedkar.

Although many of the popular songs and folksongs deal with socio-political and religious themes, others describe Dr. Ambedkar and his works. It is natural that many of these songs deal with Ambedkar, for the mission of Ambedkar's life was to try to lead the Depressed Classes to a higher social, political and economic status and to free them from the stigma of untouchability that lay upon their foreheads, according to him, from approximately A.D. 400.⁸ He aroused and awakened the masses against social injustice and instilled in them the spirit of self-reform, self-reliance, self-respect, and self-confidence. He organized them for joint action on peaceful lines. In short, he brought about a great change in the life and outlook of the Untouchables. He was a champion of the downtrodden. It is no wonder that his people, his community, created songs about him in which he is not only treated as folk hero but elevated even to the rank of divinity, as an avatar, a reincarnation of Viṣṇu.

THE SONGS: GENRE AND CONTEXT

The songs I have used in this study were collected in the village of Neri, fourteen miles west of Nagpur. In 1977, 900 people representing ten castes lived in this village. The village is dominated economically and politically by the Maratha caste which owns 60% of the land. The Mahars, the people under study here, are the second most important caste and make up 30% of the village population. Five Mahar residents are major land owners and also act as money lenders. Of the remaining Mahar residents, only a handful still carry out their traditional roles of cleaning and sweeping roads. A majority of the Mahars have been making their living as agricultural laborers. A few Mahars have taken jobs as menial servants, factory workers, or rickshaw drivers in the city of Nagpur in order to support their families in the village. Some Mahars have migrated to the city of Nagpur and have found work in building construction or in the cotton mills. They still, however, maintain ties with their village. Thus, the direct and indirect connection between the village and the city provide a vehicle for the influence and change in the socio-political ideology of village Mahars. In general, the social condition of Mahars living in the village of Neri represent those of the Mahar population living elsewhere in Maharashtra.

Although the school in Neri is open to all castes, the general literacy

rate among all non-Brahmin castes, and particularly among the Mahars, remains low. This is especially true for women. Although literacy and the influence of written traditions, particularly among educated Mahars, produce variations in the cultural content and style of the various oral traditions, the local dialect remains the primary medium for the oral tradition. Some songs have been printed in locally-produced bazaar pamphlets. These are published mainly for the benefit of urban people and have very limited use in the villages. This paper deals only with those songs which are actually sung by the Mahars and avoids using any of the published collections. Even so, some of the songs included here can also be found in pamphlets.

Songs of both men and women have been included in this collection. The mode of transmission of songs differs somewhat for men and women. Girls usually learn their songs in school while boys learn their songs from their friends. Since the songs of the ex-Mahars, now Neo-Buddhist, are fairly new, neither boys nor girls learn the songs from their mothers and fathers, which is a traditional mode of learning folksongs.

The song repertoire of village Mahars traditionally consisted primarily of songs sung by people of all castes. The songs still remain part of this repertoire, although mostly among women. In addition, Mahars have added their own particular songs to this repertoire. The songs collected in this paper represent three genres: the *pālṇā*, the *ovi*, and the *lokagīt*.⁹

Of the songs collected, the first one (see p. 106 below) is characteristically a *pālṇā* and is sung exclusively as a lullaby. The *pālṇā* songs are sung by women while putting the baby to sleep, and during the naming ceremony, which is held on the twelfth day after the baby's birth.

The second song belongs to the genre category of *ovi*. The *ovi* is an oral folk song, composed by village women, orally transmitted and not written down. The *ovis* are used as 'worksongs,' sung by women while grinding grains, lentils and spices or while doing other domestic tasks of monotonous nature, such as plastering mud walls, making spaghetti by hand, or doing farm chores such as weeding. In general, the *ovi* is almost always sung while working and rarely sung in a recreational context.

The remaining songs can be classified under the genre of *lokagīt*, meaning 'people's song' or 'folk song,' a literary term used for a popular song of a fixed composition. Mahars and Mangs in general use the more common term *gāṇa* ("song") to describe it. As a genre, the *lokagīt* or *gāṇa* unlike the *pālṇā* or *ovi*, is not fixed by context and does not accompany another activity. It has a definite musical and metrical

structure, though it is looser and shows more variation than the *ovi* and *pālṇā*. The traditional repertoire of village men consisted mainly of *lāvṇyā*, “erotic songs,” *povaḍe* “ballads,” *bhajan* and *kirtan*, two types of Hindu devotional songs. Mahar men, like men of other castes, still sing the *lāvṇyā* and *povaḍe*, but have consciously rejected the *bhajan* and *kirtan* upon conversion to Buddhism. In general, they have adopted the *lokagits*, composed by urban, educated Mahars to their repertoire.

Although Mahar men have rejected the *bhajan* form, they retain on certain occasions the *bhajan* style of performance. At formal gatherings held for political purposes or to celebrate religious holidays such as the birthday (*jayanti*) of Ambedkar or Buddha, the men’s *lokagits* are sung by itinerant groups called *bhajan mandali*. The word *bhajan* here refers not to a devotional song but to any songs sung in the characteristic style of a *bhajan*. The leader of the group chooses a song, sings a line or stanza, and the rest of the group follows. The audience as a rule does not join in. The group performs on a raised platform and is accompanied by a harmonium, drums, and cymbals. *Lokagits* are also sung at impromptu, informal gatherings held at home in the evening, where everyone may sing together or take turn singing with or without musical accompaniment. Mahar women only sing *lokagits* at informal gatherings at home. In comparison with the *ovi* and *pālṇā*, the *lokagit* is more elaborate structurally and musically and show more variation among songs. The *lokagits* are sung both by men and women, whereas *ovi* and *pālṇā* are exclusively sung by women only.

DR. AMBEDKAR’S IMAGE IN THE SONGS

After looking at the song genres and the context in which they are used, let us examine the content of the songs in order to see how Dr. Ambedkar has been depicted in them.

The first song discusses Dr. Ambedkar’s life story. Characteristically, it depicts him as a champion of the downtrodden, in particular the Mahars, here called *Dalits*, ‘downtrodden.’ It mentions how he was born in a poor family, in a Dalit hut, but bettered his status through higher education in India and abroad. The song discusses that Ambedkar’s main goal was to remove untouchability and the caste system, and create equality. It also refers to his revolt against injustice. Like a warrior-hero on the battlefield, he fought against injustice, roaring with anger and blowing the trumpet of revolt. The song describes Ambedkar’s role in organizing several agitations including the Chaudār Tank *Satyāgraha* at Mahad, and the *satyāgraha* at Nasik and the *satyāgraha* at Pune. The Chaudār Tank agitation was for the vindication of the rights of the Untouchables to public waters. The *satyāgrahas* of

Pune and Nasik were organized for the vindication of the rights of the Depressed Classes to temple entry. Also, the song refers to Ambedkar's drafting of the Hindu Code Bill, which pertains to a joint family and women's property rights.

The song conveys that Dr. Ambedkar was a common man but rose to a high position, as Keer says, from "dust to doyen." The song depicts him as a *panḍit*, a learned man, a lawyer, a Government Officer in high position (Labor Minister of the Executive Council of Government), and a social reformer.

The Mahar community's respect and love for Dr. Ambedkar is explicit in the second song. The singer refers to him as *Bābu*, the term of respect used in referring to Government officials. It is also the term for addressing young boys with affection. The singer proudly describes him as handsome, rich, and a man of power and prestige. Dr. Ambedkar is so handsome that his looks attracted even a Brahmin girl. Of course, this statement is in reference to his second wife, who was Brahmin. It was surely a victory for the Mahar community that their leader married a woman of the Brahmin caste, the top caste in the caste hierarchy, and the traditional enemy of the Mahars. Dr. Ambedkar is a wealthy man who owns a new car and often travels to Bombay. Since Bombay is the capital of Maharashtra, Ambedkar's visits to that city imply that he is an important and powerful politician. The song portrays him as a peaceful leader with the ability of controlling large crowds. The singer's praise of Ambedkar seems quite strong. Not only everyone respected and admired him but also the Congress, that is, the members of the parliament. Therefore, Ambedkar has been described as a 'blessed man' who has been favored by the God. Thus, Ambedkar has everything—power and personality, wealth and wisdom, fame and fortune.

The third song clearly states that Ambedkar was a political figure of high caliber, with the sense of duties and responsibilities for his community. His leadership is unmatched and will remain unmatched. This credit is due Ambedkar because of his leadership in politics. In the political sphere, Ambedkar worked for radical social legislation and political recognition for the Depressed Classes. He founded the Independent Labor Party (1936), the Scheduled Caste Federation (1942), and the National Republican Party (1956). Through these he hoped to politicize the Mahars. The first two parties did not survive; the National Republican Party is still the only party dominated by the Untouchables of India. That there is presently a factional split or leadership void in the party is expressed by the third song, which we, for the sake of convenience, titled 'The Unique Ambedkar and the Call for

Leadership.' This song must have been learned from a pamphlet. The songs of a propagandistic nature are learned from pamphlets and not primarily from oral transmission. This song reflects one of the basic function of folk literature, which is to control, influence, or direct activities of the members of a group or society.

The song expresses that Dr. Ambedkar was an able leader who organized the Mahars and infused in them the spirit of unity and brotherhood. He was moral, ethical, loyal and sacrificial. At present there is no one equal to him in qualities and leadership, and perhaps, there will be no one in the near future. The community expresses disappointment in present leaders, the hopelessness of the political situation, and anxiety about the community's survival in the absence of leadership like that of Ambedkar. The essence of the song is that Dr. Ambedkar was a competent statesman, an outstanding leader, who will remain unequalled in the history of mankind. Dr. Ambedkar was the only hero of his kind!

The death of Ambedkar further raised him to the status of a deity. His death is not considered the death of a mortal, but the death, or more properly, disappearance, of an avatar, or incarnation of god. The belief that Ambedkar was an avatar finds expression in the fourth song. When Dr. Ambedkar came down to this earth in the form of an *avatāra* of Bhimrāyā (Bhim was his first name, and *rāyā* means 'king'), he ruled the world. As a ruler, he not only controlled the Brahmins, but the Earth, the Moon, and the Sun. In his kingdom flourished the down-trodden. The song provides a powerful image of Dr. Ambedkar as a master of the Universe, as an avatar, a deity.

Ambedkar's leadership dominated not only the political and socio-economic spheres but also the sphere of religion. Immediately following his conversion to Buddhism, many conversion ceremonies were held in Maharashtra. At the time of the 1961 census, the total number of declared Neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra included approximately 80% of the Mahar caste.¹⁰

As Ambedkar received his initiation of *dīkṣā* into Buddhism in Nagpur, Buddha *Jayanti* (Buddha's Birth celebration) and Bhima *Jayanti* (Ambedkar's Birth celebration) are observed there with great festivity. The Mahars have deified Ambedkar giving him the highest place in their lives, second only to the Buddha. In their homes and also on the covers of the pamphlets of songs, Ambedkar's portrait is found right next to one of the Buddha. Ambedkar and Buddha are not considered to be identical. Ambedkar is considered to be an avatar of Bhima (Ambedkar's first name), and not of the Buddha. Since Bhimrao Ambedkar had become a Neo-Buddhist, the celebrations of Buddha's

birth as well as Ambedkar's birth are observed with similar rituals and on the same *dīkṣā* ground. Buddha gave the message of non-violence to the world, whereas Ambedkar gave the doctrine of *pañchashīlā* (the five basic principles of good international conduct to be used by nations to achieve world peace).¹¹

Song five is clearly representative of the Mahar community's respect and devotion for Ambedkar. He has become their God and they worship him as the singer sings: "We worship Bhima, too." Dr. Ambedkar is referred to as 'Mother'; the image of God as 'Mother' is quite dominant in Indian culture.¹²

In the last song, Dr. Ambedkar is raised from a deity to a supreme deity. He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. Dr. Ambedkar is present everywhere, as the singer expresses:

Bhima is overhead, Bhima is beneath
 Bhima is in front, Bhima is behind.
 Oh my friend, nothing is here without him
 He is everywhere, he is everywhere.

The song also expresses a non-dualistic philosophy. That is oneness of God with the Universe. Ambedkar is the Supreme Soul, the Ultimate Reality, which resides in every thing and every being as in the following couplets:

He is in the breath of the poor, he is in their tears,
 He is in their hearts, he is in the temples of their minds.
 He is in the light of lamps, he is in the rays of the sun,
 He is in the sorrow of the troubled, he is in the body and
 the soul of the Dalits.

Thus, the songs of the Mahars provide various images of Dr. Ambedkar: a common man who with his struggle rose above society, a blessed man with fame and fortune, a unique leader with extraordinary talent, an unparalleled hero, a deity, an avatar, and finally the Supreme God.

In Ambedkar the songs combine the image of the hero (or folk-hero) whose main task is the defense of his community against outside enemies, the enemies being the Brahmins and other supporters of a caste society, and the image of the avatar, or divine descent, who also according to traditional mythology has as his main task or purpose the defense of the world from some evil force or oppressor, usually a demonic

figure. In Indian folklore the ascription of divine and superhuman qualities to the hero is a common feature. Because of this ascription the distinctions of folk and religious literature are not so clear-cut as in other cultures. To his followers, Ambedkar is everything: god, saint, teacher, leader, father, and mother.

DR. AMBEDKAR, THE HERO

This final section shall investigate why Dr. Ambedkar is such a special hero, and what makes him stand out in the hero-tradition.

Lord Raglan discussed at length the general meaning and idea of "hero" and to what extent traditional heroes were ever real men (1936, 200). He adheres to the opinion that heroes of tradition were rarely real persons. If they were real persons then they were simply historical persons, *not* heroes. We know that Ambedkar was a historical person. We have evidence about his birth, and his works. However, an examination of the songs of the Mahars clearly indicates that although Ambedkar was a real person, his eminence led to his deification. Many of the songs used in celebrations of his birth seem to express an opinion similar to that of William Ridgeway's view of a hero. According to Ridgeway, dramatization of a hero's exploits or sufferings through dances, eulogies, paintings, and statues is one of the regular methods of propitiating a man of outstanding personality. With this method the great man is canonized as hero or saint, and finally promoted to the foremost rank of the great divinities (Raglan 1936, 202). The songs of the Mahars are nothing but eulogies, first elevating their object to a hero and then to a deity. The deification of Ambedkar is completed by statues and temples in his honor. In this case, the dramatization of Dr. Ambedkar's life story is done through the composition of folk songs by the Mahar community.

According to Campbell (1949, 30), "the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: Separation—initiation—return"

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Campbell 1949, 30).

On the rite of passage the hero assumes many forms and many roles. Besides the images of a hero and a deity, the songs of the Mahars depict

Dr. Ambedkar with other images, similar to Campbell's hero with a thousand faces. Campbell supports his opinion of the hero by the traditional legend of the Great Struggle of the Buddha. The legend provides a majestic representation of the difficulties of the hero-task and of its sublime import when it is profoundly conceived and solemnly undertaken. As Buddha was a historical hero, later becoming the God of the Buddhists, so is Ambedkar becoming the God of the Mahar community. Just as folktales and legends describe Buddha's deeds, so do the songs of the Mahars describe the greatness of Dr. Ambedkar. Thus we can conclude that although Ambedkar has not yet become the mythical hero, or Lord Raglan's hero of tradition, he is on his way to becoming one.

The making of a mythical hero in Indian tradition is fairly easy. This may be due to two living processes: 1) exaltation or ascension, and 2) descending. By the first process, a person is exalted to the status of a deity or a god. The second process can be perceived as the doctrine of avatar. According to this doctrine, whenever there is chaos, tyranny, and injustice, the god comes down to earth in a human form in order to bring order and peace to the community.¹³ It is not difficult for the Mahars to believe that God came to them in the form of Ambedkar to help them fight injustices accorded to them by the Hindu community. To quote a couplet from a lullaby:

On the first day, there was a celebration
The god of the Dalits has come to Ramji's house
The babe was named Bhima, Bhimrao.¹⁴

The Mahars believe that God came to Ramji's (Dr. Ambedkar's father) house in the form of his son, Dr. Ambedkar. This belief of the community is embedded in the theory of reincarnation. Just as an individual soul is eternal and is reborn again and again according to the individual's karma, the Supreme Soul (God) can take various forms or avatars. Again, in this sense Ambedkar can be considered an avatar of Buddha or of another Supreme Soul. Both Buddha and Ambedkar can be perceived as two different forms of the Supreme Soul. Ambedkar does not stand in opposition to Buddha but next to Buddha. This explains why small temples of Ambedkar are found next to temples of Buddha. It seems that Mahars perceive Buddha and Ambedkar as two different avatars of the same god—who appeared in different time periods. This succession of the avatars, Buddha avatar first, and Bhima avatar later, is indicated in the following line of the song:

I am the daughter of Bhima and the granddaughter of Gautama!¹⁵ (Gautama being the grandfather of the devotee came first, whereas, Bhima being the father came later.)

The belief in different gods on the one hand and in their oneness on the other is characteristically monistic. The philosophy of monism has been in existence since Vedic times among Indians of all castes. The Mahars, though now Neo-Buddhists, believe in, as do a majority of Hindus, the Vedic teaching: "To what is one, sages give many a title"¹⁶

After discussing some important philosophical and religious features of the Hindu society that contribute to making Dr. Ambedkar a hero, let us turn our attention to the importance of hero-worship.

Hero-worship is quite important in the evolution of religion. Stressing the importance of a hero in the religion of Berar, Sir A. Lyall remarks

Perhaps the gods who have suffered less from the wear and tear during the centuries of religious caprice, and who have longest held their ancient forms and places in the front rank of popular imagination, are the gods of heroic legend. In this stage of belief the people construct for themselves Jacob's ladder between earth and heaven: the men are seen ascending until they become gods; they then descend again as embodiments of the divinities; insomuch that it may be whether any except the Vedic divinities and other obvious Nature gods, come down the ladder who had not originally gone up as a man, and an authentic man. (Crooke 1926, 180)

Dr. Ambedkar and his worship support the above opinion. It is possible that several centuries from now historical facts about Dr. Ambedkar will become muddy and unclear, eventually fading away, thus making Ambedkar the god of heroic legend. In fact, the historical events have already begun to be misunderstood and misrepresented; for example, in Song IV, the singer says that Dr. Ambedkar drafted the constitution in 1931 and died in 1962. Actually, the Constitution was made in 1951 and Ambedkar died in 1956. What is surprising is that in such a short time, less than thirty years after his death, we have been able to see the process of deification, the phenomenon of god-making.

The credit for such a speedy transformation of Ambedkar into a god goes to the Mahar community and its tradition. Sir James Frazer, who synthesized two rival schools of mythologists, maintains that mythical beings are nothing but notable men and women who in their lifetime,

for one reason or another, made a great impression on their fellows, but whose doings have been distorted and exaggerated by a false and credulous tradition. Following this view, we can say that Dr. Ambedkar was a notable man who has made an impression on his fellow Mahars, but whose deeds have been exaggerated by the Mahar tradition. The Mahar tradition is responsible for raising Dr. Ambedkar to the position of God and later bringing him down as avatar, thus completing the full circle. Dr. Ambedkar triggered the mechanism, but the Mahar tradition hastened it.

The Mahar tradition is the main factor which put Ambedkar on a pedestal. Dr. Ambedkar revived Buddhism, added to it some of his philosophies and created a new religion for his community. He gave Mahar tradition a religion. In turn, the tradition filled the void of God, which was apparent in the religion, by making Ambedkar the God. The earlier Buddhism, the religion of Buddha and his disciples, basically being silent on the issue of god and primarily focused on the strict yogic practices, provided no inspiration to ritualistic (orthoprax) Hindus. The need for a source of inspiration was felt in the new religion of the Mahars, Neo-Buddhism, which they cleverly filled by creating the Ambedkar deity. Buddha was too far away in time and thus failed to provide the Mahars with the needed inspiration. On the contrary, Bhima (Dr. Ambedkar) being contemporary, the Mahar tradition could easily relate to him. Thus, we can say that Dr. Ambedkar built a temple of Neo-Buddhism for the Mahar tradition, and the tradition in turn carved Ambedkar into an image or an idol to place in the temple.

CONCLUSION

As for the literature, especially the folksongs of the Mahars, Dr. Ambedkar provided the Mahar tradition with the poetic inspiration. Reciprocally, the tradition produced many folksongs that revolve around Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar occupies an important place in many song genres. It is understandable that lullabies and propagandistic songs revolve around him, for lullabies serve to instill the qualities of a hero in a child, whereas, the propagandistic songs serve to inspire the community and direct their activities. It is astonishing, however, that Dr. Ambedkar also is the focus of Mahar worksongs, religious songs and entertainment songs. We can conclude that Dr. Ambedkar provided the tradition with the poetic inspiration, and the Mahar tradition, in turn, produced folk songs and used them as a vehicle in the making of their hero. In the making of him into a hero, Mahar society played a much bigger role than simply tallying the noble qualities of Dr. Ambedkar. The remarkable strength that society holds in the making

of an individual and elevating him/her to the highest possible position is perhaps more true in a society where the emphasis is not on the duty to oneself but rather on the "duty to others" which characterizes Indian society. It is no wonder that society pays its dues to the great individual in turn after the individual has sacrificed himself for society.

The songs presented in this paper establish the importance of hero-worship and the cults of heroes in the religion of the Mahars of Maharashtra. The process of hero making and mythologizing expressed by the songs of the Mahars is active and plays an important role in the popular religious tradition of India. It is not surprising to hear of the creation of a new god or goddess at least every seven to ten years. The recent "Santoṣi Mātā" is a good example of this phenomenon.¹⁷

Finally the songs indicate the importance and the usefulness of the literature in the making of a hero, just as the great epics such as Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa created the heroes Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, and Rāma and later transformed the latter two into gods for popular Hinduism. Today Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are more popular, though developed out of literature, than the traditional Vedic gods.

Thus, the songs of the Mahars constitute important works of literature that shape and mould Dr. Ambedkar into being a hero and a god, reflecting the rapid living process of mythologizing and god making in the religion of the Mahars in particular and in popular religion in general.

APPENDIX

SONG I: A BIOGRAPHY OF DR. AMBEDKAR (*Pālṇā*)

In the year of 1891,
On the fourteenth day of April,
Happiness came to Mohagaon.¹⁸
Flags and banners were raised.

Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

Monday has come,
Bhimabai's baby is ready to be born.
Blessed Ramji made a vow for a son,
Then Baby Bhim was born.

Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

The baby grew like the moon
Ramji's house was bathed in light.
Even though he played in a Dalit hut,

He became determined to fight injustice.
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

See the wanton Brahmins drunk with power.
Polluting is our touch to them.
In school Bhim remained apart.
Alone he took pains for learning.
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

After a little education in Satara,
He went to school in Bombay.
He studied very hard,
And passed Matric at sixteen.
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

Thanks be to you, King Gaikwad!¹⁹
Let the vine of your lineage prosper!
You helped the cause of the poor and weak,
By sending my Bhim to a foreign land.
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

King Bhim became oh so angry.
Like a lion did he roar.
“Why do you torture the Dalits?
Now I will thrash those villains.”
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

Seeing the condition of the poor,
King Bhima boiled.
He blew the horn of revolt,
And called the hero in him to work.
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

Ambedkar roared:
“I’ll destroy the kingdom of rich merchants and priests.
Ending all oppression
I will raise the banner of equality.”
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

He directed the *Satyāgraha*²⁰ of Chaudār²¹ Tank.
He asked the Hindus for some water.
Going to Nasik²² and Poona.²³
He fought for the cause of the Dalits.
Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

When Gandhi became a big national leader,
 The Dalits were faced with the arrival of an enemy.
 He snatched away our rights,
 Claiming he was about to sacrifice his life.
 Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

Bhim became the Labor Minister of Delhi,
 He helped our people by the millions.
 He was a good minister of law,
 And introduced the Hindu Code Bill.²⁴
 Sleep, baby, sleep. Sleep, baby, sleep.

Text:

aṭharāse ekkyāṇu sālāta
 tārikh caudā epril mahinyāta
 ānanda jhālā mohagāvāta
 guḍhyā toraṇe ubhāritāta
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

somvāra pahā divasa ālā
 bhimābaicā garbha vāḍhalā
 dhanya rāmaḷi navasa kelā
 bhima nāvāne bāḷa ḷanmalā
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

candrāsarikhā vāḍhalā bālā
 rāmḷiḷa ghari paḍe uḷiḍa
 dalita kuḍita kheḷito kheḷa
 vairi duṣmāna māru cāḍḍāḷa
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

brāmhanāḷi masti aikā ga bāi
 māṇsāncā tyānnā vinṭāḷa hoi
 bhima ṣaḷeta bāhera rāhi
 trāsa ghetalā ṣikṣanāpāyi
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

sātāryālā thoḍe ṣikṣana jhāla
 bambaiḷā maṅga ṣaḷeta gele
 mana lavuni abhyāsa cāle
 soḷāvyā varsi myātrika jhāle
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

dhanya dhanya gāyakvāḍa rājā

yela māṇḍavi jau de tujhā
 madata keli dalita kājā
 duradeši bhima dhāḍuna majhā
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

rāga ālā bhima rājācā manā
 sīvhāsārakhi keli garjanā
 kā re chiḍatā dalita janā
 ṭhesina ātā druṣṭa lokānnā
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

hāla pāhuna dina lokānce
 santāpale mana bhima rājāce
 šīṅga vājavi banda kholiḥe
 siddha kele vira ṭhāyi ṭhāyiḥe
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

āmbedkar bole garjuna
 šetyābhatyāce rajya moḍina
 juluma sāre banda karina
 samatecā mi jhendā lāvina
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

cavdāra taḷyāncā satyāgraha kelā
 pāni mānge to hindu dharmālā
 nāsikālā āṇi gele punyālā
 dalitācā hitāsāṭhi bhāṇḍalā
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

gāndhi dešācā pudhāri kharā
 dalitālā hā graha lāgalā
 hakkācā tyāne kelā materā
 jiva deṇyālā tayāra jhālā
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

majurāmantri dilliḥe jhāle
 lākha lokāce hita sādhalte
 kāyadāmantri phāra sajale
 hindukoḍa bila tayāra kele
 jo bālā jo re jo bālā jo

SONG II: AMBEDKAR BĀBU (*Ovi*)

Ambedkar Bābu²⁵ has come,

Bombay is his home.
On the silver rupee,
Is the company's²⁶ name.

Ambedkar Bābu has come,
He always goes to Bombay.
On his head,²⁷
Is God's hand.

Ambedkar Bābu has come,
He has a new car.
Seeing his good looks,
A Brahmin woman is wonder-struck.²⁸

Ambedkar Bābu has come,
No commotion does he fear.
At Lake Shukrawar's shores,²⁹
He had Congress stand.

Ambedkar Bābu has come,
So everyone is busy.
He came to Telanᅡkheᅡi,³⁰
Lights were hung on every tree.

Text:

āmbedkara bābu ālā,
ekā bambiyāca gāva
cāndicā rupyāvara,
ahe kampayinica nāva

āmbedkara bābu ālā,
nita bambay le jāye,
yācāna širāvara,
devācā paᅡjā āhe

āmbedkara bābu ālā,
eka navina yāci gāᅡi
yācā surtikaᅡa pahuna
kaši bāmhniᅡi hoti khaᅡi

āmbedkara bābu ālā,
dhāmidhumile nāhi bhelā
sukkarvāryā taryāvara,
yāna kāngresa ubhā kelā

āmbēḍkara bābu ālā,
hākā utaralā telāṅkheḍi
utaralā telāṅkheḍi
battā lāgalyā jhāḍojhāḍi

SONG III: THE UNIQUE AMBEDKAR AND
THE CALL FOR LEADERSHIP (*Lokagit*)

A master of the poor and the weak, taking responsibility for the sick,
Will such a man of integrity arise? Will we find a leader like Bhima?
Will we ever find a leader like Bhima?

So many leaders are selfish, some have become ministers and legislators.
So many leaders are selfish,
After Bhima, is there any loyal man today?
After Bhima, today,
They have no desire and no knowledge to accomplish any task. Can
we manage?

Will we ever find a leader like Bhima?
A master of the poor and the weak, taking responsibility for the sick,
Will such a man of integrity arise? Will we ever find a leader like
Bhima?

This is election year. They say: "Listen to our speeches!"
This is election year. They say: "Listen to our speeches!"
This is election year.
Coming into our homes they ask: "Will you vote for the Blue Cap?"
Coming into our homes they ask: "Will you vote for the Blue Cap?"
Coming into our homes.
If we elect them, will they bring light to Delhi and to the world?
Will we ever find a leader like Bhima?

None of the others are loyal. After Bhima they have become Jaybhim.³¹
None of the others are loyal.
For their own benefit, they forgot morality.
For their own benefit, they forgot morality.
For their own benefit.
Of these selfish people, will there be one who will side for the party?
Will we find a leader like Bhima?
Will we ever find a leader like Bhima?

Unity has been shattered, petty quarrels have begun.
Unity has been shattered, petty quarrels have begun.

Unity has been shattered.
 Splinter groups are everywhere, our party is ruined.
 Splinter groups are everywhere.
 Can such a party-boat reach a safe shore?
 Will we ever find a leader like Bhima?

Text:

dina dubaḷyā jantecā dhani, bhāra sirāvara gheuni kuni
 imānā jāgal kā? ātā bhimācāwāni āmhālā puḍhāri lābhal kā?
 ātā bhimācāwāni āmhālā puḍhāri lābhal kā?

svārthi netā puḍhāri, jhāle mantri kuṇi āmadāra
 svārthi netā puḍhāri
 āja bhimācā pāṭhi kuṇi āhe kā imāndāra
 āja bhimācā pāṭhi
 kāryācī havā nāhi karāyca nāv nāy, aśāna bhāgal kā?
 ātā bhimācāwāni āmhālā puḍhāri lābhal kā
 dina dubaḷyā jantecā dhani, bhāra sirāvara gheuni kuṇi
 imānā jāgal kā? ātā bhimācāwāni āmhālā puḍhāri lābhal kā?

jhāle baymāna sagaḷe, bhima jātaḷa jayabhimawāle
 jhāle baymāna sagaḷe
 kharca hārācā sāṭhi, dharmanitilā visaruna gele
 kharca hārācā sāṭhi, dharmanitilā visaruna gele
 kharca hārācā sāṭhi
 he svārthasādhu pakṣācī bāju, ekhādā rākhā kā,
 ātā bhimācāwāni āmhālā puḍhāri lābhal kā?
 ātā bhimācāwāni āmhālā puḍhāri lābhal kā?

eki tuṭuna geli, suru begiḷe bhāṇdana jhāla
 eki tuṭuna geli, suru begiḷe bhāṇdana jhāla
 eki tuṭuna geli
 gaṭabājine sagaḷe āplyā pakṣaḷe wātole kele
 gaṭabājina sagaḷe
 aśi hi pakṣācī naukā kināri lāgal kā?
 ātā bhimarāyācāwāni āmhāla puḍhāri lābhal kā?

SONG IV: AMBEDKAR, THE AVATAR OF BHIMARĀYĀ (*Lokagit*)

To this fortunate land of ours, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā.
 Through his grace, millions of the poor and downtrodden are
 bettered.
 To this fortunate land of ours, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā.

When he was our leader, the whole world trembled.

The sinful Brahmin stopped preaching, the poor and downtrodden
are bettered.

To this fortunate land of ours, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā,
To better the millions, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā.

They were filled with compassion before him; to him yielded the earth,
the sun, and even the moon.

The stream of the nectar of truth is broken, the avatar of Bhimarāyā
appeared.

To this fortunate land of ours, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā,
Through his grace, millions of the poor and downtrodden are
bettered.

Making the Constitution in 1931,³² the protector of the poor left us
in 1962,³³ leaving the downtrodden to grieve. The avatar of
Bhimarāyā appeared.

To this fortunate land of ours, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā.
To this fortunate land of ours.

With all my heart I sing your deeds, please make my pen succeed.

Poet Prabhu is in grief. The *avatar* of Bhimarāyā appeared;
To this fortunate land of ours, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā.

Through his grace, millions of the poor and downtrodden are
bettered.

To this fortunate land of ours, appeared the avatar of Bhimarāyā.

Text:

bhāgyaśāli yā mātecā poṭi, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
jācā krupene koṭyāna koṭi, dina dalitacā avatāra jhālā
bhāgyaśāli yā mātecā poṭi, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā

jevḥā hotā to yā samājācā netā, tevhā thar thar kāpat hoti hi sārī jantā
jevḥā hotā to yā samājācā netā, tevhā thar thar kapat hoti hi sārī jantā
pāpi brāmhañacā bol banda jhālā, dina dalitacā avatāra jhālā
bhāgyaśāli yā mātecā poṭi, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
jācā krupene koṭyāna koṭi, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā

to pahuna jhurati tyācē kārāṇi, āṇi sarva jhāli hoti
tyālāhi candra, surya āṇi dharaṇi
satya amrutācā jharā phuṭalā, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
bhāgyaśāli yā mātecā poṭi bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
jācākrupene koṭyāna koṭi, dina dalitacā avatāra jhālā

ghaṭanā karuni ekonṇiṣe ektisa sālī, an bāsaṭ sālāta gelā to dalitacā wāli

dalita jantelā hurhuḷā lāvilā, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
 bhāgyaśāli yā mātečā poṭi, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
 jāčā krupene koṭyāna koṭi, dina dalitācā avatāra jhālā
 bhāgyaśāli yā mātečā poṭi

tana man dhanāne mi gāvito tujhā kartavyālā, yasa degā majha lekhanilā
 kavi prabhucā deha kaḷvalā, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
 bhāgyaśāli yā mātečā poṭi, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā
 jāčā krupene koṭyāna koṭi, dina dalitācā avatāra jhālā
 bhāgyaśāli yā mātečā poṭi, bhimarāyācā avatāra jhālā

SONG V: BHIMA JAYANTI (*Lokagit*)

Bhima Jayanti³⁴ is observed every year.
 Seeing this celebration our enemy cries inside.
 Seeing this celebration our enemy cries inside.
 We all will follow Bhimarāyā's path,
 Yes, we will follow his path.
 We will speak firmly, without fear.
 We will speak without fear.
 And face whatever happens, yielding to no one.
 Yielding to no one.
 We always feel proud of our Bhima.
 Seeing this celebration, our enemy cries inside.

Buddha Jayanti and Bhima Jayanti are observed every year.
 Seeing this celebration our enemy cries inside.
 Seeing this celebration our enemy cries inside.
 Let them be full of envy and spite! We don't care!
 Yes, we don't care!
 We will continue to do our sacred duty all the time.
 Yes, we will continue.
 Telling us this, Bhima, our 'mother,'³⁵ left; taking refuge
 at Buddha's feet on Dasera.³⁶
 Taking refuge in the Buddha.
 From that time on, we worship Bhima, too.
 Seeing this celebration our enemy cries inside.
 Buddha Jayanti and Bhima Jayanti are celebrated every year.
 Seeing this celebration our enemy cries inside

Buddha gave the message of peace to the world.
 The message of peace.

And Bhima advised on *panchashīlā*.³⁷

Advised.

When we were advised, we followed the *panchashīlā*,

Yes, we followed the *panchashīlā*.

Giving up the language of revolution, we made our enemy our friend.

We made our enemy our friend.

We care for our enemy too.

Seeing this celebration, our enemy cries inside.

Seeing this celebration, our enemy cries inside.

Buddha Jayanti and Bhima Jayanti are celebrated every year.

Seeing this celebration, our enemy cries inside.

Seeing this celebration, our enemy cries inside.

Text:

Bhima jayanti ana hā sohaḷā, darwaršālā bharto

hi šobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato

hi pahuna ithali šobhā vairi antari jhurato

Bhimarāyāčā mārgāvara āmhi, sāre cālat rāhu

ho sāre cālat rāhu

ṭolyāwara ṭolā deu aṇ nirbhandapaṇe bolat rāhu

nirbhandapaṇe bolat rāhu

je hoil te pāhuna gheu, pan kuṇālā šaraṇa na jāu

kunālā šaraṇa na jāu

veḷoveḷi bhimarāyāče awasāna uri dharato

hi šobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato

hi šobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato

Buddha jayanti ana hā sohaḷā darwaršālā bharato

hi šobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato

hi šobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato

kuṇi jaḷo yā nindo āmhālā tyāči parvā nāhi

ho tyāči parvā nāhi

kārya pavitra akhanḍa cālat ṭheu sadā ṭhāi ṭhāi

ho ṭheu sadā ṭhāyi ṭhāyi

he boluna geli bhima āi dasaryālā buddhāčā pāyi

dasaryālā buddhāčā pāyi

tevḥā pāsuna šri bhimāči, āmhi puḷāhi karato

hi šobhā pāhuna vairi roj antari jhurato

Buddha jayanti ana hā sohaḷā darwaršālā bharato

hi šobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato

Gautamabuddhāne hyā duniyelā šānticā sandeš dilā

śānticā sandeś dilā
 an bhimarāyāne pañčaśilecā āmhālā upadeś dilā
 āmhāla updeś dilā,
 āmhāla updeś dilā, tevhā paḍli pañčaśilā
 ho paḍli pañčaśilā
 krāntiçi bhāṣā soḍali, vairyāši maitri joḍalā
 vairyāši maitri joḍalā
 kāši nandā śatruçi hi āmhi kadara karato
 hi śobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato
 hi śobhā pāhuna vairi roja antari jhurato
 Buddha jayanti ana hā sohaḷā darwarśālā bharato
 hi śobhā pāhuna vairi roj antari jhurato
 hi śobhā pāhuna vairi roj antari jhurato

SONG VI: BHIMA EVERYWHERE (*Lokagit*)

Bhima is overhead, Bhima is beneath.
 Bhima is in front, Bhima is behind.
 Oh my friend, nothing is here without him.
 He is everywhere, he is everywhere.

He was protective shade for the Dalits,
 For whom Baba labored.
 He is in the breath of the poor. He is in their tears,
 He is in their hearts. He is in the temples of their minds.
 Oh my friend, nothing is here without him.
 He is everywhere. He is everywhere.

He wrote Mother India's Constitution,
 He put the Ashokan wheel³⁸ on the tri-colored flag.
 He is in the knowledge of the Pandits. He is in the law of the lawyers.
 He is eternal in this world. He is in the history of Bharat.
 Oh my friend, nothing is here without him,
 He is everywhere. He is everywhere.

He has planted the tree of Buddhism.
 After the Buddha, again he spread the religion.
 He is in the feet of the Buddha. He is in the hair of the poor.
 He is in every Buddhist. He is in every limb and vein.
 Oh my friend, nothing is here without him.
 He is everywhere. He is everywhere.

He has beat the drum of Buddhism throughout the entire world.

Just as Rāma's³⁹ kingdom spread to Rāvaṇa's⁴⁰ Lanka.
 He is in the light of lamps. He is in the rays of the sun,
 He is in the sorrow of the troubled. He is in the body and soul of the
 Dalits.

Oh my friend, nothing is here without him.
 He is everywhere. He is everywhere.

Text:

upar bhi bhimji hai niče bhi bhimji hai
 āge bhi bhimji hai piče bhi bhimji hai
 phir kaunsi jagā hai bāki O mere sāthi
 O kahā nahi hai, O kahā nahi hai
 phir kaunsi jagā hai bāki O mere sāthi
 O kahā nahi hai, O kahā nahi hai

dalitoke sarpe bas unki thi čāyā
 jinke liye bābāne kaṣṭa uṭhāyā
 gariboke svāsone, bhari huyi āsume
 hṛdayake andarme, aur dalitoke mandar me
 phir kaunsi jagā hai bāki O mere sāthi
 O kahā nahi hai, O kahā nahi hai

bhāratmātāki O ghaṭnā banāyā
 aśokčakra tiraṅgā pe lagāyā
 jñāni ke jñān me, kānunke khajānome
 nām amar duniyāme, bharat ke itihāso me
 phir kaunsi jagā hai bāki O mere sāthi
 O kahā nahi hai, O kahā nahi hai

buddha dharamkā jisne peḍ lagāyā
 buddhokebād phirse dharmā phailāyā
 buddhake carṇome, gariboke julphome
 samāyā ragragme, buddhiṣṭoke kankanme
 phir kaunsi jagā hai bāki O mere sāthi
 O kahā nahi hai, O kahā nahi hai

sāre jā me dekho, phailāyā ḍankā
 jaisi ti nagri, O rāvaṅki laṅkā
 dipoke tejome, surajke kirṇome
 dukhiyoke dukhome, aur dalitoke tanman me
 phir kaunsi jagā hai bāki O mere sāthi
 O kahā nahi hai O kahā nahi hai

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research for this paper was supported by the Graduate School Grant-in-Aid Program of the University of Minnesota and by the American Institute of Indian Studies Fellowship. I am indebted to Shevantibai Bondade, Vithabai Kasture, Prabhu Suryavamshi, and other people in Neri for providing me with the songs. I am also grateful to Alan Musielewicz, of the University of Minnesota, for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

NOTES

* This is a revised version of the paper presented at the XXXIInd International Congress for Asian and North African Studies, Hamburg, Germany, August 22-30, 1986.

1. Only after a thorough study of Buddhism did Dr. Ambedkar decide to convert to it. His reasoning is explicit in his book: *The Buddha and His Dharma*. Buddhism and Hinduism are considered to be sister religions; both of them originated in India and have similar philosophies with one major difference—the absence of the caste system in Buddhism. The caste system that distinguishes Hinduism from Buddhism has been the primary cause of the unjust treatment of the Untouchables. Thus, the choice of Buddhism was the best in that it was nothing but Hinduism without the caste system.

2. The Census of India, 1961, records the total number of declared Buddhists as 3,250,227 with 2,789,501 of that number in Maharashtra.

3. The term 'exaltation' is similar to the term 'henotheism' which was first used by Max Müller, the great Indologist of the nineteenth century. The difference is, according to 'henotheism' only the Vedic deities were exalted to the supreme status. This term was not used for the uplifting of the human. However, in both cases, an elevation of a person or deity to the supreme status is governed by the belief that the different gods are manifestations of one single underlying reality.

4. The theory of reincarnation should *not* be equated with the doctrine of *avatāra*. The reasons being that: 1) a human being has no complete control over a new form, God does. God can decide which form He should take; 2) a human being is reincarnated according to his merits or demerits, whereas gods don't have to depend on such criteria; 3) there is a regular cause and effect relation between merits and births, whereas gods can take human form at times of disasters; 4) the important difference is that God, being all pervasive, can take various forms at one time; therefore, there can be several 'avatars,' but a human being cannot appear in two forms at one time; 5) the doctrine of 'avatar' applies only to gods or divine power.

5. In Hinduism a god is different from "God." A god is a deity having a specific function; whereas God is the Supreme God having all the powers.

6. Most scholars agree that the Vedas have played an important role in the shaping of an Indian culture during Vedic as well as post-Vedic times. Since the Vedas are the basis of India's philosophy and religion, they provide continuity in Indian tradition (see Gonda 1965).

7. Dr. Ambedkar received his M.A. (1915) and Ph.D. (1917) in Anthropology from Columbia University, New York; he also earned a M.Sc. (1921) and Ph.D. (1923) in Economics from the London School of Economics.

8. Dr. Ambedkar makes inquiries into the origin, growth, spread and perpetua-

tion of caste and untouchability in his article and the books mentioned under References.

9. These song genres have been thoroughly analyzed in terms of their linguistic and musical structures in Junghare 1983.

10. Compare the figures listed in note 3.

11. The five basic principles of international conduct designed to achieve world peace, first enunciated by Nehru are: 1) respect for each other's sovereignty; 2) assurance of mutual nonaggression; 3) noninterference in each other's internal affairs; 4) equality and cooperation for mutual benefits; and 5) peaceful coexistence. These five principles are termed as *panchashilā*.

12. God in Hinduism is often referred to as 'mother.' In this relationship with God, the devotee assumes the role of a 'child,' indicating intimacy with and dependence on his life giver who is supposed to care and help the 'child.' Dr. Ambedkar was perceived as a god through this expression of 'mother' who looked after his people, the children.

13. The same philosophy is conveyed by Lord Kṛṣṇa to his disciple Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gitā by the Sanskrit couplet:

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati Bhārata,
abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham!

Whenever, O descendant of Bharata,
There is decline of Dharma, and rise of Adharma,
I body Myself forth.

The translation is from Swami Swarupananda's *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita*, p. 99.

14. See the Appendix: Song I, compare Stanza 1.

15. This line is from another popular song of the Mahars. The original line is: leka mī bhimācī nāta āhe gautamācī! For the complete song, see Junghare 1983.

16. Ṛgveda I. 164.46, from R.T.H. Griffith's *The Hymns of the Rigvedas*.

17. The goddess Santōṣī Mātā, 'Mother of content,' of popular Hinduism. She was created/invented about twenty-five years ago. Mythological and religious pamphlets and texts on her greatness are still being written.

18. Birthplace of Ambedkar, a town in Central India; also known as Mhow.

19. Sayajirao Gayakwad was the ruler of the Princely State Baroda, who gave Dr. Ambedkar a fellowship for his education in the U.S. and England.

20. *Satyāgraha*: lit. insistence on the truth; a term for passive resistance offered to uphold truth (a weapon made popular by Gandhi during the freedom movement).

21. Chaudār: lit. tasty; the Mahad Tank agitation (1927) is known as Chaudār Tank Satyagraha for its tasty water.

22. The Kālāram Temple Entry Satyāgraha occurred at the city of Nasik (1930).

23. The Parvati Temple Entry Satyāgraha was organized at Poona (1929).

24. The Hindu Code Bill is a revised version of the Hindu Law which introduced: 1) abolition of the doctrine of the rights by birth; 2) absolute rights over property given to women; 3) share to daughters; and 4) provision for divorce.

25. *Bābu*: an educated man, a gentleman.

26. Company: a governmental stamp on a rupee note.

27. God's hand is on his head, i.e., he is blessed by God.

28. Seeing his good looks, a Brahmin woman is wonder-struck—a high-caste woman is wonder-struck on seeing an Untouchable with good looks.

29. Political meetings and rallies are held at Lake Sukrawar in Nagpur.

30. Telangkhedi is the name of a suburb of Nagpur; it was decorated with lights.

31. *Jaybhīm*: boastful.
32. The Constitution was drafted, according to the singer, in 1931; actually the Indian Constitution was made in 1951, only after India received her freedom.
33. The singer is inaccurate in giving 1962 as the year of Ambedkar's death when he actually died in 1956.
34. *Jayanti*: annual birthday celebration.
35. Please see note 12 for explanation.
36. *Daserā*: an important Hindu festival celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Ashvin, the seventh month of the Hindu year, to commemorate the victory of Rāma over Rāvaṇ, symbolizing the victory of good over evil.
37. *pañchashīlā*: see the explanation in note 11.
38. The Ashokan wheel represents the Buddha's Eight-Fold Path in terms of its spokes. The path includes: 1) Right views; 2) right resolve; 3) right speech; 4) Right conduct; 5) right livelihood; 6) right effort; 7) right mindfulness; and 8) right concentration.
39. Rāma was the hero of the Indian epic *Rāmāyaṇa*.
40. Rāvaṇa was a demon king and the ruler of Srilanka who was defeated by Rāma the king of Ayodhya.

REFERENCES CITED

- AMBEDKAR, B. R.
- 1916 *Castes in India: Their mechanism, genesis and development. Indian anti-quary*, May.
 - 1944 *Annihilation of caste*. Amritsar: Ambedkar School of Thought, Katra Jaman Singh.
 - 1946 *Who were the Shudras and how they came to be the fourth varna in Indo-Aryan society*. Bombay: Thacker and Co., Ltd.
 - 1948 *The Untouchables: Who were they and why they became Untouchables*. New Delhi: Amrit Book Co.
 - 1957 *The Buddha and his dharma*. Bombay: Siddhartha College Publications, No. I.
- CAMPBELL, Joseph
- 1949 *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- CROOKE, William
- 1926 *Religion and folklore of Northern India*. London: Oxford University Press.
- GONDA, J.
- 1965 *Change and continuity in Indian religion*. The Hague: Mouton and Co.
- GRIFFITH, R.T.H. tr.
- 1920-1926 *The hymns of the Rigveda*. 2 vols. Banaras: E. J. Lazarus and Co.
- JUNGHARE, Indira
- 1983 Songs of the Mahars: An untouchable caste of Maharashtra, India. *Ethnomusicology*, XXXVI: 271-295.
- KARVE, Irawati and Y. B. DAMLE
- 1963 *Group relations in village community*. Poona: Deccan College Monograph Series 24.
- KEER, Dhananjay
- 1966 *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan. (in Marathi)

- 1954 *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and mission.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
- RAGLAN, Lord
1936 *The hero: A study in tradition, myth, and drama.* London: Watts and Co.
- SWARUPANANDA, Swami
1967 *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gitā.* New Delhi: Advaita Ashrama.
- ZELLIOT, Eleanor
1969 *Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar movement.* Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.