

Ambedkarism, Buddhism, and Interrelation between them: Similarities and Differences

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Abstract

This article discusses the relevance between Ambedkarism and Buddhism and their critical points. The ideology of Ambedkarism significantly impacts Indian society by empowering Dalits and other marginalized communities by promoting the principles of social justice and equality. On the other hand, Buddhism revolves around the core teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, Meditation, Impermanence, and others, which are a means to an end suffering and attain enlightenment - both belief in the rejection of the caste system and the belief in the equality of all individuals. Ambedkarism strongly emphasizes education and encourages people to acquire knowledge and skills to help them achieve their goals. At the same time, Buddhism is a complex and diverse religious and philosophical system that offers a path toward greater understanding, compassion, and inner peace.

Keywords: Ambedkarism, Buddhism, Four noble truths, Eightfold path, Social justice, Nirvana.

1 Introduction

Ambedkarism is a socio-political philosophy that originated in India based on the teachings and beliefs of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an economist, Indian jurist, and social reformer. Ambedkar is widely regarded as the architect of the Indian constitution and is considered to be an influential figure in Indian history. The core principles of Ambedkarism revolve around social justice, equality, and the eradication of caste-based discrimination. It emphasizes the need for the emancipation of Dalits (formerly known as untouchables), who are considered at the down of the caste hierarchy in Indian society. It advocates empowering women and other marginalized communities, such as religious minorities and the econom-

ically disadvantaged. It strongly emphasizes education and encourages people to acquire knowledge and skills to help them achieve their goals. Ambedkarism has significantly impacted Indian society, particularly in social justice and the empowerment of Dalits and other marginalized communities. Many political parties and organizations in India have adopted Ambedkarism as their ideology and have worked towards promoting social justice and equality in Indian society.

Buddhism is an old world religion and founded by the philosophical system of Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha or "the awakened one." Buddhism originated in ancient India in the 6th century BCE and has since spread worldwide, with significant followings in Thailand, Sri Lanka,

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China, Japan, and Vietnam. Buddhism is also known for its philosophical teachings, including the concept of dependent Origination, which posits that every phenomenon arises in dependence upon other phenomena and that there is no inherently existing self or soul. Buddhism also teaches the concept of impermanence, which holds that everything is in a constant state of change and flux. Buddhism also strongly emphasizes meditation, which means cultivating mindfulness and awareness and, ultimately, attaining enlightenment. There are various forms of meditation within Buddhism, including mindfulness, loving-kindness, and insight meditation. Buddhism has various schools and traditions, including Theravada Buddhism, which is predominant in Southeast Asia, and Mahayana Buddhism, practiced in countries such as China, Japan, and Korea. Tibetan Buddhism is another prominent tradition incorporating elements of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism and indigenous Tibetan beliefs and practices.

2 Critical Points of Ambedkarism and Buddhism

2.1 Some critical points of Ambedkarism

1. **Social justice:** Ambedkarism is founded on the principle of social justice, which seeks to eradicate caste-based discrimination and other forms of social inequality.
2. **Emphasis on education:** Ambedkar believed that education was essential for uplifting the Dalits and eradicating caste-based discrimination.
3. **Democratic values:** Ambedkarism emphasizes the importance of democratic values such as freedom, equality, and justice.
4. **Self-respect and dignity:** Ambedkarism encourages individuals to develop and fight against oppression and injustice.

5. **Buddhism** Ambedkar converted to Buddhism towards the end of his life and saw it empowering the Dalit community and promoting social justice.
6. **Political representation:** Ambedkarism calls for more excellent political representation for marginalized communities, including Dalits, and seeks to promote their interests and rights.
7. **Women's rights:** Ambedkarism recognizes the importance of women's rights and seeks to address gender-based discrimination and violence.
8. **Humanism:** Ambedkarism emphasizes the value of life and the importance of treating all people with respect and dignity, regardless of their caste, class, or gender.

2.2 Some critical points of Buddhism

2.2.1 The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha's first teaching identifies the nature of human suffering, its cause, and the path to its cessation. Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths as the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, which provided a framework for understanding the nature of suffering and the path to its cessation. The Four Noble Truths are:

- **Dukkha:** The Truth of Suffering - This first truth recognizes that suffering, dissatisfaction, and discontentment are inherent aspects of human existence. It refers to physical and mental suffering and the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of all things.
- **Samudaya:** The Truth about the Origin of Suffering - The second truth identifies the causes of suffering, which are attachment, craving, and ignorance. Attachment and craving refer to our desire for things to be different from how they are, while ignorance refers to our failure to recognize the true nature of things.

- **Nirodha:** The Truth about the Cessation of Suffering - The third truth teaches that it is possible to end suffering by eliminating its causes. When attachment, craving, and ignorance are abandoned, suffering ends.
- **Magga:** The Truth about the cessation of Suffering - The fourth truth tells the Eightfold Path, which is a set of practices that lead to the cessation of suffering. The Eightfold Path consists of correct understanding and right intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

2.2.2 The Eightfold Path

The principle of the Eightfold path leads to the cessation of suffering, and the attainment of enlightenment outlines a path of practice. The Eightfold Path consists of eight interconnected factors or aspects of the Buddhist path, which are:

- **Right Understanding** (Sammā-ditthi): The understanding of the Four Noble Truths, the Three Universal Characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactory, non-self), and the law of Karma.
- **Right Intention** (Sammā-sankappa): Developing an intention to cultivate wholesome thoughts and actions and to avoid unwholesome ones.
- **Right Speech** (Sammā-vaca): Speaking truthfully, kindly, and constructively, avoiding lying, gossiping, and harsh or abusive language.
- **Right Action** (Sammā-kammanta): Engaging in ethical behavior, such as abstaining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.
- **Right Livelihood** (Sammā-ajiva): Making a living through ethical means, such as avoiding occupations that harm others.
- **Right Effort** (Sammā-vayama): Making a diligent effort to cultivate wholesome qualities, such as generosity,

loving-kindness, and wisdom, and to abandon unwholesome qualities, such as greed, hatred, and delusion.

- **Right Mindfulness** (Sammā-sati): Being mindful or aware of the present moment, observing one's thoughts and emotions without judgment or attachment, and cultivating an awareness of the impermanence and non-self nature of all phenomena.
- **Right Concentration** (Sammā-samadhi): Cultivating the ability to focus the mind and achieve a state of deep concentration, such as through the practice of meditation, in order to develop insight and wisdom.

Following the Eightfold Path, a practitioner can gradually cultivate wholesome qualities and develop the wisdom and insight to end suffering and attain enlightenment.

2.2.3 Dependent Origination

The Buddhist teaching is that all phenomena depend upon other factors or causes and that nothing exists independently or in isolation. It is a central teaching in Buddhism that explains the nature of suffering and the mechanism of its cessation. It is also known as Pratītyasamutpāda in Sanskrit and Patīccasamuppāda in Pali. According to this teaching, suffering and rebirth are caused by a chain of twelve causes and effects dependent upon one another. The twelve links of Dependent Origination are:

1. Ignorance (avijjā)
2. Volitional formations (saṅkhāra)
3. Consciousness (viññāṇa)
4. Name and form (nāmarūpa)
5. Six sense bases (saḷāyatana)
6. Contact (phassa)
7. Feeling (vedanā)
8. Craving (taṇhā)
9. Grasping (upādāna)
10. Becoming (bhava)

11. Birth (jāti)
12. Aging and death (jarāmaraṇa)

These twelve links can be divided into three categories: ignorance and volitional formations, consciousness, name and form, and the remaining ten links. The cycle of Dependent Origination explains how each link in the chain is dependent upon the previous one, creating a cycle of suffering that continues from one life to the next. By understanding Dependent Origination, a Buddhist practitioner can see the causes and conditions that give rise to suffering and work to eliminate them. Through practicing the Eightfold Path and cultivating wisdom and compassion, a practitioner can break the cycle of Dependent Origination and attain liberation from suffering.

2.2.4 Impermanence

Impermanence is a crucial point in Buddhism that refers to the idea that all phenomena, both internal and external, are constantly changing and in a state of flux. Impermanence is also known as Anicca in Pali and Sanskrit. According to Buddhist teachings, everything in the universe is subject to change, decay, and ultimately, dissolution. Impermanence includes all material objects, mental states, and even life itself. It is seen as a fundamental characteristic of existence and is considered one of the Three Universal Characteristics along with suffering (dukkha) and non-self (anatta). The recognition of impermanence is essential in Buddhism because it helps practitioners develop insight to the reality and let go of attachment to inherently impermanent things. By understanding the impermanence of all phenomena, a practitioner can see that clinging to things or experiences that are fleeting and transient will only lead to suffering and dissatisfaction.

Through meditation and other contemplative practices, Buddhist practitioners can develop a direct experience of impermanence and understand the nature of reality, which leads to a greater sense of peace, contentment, and acceptance and an increased ability to respond skillfully to life's challenges and changes.

2.2.5 Non-Self

Non-Self, or Anatta in Pali and Sanskrit, is an essential concept in Buddhism which refers to the absence of a permanent, unchanging self or soul in all phenomena, including human beings. According to Buddhist teachings, the idea of a self or soul is an illusion created by the mind, and clinging to this illusion is a significant cause of suffering. The concept of Non-Self is that all phenomena comprise multiple causes and conditions and that no inherent, unchanging essence or entity exists independently of these causes and conditions. Non-self includes not only physical phenomena but also mental states, emotions, and consciousness itself. Recognizing the Non-Self is essential in Buddhism because it helps practitioners let go of the delusion of a permanent self and recognize the inter-connectedness of everything. By recognizing that everything is impermanent and constantly changing, including the self, a practitioner can understand that clinging to the idea of a permanent self will only lead to suffering and dissatisfaction. Through meditation and other contemplative practices, Buddhist practitioners can cultivate a direct experience of the Non-Self and gain a deeper understanding of the nature of reality. Non-self can lead to a greater sense of peace, compassion, and wisdom and an increased ability to respond skillfully to life's challenges.

2.2.6 Mindfulness

Buddhism has the central concept as Mindfulness that refers to paying attention to the present moment with non-judgmental awareness. Mindfulness is known as Sati in Pali and Smriti in Sanskrit. According to Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is essential for developing insight and wisdom and cultivating a deeper understanding of the nature of reality. By paying close attention to the present moment, including our thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, we can recognize the impermanent, ever-changing nature of all phenomena and develop a more grounded and compassionate perspective on our experiences.

The practice of mindfulness involves in-

tionally directing our attention to our present-moment experience without getting caught up in judgments or distractions. This can be done through formal meditation practices, such as sitting, walking, or body scan meditation, as well as through informal practices, such as mindful eating, breathing, or communication.

The benefits of mindfulness include reduced stress and anxiety, increased emotional regulation and resilience, greater clarity and focus, and a more profound sense of connection with us and others. Mindfulness is now widely recognized as a valuable tool for improving mental health and well-being and has been incorporated into various secular contexts, such as healthcare, education, and workplace training.

2.2.7 Compassion

Compassion, or *Karuna* in Pali and Sanskrit, is a concept in which refers to the quality of empathetic concern for the suffering of oneself and others, combined with a solid motivation to alleviate that suffering. According to Buddhist teachings, compassion arises from recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings and the impermanent nature of existence. When we recognize that all beings are subject to suffering and that our happiness is intimately linked to the happiness of others, we develop a natural sense of empathy and concern for the well-being of all beings. Compassion is a feeling and motivation to act in the world in a way that reduces suffering and promotes well-being. In Buddhism, this is known as the *Bodhisattva* ideal, which involves a commitment to work towards the liberation and enlightenment of all beings rather than just seeking one's enlightenment.

The practice of compassion involves cultivating a sense of warmth, caring, and kindness towards oneself and others, even in the face of difficult emotions or challenging situations. This can be done through meditation practices such as *Loving-kindness* meditation, which involves silently repeating well-wishing phrases towards one and others. The benefits of cultivating compassion include greater emotional resilience, a more profound sense of connection with oneself and others, and a

stronger motivation to work towards the well-being of all beings. By developing compassion, we can become more skillful and effective agents of positive change.

2.2.8 Nonviolence

Nonviolence or *Ahimsa* in Pali and Sanskrit refers to the principle of refraining from causing harm or violence to oneself or others, whether through physical, verbal, or mental means. According to Buddhist teachings, nonviolence arises from recognizing the interdependence and interconnectedness of all beings. When we harm or act violently towards others, we create negative karmic consequences for ourselves, perpetuating a cycle of suffering and harm. Nonviolence is a moral principle and a practical strategy for promoting peace and well-being in the world. By cultivating nonviolence in our thoughts, speech, and actions, we can reduce the causes of conflict and create the conditions for greater harmony and understanding.

The practice of nonviolence involves developing awareness and sensitivity to the impact of our actions on others and cultivating the ability to respond to challenging situations with compassion and wisdom rather than reactive emotions such as anger or fear. The benefits of cultivating nonviolence include greater inner peace, increased emotional regulation and resilience, and a more profound connection with oneself and others. Nonviolence is a core principle of Buddhism and a fundamental value shared by many spiritual and ethical traditions worldwide.

2.2.9 Meditation

Meditation is a central Buddhist practice and refers to various techniques and methods for cultivating mindfulness, concentration, and insight. The primary goal of meditation in Buddhism is to develop greater awareness and understanding of the mind and to cultivate positive mental states such as compassion, wisdom, and equanimity. Buddhism has many different types of meditation, including mindfulness, loving-kindness, concentration, and insight. These practices may involve focusing the mind on a specific object, such

as the breath or a visual image, or developing awareness of the present moment and the contents of the mind.

One of the most common forms of meditation in Buddhism is mindfulness meditation, that involves cultivating a non-judgmental awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the present moment. Through regular practice, mindfulness meditation can help to reduce stress and anxiety, increase emotional regulation and resilience, and develop greater clarity and insight into the nature of the mind. Meditation is often practiced as part of a broader path of spiritual development in Buddhism, which involves cultivating ethical behavior, wisdom, and compassion and developing mindfulness and concentration through meditation. Buddhist meditation aims to achieve a state of liberation and enlightenment characterized by realizing the true nature of the mind and the cessation of suffering.

2.2.10 Nirvana

Nirvana is a central concept in Buddhism and refers to the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path - the cessation of suffering and attainment of enlightenment. It is a state of perfect peace, happiness, and liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara). In Buddhist teachings, suffering is a fundamental aspect of life caused by our attachment to transient phenomena and identification with the self. The Buddhist path aims to overcome this suffering and attain Nirvana, a state of absolute freedom beyond all dualities and concepts. The experience of Nirvana is often described as indescribable or ineffable, as it lies beyond the realm of ordinary human experience and language. However, Nirvana is a state of complete awareness, wisdom, and compassion in which one sees the interconnectedness of all things and feels a profound sense of inner peace and joy. While Nirvana is often seen as the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path, it cannot be achieved through external means or practices alone. Instead, it is seen as a state of being that arises from within as a result of the gradual transformation of one's mind and heart through the practice of ethics, meditation, and wisdom.

3 Similarities and Differences between Ambedkarism and Buddhism

Ambedkarism and Buddhism share some common ground, as both are philosophies that emphasize social justice, equality, and the rejection of caste-based discrimination. However, we can see the significant differences between the two.

1. **Origin:** Ambedkarism is a socio-political philosophy that emerged in the 20th century in India, whereas Buddhism is a major world religion and philosophical system that originated in ancient India in the 5th century BCE.
2. **Beliefs about the nature of existence:** Buddhism teaches that all phenomena occur in dependence upon other phenomena and that there is no inherently existing self or soul. Ambedkarism does not have any specific beliefs about the nature of existence.
3. **Role of meditation:** While Ambedkarism and Buddhism emphasize the importance of education and acquiring knowledge, Buddhism places a much greater emphasis on practicing meditation to cultivate mindfulness and awareness and, ultimately, attain enlightenment. Ambedkarism does not have any specific practices related to meditation.
4. **Views on social and political change:** Ambedkarism is primarily focused on social and political change within Indian society, particularly in empowering marginalized communities such as Dalits and women. Conversely, Buddhism is a broader philosophy that is not explicitly focused on social and political change. However, it has influenced political and social movements in some Buddhist countries.
5. **Role of the Buddha:** While both Ambedkarism and Buddhism acknowledge the significance of the Buddha, Ambedkarism places more emphasis on the political and social aspects of his

teachings. In comparison, Buddhism places greater emphasis on its spiritual teachings.

Overall, Ambedkarism is a more recent and specific socio-political philosophy that seeks to address the social and political inequality and discrimination faced by marginalized communities in India. Conversely, Buddhism is a broader philosophical and religious system that emphasizes spiritual and ethical principles to achieve inner peace and enlightenment.

Ambedkarite followers choose to embrace Buddhism for several reasons, including:

1. **Rejection of caste-based discrimination:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, founder of Ambedkarism, staunchly criticized the caste system and its discriminatory practices. He saw Buddhism as a means to reject the caste system and promote equality among all individuals, regardless of their social status.
2. **Empowerment of marginalized communities:** Ambedkarite followers view Buddhism as a means to empower marginalized communities, such as Dalits and women, who have historically been excluded from mainstream society due to their lower caste status. Ambedkar himself saw Buddhism as a means to promote social and political equality among all individuals.
3. **Inspiration from the life of the Buddha:** Ambedkarite followers also drew inspiration from the life of the Buddha, who rejected traditional caste-based hierarchies and embraced a more egalitarian and compassionate approach to life. They see the Buddha's teachings as a means to promote social and political justice and to inspire individuals to work towards a more equitable society.
4. **Spiritual and ethical teachings:** Buddhism also offers a set of spiritual and ethical teachings that resonate with Ambedkarite followers, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the cultivation of mindfulness and compassion. These teachings provide a

framework for personal growth and development and offer a means to attain inner peace and enlightenment.

Overall, Ambedkarite followers see Buddhism as a means to reject caste-based discrimination, empower marginalized communities, promote social and political equality, and attain personal and spiritual growth.

4 Buddhism as a Dalit religion?

It is not accurate to label Buddhism as a "Dalit religion." While it is true that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a Dalit leader and the architect of the Indian Constitution, converted to Buddhism along with thousands of his followers, Buddhism is a major world religion with followers from all backgrounds and social classes. Furthermore, while it is true that Buddhism has been used as a means of empowerment and social justice for marginalized communities in India, it is not limited to any particular caste or community. Buddhism's long and complex history in India predates the caste system. Its teachings emphasize the importance of compassion, wisdom, and ethical behavior, rather than caste or social status.

The term "Dalit" is a relatively recent construct and refers to a broad category of individuals who have historically faced social and economic discrimination in India. While many Dalits have embraced Buddhism to reject the caste system and promote equality, this does not make Buddhism inherently a "Dalit religion."

5 Conclusion

In summary, the article showed the relevance between Ambedkarism and Buddhism and discussed some of their critical points. It found that the ideology of Ambedkarism significantly impacts Indian society by empowering Dalits and other marginalized communities by promoting the principles of social justice and equality. It discussed core teachings of Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths,

the Eightfold Path, Meditation, Impermanence, and others. It found that Buddhism is focused on ending suffering and attaining enlightenment - both belief in the rejection of the caste system and the belief in the equality of all individuals. It emphasized that Ambedkarism powerfully highlights education and encourages people to acquire knowledge and skills to help them achieve their goals. At the same time, Buddhism is a complex and diverse religious and philosophical system that offers a path toward greater inner peace, compassion, and understanding.

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