

Justpeace Prospects for Peace-building and Worldview Tolerance:  
A South Asian Movement's Social Construction of Justice

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the many named and unnamed dalits who have endured the suffering and humiliation of centuries of social ostracism, discrimination, and structural violence. Their stories, though largely unheard, provide both an inspiration and foundation for creating social justice. It is my hope that in telling and analyzing the stories of dalit friends associated with the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha, Sahayak Gana (TBMSG), both new perspectives and a sense of hope about the ideal of justpeace will be fostered.

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While it goes without saying that my dissertation committee has been a driving force behind the successful completion of this document, many others have also played important roles in the intellectual and spiritual development necessary for the completion of the following work. To the late Dr. David Chappell, thank you for your friendship, inspiration, and introduction to both engaged Buddhism and the work of TBMSG. To Mangesh Dahiwalé and all those at the Manuski Center, thank you for your spiritual friendship along the way, without it I am not sure that this work could have been completed. To all those that I met through the TBMSG movement, thank you for your patience, eagerness, openness, and dedication to assist in collecting the data needed to complete this work. To many unnamed colleagues at GMU (you know who you are), thank you for the comments, guidance, and sense of community that you provided. Finally, I also wish to thank my brother Matthew and his family (Stacy, Paige and Garrett), as well as, my sister Natalie and her family (Harry and Liam) for their support and encouragement along the way. Undoubtedly I have forgotten many important individuals, but in asking that you forgive this oversight I rest assured that your collective hurt does not compare to the continued suffering of the many dalits living under oppression today. I ask that you please forgive any oversights and keep those less fortunate in your hearts and minds.

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## ABSTRACT

### JUSTPEACE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE-BUILDING AND WORLDVIEW TOLERANCE: A SOUTH ASIAN MOVEMENT'S SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE

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This dissertation is an attempt to understand the meta-narratives of justice operating within the *Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha, Sahayak Gana* (TBMSG), a dalit Buddhist social movement active in Maharashtra, India. The movement, a vestige of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's 1956 conversion to Buddhism, is actively fighting for dalits rights by exposing atrocities and rights abuses against dalits, as well as, advocating an identity for dalits as newly self-aware Buddhists. Such a social action approach has supported both inclusive and exclusive conceptions of social justice, and this dissertation is intended to develop an understanding of the dialectics involved in the various conceptions of social justice within the movement. With the broader aim of explaining how such understanding can inform conflict resolution practitioners engaged in peace-building practice among marginalized populations, this dissertation is based on a social constructionist epistemology.

In analyzing the justice/injustice narratives routinely produced by movement activists and leaders, this dissertation takes an action science approach of helping the group make better use of the deployment, limitations, and contradictions of the narratives it weaves. The aim of the present work is to build upon theories that address the nexus between conflict resolution and social justice in developing an epistemological framework for understanding, in theory and use, actors' normative commitments to justice. By unpacking the social justice commitments of TBMSG members, this dissertation exposes the rationale for understanding how, in practice, narratives are produced and deployed, as well as, constructive of movement members' conceptions of social change. In short, this dissertation is a peeling away of layers of reality inherent in movement members' justice/injustice narratives in order to begin to understand the implementation of social justice as an ideal.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The teaching of the Buddha is through and through goal-oriented (teleological). It is entirely dependent upon its goal of freedom from suffering and ultimate frustration. And the Buddha's concern is not discussion. It is not pondering or mulling things over. It is action.<sup>1</sup>

Sameer Taware, an energetic young *dalit*<sup>2</sup> (ex-'untouchable') activist, is quite comfortable expressing his emotions. If asked his identity, he will readily express himself as a dalit, while more reservedly proclaiming himself a Buddhist. Both engaging and deliberative in character, Sameer exemplifies the thoughtful and astute fruit of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's historic movement to uplift and educate dalit communities in India. In his mid-to-late-twenties, Sameer is an Ambedkar Buddhist activist working in the "inter-related projects"<sup>3</sup> that are implemented from the *Manuski Center*, a program of the *Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana* (the TBMSG), the Indian wing of a worldwide Buddhist *sangha* (community) aimed at creating a "*Dhamma* revolution."<sup>4</sup> In June 2008, Sameer had just been hired by the Manuski Center to utilize his education and experience as a Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) Masters of Social Work graduate.

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<sup>1</sup> Williams (2000), 36.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'Dalit' means 'broken' or 'downtrodden' in Sanskrit and was "used as far back as 1931 in journalistic writing" [Michael (1999), 99].

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.manuski.net/>

<sup>4</sup> Sponberg, A. (1996) "A Dhamma Revolution in Contemporary India" in Queen, C. and King, S. eds. *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. New York: SUNY Press. *Dhamma* is the Pali equivalent of *Dharma* in the Sanskrit and in Buddhism has many meanings, the most common of which is a referent for the Buddhist teaching or tradition.

This chapter will, through both recounting and analyzing the stories of activists like Sameer, as well as, providing some historical background to the Ambedkar Buddhist movement in Maharashtra, highlight the critical features of the modern Indian caste system<sup>5</sup> by underscoring the work that a particular movement of Ambedkar Buddhists, the TBMSG, is doing to recreate low-castes' place in both history and modern society. In turn, this introductory chapter begins to reveal TBMSG's on-going struggle to construct a pragmatic vision of Indian society that is guided by a commitment to social justice,<sup>6</sup> both in its attention to a myriad of problems that face Indian society today and in its ideals for a better tomorrow. It is this vision - both pragmatic and normative - and its

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<sup>5</sup> The definition of 'Caste' is one that is multi-faceted and contentious, but an important concept to define nonetheless. The term was probably first used by the Portuguese settlers (in 1563) on the Northwestern Indian coast to describe the economic associations of the Indian people that they encountered [Hutton (1946)]. As Hutton (1946) further details: "The truth is that while a caste is a social unit in a quasi-organic system of society, and throughout India is considered enough to be immediately identifiable, the nature of the unit is variable enough to make a concise definition difficult. If it be enough to define the system, the following formula is suggested – 'a caste system is one whereby a society is divided up into a number of self-contained and completely segregated units (castes), the mutual relations between which are ritually determined in a graded scale'" (Hutton, 50). The Indian caste system is typically explained using the chaturvarna framework, in which Indian society is divided into four castes which represent different body regions of the cosmic first man, who is named Parusha in Brahminical sources. In this chaturvarna framework the Brahmin (priests) make up the head and mouth of this cosmic being while the Kshatriya (warriors) make up his arms, the Vaishya (merchants) make up his thighs, and the Shudra (servants/peasants) make up his feet. 'Untouchables,' or what have become know as dalits or scheduled castes, fall outside this system and are, thus, seen to be ritually impure.

<sup>6</sup> Social justice, being a key conceptual frame of this dissertation, requires some definition. Despite the fact that even "among those that support it, it is not at all clear what the idea means" [Miller (1999), ix], I believe that social justice can be given some broad definition. Here it will suffice to say that social justice is a social context in which fairness, equity, and justpeace reign and violence as a hindrance to any person or peoples' potentiality does not exist [see further references to Galtung (1969) and Schirch (2004), among others, for a broader understanding of such a difficult concept as social justice].

wide-ranging potential and impact that are the subject of this dissertation.<sup>7</sup> In analyzing and explaining TBMSG's social justice vision, the need for not only individual self-reflection but also collective self-reflection becomes pre-eminent. TBMSG's struggle for a casteless society is more than just the opportunistic power struggles of the dispossessed, but is representative of a pragmatic epistemology of social justice that blends political discontent with pluralistic religious commitment. This is the story that this first chapter of this dissertation begins to frame. It follows that TBMSG's narratives, as both collective expressions of justice and peace, present an ideal lens with which to explore the role of justice in peace-building.

Though at first sight the TBMSG movement's goals do not seem politically radical, and their foundational concern is in spreading knowledge of Buddhist practice, their privileging of social justice betrays an equally primary concern for addressing past injustices. Such injustices as economic/occupational discrimination, structural inequalities, and social oppression at the hands of ruling Brahmin elite are a ubiquitous set of experiences for the Ambedkar Buddhist membership of the TBMSG. It is such all encompassing injustice that the dalits of India experience in every sphere of their daily existence and which the TBMSG is determined to fight and overcome. Through following Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's favorite mantra, which he co-opted from American labor

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<sup>7</sup> One might notice the mix of the theological and practical similarities between TBMSG's engaged Buddhism and the Liberation Theology of Latin American Christian movements of the 1970s and 1980s [see Gutiérrez (1988) for a discussion of the complexity of Latin American Liberation theology and Smith (1991) for an explanation of the broad social movement that Gutiérrez's, as well as, other Christian thinkers ideas inspired post Vatican II]. Many more good resources for exploring liberation theology can also be found at <http://www.liberationtheology.org/>.

movements of the 1920s, followers of the TBMSG have vowed to “Organize, Agitate, Educate.” This means that they collectively understand the need to work within dalit communities to empower these communities to develop the means to eradicate the sources of injustice – here it may be a corrupt police chief; there it might be a Brahmin dominated *panchayat* (local government administration). Whatever the source of this injustice, their goal of its eradication is seen as complimentary to the spread of Buddhist dharma.

This dissertation employs ethnographic methods (interviews, participant observation, and participatory action research in the form of formal and informal movement dialogues on caste injustice and motives for joining the movement) to unpack the layers of the Ambedkar Buddhist worldview prevalent in the TBMSG. In examining the justice/injustice narratives routinely produced by movement activists and leaders (collectively called members herein), it is my aim to help the group make better use of the deployment, limitations, and contradictions of these narratives and assist its members as they progress toward the co-extensive conflict resolution goal of justpeace. The intention of the present work is to build upon theories that address the nexus between conflict resolution and social justice in developing an epistemological framework for understanding, in theory and use, actors’ normative commitments to justice. The chapters that follow will repeatedly reference the stories told to me by TBMSG leaders and activists. At times I will reconstruct informal conversations and at other times I will analyze transcribed narratives taken from formal interviews or members’ writings. The choice of narratives and method of analysis is not random but rather aims to highlight the

complexity of both TBMSG discourse and narrative. Narratives were chosen as the unit of analysis because, as more manageable constituent parts of wider discourses, narratives provide an ideal means to access movement meaning and learning and to expose actors' normative commitments. My own role as a doctoral candidate and researcher in conflict analysis and resolution, though alluded to throughout, has been minimized in order to focus on giving voice to respondents that often do not have voice in their society. Where necessary, my own positioning vis-à-vis the movement is mentioned in order to provide important context and effect.

Over lunch at the Manuski Center one day in June 2008, Sameer solicitously asked me “What can conflict resolution do about caste discrimination?”<sup>8</sup> This question was not intended to be a critical affront to my chosen field of expertise, conflict resolution, but rather a pragmatic and heartfelt inquiry, an inquiry that he hoped would help him as he began his new job at the Manuski Center by providing him some replicable tools. Sameer, like others at the Manuski Center, are continually looking for answers to India's endemic caste-based structural violence.<sup>9</sup> He was not looking for simple answers – TBMSG members readily admit there are none of those - but practical techniques that he could employ in both his new occupation, as well as, with personal acquaintances. This pragmatic approach to the creation of social justice not only marks

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<sup>8</sup> Informal interview with Sameer Taware at Manuski Center, June 29, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Structural violence is a crucial concept to understand, as it is the sometimes invisible hand of structural violence that dalits feel and higher castes deny, thus causing tension between caste groupings. Galtung (1969) defines structural violence as “violence without [subject-verb-object] relation” (171). Such violence is “built into the structure. Thus, when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence” (171).

TBMSG as a fascinating case study of religiously-based social movement organization, but also exposes the on-going struggle for a unified conception of a TBMSG social justice ideal. Like the marginalized anywhere, dalits want change yesterday! But, beyond discontent with the status quo, TBMSG's pragmatic worldview exposes an on-going attempt to realize social justice. It is such processes of justice's social construction that illuminate the capacity of conflict analysis and resolution methodology to combat discrimination and the destructive normative creations of 'others.'

Sameer's question was typical in the sense that TBMSG activists are engaged in an on-going process of reflection on past injustices as a means to negotiate future approaches that will consistently create a wider impact on the oppressive social structures they face. Though TBMSG leaders' and activists' analysis of the caste situation always leads back to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's thought, it is a pragmatic engagement with the world that continually re-negotiates TBMSG's conception of social justice. What made Sameer's query special was that my own response to it led him to a place where he felt comfortable to informally open up. A cathartic release of pain and emotional suffering, which he was obviously struggling to express, followed my supportive response that conflict resolution, if done right, can provide opportunity for the voiceless to have voice. TBMSG activists' and leaders' construction of social justice lives in the negotiated space which such spontaneous social interactions create. It is in this story-telling process and structure that reflective learning and the transformational re-positioning of self in society

can take place.<sup>10</sup> With my own simple response, Sameer, unprompted, began to give a rationale for why he had asked this question. First he lamented about two high-caste friends with whom he felt he could not discuss caste issues. “They do not want to hear this stuff. They think that caste is no longer an issue in India.”<sup>11</sup> It is these people with whom Sameer strived to dialogue and, yet, they did not even want to engage. What does conflict resolution offer in such a case?

Next, Sameer launched into a story that Erik Erikson might describe as persisting “from stage to stage [of the life cycle] as a foreign body seeking outlet or absorption.”<sup>12</sup> It is a story meant to further justify his initial query, but it is also telling of TBMSG activists’ complex understanding of social justice and the ways to achieve it. As a first year student at the TISS, Sameer began dating a classmate. By all accounts everything seemed to be going well. Sameer spent every available moment with this girl and had become quite friendly with her father, who, upon visiting his daughter at the university, would first stop to check on Sameer. The relationship with this girl’s father was so good that Sameer admitted “he seemed to be more interested in my education than his own daughter’s.”<sup>13</sup> One day while sitting in their core freshman social work class, Sameer and his classmates whom by this point in their first semester had become a very close cohort,

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted here that the public space for the storytelling of caste discrimination and social justice is lacking in democratic India. As a dalit friend taught me as he gave his reaction to the first ever U.S.-based Dalit Studies Conference held recently at the University of Pennsylvania: “such reflective public space is not even available in India” (Informal interview with a dalit participant at the Dalit Studies Conference, University of Pennsylvania - December 5, 2008). This is a common refrain of complaint among the dalits I have engaged with during this research.

<sup>11</sup> Informal interview with Sameer Taware at Manuski Center, June 29, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Erikson (1969), 98.

<sup>13</sup> Informal interview with Sameer Taware at Manuski Center, June 29, 2008. Statements like these in India are not uncommon and indicate that marriage is a distinct future possibility.

were interrupted by a school administrator. Speaking over the din of students, this administrator began to read an announcement about an open scholarship opportunity. As the students quieted, the administrator continued by explaining that the scholarship was open for Scheduled Castes (SCs)<sup>14</sup> only. After reading the full announcement, this administrator then proceeded to read the names of all the eligible SCs in the class. This last act, whether intentional or unintentional on the part of the administrator, caused shock and turmoil in the class. Both the girl Sameer had been seeing, and many of his newfound ‘friends’ were shocked to hear his name read out on this list. Once the administrator left, they began asking Sameer if this was true – was *he* an SC? Sameer, not having faced such questions before and feeling he had no reason to hide anything, readily admitted that he was from a SC community. As students filed out of the classroom at the end of class, Sameer could overhear them asking each other in disbelief: “How can Sameer be a Scheduled Caste?... It cannot be...”<sup>15</sup>

From that day forward Sameer’s relationship with the girl he had been dating, as well as with many others in his class, changed. The girl would not return his calls, and indeed, after that day he never again spoke directly to her. He was angry and hurt that

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<sup>14</sup> SC is the official Indian government designation for low-castes former ‘untouchables,’ though the Indian government makes further official distinctions for the administration of a “compensatory discrimination” system, also called a reservation system [see Galanter (1984) for a description of Indian attempts at engineering equality]. While Scheduled Castes (SCs) in this labeling system comprise those castes that fell outside the traditional caste system, the designation Scheduled Tribes (STs) includes those that are from tribal communities (largely what are called adivasis), and the category of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) “comprises the non-untouchable lower and intermediate castes who were traditionally engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, hand crafts, and functional services” [Sharma (1997)], 120-121. Thus, in developing a system for the administration of affirmative action programs, the Indian government created a new hierarchy of division among the lowest rungs of Indian society.

<sup>15</sup> Informal interview with Sameer Taware at Manuski Center, June 29, 2008.

this label had changed his relationship – nothing about him had changed, but to others (especially this girl), something had changed drastically. Further, he expressed frustration that he was never able to have an open discussion about this situation with her, or anyone else in his class for that matter. It was as if such an incident did not happen, yet the social exclusion that resulted remained.

Sameer's traumatic story voices a need for critical narrative reflection more fully than any attempt at a rational functionalist analysis or problem solving could. Further, this story hits upon some important aspects of the TBMSG narratives of injustice. First, such injustice narratives always already involve background knowledge of similar stories of injustice. Like other injustice narratives we will encounter in this dissertation, this injustice narrative is retrospective. As opposed to the projective character of the justice narratives we will encounter,<sup>16</sup> such injustice narratives seem almost stuck in the past. Second, such injustice narratives imply a sense of the 'Other,' even if that 'Other' is not always clearly delineated or defined. And third, they operate simultaneously on a structural/sociological and a personal/emotional level. These aspects of such formative narrative, combined with a social reading of Buddhism, also bring to the foreground a number of low-caste assumptions about social change. For example, by implicitly asking what kind of actions should be taken to transform the psychology of high caste Hindus, a sort of low-caste guilt in working on dialogue with higher castes is exposed. The logic of this guilt can be summarized as follows: since there is so much need within the dalit

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<sup>16</sup> This is an important distinction that will be further fleshed out in the narrative analysis of Chapters Four and Five, as well as in the comparative analysis of Chapter Six.

community, why should dalits work to engage higher castes who do not want to speak to them in the first place? Despite high caste denials of a problem and low-caste anger over past injustice, the fact remains that it is through incidents like Sameer's that dalits and higher castes are continually "crashing"<sup>17</sup> into each other. Further, Sameer's story hints at a sort of resignation when approaching 'others;' since high caste thinking cannot be easily changed it is better to work on perfecting yourself in order to model the change you want rather than trying to persuade 'others' to accept you as you are.

After this incident, Sameer recounted that he did have one further interaction with the girl's father. A few weeks after the announcement of the scholarship, the father came looking for him in his dorm. When they met, the father grabbed Sameer's shirt collar and demanded "Why didn't you tell my daughter that you were a scheduled caste, you bastard?"<sup>18</sup> Sameer was incredulous. Why should he have to tell anyone this? There was nothing different about him because of it, and telling people would only imply that there was some difference. He never spoke to the father, or his daughter, again after this episode, though he did have to sit in all the same classes with this girl for the next three years – which he admitted was "very awkward."<sup>19</sup>

Before this experience, Sameer had heard his father talk about how caste still existed and how dalits still faced problems due to caste-ism, but he had argued with his father that that was the past, that things were different now. While many young Indians still believe in the liberalizing power of the global economy to alleviate the scourge of

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<sup>17</sup> See Paul Haggis' Oscar winning movie "Crash," Lions Gate Films, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Informal interview with Sameer Taware at Manuski Center, June 29, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

caste-ism, this incident changed Sameer. After this experience, he was less trusting and open about sharing his background and he began to see the effects of caste in all spheres of social life. Sameer resolved to work on these social issues. First, as an active participant in the scheduled caste student movement that one of his later Manuski colleagues had originally co-founded at TISS a few years before,<sup>20</sup> and later as a social work graduate looking for a job, Sameer constantly felt the effects of caste. Sameer's radicalization, beginning in college and stemming from such often unspoken personal experiences, is typical of the cadre of young activists working within the Manuski Center. Buddhism, in such a context, provides both psychological and social ideology for action.

In fact, injustice narratives like Sameer's are not uncommon among TBMSG leaders and activists, but the open sharing of such personal, degrading, and raw experiences of injustice are rare among this largely young and male cadre of Manuski Center activists. Further, the deployment of such injustice narratives by movement actors is far from completely instrumental or uniform. In combining participant observation, action science, formal and informal interviews of activists and leaders, and the analysis of the autobiographical stories of Ambedkar dalits, the chapters that follow both document and analyze the narrative structures of the TBMSG social movement as a means to understand social justice as an end. More precisely, the dissertation that follows is aimed at analyzing both justice and injustice narratives in order to develop some practical and theoretical grounding for conflict resolution practitioners to make use of actors' social

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. as well as, formal interview with Hareesh Dalvi, another Manuski Center activist and TISS graduate, on June 28, 2008.

justice commitments in attempting to transform caste conflict, and by implication, other similar conflicts' dynamics and situations.<sup>21</sup> Sameer's story highlights the conflict truisms that both parties' interactions (i.e. the conflict dynamics) take "predisposing conditions and turn them into actual conflict,"<sup>22</sup> and, therefore, that the conflict-situation is dynamic.<sup>23</sup> By unpacking the social justice commitments of TBMSG members, this dissertation is aimed at exposing the rationale for understanding how, in practice, narratives are produced, deployed, and constructive of movement members' conceptions of social change. The wider implication of such an aim requires movement members to reflect on the conflict situation and dynamics, and, in turn, to consistently develop innovative and practical means to address caste's legacy.

Like the wider dalit rights movement, dalit Buddhists lack a unified social justice vision. As Gail Omvedt so aptly stated in a roundtable discussion on India's future and the future of dalits at the first conference devoted to Dalit Studies in the United States:

It seems to me that there is a paradox about [the] dalit movement today. And that is that, you know, on the one hand there is a very vibrant degree of assertion, you know people are not giving up, they are asserting themselves on all levels, they are moving into new occupations, they are creating political parties, dalit literature is emerging in practically every Indian language by now. But, at the same time, you know, I don't get the sense of a vision or original thinking and this seems to be a problem.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For concise definitions of both conflict dynamics and situations see d'Estree (2003) and Druckman (2003) in chapters five and six respectively of Cheldelin, Druckman, and Fast, eds. Conflict: From Analysis to Intervention. Continuum: New York, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> d'Estree (2003), 69.

<sup>23</sup> Druckman (2003), 108.

<sup>24</sup> "The Dalit Studies Conference," organized and funded by the Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI), University of Pennsylvania, December 5, 2008.

To address this paradoxical problem, it is argued here, that an exploration of the lived experience of Ambedkar dalit justice narratives<sup>25</sup> and injustice narratives<sup>26</sup> is necessary. Such narratives, in the case of TBMSG, can be accessed through the story telling in which movement members engage. While both justice and injustice narratives imply a normative frame, these frames are indeed quite different. Though injustice narratives abound in the TBMSG movement, justice narratives are more opaque to those involved in social change. In using justice/injustice narratives to highlight aspects of a social justice vision, this dissertation is action science in the sense that it attempts to clarify a framework for understanding justice narration. Outside of autobiographical accounts of dalit life, too little scholarship has focused on documenting the life experiences of dalit Buddhists. Reflecting on what works (narration of justice), as opposed to simply focusing attention on what is wrong (narration of injustice), a vision of TBMSG social justice can be exposed and the foundations for transforming caste conflict's situation and dynamics can be revealed.

From the broadest perspective, in focusing a majority of attention on the role that injustice narratives play in the creation and reification of social justice, the grounding for justice in peace-building can be exposed and opportunities for broadening the uses of expressions of justice gained. The potentials of caste conflict's situation and dynamics can be used to transform the conflict setting. But before such far-reaching goals can be

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<sup>25</sup> Justice narratives are here understood as the stories that people tell about fairness, equality, justice.

<sup>26</sup> Injustice narratives are here understood as the stories that people tell about lack of fairness, equality, and justice. They are distinguished from justice narratives not simply by being the opposite, but also by their retrospective as opposed to projective quality.

accomplished, one must first both describe the context of the hard realities that TBMSG protagonists face on a day-to-day basis and explain how the existence of these hard realities combine with injustice narratives to develop the identity of these particular protagonists of social justice activism. These two tasks, arbitrarily separated in sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2, are in reality interconnected. As should be clear from Sameer's story above, the injustices and oppression that Ambedkar Buddhists face provides a major part of their socially positioned identity, and their subsequent lack of power and privilege conditions their worldview. Sections 1.2 and 1.3, respectively, map out the various branches of the TBMSG movement and outline more fully the methodological and theoretical assumptions and limitations of the problem to be addressed. Such a plan for the introduction of both the subjects and the research problem highlights the need to integrate the often overlooked analytical and reflective elements of problem setting with the tendency to immediately engage in problem solving.<sup>27</sup> The fact is that TBMSG members and activists face a number of paradoxes, which this introduction aims to contextually map. In advocating and modeling an action science approach<sup>28</sup> to research, this dissertation develops an epistemological model for conflict resolution practitioners to employ conflict protagonist's justice commitments in the process of transforming conflict situations and dynamics. This pragmatic research goal is accomplished by simultaneously helping TBMSG activists realize, as Schon (1983) so clearly articulates, that: "when ends are fixed and clear, then the decision to act can present itself as an

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<sup>27</sup> See Schon (1983), 40-41.

<sup>28</sup> See Argyris (1985). Argyris describes action science as an "interventionist" approach to social science that is aimed at "enacting communities of inquiry in communities of social practice" (36).

instrumental problem. But when ends are confused and conflicting, there is yet no ‘problem’ to solve.”<sup>29</sup> In short, through analyzing the role that justice/injustice narratives play in framing TBMSG movement actors’ story-telling practices and normative orders, the social justice commitments of TBMSG movement actors can be grounded for use by conflict resolution practitioners and the role of justice in peace-building practice can be contextualized. Such a thesis rests on the argument that by analyzing the narrative structures of movement stories, conflict resolution practitioners can expose strategies and tactics to transform conflict situations and dynamics by exposing an overarching justice framework.

### ***1.1 The Hard Realities: Caste, Class, Social Exclusion, and Ambedkar Buddhists***

As Dalits increasingly organize to protest their discriminatory treatment and claim their rights, the government has consistently failed to protect Dalits against retaliatory attacks by upper-caste groups... – From “Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination Against India’s ‘Untouchables’” Shadow Report to the UN Committee of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, February 2007, page 5.

Empowerment of the socially disadvantaged: encouraging the cultivation of self respect, confidence, knowledge and skills, enabling them to participate in, initiate and take responsibility for activities leading to social transformation. - From the Manuski Center’s Informational Brochure section entitled “Our Core Values,” page 2.

The lowest castes of Indian society are crippled by both a lack of effective government social policy and a lack of self-respect and confidence. Of the roughly 15

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<sup>29</sup> Schon (1983), 41. Though this may overstate the problem of caste discrimination with respect to collective action (for surely just because social actors cannot agree on ends that does not mean that caste injustices ceases to exist) the importance of defining ends should, nonetheless, be afforded the importance of priority. While means are often debated, ends provide the foundation for the means that are eventually chosen by social actors – in other words ends cannot be separated from means.

percent of the Indian population that is classified as scheduled castes,<sup>30</sup> the hard realities of caste co-exist with class inequalities, social ostracism, and a sense of psychological inferiority that often accompanies economic and social exclusion. While the statistics on social exclusion can become mind-numbing (see section 1.1.1 below for a brief overview), the prescriptions for action seem relatively clear: transform social and economic exclusion to opportunity and inclusion. Yet, it is in determining *how* to act in a transformative way that both scholars and social activists themselves often disagree.<sup>31</sup> With injustice all around, no single prescription for achieving social justice seems adequate. As a result, both the ‘how’ and actualization of problem-solving get caught up in the rhetorical discourse of problem-setting. This leads to a situation in which, for example, problems such as class inequities become confused with caste inequality. Such getting stuck in problem setting results in subsequent problems of both analysis and policy prescription.

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<sup>30</sup> While Deliege (1993) writes “In 1991, there were about 140 Million untouchables who constituted approximately 15 per cent of the Indian population,” others lump Scheduled Castes (SCs) together with Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) to argue that “about half of Indian population is lower caste in one form or other” [Luce (2007), 122]. The TBMSG activists of the Manuski Center state on their web-site: “Most of the 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the population of modern India who are from the Scheduled Caste communities will have experienced something of discrimination” ([http://www.manuski.net/?page\\_id=2](http://www.manuski.net/?page_id=2) – accessed November 22, 2008). It is safe to say that between 15 and 20 percent of India’s billion plus population are from former ‘untouchable’ communities.

<sup>31</sup> This fact is evidenced by the economic analysis of caste discrimination and subsequent debates that were presented at the December 2008 “Dalit Studies Conference” at the University of Pennsylvania. Further, as Desai, Adams, and Dubey (2008) argue: “While a variety of affirmative action programs are in place to bridge educational, occupational, and income disparities between dalits (Scheduled Caste), adivasis (Scheduled Tribe), and general populations, substantial educational disparities persist” (Desai, Adams, Dubey. “Segmented Schooling: Inequalities in Primary Education.” Prepared for the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Current Version January 2008). The same indictment could be made for other areas of social policy implementation none of which lack democratic debate on policy effectiveness.

In the case of class, Omvedt (1994) has articulately argued, anti-caste movements in India have both wittingly and unwittingly combined their caste contention with traditional Marxist class analysis of conflict in their attempts at creating social justice. One important consequence of such a hybrid emphasis on caste-class analysis has been a confusion of the social justice movement frames of low-caste activists. Such confusion manifests itself in the debate over the role of capitalist markets in bringing change to the caste structure. In other words, do we believe the argument of dalit writer Chadra Bhan Prasad when he states “Capitalism is beginning to break the caste system,”<sup>32</sup> or do we strive towards the “need for a ‘moral economy.’”<sup>33</sup> Such examples of frame confusion vex the organization and mobilization of low-caste contention, and, in turn, help pro-caste forces to successfully minimize the rhetoric of anti-caste uplift movements (for example by diverting debate over caste discrimination to talk of reservations<sup>34</sup> as the sole answer to caste demands for inclusion). But the exclusion of low-castes is more complex than simply social, economic, or psychological explanations alone can provide – it is a combination of all. As Sukhadeo Thorat has argued on the policy level:

Fighting discrimination therefore calls for additional policies complementing anti-poverty and economic development programs. But there is also considerable overlap, and therefore the need to combine and complement, and not divide, programs against poverty and economic deprivation [with] policies for equal rights and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wax (August 31, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Omvedt. (1997), 310.

<sup>34</sup> Note that reservations are the Indian equivalent of affirmative action policies in the United States or positive discrimination policies in Great Britain.

<sup>35</sup> Thorat (October, 2008).

Regardless of where one stands on the role of government in engineering social policy, it should be clear that for the Ambedkar Buddhist activists of the TBMSG the problems of low-castes cannot be divorced from either their social analysis of the problem or the range of solutions available to them. Both failed social policy and a lack of self-confidence can only be remedied by sound social analysis and a clearly understood collective vision of the future.

The three sections that follow (1.1.1, 1.1.2, and 1.1.3), like a project proposal, outline the problem of caste-ism, situate the capacity and identity of the Ambedkar Buddhist of the TBMSG to attack the problem, and, finally, highlight some of the paradoxes that *these* particular low-castes face in attacking *this* particular set of social problems. While not exhaustive, these three sections provide an understanding of the context within which TBMSG leaders and activists work for social justice – a context that is crucial for both contextualizing the analysis of leader and activist narratives that follow in subsequent chapters and understanding the implications of such analysis for social justice in conflict. Before returning to the centrality of narratives like Sameer’s to provide pragmatic social justice insights to TBMSG actors, it is first necessary to develop the facts of the case to be studied. Despite some dalit activists’ reticence to empirically quantify injustice by arguing that the ubiquity of injustice in low-caste communities obviates the need for such a focus, the fact is that attempts to quantify caste discrimination provide a way to bracket caste-ism as a social problem and benchmark the effectiveness of any solutions. The sections that follow are an attempt to create a broad set of boundaries for approaching the complex sociological issues of caste.

### ***1.1.1 Caste Realities in Modern India***

While any overview of caste discrimination is bound to be imperfect, especially when written by one who has no direct personal experience of it, an empirical summary of the realities of caste in modern India has value in that it brings to light a picture of the structural inequities that remain in modern Indian society and questions the disbelief that such a picture often engenders. Despite the reality that such empirical measures are few and far between due to the systematic and intentional oversight by ruling elites, government denial of a caste problem, and, until recently, lack of scholarly focus on the lowest of the low in Indian society, some studies have begun to report the caste system's modern realities.<sup>36</sup> Though discussion of caste inequality has largely disappeared from the public sphere, the reality of caste difference, and its subsequent social positions, has not disappeared from Indian society. As Fuller (2005) writes:

Because people cannot openly speak of castes as unequal, they describe them as different... they may avoid the terms 'caste' or jati and refer instead to 'community' or samaj. As Mayer (1960) suggests, this change may indicate greater commitment to equality, but it is at least as likely that it does not, for terms like samaj [community] are frequently euphemistic and the language of difference can be a coded means to assert the status of one's own caste and to justify the inequality among castes.<sup>37</sup>

Such complexities and nuances abound in attempting to paint a picture of modern expressions of caste oppression. Still the rampant expressions of the hard realities of caste oppression in modern India are daily being exposed by brave activists like those working in the TBMSG movement.

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<sup>36</sup> See Kapur and Prasad's study on the role of market forces in Uttar Pradesh (forthcoming) and Newman and Attwell's econometric study of India's private labor markets and hiring practices (forthcoming).

<sup>37</sup> Fuller (2005), 13-14.

Many scholars have attempted to explain the caste system via the sociological theory of social stratification,<sup>38</sup> a reality that is argued to be universally found in all human society. But, as Shirama explains, “The traditional pattern of social stratification in India has certain characteristics which are rather unique, and these have attracted and intrigued many scholars all over the world.”<sup>39</sup> The relative importance of the *varna* (stratified categories of occupation) and *jati* (literally a form of existence determined by birth) systems of Indian society in upholding caste-based social stratification have been debated, but the roots of such systems, most scholars agree, begin with the clash of Aryan and Dravidian populations in North-west India around 1500 B.C.E. This story, pieced together largely from archeological evidence, is a story often recited by scholars of caste<sup>40</sup> and, therefore, will be largely omitted here. The important essentials to realize about this story of the origins of the stratified structure of India society are: 1.) that caste is an institution which has continually evolved and adapted throughout India’s long history; 2.) that ‘untouchable’ communities over centuries came to find themselves on the very bottom of this structure;<sup>41</sup> 3.) that as a group these ‘untouchables’ are by no means a homogenous ethnic or cultural entity, and; 4.) that it is by no means clear that the Aryan invasion brought everything we know today as Vedic culture, including the foundations for the current instantiation of the caste system, to India. Across India there exist today

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<sup>38</sup> See Milner (1994), Sharma (1997), Beteille (1996), and Shirama (1999) as examples.

<sup>39</sup> Shirama (1999), 42.

<sup>40</sup> See the scholarship mentioned in footnote numbers 38 and 39 above, as well as, Srinivas (1962, 1966), Deliege (1993), Dumont (1980), Hutton (1946), and Charsley (1996).

<sup>41</sup> Some would argue that they have for so long been so far at the bottom that they must, indeed, be considered as completely outside of this structure.

over 6000 untouchable castes<sup>42</sup> which “are strictly endogamous and sometimes quite fastidious about avoiding each other.”<sup>43</sup> These ‘untouchables’ relation to other caste groupings is regionally differentiated, but almost universally legitimated by the *chaturvarna* framework (i.e. the Vedic splitting of society into four castes with ‘untouchables’ falling outside of this religiously sanctioned division) and the *varnasramadharm*a system (i.e. those norms and duties that underpin the maintenance of the chaturvarna framework), which have together provided license for the institution of caste for thousands of years.

Milner’s (1994) assessment of the breadth and reach of caste hierarchy in modern Indian society is helpful in understanding the invasive nature of the thousands-year-old institution of caste. He writes: “The proportion of the population that falls into each varna varies greatly by region, but in most areas, none of the top three varnas constitute as much as 10 percent of the population, and the total of these three is less than 30 percent.”<sup>44</sup> Logically this places the other roughly 70 percent of Indian population as either lower castes, Muslims or other religious/tribal minorities. But it is these top three varnas, in most Indian villages and regions, that control the majority of the available resources – in particular land, water, and other means of capital including ‘soft capital’ such as educational resources. This has resulted in an imbalanced and structurally violent system in which high castes have recourse to resources including social capital and social networks, to which low castes just do not have access. In a February 2007 Human Rights

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<sup>42</sup> Interviews with TBMSG movement leaders and International Center for Dalit Rights (ICDR) activists.

<sup>43</sup> Deliege (1993), 535.

<sup>44</sup> Milner (1994), 46.

Watch report, the authors write: “Only ten percent of Dalit households have access to sanitation (as compared to 27 percent of non-dalit households).”<sup>45</sup> Such imbalances in access to structural resources are perpetuated by endemic and often discounted unequal opportunity for social mobility among the lower castes. Mungekar (1999) reports that “in the year 1987, in as many as 41 universities in the country the share of SC communities in the grades of professors, assistant professors and lecturers was 0.61, 1.04, and 3.16 percent respectively.”<sup>46</sup> Such figures confirm the unequal nature of a system in which nearly 25 percent of the population has little or no opportunity to progress. It is such inequities that run rampant across Indian society and perpetuate the structural imbalances apparent after centuries of caste. Yet, as rich Indians have increasingly used their means to circumvent interacting with what many describe as a failed Indian state, such inequities have only continued to grow. So as Indians with means flee the public education system en masse, “99 percent of Dalit students are enrolled in government schools that lack basic infrastructure, classrooms, teachers, and teaching aids.”<sup>47</sup> Such realities are what make it difficult for most to overcome caste discrimination. In fact, such modern realities also highlight the adaptability of caste as an institution of social group formation.

India’s human development indicators do not paint any less bleak a picture of the relative place of India’s progress on the world stage, a ‘progress’ that could be attributed, at least in part, to India’s caste-based structure of society. In 2007-08, India ranked 128 out of 177 countries on the United Nations Development Program’s Human Development

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<sup>45</sup> Barbour, S., Palikovic, T., Shah, J., & Narula, S. (2007), 14.

<sup>46</sup> Mungekar (1999), 294.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 13.

Index (HDI).<sup>48</sup> Despite moving up in rank from previous studies, in relation to India's astounding annual economic growth rate of close to eight percent during the same year period, India's HDI movement has been minimal. In the area of adult literacy, India finds itself wedged between Malawi and Sudan, two extremely poor and completely underdeveloped states, with a literacy rate of only 61% of people 15 and older.<sup>49</sup> India fares only slightly better on the percentage of students enrolled in primary, secondary, and tertiary education at 63.8%.<sup>50</sup> With a 16.8% probability that a citizen will not survive past the age of 40, India's health indicators reveal as dismal a picture.<sup>51</sup> The fact is that India, though consistently increasing in terms of various economic development indicators since economic liberalization in 1991, remains extremely underdeveloped. As was recently reported in *The Washington Post*, "Although India's economy is booming, poverty runs deep. Nearly half of all Indian children are clinically malnourished or underweight, on par with the rate in Bangladesh and worse than Ethiopia..."<sup>52</sup>

The brunt of this underdevelopment is felt by those that find themselves in the lowest castes of society. Based on the government of India's own statistics, about 220 million people, or nearly one quarter of the country's population, are living below the

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<sup>48</sup> [http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_IND.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_IND.html) accessed December 9, 2008. The UNDP human development index (HDI) looks beyond GDP to a broader definition of well-being, which includes: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and educational enrollment) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity and income). While the index does not include important indicators such as gender, caste, ethnicity, income inequality, or degree of political freedoms in a society, it does provide is a rubric with which to view human progress over time and compare it to other nations.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Wax, (December 9, 2008).

poverty line.<sup>53</sup> The majority of these impoverished souls are Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Castes (OBCs). These people live on less than a dollar a day and have little or no opportunity to change their condition. In short, India's economic disparities seem to correlate quite closely with its caste-based social divisions. For example, in 20 to 25 percent of 565 villages surveyed in 11 Indian states, it was found that dalits earned lower wage rates for the same work done by higher castes.<sup>54</sup> In addition, India's National Sample Survey for 1999/2000 revealed that while the rural population that fell below the poverty line was 27.09%, dalit or SC populations that fell below the poverty line in these same rural areas was 36.25%.<sup>55</sup> Finally, in holding other factors such as age, occupation, and gender constant, Kabeer (2006) notes that SCs were still "19 percent more likely to be poor than the rest of the population."<sup>56</sup> All these statistics point to the fact that the bottom rungs of the economic ladder in India are disproportionately filled with the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.economywatch.com/indianeconomy/poverty-in-india.html> - accessed December 9, 2008. There is wide disagreement about how to determine the poverty line in India – if one takes the World Bank's definition of the poverty line (US\$ 1/day/person or US \$365 per year) then the number of those living under it is much larger than stated above. "As per this definition, more than 75% of all Indians are, probably, below the poverty line!" [http://www.wakeupcall.org/administration\\_in\\_india/poverty\\_line.php](http://www.wakeupcall.org/administration_in_india/poverty_line.php) - accessed December 9, 2008. As Sen (1997) correctly argues, there are "strong arguments for distinguishing between (1) the diagnostic poverty line and (2) the immediately imperative income-support line. The latter exercise is, of course, clearly ethical and value based, but even the former – mainly descriptive – subject cannot be seen as being 'value free'" (167).

<sup>54</sup> See Barbour, S., Palikovic, T., Shah, J., & Narula, S. (2007), Appendix 1, 113.

<sup>55</sup> National Sample Survey for 1999/2000 quoted in Barr, E., Durston, S., Jenkins, R., Onodo, E., & Pradhan, A. (June, 2007), 5. It is important to note that the gap between these figures was even wider when looking at the urban areas studied.

<sup>56</sup> Kabeer, N. (March 2006), 3 quoted in Barr, E., Durston, S., Jenkins, R., Onodo, E., & Pradhan, A. (June, 2007), 5.

Still, even though the gap between rich and poor seems to be widening,<sup>57</sup> and dalits appear to be on the bottom of this gap, the political opportunities for change abound. Despite deep social and economic inequalities, new social and economic circumstances and relationships are slowly weakening caste. Further, as the largest democracy in the world, India allows for a vibrant civil society sector which social movements often take advantage of to frame and disseminate their message.<sup>58</sup> Given that caste issues cross-cut so many realities of public life, various social movements are at any one moment actively fighting various aspects of the broader caste problem.

Lokamitra, the founder of TBMSG has, himself, delimited the objectives of his movement. He has said “Ambedkar started a many-faceted movement. TBMSG does not pretend to work in all these areas. It is especially concerned with the area of Buddhist teaching and practice which had been largely neglected since the conversion.”<sup>59</sup> Still, since 1998, under the auspices of an independent, but related Jambudvipa Trust, Lokamitra has become increasingly involved in projects that are aimed at social renewal as opposed to just Buddhist teaching or practice. Though underlying all work of the family of TBMSG organizations is a belief that Buddhist practice will eventually eradicate the social, psychological, and economic ramifications of caste discrimination, such long-term optimism has given way to an immediate and pragmatic desire for a more

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<sup>57</sup> As recently reported, “the number of dollar millionaires has increased to 100,000 according to government data.” Wax. (December 9, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> A perfect example of this phenomenon can be seen in the opportunity space created by the recent Mumbai Terrorist attacks which began November 26, 2008. These events have opened up anti-government activism around the poor response to the attacks and activist organizations have led in the organizing.

<sup>59</sup> Lokamitra, (1991), 1303.

robust engagement with social action. Such a pragmatism and sense of immediacy has evolved slowly through the life of the TBMSG movement.<sup>60</sup> In order to tell that story, it is important to situate the identity of the Ambedkar Buddhists of the TBMSG within the wider Ambedkar movement and to address their particular capacity to attack the problems briefly summarized above. The fact is that the story of the TBMSG rests on many other inter-related stories.

### ***1.1.2 Who are the Ambedkar Buddhists of the TBMSG?***

*October 2, 2006 - 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar's Conversion to Buddhism:*

The tension and excitement were palpable. Thousands of blue bandana-wearing youth shouted and waved their fists towards the sky from atop buses, rooftops, and the numerous teetering light-posts that dotted the divided thoroughfare. Crowds of revelers lined the street leading to the main entrance of the giant stupa-like structure that marked the spot, in Nagpur City, where 50 years earlier Dr. B.R. Ambedkar led one of history's largest mass religious conversion ceremonies. Like much in India, this celebratory atmosphere, in which people seemed to fill every crevice of available space, attacked all the senses. It was clear that many of the revelers were happy to be there -- not to revere Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism, but to show that they existed; that Ambedkar's organizing had given them a distinctly new identity; that they could not be simply disregarded and de-legitimized. Yet, it was also clear that this was a religious pilgrimage

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<sup>60</sup> One rationale for this slow evolution towards practical action could be due to the fact that just as Indian society began to open up political and economic opportunities to foreign investment in the post-liberalization period Lokamitra and the TBMSG also opened and began making more and more foreign contacts across Asia and even in North America.

for many – a show of support for the deified *bodhisattva* Ambedkar and his important embrace of a socially engaged Buddhism aimed at the betterment of dalits. Within such a dynamic atmosphere, the schisms of the Ambedkarite movement can be more clearly seen and understood. In attempting to understand who the Ambedkar Buddhists of the TBMSG are, it is important to first start with what they are not.

The boisterous youth in blue bandanas were members of the Samata Sainik Dal (SSD), a youth organization that was originally begun by Dr. Ambedkar in 1927 to rally support for the Mahad Satyagraha.<sup>61</sup> A vestige of Ambedkar’s secular political organizing, the SSD, though largely comprised of Ambedkar Buddhists, advocates a strictly secular rights-based agenda – exposing atrocities against dalits and protesting when the government does not take quick enough action against discrimination and oppression. On the other hand, the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG), a vestige of Ambedkar’s conversion history and identity, is a religious organization that, at least originally, stayed out of direct political organizing in favor of teaching Buddhist dharma practice to newly converted Ambedkar Buddhists. Though these opposite ends of the Ambedkarite spectrum often disagree over movement strategy and tactics, on this day any disagreement was subdued. Buddhist flags adorned activists of all persuasion and flew on the rickshaws and buses of the SSD, TBMSG, and all other Ambedkarites present. As Kantowsky (2003) explains, “Buddhists in India today can be

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<sup>61</sup> Kshirsagar, R.K. (1994), 102. The Mahad Satyagraha remains a highpoint in Ambedkarite activists’ remembrance of their leader Dr. Ambedkar. In 1927 Ambedkar lead a group of local ‘untouchables’ in Mahad to the local Chawdar water tank and drank from it (an act that was prohibited by the local Brahminical order). In the non-violent protests that followed Dr. Ambedkar was beaten along with other protesters.

appropriately understood only as a diverse multitude of groups, each with its own peculiar characteristics.”<sup>62</sup> This is certainly the case with the sub-group of Indian Buddhists known as Nava (new) Buddhists, who converted to Buddhism following Ambedkar’s 1956 conversion. Encircled by a group of karate students from TBMSG-sponsored youth hostels, the group of TBMSG supporters and friends I was tagging along with filed into the stupa for their annual circumambulation of Ambedkar’s ashes. These ashes had been placed inside the *Dikshabhumi* (conversion site) stupa soon after it was erected in the early 1990s. Due to the huge crowds, this was a speedy procession, encircled as much to keep everyone together in the larger crowd as to show TBMSG’s force in numbers. Everything in such an atmosphere is public discourse and TBMSG clearly wanted to make its identity known. My own presence, as a foreigner, undoubtedly added to this public discourse. TBMSG members and friends happily participating in this religious ritual was intended to send a message to other Ambedkarites; a message that said working to perfect oneself is the first step in perfecting society. This emphasis on practice (meditation and self-cultivation in this group has become synonymous with practice) is the hallmark of TBMSG members’ ideology.

Still, from an outsider’s perspective, the excitement and revelry of the crowd was eclipsed only by a veneer of social conflict. One could even talk about levels of social conflict – inner ones between Ambedkarites themselves and outer ones between

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<sup>62</sup> Kantowsky (2003), 58.

Ambedakrites and non-dalit ‘others.’ Just a street away from the Dikshabhumi conversion site was a different kind of reveler. You see, October 2, 2006, was also the confluence of the start of a major Hindu festival – *Divali* - and a national holiday - *Gandhi Jayanti*. While the tension between Ambedkar supporters and either those celebrating the Hindu festival of lights, or those celebrating the birth anniversary of M.K. Ghandi, could have easily risen to a level of violence, it did not on this day in Nagpur. The sacredness and ritual of the religious experience of a pilgrimage to Dikshabhumi seemed to trump secular political disagreements that Ambedkar dalits in the crowd would surely share with their Hindu counterparts and/or supporters of Gandhi. Just as the divisions between the segmented arms of the Ambedkarite movement seemed to take a back seat to the auspiciousness of this day, so did the irrational potential for violence among large crowds of diametrically opposed collectives take a back seat to decorum. Religion here seemed to hold all answers, or was there something else that might help explain the veneer of social conflict not turning to expressions of anger and violence? Despite a lack of attention to this question in the literature on Ambedkar Buddhists,<sup>63</sup> the veneer of social conflict is not denied by even TBMSG leaders.<sup>64</sup> Surely, the distinctly religious framing of an Ambedkar Buddhist identity, seamlessly interconnected with the

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<sup>63</sup> During the course of this research I found only one reference to this problem. Kantowsky (2003) remarking on the potential for social conflict among New Buddhists in religious procession says: “As is well known, processions in India are often a cause for the outbreak of brutal excesses because they are aimed at provoking emotions of people of a different faith” (36). But, in attempting to explain why this aspect of the New Buddhist movement has not been explored, Kantowsky (2003) only offers the following explanation: “This may have something to do with the fact that New Buddhism in Maharashtra is a new subject for investigation by social sciences, and is very difficult to deal with” (36).

<sup>64</sup> In a personal interview with Lokamitra in October of 2007, he admitted the potential for social conflict, but insisted on the necessity of ritual occasions for continuing to build collective identity as newly awakened and self-aware Buddhists.

social problematic of the caste system's identity politics, fits the Indian socio-political context well – a context where such 'secular' versus 'religious' distinctions are rarely, if ever, made. But what does this blending of both a political and religious identity say about those who consider themselves Ambedkar Buddhists? And further, what can comparing this identity with amorphous 'others' in the public sphere do for an improved understanding of Ambedkar Buddhists?

It is the above questions that are rarely asked in attempts to answer the question who are Ambedkar Buddhists. In fact, such questions, even among Ambedkar Buddhists, seem to be taboo – it is as if a desired unity in the Ambedkar Buddhist identity trumps any desire for deeper reflection on the divisions within the community. The reason for this may well be the difficulty with which low-caste leaders, including Ambedkar, have always had with creating a pan-Indian identity for their people. As one TBMSG leader puts it: "Caste is not just high-middle-low; it is graded inequality in which there is low-lower-lowest."<sup>65</sup> Since caste is a marker of both your occupation (varna) and your birth (jati), both socially exclusive markers, when cooperation and social interaction is able to be developed between distinct caste groupings, a tendency arises to restrict any discourse that could potentially disrupt this social cooperation. The auspicious 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ambedkar's conversion provided an opportunity to celebrate together, but internal divisions remain in the Ambedkar community. Such social divisions restrict reflection and hamper the construction of a shared and equally coherent social justice vision.

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<sup>65</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwalé and Maitreyanath Dhammakirti, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007.

The comparison of TBMSG Buddhists to another self-proclaimed Ambedkar Buddhist organization is informative here. Professing to be the vanguard of a dalit Buddhist population of nearly 10 million strong,<sup>66</sup> the TBMSG is certainly a major force in Maharashtraian Buddhism but not the only one. The *Bharatiya Bauddha Maha Sabha* (Buddhist Society of India), an organization that Ambedkar founded in 1955 over his disdain for the Brahmin-controlled Maha Bodhi Society, also has considerable reach and appeal among Ambedkar Buddhists.<sup>67</sup> With organizational branches in every major city of Maharashtra<sup>68</sup> the Bharatiya Bauddha Maha Sabha (BBMS) is a membership organization which leads Buddhist conversion ceremonies and processions in addition to employing a Bhikku order (of which all the monks are from Sri Lanka). In three random interviews of dalit Buddhist families in the Pune slums, each had a certificate of conversion from the Bharatiya Bauddha Maha Sabha, but seemed to have little other institutional connection with Buddhism (including with TBMSG who manages the *Dhammachakra Pravartan Mahavihar*, its largest Buddhist vihara, in Dapodi, Pune's largest slum, just minutes away from the homes in which these interviews were conducted).<sup>69</sup> In fact, the general reputation of BBMS is that it organizes politically around Buddhism but does not support education as to how to practice Buddhism. This is

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<sup>66</sup> Kantowsky (2003) quotes D.C. Ahir (1991) is stating that “more than 6.5 million Buddhists were counted in the Census of 1991. However in 1890 only 50,000 Buddhists were supposedly left in India” (19). This large increase over this century, he credits largely to Dr. Ambedkar's conversion in Nagpur, Maharashtra and the State specific data for 1951, 1971, and 1991 that he provides strongly supports this claim [see Kantowsky (2003), 20.]

<sup>67</sup> See Kantowsky, (2003).

<sup>68</sup> Ahir (1991), 136.

<sup>69</sup> Formal interviews with families in Dapodi, Pune's largest slum, July 1, 2008.

where TBMSG sees itself as the vanguard of Ambedkar Buddhism. Theirs is a Buddhism which, though sensitive to the political organizing mantle of Ambedkar's legacy, in fact, stresses education as Ambedkar's most important bequest. For TBMSG, learning the practice of Buddhism (the dharma) cannot be divorced from this activity of organizing. TBMSG strives for inclusion, and works to bring together various low-castes in dialogue and cooperation, but ironically, due to its middle class support and foreign connections, it is often seen as elitist by Ambedkar Buddhists on the lowest classes of society. Such suspicions, along with TBMSG's largely Mahar membership ranks, have plagued its ability to appeal to a majority of dalit Buddhists while simultaneously appearing to be completely egalitarian and inclusive.

In returning to the concept of the 'other' for additional comparison, TBMSG can be further understood. Remarkably, Nagpur is a city that has seen both the rise of dalit identity politics and the rise of the Hindutva youth organization, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS).<sup>70</sup> The fact that Nagpur is the historical center of the Ambedkar Buddhist conversion movement and the Hindutva activism of the RSS draws attention to the shared discursive space of these movements. Despite little to no direct

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<sup>70</sup> The term "Hindutva" is derived from the two terms "Hindu Tattva," which literally mean "Hindu Principles." Hindutva became an operational ideology via two main sentiments in pre-independence India; the fear of outsiders defaming, destroying, and subsequently bringing about the loss of Hindu identity, and the desire to take active political steps in order to insulate Hinduism from foreign rule and oppression. The first sentiment resulted in the formation of a social service organization, the other the formation of a political movement (Ram-Prasad, 2003). The social organization formed was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), while the political movement went through various periods of gestation culminating in the current Sangh Parivar family of Hindu nationalist based political parties, the most prominent of which is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Though these manifestations of Hindutva were initially separate responses to the perceived threat of colonialism and modernization they later melded together under an identity of Hindu nationalism and communalism.

interaction, these movements, from their respective beginnings in Nagpur, have been in a discursive public encounter with each other. Ambedkar Buddhists' desire for inclusion runs counter to the RSS discourse of exclusion and, though this point of comparison (or direct reference to the other) is never made explicit in their speech, this difference is an important aspect of Ambedkar Buddhist identity. Counter-acting the exclusive rhetoric<sup>71</sup> of the *Sangh Parivar* (family of Hindu radical right religious parties) is an important aspect of the Ambedkar Buddhist conversion identity. Since Hinduism was the root cause of caste discrimination, conversion is understood by Ambedkar Buddhists as the best means of escaping the suffocating culture on Hinduism. It is such an outright expression of Hindu nationalism and chauvinism that provides the motivation for a more moderate inclusive discourse among Ambedkar Buddhists. It is in this broad discursive terrain that dalits are constantly negotiating with non-dalits over the legitimacy of the traditional system. This discursive contention, along with a conversion identity which focuses on education for practice, positions Ambedkar Buddhists in conflict with the Hindu right. But, more importantly, as a major purveyor of a narrative storyline of Buddhist identity, TBMSG is positioned as an important sub-group within the wider dalit movement. Ambedkar Buddhists' ability to offer a self-aware conversion identity is an important counter to the exclusion of the Hindu right. Having just scratched the surface of understanding both who Ambedkar Buddhists are and where the TBMSG fits into this

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<sup>71</sup> As an example of this exclusive rhetoric a spokesman for the RSS was recently quoted in the Washington Post reacting to the arrests of some Hindu radicals expected of involvement in a September 2008 bombing of a Muslim teashop in Malegon, India saying "you cannot call it Hindu terrorism. If you must, then call it retributive terrorism" [Lakshmi (November 25, 2008).]

wider Ambedkarite social movement, it is time to supplement this picture with some history and context to TBMSG's "engaged Buddhist"<sup>72</sup> activism. Beyond comparing TBMSG to what it is not, it is also important to provide an historical outline of TBMSG's work.

### ***1.2 A Place in History: Ambedkar, the TBMSG, and its Related Organizations***

Before going too much further into the social justice foundations and conceptions of Ambedkar Buddhists, it is important to take a step back and say a few words about the important personage of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his influence on the TBMSG movement. It is the life and legacy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar that laid the first foundation for the TBMSG movement to find a platform for its vision of a 'dharma revolution.' Sketching Ambedkar's biography and influence provides the space for an overview discussion of the TBMSG's mission and structure.

As both a social reformer from within the government, and then later a cultural reformer from the outside, Dr. Ambedkar's life represents a balancing between two, not incompatible, religious and secular identities. While many people outside the Indian sub-continent are familiar with Mahatma Gandhi, few who live outside of India know much about Dr. Ambedkar, or for that matter much about the conversion movement that he helped spawn. Both his political significance as the foremost representative of the Mahar

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<sup>72</sup> The initial use of the term 'engaged Buddhism' is credited to Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist, who wrote a book of that title in 1963 and was an active voice against the Vietnam War. A Mahayana approach to Buddhism, engaged Buddhism is akin to the 1970s liberation theology movements in Christianity – advocating a focus on practice in this world coupled with a "new awareness of the social and institutional dimensions of suffering" [Queen (1996), 10]. For a complete discussion of the historical and soteriological implications of engaged Buddhism see Chappell (1999), Queen and King (1996), Kotler (1996), and Kraft (1999), among others.

‘untouchable’ community in Maharashtra and the religious importance he played in changing the social identity and spiritual commitments of that particular community of dalits through a revival of Buddhism are unrivaled throughout India’s long historical development. Ambedkar’s prolific written legacy, role as chairman of the drafting committee for the Indian constitution, as well as his call to all former “untouchables” to convert to Buddhism makes him the most influential leader of scheduled caste contention even over fifty years after his death. Indeed, his life narrative is so compelling, and his influence so wide, that Indians of all political persuasions still attempt to appropriate his image, much as American politicians attempt to appropriate the personage of Abraham Lincoln.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956),<sup>73</sup> affectionately known by his followers as Babasaheb, overcame the cultural and economic impasses of being born an ‘untouchable’ Mahar (i.e. one of three major low-caste segments of Maharashtra society). Breaking through countless stereotypes, Ambedkar was taught early of the importance of education, and he used the social cleavages that the British administrative policy provided to transcend his socially prescribed role. Studying under the famous pragmatist John Dewey at Columbia University in the 1920s, Ambedkar returned to India as one of its most educated men. Rising to the post of Law Minister in Nehru’s first independent Indian cabinet, he was appointed chairman of the drafting committee for the new constitution. From this vantage point, Ambedkar was well-placed to destroy the legal

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<sup>73</sup> See Appendix A at the end of the proposal for a timeline of the important events in Dr. Ambedkar’s life.

foundations of the caste system, and in 1948 Ambedkar presented his draft of the Indian constitution, which was accepted a year later. In it can be seen Ambedkar's push to get social change codified legalistically. This part of Ambedkar's legacy culminates in Article 17 of the Indian Constitution, which states:

Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'untouchability' shall be an offense punishable in accordance with the law.<sup>74</sup>

But despite this important legal success, Dr. Ambedkar slowly began to realize that structural reform was only one means to his larger goal of social change in India. Increasingly frustrated that change was not coming to his people fast enough, he began to believe that social revolution was necessary and this could come only from actively critiquing the cultural structure of Hinduism, as opposed to attempting to change it from within.

Similar to later conflict resolution scholars, the trailblazing Ambedkar seemed to be formulating the important question: "Will we contribute to harmony through conflict resolution, but do so at the cost of accepting the continuation of some injustice? Or should we pursue justice for a particular group, knowing that this pursuit may increase conflict rather than resolve it?"<sup>75</sup> Gradually coming to believe the answer to such a question was a resounding call for justice, Dr. Ambedkar began to focus more on societal rather than structural locus of change.

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<sup>74</sup> Ling (1980), 88-89.

<sup>75</sup> Hubbard (2001), 276.

Ambedkar's identity evolved throughout his life to one of social activist, and the evolution of his growth and thought can be seen clearly in his prolific writings.<sup>76</sup> During the latter part of his career, Ambedkar increasingly began to see religion as the means to realize change through socio-cultural critique. As an answer to his discontent with the structural violence imposed by the caste system, religion provided a vehicle to restructure social discourse and remake the foundational values of the social structure. Thus, by 1935, Ambedkar had decided that Hinduism was the root cause of the 'untouchable' problem and had resolved to change his religion as a result. This was a full-on castigation of Hinduism as the root cause of non-rational beliefs and practices that led to caste injustice. Encouraging all 'untouchables' communities to join this cause, he enumerated the benefits of changing one's religion:

If you want to gain self-respect, change your religion.  
If you want to create a cooperative society, change your religion.  
If you want power, change your religion.  
If you want equality, change your religion.  
If you want independence, change your religion.  
If you want to make the world in which you live happy, change your religion.<sup>77</sup>

It is clear that Ambedkar saw religion as a social vehicle as much as others' saw it as a spiritual answer to the mysteries of what awaits one after death. For Ambedkar, choice of religions was a means to social change in the present. By changing religious traditions he, as a leader, could change society. Thus, he waged a polemical and rhetorical war

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<sup>76</sup> For a complete list of his writings see Rodriguez's (2002) bibliography and the 16 Volumes entitled Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches edited by Vasant Moon and brought out by the Government of Maharashtra (1979-98).

<sup>77</sup> Queen (1996), 51. This is a quote from Ambedkar's speech at Yeola, Nagpur in 1935 - the same speech in which he promised to not die a Hindu. This speech sparked intense debate both within and outside the untouchable community.

against Hinduism.<sup>78</sup> By declaring that though he was born a Hindu he would certainly not die one, Ambedkar challenged the orthodox beliefs of Indian culture head on, and was either reviled or loved for this audacity (depending on one's position within the social order of course). These acts created both debate and criticism, and Gandhi, upon hearing Ambedkar speak, was once said to have remarked, "Religion is not like a horse or a cloak, which can be changed at will. It is a more integral part of one's self than one's own body."<sup>79</sup>

Yet, while Gandhi criticized the idea of a 'choice' in religion, Ambedkar studied all the world's faiths in order to find the one, which would best fit his 'untouchable' communities' needs. The act of choosing his religion was, for Ambedkar, the cement of his re-positioned identity. As the answer to many of the needs of his untouchable community, it was an act of social protest and self-help rolled into one. If his more outwardly social protests brought spite from Brahmins (the highest castes of society), his re-positioned identity as a Buddhist would bring him deification among his own 'untouchable' community – something with which he himself was said to feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1956, on the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buddha's Nirvana, Ambedkar led a mass conversion of 'untouchable' Hindus to

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<sup>78</sup> Probably his most reviled act was his infamous burning of a copy of the revered Hindu guide to social order, the Manusmriti. This act brought spite from both high-caste conservative and reform-minded Hindus alike, and with it Ambedkar became increasingly seen as radical and dangerous.

<sup>79</sup> Queen (1996), 51.

Buddhism.<sup>80</sup> This was the culminating act of his now re-positioned identity and in writing his own vows<sup>81</sup> upon taking refuge Ambedkar ensured that he had created what some religious scholars have called “neo-Buddhism.”<sup>82</sup> Through this re-positioned identity, he legitimated a new social perspective; Buddhism just happened to be a means to the end of creating a new worldview and social discourse. Since only six months after his controversial conversion, Ambedkar died, it is not completely clear what form of institutionalization his Buddhism would have taken. As mentioned above he did form a Buddhist society called the Bharatiya Bauddha Maha Sabha, which his son Yashwant Ambedkar and then later his second wife Savita Ambedkar headed upon his death,<sup>83</sup> but this organization itself has been divided about the direction of Ambedkar’s Buddhist legacy. What is clear is that Ambedkar ignited a revitalization of Buddhism on the Indian sub-continent, and many organizations took up various aspects of the excitement generated by Ambedkar 1956 conversion. By inspiring many a social activist, and, of course, living up to his promise to not die a Hindu, Ambedkar began a socially engaged conversion movement which thrives today. The TBMSG sees itself as promoting the most important aspect of Ambedkar’s conversion – the re-emergence of the Buddhist dharma in India.

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<sup>80</sup> “Approximately 380,000 untouchables took part in the outdoor ceremony” [Queen (1996), 54]. Indeed scholars disagree as to the actual size of this event, but most agree that it is probably the largest mass religious conversion in human history. Some have estimated that as many as 800,000 untouchables converted to Buddhism that day.

<sup>81</sup> For a list of Ambedkar’s 22 vows taken upon his refuge to Buddhism see Appendix B.

<sup>82</sup> See Queen (1996).

<sup>83</sup> Kantowsky (2003), footnote number 4, p. 25-26.

### ***1.2.1 A Network of Dalit Activism: The Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana***

The correct view is that religion, like language, is social for the reason that either is essential for social life and the individual has to have it because without it he cannot participate in the life of the society. - From a speech by Babasaheb Ambedkar, Maharathi May 30, 1936.

The Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG – literally ‘The Association of Friends of the Buddhist Order of the Three Realms’<sup>84</sup>) today is the largest indigenous Buddhist organization on the Indian sub-continent. Professing to have over 10 million Indian Buddhist followers,<sup>85</sup> TBMSG is larger than many Christian religious denominations in the United States, and indeed much larger than its parent organization the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) in England.<sup>86</sup> An institutionally-based Buddhist revival may have seemed strange a few centuries ago, in the land of Gotama Buddha’s birth, but today it is reality. In a cultural context where Hindu belief in polytheistic pluralism all but limited religious difference to Hindu sectarianism, and Islam was on the constant guard of the Hindu majority, the chance for a mass resurgence of Buddhism seemed slim without the vision of three important figures, and their religious and political thought. The lives of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (outlined briefly above), an English Buddhist monk named Sangharakshita, and one of his disciples, Lokamitra, all intertwine to create the story of the TBMSG.

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<sup>84</sup> See Sponberg (1996), 76 and Ganguly (2005), 156. Kantowsky (2003) translates TBMSG slightly differently as the “Union of the Helpers of the Buddhist Great Order of the Three Worlds” (135).

<sup>85</sup> This figure is disputed by other dalit rights activists as well as by other Ambedkar Buddhist groups.

<sup>86</sup> In 1991, the number of FWBO members worldwide was estimated to be only about 100,000 [Baumann (2000), 372].

As Sponberg (1996) states in introducing Western readers to TBMSG: “Buddhist rebirth has manifested itself at opposite ends of the country’s complex social spectrum.”<sup>87</sup> On one end of this spectrum, British colonials and Indian Brahmin intellectuals have focused on Buddhism’s textual and philosophical analysis; on the other resides an interest in Buddhism’s practice in daily life. As opposed to the Tibetan Buddhists or Maha Bodhi Society intellectuals of North India, it is within this second segment of India’s Buddhist spectrum which TBMSG grew and flourished. TBMSG stresses a social doctrine and socio-political interpretation of historical Buddhism by placing a primary importance on the individual and stressing the role of Buddhist practice in bringing about both individual and collective change. Portrayed as a native system by its leaders, TBMSG’s Buddhist revival in India is made possible in relation to existing oppressive socio-political structures. The TBMSG brand of ‘new’ or ‘neo’ Buddhism would not hold without the reality of social and economic injustice its followers face on a day-to-day basis. It is the lower caste desire to overcome social stigma, and political powerlessness which gives TBMSG its strength and numbers, and as such the TBMSG movement is less a revival than an awakening in the true sense of the word – an awakening to the legacy of social and psychological injustice perpetuated against the individual. But in making such broad statements about TBMSG, it is important to differentiate between TBMSG as a social movement and TBMSG as a functioning organization.

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<sup>87</sup> Sponberg (1996), 73.

If Ambedkar's conversion was the catalyst for the movement of dalits to Buddhism, Sangarakshita's teachings were the catalyst for the formation of TBMSG as an organization. Sangarakshita (originally Dennis Lingwood) was born in 1925 in London, England. In 1944, just 19 years old, Lingwood was conscripted by the British army and found himself in India and Ceylon. In 1946, at the end of World War II, Lingwood applied for a six-week leave of absence from his post. Never returning to the British Army, and thus being classified as AWOL from his unit, Lingwood began a life-long study of Buddhism. In 1949, he was ordained as a shramanera or novice monk, and was given the name Sangharakshita. As a newly ordained monk, Sangharakshita chose to study under the Venerable Jagdish Kashyap, who held the chair in Pali and Buddhist studies at Benares Hindu University. After only a few years of study, on a visit to the Tibetan border hill station named Kalimpong, Sangharakshita was instructed by Kashyap to "work for the good of Buddhism," and was left completely on his own for the first time in his life.<sup>88</sup> This unorthodox arrangement (a Theravadan monk would typically follow the teacher under whom he was ordained for the rest of that teacher's life), allowed him to continue to study Buddhism while developing deep ties in the Indian Buddhist community. After twenty years in India, during which time he had some interaction on

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<sup>88</sup> Subhuti (1995), 39.

three occasions with Dr. Ambedkar,<sup>89</sup> in 1964, Sangharakshita decided to return to England to preach his Dharma, which was to him, like Ambedkar, an historical understanding of Buddhism based on the need for a modern re-interpretation.

After a few years of getting to know the English Buddhist scene, Sangharakshita decided that there was too much to do for Buddhism in England for him to return to India as he had originally planned. Sangharakshita started the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) on April 6, 1967. Ordaining nine men and three women as the nucleus of the Western Buddhist Order (WBO), the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) was intended for those unwilling to full-heartedly enter the Western Buddhist Order (WBO), but who had a desire to be in a like minded community of Buddhists. The stated purposes of the FWBO are “to encourage and facilitate the growth of real individuals,” and to “create a new society in the midst of the old.”<sup>90</sup> As the parent organization of the TBMSG, the FWBO provided a broad and radical vision of Buddhist life in the modern world. It is through this broad vision and institutional foundation that Sangharakshita has

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<sup>89</sup> While it is impossible here to outline all of the people and events that effected, and molded Sangharakshita’s specific understanding of Buddhism, his interactions with Dr. Ambedkar seems to have been influential to both his thinking and later developments of the TBMSG as an organization claiming the heritage of Ambedkar’s conversion. As a younger contemporary of Dr. Ambedkar, Sangharakshita undoubtedly first seemed to Ambedkar to represent the British colonial intellectual branch of modern Indian Buddhism, an institutionalized form of Buddhism that Ambedkar despised. The first question that Ambedkar is reported to have asked Sangharakshita upon their first meeting was: “Why does your Maha Bodhi Society have a Bengali Brahmin for its president?” [Sangharakshita (1991), 450] Sangharakshita’s intuitive distancing of himself from the Society built a relationship and on three separate occasions, these two men met, and found a similar kindred spirit in the subject of Buddhism’s social flourishing. It is said that on their second meeting Sangharakshita advised Dr. Ambedkar to ask U Chandramani (the senior Theravadan Bhikku in India at the time) to conduct his famous conversion ceremony. Of course, the veracity of this claim could be questioned, as the source of much of the hagiographic descriptions of Sangharakshita’s life come from the FWBO’s own publishing house - Windhorse Publishing. As Kantowsky (2003) says: “the works of members of the order are... not an unbiased source of information about New Buddhists in India” [Kantowsky (2003), 41].

<sup>90</sup> Baumann, 372.

spent the preceding years of his life (he is now 83), and from which the story of TBMSG originates.

The TBMSG as an organization was founded in 1979 by yet another Englishman named Jeremy Goody. While both Ambedkar and Sangharakshita were crucial to the formation of the TBMSG's 'ex-untouchable' base of support, it took the leadership of Dharmachari Lokamitra (a.k.a. Jeremy Goody), to organize and empower the community to act. Goody joined Sangharakshita's Western Buddhist Order (WBO) in 1972, and became ordained in 1974. In June 1974, while looking for a spiritual home for the FWBO, Lokamitra was "invaluable in mobilizing the energies of the movement,"<sup>91</sup> and raising funds. In October 1977, Lokamitra, now one of Sangharakshita's most senior disciples, decided to take a six-month study tour in India. Even though Sangharakshita had given him contacts and hoped that the FWBO could rekindle some of the work that Sangharakshita had left undone, it was by chance that Lokamitra happened across a rally in Nagpur, on the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the famous Ambedkar conversion. This event was the catalyst for Lokamitra's interest in the Ambedkarite ex-untouchables. Writing from Pune, Lokamitra saw the importance of the Buddhist community in India to the overall success of the FWBO:

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<sup>91</sup> Subhuti (1983), 141.

I think it is very likely that once the FWBO gets going in India, among ex-untouchables, it will be the fastest growing area of our activities... Twenty years ago a few million people changed their religion. They therefore want to know how to live, practice, and develop as Buddhists. It is vitally important to them... As far as I can see there is no one, besides Sangharakshita, and no other movement besides the FWBO, capable of working with the situation.<sup>92</sup>

The TBMSG organization was inaugurated in India in 1979, by Sangharakshita himself, and more ex-untouchables were converted by the newly formed Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha (TBM), the Indian branch of the WBO. Like the FWBO in England, the TBMSG was conceived of as a loose institutional arrangement in which a Buddhist Sangha could be created and fostered, while the TBM, like the English WBO, was the official body of religious ordination for both lay and monastic adepts alike. In other words, the TBMSG was the dharma work branch of the new Indian wing of the WBO (i.e. the TBM).<sup>93</sup> To institutionalize this structure, the TBMSG adopted the FWBO's hierarchy and ordination system. The path to becoming a *dharmachari* (feminine *dharmacharini*, an ancient Buddhist term that literally means 'dharma-farer,') is "a lifelong commitment, and a very serious step, so it usually takes a number of years."<sup>94</sup> As Kantowsky (2003) outlines:

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<sup>92</sup> Subhuti (1983), 147.

<sup>93</sup> For an overview of the structure and organizations which are run and managed by TBMSG members see Appendix C. The tripartite structure that Sponberg (1996) describes, though changed slightly with Lokamitra's inauguration of the Jambudvipa Trust in 1999, remains extremely complicated to unpack. As Sponberg writes: "Clarifying this tripartite structure in India is complicated, moreover, by the fact that TBMSG developed historically and institutionally as the Indian branch of the Western Buddhist Order and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order founded by Sangarakshita in the late 1960s" (76). On a practical level the distinctions between the various institutional structures of the TBMSG movement are unimportant to those working within the Indian TBMSG movement.

<sup>94</sup> [http://www.fwbo.org/fwbo/order\\_members.html](http://www.fwbo.org/fwbo/order_members.html) - accessed December 23, 2008.

The TBMSG distinguishes three steps of approaching the inner circle, which at present comprises approximately 180 dharmacharis and dharmacharinis [in India]. As a sahayak (helper), one is in sympathy with the work of the TBMSG and attends various meetings, but does not yet intend to make a further commitment to the movement. As a dhamma mitra (friend of the dhamma), one declares one's deep interest in the work and, following specific invitations, one attends regularly training courses and also meditation courses. As a dharmachari or dharmcharini, one has been trained for several years under the guidance of two Kalyana mitra (noble friends) and one has visited special retreats for candidates [and been granted an opportunity to partake in] the ritual of admission.<sup>95</sup>

As a radical departure from modern forms of Asian Buddhism, the TBMSG/FWBO blurring of the distinction between lay and monastic has allowed it to engage Indian society with an inclusiveness that other Buddhist institutions would find difficult. Dharmachari Lokamitra, following a loose interpretation of the Buddhist Vinaya similar to that of Sangharakshita before him,<sup>96</sup> both for reasons of TBMSG administration as well as acceptance into the 'Untouchable' community, left his robes and anagarika (wanderer) status to marry an untouchable woman. Since that time Lokamitra has been a consistent Western presence in the work of the TBMSG organization, and is largely responsible for the order becoming self-sufficient in terms of its administration. The TBMSG is now run almost entirely by ex-untouchables, but still relies heavily on financial support from England (see below).

“Central to both Sangharakshita's formulation of Buddhism, and to the TBMSG program to fulfill Ambedkar's vision is the notion of a Buddhist order that is neither lay

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<sup>95</sup> Kantowsky (2003), 144. Kantowsky (2003) reports that in 1997 Dharmachari Lokamitra stated that there were over 700 Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis worldwide, and about 180 in India alone (144).

<sup>96</sup> In fact, the FWBO's current website talks of rules in this way: “You cannot create a spiritual community by force. Therefore, no rules are necessary.” [www.fwbo.org](http://www.fwbo.org).

nor monastic.”<sup>97</sup> While both Sangharakshita and Ambedkar were converts to Buddhism and pushed for a new modern formulation of Buddhist doctrine, they both also sought to ground their Buddhism in a historical reconstruction of early Buddhism.<sup>98</sup> The basic principle of the TBMSG thus became to form a Sangha of Kalayana Mitra or ‘spiritual friendship.’ This belief, adopted from the FWBO’s own mission statement, is that without spiritual friendship the practice of the dharma is next to impossible. Here is where the institutional foundations of the TBMSG collide with TBMSG Buddhism and generate what will be referred to more broadly as the TBMSG movement.

Organizationally, what has evolved is a parallel system in India based on the FWBO model imported from England (with slight cultural adaptations of course), but culturally TBMSG has positioned itself as a broad-based movement for social change through shepherding the legacy of Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion.<sup>99</sup> From a pragmatic perspective, there appears to be little distinction in the TBMSG movement as whole between the FWBO and TBMSG sangha – friends are not bound by any formal institutional distinctions. Like their counterparts in the WBO, the TBM is not a strict monastic order either. While order members are free to marry (and indeed encouraged to inter-marry across caste-based traditional restrictions), they must always possess a full-time commitment to the dharma. The blurred distinctions between lay and monastic within the

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<sup>97</sup> Sponberg (1996), 86.

<sup>98</sup> Sponberg (1996) calls this a “neo-traditionalist approach” (85) and points out that Sangharakshita’s approach to Buddhism shows this best, by its insistence to not be tied to any one school or lineage.

<sup>99</sup> TBMSG’s own website explains their institution by reference to Sangarakshita as “well known and appreciated by Dr. Ambedkar.” And by describing Sangharakshita as a “translator between East and West, between [the] traditional world and [the] modern, between principles and practices” <http://www.tbmsg.org/index1.html> (accessed December 22, 2008).

TBMSG movement allows for multiple institutional expressions and movement adaptations. In such a modern sangha, distinct but connected spiritual communities thrive on the spirit of teamwork, and both individually and collectively can ‘go for refuge’ in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Specifically the TBMSG seeks to put the dharma into practice in three ways: 1.) by giving dharma course lectures, 2.) through retreats of intensive Buddhist practice, and 3.) through the creation of dharma communities in which members work together for the common good of that community. The first two of these institutional goals were immediately taken on by the TBMSG, while the third goal was a bit more problematic. In order to overcome obstacles of funding and programming, and to achieve the goals of this third practice of the dharma, the Indian TBM decided, with the help of some other Westerners, to create a social work arm of the organization. Thus the Bahujan Hitay “for the welfare of the many” was created, and the first public health project was started in Pune. Together with the work of the Bahujan Hitay, TBMSG uses its limited administrative skills and capital resources to press forward in the sphere of community development, by finding new means of livelihood for the dharma communities that it helped establish. With twenty dharma Centers situated throughout India (mostly in Maharashtra State), TBMSG is the setting for the community-based social work of Bahujan Hitay. These activities include health projects, educational hostels, kindergartens, and vocational training instruction. The initial problem of financing this work remains, but in 1987, with the creation in England of the Karuna Trust, new means of funding for existing projects in India was found. The Karuna Trust incorporated the

previous funding arm of Aid for India (AFI) and consolidated the parallel orders of the WBO and TBM's fund-raising contributions into one trust. The Karuna Trust now supports the dharma and social work projects of FWBO in the West, and the TBMSG and Bahujan Hitay, in India, and its mission statement reflects a desire to fund Buddhist humanitarian projects throughout the world.

Important to the success of the Karuna Trust was the early decision that focused on a certain type of fund-raising requirement under British tax law. "Under the covenanted contributions system, the government will provide a registered charity with matching funds equivalent to the tax paid on that portion of the donor's income if – and this was the crucial feature of the law – the donation was in the form of a seven-year covenant pledging an annual contribution."<sup>100</sup> This required the fund-raising teams from the FWBO to create intensive long-term relationships with the donors they were soliciting, and was seen as a new means of right livelihood for English FWBO members. The financial benefits of this type of fundraising were evident as early as 1981. "Total receipts for the first thirteen months of fundraising amounted to 33,091 pounds. More significant, however, was the fact that over half that amount was covenanted pledges that would eventually bring in 300,000 pounds as the seven year commitments ran their course."<sup>101</sup>

As one can clearly see all these foundational organizations make up a TBMSG/FWBO family of organizations with interrelated programming and financial

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<sup>100</sup> Sponberg (1996), 101.

<sup>101</sup> Sponberg (1996), 104.

structures which operate cooperatively, yet semi-autonomously. In this sense, the TBMSG has become an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) that, having only recently come to an understanding of their transnational potentials, has begun to solicit government and international donors as well as develop new trusts to pursue aspects of the wider movement that members deem as lacking support and needy of attention. TBMSG and Bahujan Hitay do still require most of their budgets from the Karuna Trust, but realize that there is a need to move further towards organizational self-sustainability. Despite this realization, diversification of funding has been a struggle and TBMSG as an organization lacks the professional capacity to move its message outside the network that association with the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) has long fostered. The same is not true of TBMSG as a movement; as a movement TBMSG has been able to attract young professional activists that have revitalized the work of the movement and indeed given it a ‘secular’ legitimacy.

In 1999, Lokamitra, realizing this need for diversification and frustrated with the constraints of Karuna Trust funding, founded a new Indian trust that he called Jambudvipa Trust. “Jambudvipa, the ancient Buddhist name for the Indian sub-continent, represents for us the transformation of society and culture through the ethical and spiritual values.”<sup>102</sup> Working on parallel tracts as the TBMSG and Bahujan Hitay, the Jambudvipa Trust runs a number of inter-related programs that are aimed at two areas of societal transformation: the support of “disadvantaged sections” of Indian society and

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<sup>102</sup> From *Padmapani*, the Annual review of the Jambudvipa Trust, 2007-2008, 4.

“bringing people together through spiritual practice to transcend barriers.”<sup>103</sup> These two rather broad aims find life in the work of the Manuski Center, the Pune-based home of Jambudvipa’s largest and fullest staffed project. Manuski, like Jambudvipa, has historical significance. As “one of the most significant words used by Dr. Ambedkar, [Manuski] has connotations of humanity, compassion, and respect.”<sup>104</sup> Run by local members of various scheduled castes, the Manuski Center embodies Dr. Ambedkar’s call to organize, educate, and agitate. In developing a network of activists to monitor and report on atrocities against dalits across India, Manuski was instrumental in organizing activism in response to the Khairlanji Massacre (see Chapter Four for more discussion of this incident and Manuski leadership’s role in organizing and agitating). Working with the Nagarjuna Institute at Nagaloka (another Jambudvipa project near Nagpur), Manuski has assisted in bringing in foreign speakers and lecturers, and educating students from across India for engaged Buddhist activism and agitation. The Jambudvipa Trust website lists Manuski as one of the current ‘projects’ that activists are engaged in, along with the following: The Nagarjuna Institute at Nagaloka (for more on this see Chapters Four and Five), the Women's Development Centre (Samata Mahila Society), response to the Gujarat Earthquake, Community Centers, Kondhanpur Retreat Centre, Tsunami Rehabilitation Work, Mumbai Flood Relief, and a ‘Right Livelihood’ Initiative called Jambhala (wealth and prosperity in support of the Buddhist life).<sup>105</sup> All these projects,

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>104</sup> *Manuski* (Informational Brochure). (2008), front cover.

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.jambudvipa.org/sec3.htm> (accessed December 26, 2008). For a basic schematic of how these projects related to the TBMSG family of organizations see Appendix C.

though working independently, are in continual contact and best understood as a family of organizations and projects with activists from one arm freely moving between other arms as opportunities are opened both organizationally and in the public sphere.

As should be clear from this brief overview of the TBMSG, it is a diverse spiritual and activist family of organizations engaged in a number of activities aimed at empowering both Buddhism and oppressed dalit communities throughout India. This socially engaged Buddhism can be, and has been, questioned as either neo-traditional or self-serving, but its strength and impact are testament to the power of a religiously-based collective identity. While the TBMSG continues to face severe funding constraints, which are exacerbated by a fear on the part of secular donors to mix religion and social development, TBMSG remains a force in Maharashtra and an important player in the teaching of Buddhist practice in India. While its own rhetorical statement that it is on the vanguard of turning all of India Buddhist may be fanciful, the TBMSG has indeed helped to develop the 'dharma revolution' that Ambedkar's conversion instigated. If judged by its strength in places like Pune and Nagpur, the TBMSG movement has accomplished a great deal in the nearly 30 years that it has been in existence as a formal organization and movement. The network of activists and social workers that the Jambudvipa Trust's Manuski Center has more recently helped to foster has enhanced TBMSG's presence in the realm of community organizing and activist agitation by working to expose atrocities against scheduled castes, providing professional capacity building and training to partner organizations, and engaging in various social development programs both nationally and internationally. Still the TBMSG must be seen as one Ambedkar dalit activist response

among many. Dr. Ambedkar's prolific life work acts as the basis for not just TBMSG but also other organizations across India.

### ***1.2.2 The TBMSG Discourse: Balancing Identity, Social Positioning, and Claims to Power***

The discourse of the TBMSG privileges a notion of social justice that implies often competing conceptions of social identity, social positioning, and power relations. While narratives of injustice are common among movement members, an overarching identity narrative of Buddhist often complicates the expression of these injustice narratives. The narrative structure of each of these identities does not fully support the other identity and, therefore, the story of the TBMSG is a continual balancing of these two identities: self-actualized Buddhist convert and oppressed victim of injustice. While a political identity as oppressed and discriminated against, if the sole focus of movement discourse, can become problematic for the disempowering agency that it reifies in social actors, such an identity can also mobilize people around their commonly held experiences. Similarly, while an identity of Buddhist convert can develop pride and self respect among formerly oppressed communities, it can also empower a newly exclusive worldview in which Buddhist practice is understood as the sole response to Hindu cultural chauvinism. It is in finding a balance between these two competing identities, and the power and social positioning opportunities and limitations they entail, that the TBMSG is actively engaging Ambedkar Buddhist converts. Embedded in this social engagement is an on-going negotiation of social justice conceptions. The chapters that follow argue that TBMSG's discursive bias towards a focus on creating the identity of self-aware Buddhists does not

allow activist narratives of injustice to have full voice. The implication of this discursive bias is that the TBMSG movement has not really answered the inherent problems of inter-caste coordination which the creation of a casteless society requires. Simply not engaging castes from 'higher' social strata, the TBMSG is missing the opportunity to have a wider impact on unjust caste structures. While such a statement is not meant to discount the important work that the TBMSG is currently engaged in, it is aimed at critically reflecting on how to make that work's impact and effectiveness more completely felt. While many TBMSG members understand this problematic of multiple narratives of identity, they have not, as far as I can see, critically reflected on how to overcome it.

Neither simply a Buddhist nor simply an oppressed identity provides the full social legitimacy needed by TBMSG to create and maintain social justice. In exploring both the justice narratives (the stories that people tell about fairness, equality, justice and/or their absence) and injustice narratives (retrospective stories of a lack of justice) of TBMSG members, it becomes clear that collective analytical reflection on social justice by TBMSG leaders and activists has been lacking. TBMSG's impoverished conception of social justice, therefore, can only be resolved through an open process of critical collective self-reflection. Agency in such a process resides within the movement and appears as socially constructed opportunities to dialogue with 'others,' however these 'others' might be defined. But, beyond traditional contact hypothesis,<sup>106</sup> such dialogue entails confronting injustice in the creation of new identities that are inclusive and

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<sup>106</sup> See Abu Nimer (1999) for a nice overview of contact hypothesis.

accepting of difference. Such dialogue and pluralism is often hard to create within organizations, but faith-based organizations<sup>107</sup> may be among the most fertile ground for such authentic value exchanges and social re-positioning of identity to occur. Faith-based organizations provide an overarching shared identity that is necessary to mobilize and engage around social justice claims, as well as, a textual tradition that is open to multiple interpretations, and, therefore, malleable as a means of creating this social change. In focusing on the narratives and story-telling practices of TBMSG social actors, creative means of developing and maintaining social justice can be explored and exposed. Such analysis results in the creation of a particular vision of social practice; the narrative structure of TBMSG justice/injustice narratives tells one a great deal about how to develop lasting solutions to caste inequality.

The solution to an impoverished conception of social justice is not solely an issue of obtaining economic or political power as some suggest.<sup>108</sup> True transformation of society entails a collective re-construction of social justice that arises from engagement with others. As Habermas articulates:

As long as we do not free ourselves from the naïve, situation-oriented attitude of actors caught up in the communicative practice of everyday life, we cannot grasp the limitations of a lifeworld that is dependent upon, and changes along with, a cultural stock of knowledge that can be expanded at any time.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Here the term faith-based organizations has been adopted from the politically correct parlance for religious-based organizations working for social welfare that came into vogue after President Bush “issued Executive Order 13198, creating Centers for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives” in January 2001 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/08/unlevelfield.html> (accessed December 29, 2008).

<sup>108</sup> See above comments on Chadra Bhan Prasad and capitalism or Omvedt’s (1993) reading of Marxist movements in India as a means to further this discussion.

<sup>109</sup> Habermas (1987), 133.

Beyond simply economic or political power, renewed social position, or a new identity, what oppressed dalits must strive for is a complete collective cultural shift. Such a shift requires a diversity of ‘others,’ both low and high caste. Further, while true that this shift is brought on by all the above solutions (political, economic, social), it is a collective engagement with and analysis of social justice that both ushers and maintains such a broad-based transformation of society. TBMSG’s challenge is to mediate the diversity of responses to collective engagement and fashion a collective solution that represents an unambiguous vision of social justice. This research provides a social constructionist analysis of TBMSG’s social justice vision which supports one representation of conflict resolution practice. The effectiveness of this conflict resolution practice, it will be argued, involves a process of social dialogue which must be co-constructed by a diversity of social actors.

### ***1.3 Epistemological Foundations, Scope, Assumptions, and Limitations of the Study***

Given the above discussion of the TBMSG movement’s discourse, one might ask: ‘Why the focus on narrative?’ Not only are narratives a smaller and more manageable medium to analyze than discourse, but attention to narrative structures, and particularly to narratives related to sense of justice/injustice, opens opportunities to transform conflict and construct avenues towards the realization of positive social change. A theory of knowledge is therefore built into the methods of this research. The methods employed in this dissertation – narrative analysis, ethnographic field notes, discourse analysis, and grounded theory/model building – are all to be seen upon the backdrop of two core objectives: action and research. Furthermore, in studying an activist movement like

TBMSG, attempts to delineate normative statements regarding what should and should not be done from descriptive ones regarding what is and is not true about the work becomes very problematic. In activists' minds, the distinction between theory and practice is fluid. Delineation requires assigning intention to social actors and such moves are often assumptive. Nonetheless, what actors say does hold a primary importance to understanding social movements. Social actors communicate through stories (narrative), and failure to realize this misses a crucial foundation of epistemology. Therefore, research focused on a movement like TBMSG requires close attention to narrative. Narrative and narrative structure provide a picture of the psychological and social processes of those involved in social action. Though intention is often very difficult to infer from narrative, the narrative structure of utterance can provide clues to meaning. No archival research will be able to adequately approach such lived experience and provide adequate solutions to the problems this lived experience presents.

While a detailed discussion of methodology and research questions can be found in Chapter Three, the remainder of this introductory chapter will outline the limitations, scope and assumptions of the research and its epistemology. The research epistemology of this work informs both practical action and science and is, therefore, understood to be intricately involved in research success. Since such an epistemology of social scientific inquiry can often seem broad and unbounded, the final sections of this introductory chapter are dedicated to discussion of the limitations, scope, and assumptions that my research of TBMSG entails, as well as, its broader relevance to conflict theory.

### ***1.3.1 Epistemology in Methods***

The epistemology of this research cannot be separated from its methods. As stated above, I believe there is no better way to approach lived experience than through the collection and analysis of narratives. Narratives, as ever evolving and never constant tropes of lived experience, are the manner in which humans convey meaning. As Polletta (2006) says, “Stories assimilate confusing events into familiar frameworks.”<sup>110</sup> Narratives are “bracketed in a flow of discourse.”<sup>111</sup> As socially constructed representations of reality, narratives provide the researcher with a discernable plot, structure, and timeline upon which to test their understanding of a situation, context, or dynamic of larger discursive systems. In this sense, my attention to narrative structures is imbued with an underlying theory of knowledge (social constructionism). “Together our ways of thinking and acting create society, but the opposite is also true: social institutions condition how we think and what we do.”<sup>112</sup> Narrative represents meaning within a society and is, therefore, the foundation of that society’s social institutions. For this reason, unpacking narrative requires not only an understanding of the conventions and norms of society but also an awareness of how the “dominant epistemologies of narrative have imposed constraints on how effectively people can use stories to press for change.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, the epistemology of social constructionism cannot be separated from

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<sup>110</sup> Polletta (2006), 34.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>112</sup> Loy (2008), 139.

<sup>113</sup> Polletta (2006), 27.

the work of narrative analysis, and by association, the lived experience cannot be approached outside of the discursive interaction that narratives create.

### ***1.3.2 Scope and Limitations***

This research highlights some, but not all, of the many paradoxes of narrative. Focusing on the ways in which TBMSG narratives condition and are conditioned by social norms of positioning, identity, and power, this research is limited to explaining these conditions with the lens of religious peace-building in mind. What will concern us here is the TBMSG movement's framing of story-telling practices, the narrative structures they employ, and how these social constructed conventions help to condition the movement's conception of social justice. TBMSG movement activists and leaders' choice of justice/injustice narratives acclimatize storylines to discursive context and, in turn, play a crucial role in constructing conceptions of social justice. With the aims of empowering the social justice work of TBMSG leaders and activists, while at the same time grounding their experience and knowledge for use by conflict resolution practitioners in other diverse contexts, the scope of this research is broad but bounded by a pragmatic use of theory for the benefit of practice.

The limitations of such research, as theory-building that unwraps the layers of worldview, is apparent from the fact that worldviews are as various as the number of humans alive at any given time. Further, each of these many worldviews is conditioned by a rich and infinite set of experiences which collectively build ones' identity. Still, from the collective viewpoint of social movement, these worldviews and sets of experience can be bounded and studied from a rich set of sociological, psychological, and

anthropological perspectives. As Polletta (2006) cogently argues, “The stories protesters tell to make sense of what is happening may compel others to listen and to act not by providing a sense of the ease or efficacy of protest, but by reproducing its inexplicable character.”<sup>114</sup> While narratives are a sticky and imprecise means to make claims about collective identity and action, they are extremely valuable nonetheless. The broad limitations of this study<sup>115</sup> are not specific to this research, but signal broader problems with the attempt to engage in completely objective approaches to social theory more generally. What this research aims to accomplish is an analysis of TBMSG’s social justice conception, which will, thereby, provide an illustration of the processes of social justice conceptualization that inform peace-building practice.

### ***1.3.3 Assumptions and Clarity on Definition of Terms***

Finally, it is important to be clear about the assumptions that lie dormant in this research and, in the process, to clarify the definitions of any terminology that may prove confusing or problematic as we move forward. This study makes the following three primary assumptions (in addition to a number of secondary assumptions detailed below): 1.) peace, as what Lederach (1997) describes as “a dynamic social construct,”<sup>116</sup> requires the sustained building of relationships, structures, and processes to transform rather than simply resolve conflict; 2.) protracted conflicts are fueled by both worldview commitments and the various conceptions of the ‘ideal’ that they engender, which in turn can be engaged towards positive transformation, and; 3.) justice/injustice narratives

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>115</sup> More specific limitations appear in the Chapter Three on Methodology.

<sup>116</sup> Lederach (1997), 20.

conveyed through story-telling practices are crucial to understanding and explaining the conflict transformation process and, therefore, to creating what Schirch (2004) has called “justpeace.”<sup>117</sup>

While it is clear that both justice and injustice narratives represent a subtle and reactive space through which the potential for conflict can be prevented and overcome, such narratives have often been overlooked when rational<sup>118</sup> or realist methods of conflict analysis and resolution trump techniques that focus on more intuitive pursuits such as the social construction of worldviews and relationships. In practice, while social actors’ unsophisticated conceptions underline a broader lack of critical social analysis of the virtue of justice, it is also true that social actors’ religious frames often get sidelined as irrational and counter-productive to a functionalist and positivist approach to conflict. As the social scientific focus on justice has been relegated largely to departments of philosophy, little attention has been focused on justice as a socially constructed concept connected to actor’s agency, decision-making, and group mobilization. Further, as Keller (2006) has convincingly argued:

Political and moral philosophy have primarily focused on the idea of a Just War. Countless books have examined the relationship between war and justice from a legal, political, or moral perspective... There has, however, been little research on the concept of Just Peace and its history.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Schirch (2004) states “justpeace recognizes that justice pursued violently only contributes to further injustice, and that peace without justice is unlikely to be sustainable” (16-17). The concept of justpeace is here understood to mean an ideal state in any peace-building continuum where not only positive peace reigns, but where the ‘justice’ of all conflicting parties is legitimized and given voice.

<sup>118</sup> Schirch (2001) outlines and analyzes three divergent approaches to conflict - rational (competing interests over an issue or scarce resource cause conflict), relational (poor communication or social structures cause conflict), and symbolic (differing perceptions, cultures, and worldviews create conflict). This research explores justice narratives from the largely unexplored symbolic frame of conflict studies.

<sup>119</sup> Keller (2006), 19.

This research is an attempt to develop the focus of justpeace from the perspective of those engaged in active struggle for it. Despite traditional bias towards an interior exploration of justpeace, Keller (2006) does a good job of outlining at least three important means to examining the link between peace and justice. The first he calls conflict resolution, which focuses on “the negotiating process and the way in which it is affected by the ‘call for justice.’”<sup>120</sup> The second, Keller ascribes to the field of political psychology which places “emphasis on the role of ‘perception’ and ‘motivation’ in decision-making process and conflict management.”<sup>121</sup> Finally, Keller himself says that his own approach is to “show that we have no hope of explaining what is – or is not – a Just Peace unless we pay more attention to the intellectual context in which international law was formed.”<sup>122</sup> This research falls somewhere between the first and second of Keller’s ways of examining the important link between peace and justice, while only hinting at the third. By both analyzing the discourse and narrative of TBMSG actors and focusing on the role that identity, power, and social positioning play in these actors’ construction of social justice, this research is aimed at developing our understanding of justpeace.

Of course, in arguing that discourse conditions particular narratives, and that in turn those narratives reproduce discourse, this study assumes the importance of social interaction and communicative processes in the construction of social reality. Narrative and text are, thus, the keys to understanding meaning. “In their narratives, individuals

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 21.

push against prevailing systems of discourse... [but]... of course narratives do not establish the truth of events... they create the very events they reflect upon.”<sup>123</sup> While narratives are but a representation of reality, they are ‘real’ in the sense that they are re-constitutive of discourse. It then follows that in order to change discourse, one is dependent on human agency. The above assumptions can be clarified by outlining some key related assumptions that the three broader assumptions listed above imply:

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<sup>123</sup> Denzin (2001), 60.

**Table 1: Broad Assumptions and Key Assumptive Postulates**

***Broad Assumptions:***

- 1.) Peace requires the sustained building of relationships, structures, and processes to transform rather than simply resolve conflict.
- 2.) Protracted conflicts are fueled by both worldview commitments and the various conceptions of the ‘ideal’ that they engender. Contrary to popular belief, such conflicts can be positively engaged and transformed.
- 3.) Justice/Injustice narratives conveyed through story-telling practices are crucial to understanding and explaining the conflict transformation process.

***Key Related Assumptive Postulates:***

- Intervention *is* changing the narrative.
- Change is preferable to maintenance of ‘negative peace’ when prolonged social contention exists.
- Exploration of worldview commitments will yield opportunities for conflict resolution.
- Worldview conflicts can be engaged and transformed, creating a workable framework for conflict transformation.
- Justice concerns, when unaddressed, lead to violence [structural, cultural, or direct – see Galtung (1969)].
- Narrative analysis represents an important means of engaging social contention (especially contention in which there is a legacy of inequitable relations or unequal power).
- There are a number of opportunity structures available to social movements that allow parties to make use of narratives of social justice. In order to transform conflict situations and dynamics, critical reflective analysis of collective narratives is needed to realize these opportunity structures.

While the above theoretical assumptions underlie this study, these assumptions, the complexity of issues involved, and the dearth of theories that can collectively address the sociological and psychological problems raised by them, point to the need for a new

approach to attempting to understand the intersection of religion, identity, and justice in social contention.

Sameer's experiences, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, are exemplary of the activists of the TBMSG movement. At the same time, deeper analysis of such experiences exposes the lack of academic attention and resources that has been aimed at either the analysis or transformation of low-castes' lives. Despite the fact that it could be argued that Sameer and other Manuski activists are from what has been called by many the 'creamy layer,'<sup>124</sup> his experiences are representative of the plight of many more scheduled castes and other backward castes across India. While this research's attention to relatively well-to-do dalits involved in the TBMSG movement may be perceived as a limitation, the fact is that academic attention to dalit movements from any socio-economic sphere have been lacking. What makes Sameer's story special is that it has inspired not angry revenge, but a commitment on the part of many dalits to a re-constructed sense of community. This research is not simply advocating the importance of religious framing in conflict transformation or attempting to argue that TBMSG has a solution to India's caste problems (though these related arguments should become increasingly clear as one reads this dissertation). Rather, it is arguing that by analyzing the justice/injustice narratives of TBMSG movement actors, opportunities for exploiting the situation and dynamics of caste conflict can be revealed. In this analysis process, the

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<sup>124</sup> The 'creamy layer' is a term used in Indian Politics which refers to the wealthiest citizens of the lower castes. Its precise definition is contentious because being placed in this layer of society excludes one from being eligible for social/ educational benefits from the government under the reservations system. See also Chapter Three, footnote number 144.

means for creating social justice can also be exposed and grounded for use by conflict resolution practitioners. In response to Sameer's question as to what conflict resolution can do about caste discrimination in India, the answer is that it can provide the space, structure, and methods for activists, like himself, to critically analyze the narrative constructions that are being deployed, both wittingly or unwittingly, towards the reconstruction of Indian systems of inequality. It is through such critical analysis of these narrative constructions that processes of interactive problem solving<sup>125</sup> can begin and a lasting transformation of Indian society can take hold.

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<sup>125</sup> See Fisher (1997).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature incorporates a cross-disciplinary array of writings from sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and religious studies, as well as, much of the literature on conflict theory, which is taught at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) and found in Cheldelin, et al. (2003). While, admittedly, the relationship between actors' normative values and peace-building processes is not well established in conflict theoretical literature, it is important to address that gap here. Despite attempts to quantify cooperation or the 'evolution' of social harmony [see Axelrod (1984)], few studies of conflict have focused on developing qualitative understandings of values as distinct from actors' rational choice; indeed Schirch (2001) has labeled such approaches the "leftovers in the theoretical trash-bin."<sup>126</sup> It is towards filling the gap between conflict parties' normative commitments and their subsequent social action that much of the work of this dissertation is aimed. Besides a smattering of sources which attempt to connect religious values to conflict resolution [see for example the Peace Churches tradition represented by Docherty (1998), Lederach (1997), Schirch (2001, 2004), and Schrock-Shenk (2000) among others; the burgeoning field of Islamic peace-building represented most clearly by Abu-Nimer (2003) and Abu-

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<sup>126</sup> Schirch (2001), 145.

Nimer and Shafiq (2007); or the broader-based comparative religion and conflict approaches of Appleby (2000), Fox (2002), Girard (1972), Gopin (2000, 2002), Johnson and Sampson (1994), Johnson (2003), Juergensmeyer (2000), Kakar (1996), McTernan (2003), and Queen and King, eds. (1996)], the writings connecting peace-building practice and values is sporadic and receives only passing mention in traditional functionalist sources [for example see Coser (1956)]. Conflict resolution's focus on process has conditioned a number of responses to values, which has, in turn, subsumed values under the rubric of culture. This tendency to equate values with culture has, in turn, given voice to the secular liberal claim that, like culture difference, disagreements over values are somehow completely non-negotiable.

Providing a good overview of the debates around culture in the field of Conflict Resolution (CR), Fisher (1997) outlines the disagreements between Avruch and Black (1991) and Burton (1990) over the importance of culture as shared values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors in conflict resolution process. This focus on values as related to CR process has directed attention to CR practitioners and, thus, de-emphasized the role of conflict parties' own construction and use of value commitments in conflict episodes. From a practice standpoint, an emphasis on process has resulted in increased attention being placed on practitioner-focused reflexive analysis of values [ala Schon (1983)], but little attention has been paid to engaging conflict actors' core values. Rather, core values are often seen as problematic to any process of conflict resolution. Despite Burton's (1990) adamant argument for the need for problem-solving processes to be culturally neutral (read value neutral and objective), this work marks a need to redirect focus

towards social actors' narrative construction as inseparable from their value commitments.

As the field of conflict analysis and resolution has traditionally been dominated by structural-functionalist approaches to social science, qualitative methods and methodologies from anthropology, comparative religion, philosophy, and sociology have too often been disregarded or overlooked. Johnston (2005) reminds us that narrative analysis provides an important means to developing what she calls a "worldview model" with which to understand conflict. Narrative analysis, as a methodology, provides an important starting point for developing an innovative means to fill the gap that exists between conflict theoretical literature and social justice. For, despite huge similarities and overlap in the origins and actors involved in both conflict resolution practice and social justice movements, relatively little scholarly work has been done in attempting to understand the relationship between them. In other words, while there is a clear link between social justice conceptualization processes and the maintenance of social harmony, this link has not often been the subject of scholarly scrutiny. The few theoretical sources of this important nexus between social justice and the field of conflict resolution include Deutsch (1975, 1985), Cormick and Laue (1978), Rubenstein (1993), Rawls (1999), and Schoeny and Warfield (2000). The aim of the present work is to build upon these explanations of the theoretical nexus in developing an epistemological framework for understanding, in theory and use, actor's normative commitments to justice. While much has been written on the ethics of third-party practice [see for example Cobb and Rifkin (1991), Cobb (1993), and Bush and Folger (2005)], relatively

little has been written on analyzing the social justice conceptions of actors in conflict, and thus, their creation of an ethical worldview as social activists. Beyond analyzing the narratives of third-party interveners, analysis of the narratives of conflict protagonists is a crucial aspect of conflict transformation as Monk and Winslade (2000) have made clear in their elaboration of what they call “narrative mediation.”

This literature review is designed to highlight the key tenets of a theoretical approach to understanding worldview conceptualization of social justice within a specific social movement context aimed at social transformation. Beginning by outlining the narrative context of social movement organization, this context’s connection to social justice will be established. In turn, the power of a symbolic approach to conflict will be empowered and the literature important to understanding conflict in this way will be reviewed. In the processes of such a review, the philosophical and epistemological foundations of an approach that focuses on the social construction of justice (and peace-building more generally) will be explored. Although the literature is grouped in three headings (social movements and social change; social justice conceptualization and peace-building; and movement frames: social identity, power asymmetry, and positioning theory), specific case-related literature on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the social movement he helped to spawn appears throughout all three sub-headings of this literature review. Uncovering ideal-types from real-life narrative is easy, but determining their context and meaning is more difficult. In attempting to understand social movement actors’ meta-narrative of justice, an understanding of their worldview must first be developed. Privileging social justice, the TBMSG social movement provides one important means to

illustrate this reality. An understanding of social change movement's social movement organization provides a window into this 'subaltern' worldview, thereby, creating a space where new insights for both theory and practice can, and should be, developed.

## ***2.1 Social Movements and Social Change Literature***

As Olson astutely realizes early in his seminal 1965 work on social movement organization: "The logical place to begin any systematic study of organizations is with their purpose."<sup>127</sup> The problem with this seemingly pragmatic approach is that, often, determining the purpose of collective action movements is neither simple nor self-evident. For example, in writing on what she calls "identity movements" Bernstein (1997) explains that such movements shift their strategic use of identity based upon the opposition encountered and their own understanding of identity as either a tool for mobilization, an intrinsic goal, or a strategy to garner further understanding of the movement as a whole. Thus, it is immediately apparent that movement actors' purposes, and framing of these purposes, change over time. As events unfold, social movements develop new ways to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them by the state and their other opponents. These "political opportunity structures"<sup>128</sup> as described by Tarrow (1998) can be viewed as repertoires of contention from a political perspective. Though repertoires change slowly over time, they are crucial to mobilization for collective change in the political arena. But how do political opportunities and repertoires affect a social movement's leadership that is disenfranchised with political action and thirsty for new

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<sup>127</sup> Olson (1965), 5.

<sup>128</sup> Tarrow (1998), 20.

modes of action? As Jaffrelot (2005) makes clear, Ambedkar himself oscillated between working in the system and attacking it from the outside. The purposes of social movements are tied up in the individual and collective identity of movement leaders as much as in political opportunity structures and repertoires of contention. Thus, understanding the purpose of social movements often entails understanding the ‘story’ and purposes of the movement’s foundational figures, as well as the context of contention.

While the literature related to social movement organization and the opportunity structures these movements encounter is large and diverse it can be approached in a manageable way by breaking social movement down into constituent parts.<sup>129</sup> McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, eds. (1996) focus on the three comparative aspects of social movements – political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. In reviewing the history and leadership of the TBMSG, each of these aspects is crucial to understanding members’ narrative conception of justice. Political opportunities play a key role in ‘untouchables’ clash with high-caste Hindus as is evident in the story of temple entry Satyagraha which Saptershi (1977) relays. In addition, both Sponberg (1996) and Queen (1996) have argued that the mobilizing structure of Ambedkar’s

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<sup>129</sup> As Rajagopal (2003) outlines the study of social movements can be roughly divided into two theoretical approaches. “The first known as Resource Mobilization theories, predominates in the Anglo-Saxon world and is primarily concerned with strategy, participation, organization, rationality, etc. The second, known as the New Social Movements Approach, predominates in Europe, Latin America, and South Asia, and emphasizes the cultural and symbolic aspects of identity formations as central to collective mobilizations. The latter is also heavily influenced by poststructuralism, post-Marxism, and to some extent, postmodernism” (43). This research focuses on elements of both these approaches, placing much needed emphasis on the latter.

“*navayana*” (new vehicle of Buddhism) is best understood as a response to historical precedent. As one of the key foundational figures in the TBMSG movement, Ambedkar’s legacy continues to both enliven and restrict political opportunities for Mahar Buddhists. Still, though Jaffrelot (2005), Queen (1996), Sponberg (1996), and Zelliott (1969, 1992) all touch on the historical political opportunities of the Ambedkar movement, this focus is secondary to their larger academic projects. Further, while Moon (2000) and Omvedt (1993, 2004) highlight the nature of oppressive structures experienced by ‘untouchables’ and the framing it engenders, this framing process goes unanalyzed in relation to social movement organization and the use of the social-psychological processes of positioning. While commentators of the wider Ambedkar movement have often made reference to cultural and symbolic aspects of members’ identity formation [see Moon (2000), Zelliott (1969, 1992)], little ink has been dedicated to analyzing these aspects’ role in the collective organizing of Ambedkar Buddhists for contention [see Omvedt (2004) and Beltz and Jondhale (2004) for brief discussions].

As McCarthy (1996) states: “In any concrete social setting, a range of mobilizing structural elements are more or less available to activists as they attempt to create new movements or nurture and direct ongoing ones”<sup>130</sup> Brockett (1991) further defines these mobilization structures as “the configuration of forces in a (potential or actual) group’s political environment that influences that group’s assertion of its political claims.”<sup>131</sup> The structures reified by caste in Indian society have played a key role in the social movement

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<sup>130</sup> McCarthy (1996), 147.

<sup>131</sup> Brockett (1991), 254.

organization and identity formation of Mahar ‘untouchables.’ The oppressive caste system described in detail in Charsley (1996), Deliege (1993, 1999), Hutton (1946), Jaffrelot (2000), and Milner (1994) produces inequities that empower mobilizing structures and provide the main impetus for low caste activism and organization. Jaffrelot (2000), in comparing various low-caste groups from both north and south India, distinguishes between the origin myths of these groups as either “imbued with the ethos of Sanskritization” or as an “ethnicization”<sup>132</sup> narrative aimed at firmly establishing a distinct collective ethnic identity. This distinction recalls an important fact of the wider dalit movement in India: given the mobilizing structures available, including level of education and degree of religious adherence of specific ‘untouchable’ groups in various regions, ‘untouchables’ position vis-à-vis the system varies widely. Dependent on relative number and who has historically been in power and/or in control of capital, the caste relations and level of oppression varies widely from region to region. This variation can be accounted for by different opportunity structures, mobilization resources, and framing processes available to movement leaders and participants in various localities. This makes broad-scale statements about caste extremely difficult. Caste, as a complex religious and cultural expression of *jati* (birth-right) and *varna* (division-of-labor), has restricted and empowered various social configurations and political alliances often in seemingly unintelligible ways. The local context and mobilization structures either restrict or allow for increased organizational clarity, and along with other

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<sup>132</sup> Jaffrelot (2000), 763.

opportunities afforded in larger cycles of contention (Tarrow, 1998), they determine the strategic direction of social movements. Following a definition of mobilization structures that is similar to McCarthy (1996) who defines them as “those agreed upon ways of engaging in collective action,”<sup>133</sup> it should be clear that local context provides various responses to the idea of creating social justice.

As alluded to above, the process of framing offers insight into the comparative analysis and increased understanding of social movements. A collective action frame points to how a social movement constructs meaning in pursuit of a given end. Thus, symbolic and cultural meanings and expressions play an important role in shaping these frames. Through interpreting meaning, a frame draws upon old patterns of behaviors and creates new political opportunities. A frame is an “interpretative schemata that implies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action within one’s present or past environment.”<sup>134</sup> A collective action frame alludes to a social movement’s worldview; it is a representation of the beliefs and values that form a movement’s worldview.

While Morris (1981) highlights the importance of both internal and external organization in movements taking part in collective action, Williams (2002) goes further in underscoring cultural frames as integral to both internal and external social mobilization. Attention to frames and language in a social movement’s repertoire of contention can shed light on political opportunity structures, underlying social and

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<sup>133</sup> McCarthy (1996), 141.

<sup>134</sup> Snow and Benford (1992) quoted in (Tarrow, 1998), 110.

cultural contexts, and resource mobilization tactics. While frames provide a broad and powerful means to predict actors' intentions, the socio-political structures that frames illuminate are determined by a wider conception of justice. But what are the components of framing that are affected and, thus, affect political opportunity structures? In other words, through what variables does framing make building a social movement possible? Gamson (1992) identifies three necessary components of any collective action frame – injustice, agency, and identity. People must perceive an unjust situation, have a sense that they have the power to affect change in it, and have a clear sense of who is responsible for the problem (and in turn who they themselves are as a result). Each of these components is crucial to this study because by focusing on each of these components (at different times and from within different local contexts) Mahar dalits have framed and reframed their perception of their situation and movement objectives. They have fermented collective cohesion over a sense of injustice, and pushed their social agenda according to their idealized identity based on a picture of what 'justice' as an ideal would look like. Such a process of framing rarely occurs without internal and external conflict (McCarthy, 1996) and 'untouchable' castes interaction amongst themselves and with higher-caste Hindus provides no exception to this rule. This dissertation establishes the centrality of social justice frames to Ambedkar Buddhism through developing "a necessary corrective to those broader structural theories"<sup>135</sup> that

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<sup>135</sup> McAdam (1996a), 339.

focus on collective action mobilization and political opportunities, while overlooking the role of justice in framing.

In general, framing, as described by Snow and Benford (1988, 1992), is a conscious and deliberative process of legitimization for those in a social movement. This process is directly related to the work of understanding worldview. Beyond the fact that social, political, and historical factors influence who will be mobilized by frames, it is also true that political opportunities, as well as worldviews, are contingent upon the social construction of frames. The relationship between political opportunities and framing is an interactive relationship. Not only do political opportunities create 'cultural spaces' to develop new frames, but I suggest that frames, to an extent, shape the range of political opportunities and, over time, build worldviews.

Ambedkar Buddhists in Maharashtra provide an ideal example of this point. The political opportunities opened by Dr. Ambedkar not only developed a frame of self as having worth, which in turn provided new opportunities, but also defined a focus on identity as a crucial factor for all future contention and, thus, built the foundation of a worldview organized around Buddhist dharma (teaching). Political opportunity structures, resource mobilization, and contentious framing cannot be separated when studying social movements. To analyze any social movement, one must analyze all collective action expressions while keeping in mind the strategic importance of frames. Attempting to locate frames' interplay with the temporal sequence of the movement's organization and development opens a window into the social construction of worldview. As a movement for identity-based legitimization, TBMSG provides a prime case of

contention for exploring these frames. Focus on the comparative aspects of social movements – i.e. political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes – goes hand-in-hand with an attempt to understand TBMSG’s worldview. Coupled with the following set of theoretical foundations aimed at understanding how actors conceptualize social justice, an appreciation of worldview and social movement dynamics will become even more clear.

## ***2.2 Social Justice Conceptualization and Peace-building Literature***

That different conceptions of justice exist in the world is hardly debatable [see for example (Rawls, 1999) and the many critics his work has inspired - i.e. Daniels, ed. (1976), Wolff (1977), and Zuckert (1981)]. From courtroom arguments to public policy debates, a variety of conceptions are continuously informing our actions in the public sphere. These often contentious conceptions of justice occur between groups with diverse ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds, as well as between citizens who would appear on the face of things to have similar values, moral orders, and power positions. While justice conceptions do not always appear as contentious, conceptions do act as narrative guideposts for social identity and, thus, frame discussions about power relations and positioning. As general understandings about the world and its contingent realities, conceptions themselves imply a system of normative positioning. Yet, despite the importance that actors’ conceptions play in understanding social agents’ actions, frequently a community of speakers does not have a clearly-defined notion, and/or lacks consensus on the requirements necessary for that conception to exist. The lack of a clearly defined notion of justice makes the study of any social instantiation of justice

challenging. Despite a few attempts to point out this lack of clarity [see for example Rajagopal (2003) and Keck and Sikkink (1998)], few scholars have chosen to address the sticky business of understanding movements' efforts to clarify their own conceptualizations of social justice. Focusing on nationalism and the concept of citizenship, scholars such as Chatterjee (1993) and Tilly (1975) have provided state-based accounts of justice contention. Still, the analysis of social justice conceptualization among social actors, or social movements, remains largely under-examined in the social sciences, and woefully under-addressed in the field of conflict theory. As we conceptualize, we are implicitly taking moral positions on 'reality' as an actualization of narratives past and a projection of narratives desired. Though this conceptual tapestry brings a richness and mystery to the world, it also brings passionate debate and, at times, destructive conflict. It is in understanding the resources and theories that help tap into the power of competing conceptions, and their transformative quality, towards which this research is aimed.

Common use of justice implies a collection of social relationships – some clear, others opaque. Beyond the approach of “justice as fairness” proposed by Rawls (1999), justice must be understood as more than just a “higher level of abstraction”<sup>136</sup> on the social contract theory of Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. Justice is more contextually grounded and dependant on other normative structures than simply the political relations between actors. Rawls' focus on developing an objective framing for distributive justice

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<sup>136</sup> Rawls, J. (1999), 10.

is far removed from the work to be done here. In attempting to understand Ambedkar Buddhists' social justice conception, it is clear that the mindset of these neo-Buddhists goes beyond understandings of justice that are simply distributive or, for that matter, based on specific objective criteria. Ambedkar Buddhists' conceptualizations of justice are socially pragmatic and based in Buddhist soteriology. While such a framing of justice certainly invokes common distributive meanings of justice, it is founded on more subjective criteria. This points to the reality that, though justice acts as both a cause of disagreement and a means for forging common ground, it also provides a means to understanding actors' use of social positioning and, thus, provides a window into worldview. But it is the acts of injustice that motivate in-groups to mobilize against the out-group 'other.' Thus, while justice's contingent relationship to peace is clearly evident, bringing further definition to that relationship is more multifarious. As Perkovich (2005) rightfully acknowledges: "In most complex political situations, of course, perfect justice can neither be defined nor achieved. But egregious injustice can generally be spotted in an instant."<sup>137</sup> The voicing of injustice makes public often unvoiced grievances. The importance of these previously unvoiced grievances cannot be overstated – the redressing of injustice is a crucial component of social stability.

While Conflict Resolution as a field is aimed at providing voice to the voiceless, it has too often neglected the full potentials within the voice of injustice. Without attention to such voice, inequalities too often become grievances [see Kriesberg (1998)

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<sup>137</sup> Perkovich. (2005), 93.

and Gurr (1970) for more in-depth discussion of this topic]. To understand the important relation of justice to peace-building, we must first, therefore, approach justice from situations where it is lacking. Beginning with narratives of injustice, more problematic justice narratives can be crafted as ‘second-order’ constructions that underpin the motivating and powerful injustice narratives of movement protagonists. As Zuckert (1981) suggests as a critique of Rawls (1999), “injustice as underserved inequality”<sup>138</sup> is evident from Rawls theory of justice, but “he provides no substantive basis for a claim of right or desert”<sup>139</sup> to support a notion of justice. Since episodes of injustice frame debate because its memories are often strong and hard to reconcile, one cannot fully develop a contextual sense of justice (and thus social justice) without a focus on injustice. Thus, initial focus on injustice, it is argued, is what leads to a broader re-construction of ‘second-order’<sup>140</sup> justice narratives.

Still, before delving more deeply into the literature on the conceptualization of justice through an understanding of injustice and oppression, we must first turn to developing a more complete understanding of common conceptions, or frames, of justice. Given the multi-faceted potentials inherent in justice, it is useful to look at social justice as it is commonly conceived in order to understand the frames from which narratives of injustice pervade. As Blechman and Rubenstein (1999) point out: “Commentators since Aristotle have written of distributive, restitutive, retributive, procedural, and relational

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<sup>138</sup> Zuckert (1981), 475.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 477.

<sup>140</sup> See Harre and Langenhove (1999) for a discussion of first and second order positioning and its relation to narrative.

justice, and each of these types has been further subdivided to reflect differences in social philosophy and in common usage.”<sup>141</sup> A basic taxonomy of justice might list the elements, or categories, of justice as follows (the arrows represent further sub-division within each broader category):

- Procedural (fairness of methods)
  - Restorative, Restitutive, Retributive
- Distributive (fairness of results)
  - Equity, Equality
- Relational (effect on social relations)
  - Symbolic (as a projection of change in social relation) and Rational (as justifiable within the social context)

**Figure 1: Basic Taxonomy of Justice**

Though justice as a virtue is, of course, much more complex than this, and approaches to its understanding are often best understood with either an objective or more subjective emphasis, the above taxonomy provides a starting point to develop theory from meaning. Within the context of Western society the concept of justice often gains meaning through an objective emphasis on procedural and distributive frames, but these frames are limited

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<sup>141</sup> Blechman and Rubenstein (1999), 1.

to socially accepted meanings which are more subjective and contextual. The tendency for the 'ought' of justice, though often debated, to become less prominent in the narrative structures of justice discourse than the reality of what actually 'is' points to a need to more deeply reflect on social actors' use and meaning of justice. Further, focus on distributive justice is often blurred by normative-focused debate over either equity or equality. The common frames of procedural and distributive are integral to our individual rights-based culture, yet, often, they remain unanalyzed. Similarly, an objective focus on the relational realities of justice often leaves more normative symbolic meanings unexplored. This brief taxonomy could also be understood through the lens of general versus specific; objective approaches present a general (and realist) approach to justice and normative/subjective approaches provide more specificity. Indeed, in Rosen (1989, 2006) one can see this relation between general and specific illustrated in relation to an ethnographic study of law (i.e. broad-based agreement on the meanings of justice) as integral to culture. Studying Moroccan culture, Rosen (1989) argues that not only are common conceptions of justice telling of culture, they also frame it and continually reconstruct it. Correspondingly, Hirsch (2006) develops an anthropological approach to procedural justice that calls into question the cultural starting points inherent in expressions of justice. Such works point to the close relationship between both procedural and distributive justice and community conceptions of social justice. All aspects of the above taxonomy are needed to develop a full understanding of the link between justice and culture (and, thus, social justice). Further, while completely extricating justice from culture may be impossible, framing justice as contingent upon the

common conceptions of a social community provides a pragmatic starting point from which to develop meanings for each society's inevitable expressions of social injustice. Social justice as an ideal is constructed by dominant frames of justice in a given society.

One underlying assumption of most common conceptions of social justice is a parochial collective commitment to a belief that what is 'right' and 'good' for the community that one inhabits is 'right' and 'good' for all. This parochial character of social justice, though not altogether astonishing given the human tendency to prioritize personal experience over and above the collective, does confound attempts at integrating competing conceptions. What is 'right' for one community, of course, is not necessarily 'right' for another. Both Gerwitz and Cribb (2002) and Fraser (1997) argue for a framework of conceptualizing social justice in the field of education that identifies three tenets of concern – what they term distributive, cultural, and associational. The ambiguity between these three approaches is especially apparent in the modern discourse surrounding human rights – a discourse in which language and moral orders of one community are often said to be universal and translatable for all [for a critique of the human rights discourse from a 'third world' perspective see Rajagopal (2003)]. Relying on Rawls' (1999) definition of distributive justice as standards or principles "in assigning rights and duties and in defining the appropriate division of social advantages"<sup>142</sup> Gerwitz and Cribb (2002) posit a rational economic understanding of distributive justice that is defined by its opposite (i.e. unequal distribution structures or realities). As in

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<sup>142</sup> Rawls (1999), 9.

Fraser (1997), Gerwitz and Cribb (2002) define distributive justice in social justice terms as the absence of exploitation, economic marginalization, and deprivation. Similarly, cultural justice is defined by the absence of cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect, while associational justice is defined by the absence of patterns of association that prevent actors from full participation in decisions of the community.<sup>143</sup> Again, one should be struck by the understanding of social justice as seen through the lens of injustice. Common understanding of social justice relies heavily on a view of what justice is not.

Still, from the above framework for understanding social justice, the Rawlsian conception of justice as directly proportional to fairness is plainly apparent. Despite the many critiques of Rawls as adopting an objectivist (platonic) perspective to the conception of justice, his arguments are cited frequently by scholars in the humanities and social sciences. The Rawlsian view of justice involves a focus on the role that equity plays in society. But unlike Rawls, Gerwitz and Cribb (2002) do not argue the process of choosing the principles of justice occur “behind a veil of ignorance.”<sup>144</sup> Rather, social justice for Gerwitz and Cribb (2002) is determined in moving “between plural models of justice and the complex tensions and judgments inherent in ‘just practices.’”<sup>145</sup> While Rawls “thinks of a theory of justice as analogous to a theory in empirical science,”<sup>146</sup> it can be argued that the conceptualization of justice as fairness provides only one possible

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<sup>143</sup> Gerwitz and Cribb (2002), 502-03.

<sup>144</sup> Rawls (1999), 11.

<sup>145</sup> Gerwitz and Cribb (2002), 505.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 505.

accounting of justice. Further, while this conception of the level or degree of the equity in society is one primary measure of justice, we can see that there is often disagreement as to how societies should measure it. In other words, what standards exist for quantifying instances of justice, and are these standards agreed upon by all? In addition, as Rubenstein (1993) points out, “the principle of equity justifies inequality, that is to say, by reference to an initial unequal distribution of merit.”<sup>147</sup> An equitable conception of justice, thus, prioritizes a concept of fairness at the expense of the principles of the ‘right,’ the ‘good,’ and ‘equality.’ By placing primary significance on equity as fairness, this leaves little room for other conceptual frameworks and makes developing standards of justice conditioned upon the ability to measure inequality. Despite the fact that “the only ‘moral’ theories that can be checked against people’s actual moral judgments are anthropological theories about what, in general, people think one ought to do, not moral principles about what one ought to do,”<sup>148</sup> the Rawlsian concept of justice as fairness provides some direction to understanding the narratological bases for injustice and, in turn, for enriching our understandings of justice. Still, given that distributive justice is broader conceptually than mere equity [as Deutsch (1985) has argued], it is important to also adequately touch on the distributive values of equality and need when approaching the understanding of justice.

In prioritizing a sense of equality, another common conception of justice becomes clear. An approach that focuses on equality in justice stresses the importance of an equal

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<sup>147</sup> Rubenstein (1993), 7.

<sup>148</sup> Hare (1973), 148.

share, or quantity, of rights and responsibilities for all in a given society. Often, such a focus on equality over equity represents a static approach to justice, with lip-service being paid to equal rights while little change in re-distribution is, indeed, advocated. In the language of functionalist sociological theory, this could be explained by reference to a difference between “value-oriented movements as opposed to norm-oriented movements.”<sup>149</sup> In a strictly equality approach, justice is conceived as a state of equal treatment rather than as a measure of the level of fairness (i.e. as in the strictly equity-based approach). The distinction between the extreme version of these approaches to justice is in prioritizing the question of whether rights have been ensured (equality) versus whether needs have been met (equity). Though completely focusing on equality may have the effect of de-emphasizing equity, an awareness of the injustice of inequality is crucial in any account of social justice. In a sense, then, equity and equality perspectives of distributive justice have an inverse relationship to each other. The fact is that each of these common conceptions provides a particular richness or fullness through which to view justice, but when one is prioritized at the expense of the other, the concept of social justice as a whole becomes impoverished.

Though the above discussion may seem to point to fine distinctions between the most common conceptions of distributive justice, these distinctions, in fact, inform an understanding of justice that is always conceived of as both real and ideal. While the meaning of any concept is determined by historical conditions and context of its use [as

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<sup>149</sup> Omvedt (1994), 10. See also Omvedt’s treatment of the work of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), footnote five, p. 20, for the connection to what she calls the “anti-systemic movements” (10) of Marxist anti-Brahmin contention.

MacIntyre (1984) clearly shows], meaning is also established in relation to actors' own particular needs and projective future desires. Pitkin (1972) adeptly notices this theme when she writes: "Meaning is compounded out of cases of a word's use, and what characterizes those cases is often the speech situation, not the presence of something being referred to."<sup>150</sup> Discursive acts, like all acts, imply a future with all its normative assumptions tagging along; they provide a window into actors' worldviews. These projective futures are crucial to the process of understanding conceptions because attention to them implies that agents' narratives are crucial to social analysis. What actors narrate as unjust says volumes about what they conceive justice to be and how they see justice playing out in an ideal future. Discursive acts, while projecting a future, are part of a process of social construction – a process of narrative identity formation that is shaped by, and inclusive of, injustice frames. Narrative identity, in turn, continually supports and reconstitutes one's position vis-à-vis others. While narrative meaning is neither completely ideal, nor completely real (even for those within the same group), it does provide a representation of social and individual reality. Justice is conditioned by this narrative identity and cannot be understood outside of it.

Further, as justice is most commonly conceived in terms of the presentation of actions, the notion of agency needs as close attention as the concepts of injustice and oppression. Yet, the fact is that the notion of agency in social theory is under-examined. With the exception of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and discussions in the field of action

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<sup>150</sup> Pitkin (1972), 95.

research literature [see Lewin (1948), Argyris (1985), and Argyris and Schon (1978)], focus on agency as a distinct unit of social analysis has been lacking. Social theorists like Giddens, Foucault, Habermas, and Parsons have focused on aspects of agents in the broader system and structure of society while leaving deep definition of agency unattended. The fact is that few social theorists recognize that agency can be approached as a subject of analysis in its own right. Analyzing specific past actions, most social theorists do not attempt to understand more fully what it means to act. Focusing on specific situations in which agency is employed, these theorists fail to see the assumptions and commitments that are implied by the actual enactment of goal-directed behavior. “The result has been a flat and impoverished conception that, when it escapes the abstract voluntarism of rational choice theory, tends to remain so tightly bound to structure that one loses sight of the different ways in which agency actually shapes social action.”<sup>151</sup> In effect, the standard social theory approach to agency has treated the self as differentiated from the social world. This bifurcation of ‘self’ from ‘other’ has fostered a conception of agency that is shortsighted and has caused unnecessary debate within many social theoretical disciplines.

As temporally located, human action (agency) is often seen as a continuous flow of causes and effects [for example see Giddens (1984)]. But in reality actors (agents) are always living within both psychological and social worlds that include past histories, present realities, *and* future potentialities. Actors, as goal-oriented agents, engage in

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<sup>151</sup> Emirbayer and Mische (1998), 963.

actions that cannot be understood solely as located in specific time and space, but rather as response to their holistic worldview. Although it often appears that actors are reacting to contextual situations, it is extremely difficult for social theorists to infer their motivations, wants, and desires simply through reference to present conditions or social context. This conceptual problem has led many theorists to believe that the only way to understand agency is through reference to past events as they play out in the actions of present agents [for example see Parsons (1968)]. But this conceptualization leaves the view of agency bound to causation and supportive of only structural understandings of society. Weakening any view of agency that attempts to uncouple it from sequential historical causation, this conceptual reference to only the past misses a key element in the power of agency – its projective character.

To grasp the concept of agency, one must make a conscious attempt to recognize agents' projection of a vision of their ideal future; in this sense, the concept of agency helps to clarify expressions of injustice and calls for ending oppression. Injustice narratives are overt calls from members of an in-group to rally their base against out-group aggression, while also acting as a constitutive force in creating a collective projective future. Thus, a study of justice conceptions must be appreciated not only from the perspective of how they are conceived in the present context, but also in regards to what actors think lived conceptions ought to provide in the future. Actors are always engaged in a process of framing their worldviews (Lakoff, 2004), and the distinction between current meaning and future use highlights a significant characteristic to observe in the analysis of both agency and injustice/justice. Agency, like justice/injustice, can be

said to have both participatory and projective characteristics. The participatory quality of agency and justice/injustice positions actors vis-à-vis a particular worldview with its associated power structures and collective identities. The projective quality, though tied up in past and present experience, is primarily forward looking and pragmatic – an idealized ‘living-out’ of the values associated with the just and the good. The simultaneous application of future projections *and* an assessment of past/present significance is crucial to understanding both agency and conceptions of justice. Further, given that the influence of injustice narratives on the sense of in-group identity has a direct effect on both agency and structure, one could say that the social structures that define a collective have an axiological dimension, with justice being the highest value in that axiology. Injustice, as a formative memory for social actors, conditions all future judgments and places the ideal of justice as the top value concern in most social structures.

Having defined a broader conception of agency, important questions still remain; I, therefore, ask the following: What is the relation between this understanding of agency and the scope and breadth of existing conceptions of justice? MacIntyre (1984) points to the key philosophical distinction between ‘use’ and ‘meaning’ as one determinant of this relation. As a moral judgment, justice is often thought, under the influence of emotivism, to be nothing more than a preference. This objectivist sentiment is often one of the criticisms levied against Rawls’ Theory of Justice (a point I will return to below). But, still the philosophical distinction between use and meaning can be informative. What some have called conflicts over “normative dissensus” (Rubenstein, 2003) can often be

overcome through distinguishing between the meaning and use of justice. Thus, approaching justice as both a conceptual meaning-making ‘process’ and as fundamentally instrumentalist (i.e. as seen through groups’ use of injustice narratives) can help clarify normative assumptions, framing, and social mobilization goals of group actors. This dual aspect of justice, as meaning-making and means-ends is, yet another, crucial distinction to grasp. Outlining how the historical progression of moral tradition has shifted our concepts of what the virtues mean, MacIntyre (1984) shows that we have been lulled into perceiving virtue in the singular rather than perceiving virtues in a plural sense. In MacIntyre’s view, virtues have come to be conceived as possessing those qualities that are needed to obey the rules or laws, but not as Aristotle conceived of them as possessing a role in life that is distinct from this function. MacIntyre’s broad stroke perspective of historical narrative when approaching virtues provides an important lens with which to approach competing conceptions. Still MacIntyre (1984) provides no hard and fast methodology for non-judgmentally attempting to change others’ conceptions. MacIntyre’s project in historical narrative lacks an analysis of individual agency that other methods of understanding value incongruities do profess. But, his narratological approach to moral history can be useful as we approach the basis for conceptions of social justice.

Unlike MacIntyre, Pitkin’s (1972) approach to discovering the meaning of justice moves beyond considerations of time and context to incorporating an emphasis on duality and grammar. Stressing the agency of speakers more pronouncedly than MacIntyre, Pitkin’s reliance on Wittgensteinian epistemology adds an innovative texture to

conceptual analysis missed by MacIntyre's approach of historical narrative analysis. Starting with grammar – grammar in the sense of the rules and restrictions of language use – Wittgensteinian approaches narrative instances as coherent constructions. Focusing on the validity of inferences, knowledge is unveiled through grammar, and without a conception of grammar, there can be no meaning. While partially limiting of the social construction of new conceptions, this epistemology allows for continual and limitless exploration of the bases of existent conceptions. In this exploration of past conceptions (i.e. what Wittgenstein calls instances of inference) lie the seeds of new conceptions. While context and time are crucial to this process, they are not determinate of it in the Wittgensteinian analysis. For the follower of Wittgenstein, analysis involves relating the logic of grammar to the world. Such analysis unfolds what can be known. A logical duality of grammar and the world underpins all there is to know about the world.<sup>152</sup> It is, therefore, grammar that “controls”<sup>153</sup> our concepts. Wittgenstein's approach to grammar posits no a priori knowledge and, thus, it seems to be foregoing in its premises. “...[B]ecause in learning grammar we learn what will count as various circumstances, grammar is also prior to experience.”<sup>154</sup> Thus, a notion like justice can most easily be understood through listening and analyzing a narrative storyline in which the speaker's position is understood in relation to the listener. “We are unable to circumscribe the concepts we use; not because we don't know their real definition, but because there is no

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<sup>152</sup> Grayling (1988), 38. For the primary source of this thought see Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1961).

<sup>153</sup> Pitkin (1972), 119.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

real ‘definition’ to them.”<sup>155</sup> This approach to knowledge creation is profound, as it logically points out something that we take to be obvious only through experience. Rather than labels, words are tools, and even though definitional rules exist to make their use easy, there is a complexity and risk of getting “entangled”<sup>156</sup> in them. Attempting to understand justice’s relation to peace-building and social harmony through narratives of injustice allows the analyst to tease out the constituent parts of a group’s theory of justice in both use and meaning. Agency and grievance become understood as episodic expressions of identity and power that position parties as legitimate and continually reify and, thereby, modify the contextual meaning of justice.

That there are several conceptions of justice should be clear from the forgoing discussion. But the question of how we should best analytically approach these conceptions remains central to this project. Though the “narrative task itself generally invokes participation in conflict,”<sup>157</sup> it is through an understanding of actors’ narrative conceptions that we can envision ways out of hardened worldview or value-based conflicts. Though narratives are conflict generative, such generation of conflict for change is crucial to overcoming worldview conflicts. Providing an analytical frame for understanding social justice through narrative allows for a sort of narrative typology to be developed in given contexts, and then, in turn, provides a means for this typology to be comparatively analyzed. Deutsch (1985) argues for “some minimal conditions”<sup>158</sup> for

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>157</sup> MacIntyre (1988), 11.

<sup>158</sup> Deutsch (1985), 36.

understanding justice as cooperative across contexts and situations. But, as Deutsch (1985) also makes clear, such minimal conditions require a moral community. In effect, justice cannot be analyzed in a vacuum of lawlessness and moral poverty, but it can be best understood through attention to instances of its absence. Arguing for the analysis of “broad narratives of justice and injustice,”<sup>159</sup> Dershowitz (2000) provides support for this argument. Sterba (1988) also defends the need for moral community, while arguing for the “most morally defensible conception of justice.”<sup>160</sup> In all these theories of justice, beyond merely accepting that many justices exist, there is an implicit argument that justice requires some moral parity and degree of social cooperation. Both Deutsch (1985) and Sterba (1988) point to the cooperative nature of justice and highlight that the continued lack of justice eventually leads to destructive conflict. Justice must, therefore, be approached as contextual but with the proviso that one moral community’s struggle with justice can have profound effects on other moral communities. Thus, while expressions of justice can be seen as both pro-social and anti-social, minimal conditions or universal elements of justice can be found, but only through narrative grounding and critical analysis of actors’ justice conceptions can moral communities be transformed.

The key consequences of inattention to justice-based conflict points to a final area of importance for this social justice literature review: the huge expanse of literature on social justice movements in general, not to mention Ambedkar dalit movements for social justice in particular. Ackerman & DuVall (2000), Boxill (1984), Sharp (2005), and

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<sup>159</sup> Dershowitz (2000), 19.

<sup>160</sup> Sterba, (1988), 181.

Zunes, et. al. (1999) provide a foundational beginning for drawing comparisons from both civil rights and other non-violent social justice movements. While Jaffrelot (2005), Omvedt (1993, 2003, 2004), Sangharakshita (1986), Sponberg (1996), and Zelliott (1969, 1992) provide a good foundation for the origins and formation of Ambedkar Buddhism and the TBMSG movement, it will also be important to develop a reconstruction of the movement's discourse so as to compare that discourse with other like movements for social justice. Gore (1993), Iyer (1990), Keer (1954), Moon (2000), Omvedt (1994), Rajasekhariah (1989), and Rodriguez (2004, 1993), and Vakil (1991) are instructive for understanding more deeply the Ambedkar movement's history and prevalent discourse. Looking at the dalit movement with the specific frame of social justice in mind, Jadhav (2003), Majumdar (1997), O'Hanlon (1983), Omvedt (1994), and Rajasekhriaiah (1989) will also be valuable. The debates within the civil right movement of the 1960s as well as the discourse of Gandhi, King, and Malcolm X also represent important bases for comparative analysis of this social justice discourse. In this regard, Namishraya (2003) provides a good comparative study of caste and race in King and Ambedkar, while Khan (2002) provides a window into comparison of Ambedkar's movement from the perspective of ethnicity and gender. Finally, for comparison between Ambedkar's movement for social equality and those of other South Asian leaders, Kumar (2002), O'Hanlon (1985), Omvedt (1993), Shourie (1997), and Vakil (1991) will provide a local context and texture to this study.

Last, it could reasonably be asked, how does all this talk of justice relate to the practices of peace-building? Fashioning myself as a peace-building practitioner, it is

impossible for me engage in this research without connecting it to my practice. Like the works of Paris (1997) and Haugerundbraaten (1998), this work also points to the need to provide a richer analysis of peace-building as a practice. In comparison to approaches based on peace-keeping and conflict management [both associated more closely with Galtung's (1990) concept of negative peace than with positive peace and transformation], peace-building approaches often get overshadowed by a realist perspective on the immediate need for conflict stabilization and sustainable development. This realist approach to conflict has skewed the literature in the field of conflict resolution towards pragmatic response as opposed to longer-term preventative work [see for example Mitchell (2005)] and moral understandings. The work of Schirch (2001, 2004), again, comes to mind as an exception to this objective and realist approach to conflict. Schirch (2001) points to a growing literature that attempts to address conflict from a symbolic perspective of responsive prevention. Paying attention to the power of history, Montville (2001) and Volkan (1988, 1997, and 2004) add a level of texture to this symbolic perspective by focusing on the role that memory of historical injustice plays in conflict dynamics. While a similar attention to history and injustice is addressed from a pragmatic realist approach to negotiation in Rouhana (2004), Booth (2001) finds further correlation between history and justice in what he calls "memory-justice," explaining that such identity-based demands for justice "mark out the limits of a legal overcoming of the past."<sup>161</sup> Related to such a concept of 'memory-justice' is a concept of "identity

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<sup>161</sup> Booth (2001), 788.

justice.”<sup>162</sup> Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) describe this linking of justice with identity via reference to social conflict protagonists’ susceptibility over time to equate justice with overcoming a dangerous other. Thus, with such a set of theory in hand, a quest for social justice falls clearly in the realm of peace-building in that by definition it aims at a sustained transformation of the status quo.

Peace-building, unlike peacekeeping and peacemaking, implies sustainability and long-term attention to a community’s social problems. Arguing for peace-building as distinct from analytical concepts such as nation-building and development, Haugerundbraaten (1998) argues that peace-building is variously defined based upon six criteria or questions – its aims, its means, its temporal constraints, its main actors, whether it is a process or an action, and who coordinates it.<sup>163</sup> These six questions, Haugerundbraaten argues, have developed into two broad conceptual tendencies in peace-building literature. “The first concept is the short-term involvement of the international community...the second concept is the long-term efforts by mainly indigenous actors to promote political and economic development, and a sustainable solution to root causes of conflict.”<sup>164</sup> These two conceptual tendencies do not constitute either/or categories but rather are representative of the tensions involved in defining the concept of peace-building. This research approaches peace-building upon the latter set of concepts and assumptions. From relationships to communicative systems to opportunities and structures, peace-building is an extensive, long-term, multi-track

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<sup>162</sup> See Rothbart and Korostelina (2006).

<sup>163</sup> Haugerudbraaten (1998), 7.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

[Diamond and McDonald (1996)], and unremitting endeavor. Involving locals as well as international actors, peace-building is a comprehensive approach to creating positive peace through political, economic, cultural, symbolic, and relational systems.

Approaching Mahar grievance over injustice from this perspective provides an ideal framework from which to analyze whether narratives of justice are having an impact on society, and whether discourse is being refashioned with these justice needs in mind.

Still, the foregoing discussion of social justice and peace-building requires even further conflict theoretical focus. The emphasis on social justice commitments and social change opens up a slew of structural, psychological, and inter-relational issues. What factors are crucial to framing movement members' worldviews? Below I argue that social justice is most clearly articulated in the social identity, power asymmetry, and positioning frames of the TBMSG movement. Such conflict theoretical frames provide the central means via which members and leaders articulate social justice. The social identity of Ambedkar Buddhists, as well as the power-relationships between Ambedkar Buddhists and other groups, privileges a notion of social justice. In addition, the importance that movement members' place on social identity and power relations underscores the role of social justice as pivotal to ingroup/outgroup positioning. Exploring these important movement frames is what I develop below.

### ***2.3 Movement Frames: Social Identity, Power Asymmetry, and Positioning***

Despite the fact that social justice is defined differently by the diversity of social actors that comprise the Ambedkar movement, it is important to extract the central

notions that give a depth and breadth to the centrality of social justice among Ambedkar Buddhists. The frames of social identity, power asymmetry, and social positioning each provide an important window through which to glimpse the Ambedkar Buddhist worldview by providing clarity to these actors' privileging of a specific conception of social justice. The concept of worldview can be understood as coming from the German '*Weltanschauung*,' meaning a 'look onto the world.' Worldview is an interpretive framework through which social agents interact with the world. In the academic field of comparative religion, worldview has become a sort of corrective label to dispel the confusion around understanding the diversity of belief expressions which comprise the world's various religions [see Smart (1995) for a discussion of a worldview approach to religion]. When approaching worldview as an interpretive framework, the relation between the concept of worldview and movement frames (see social movement literature section 2.1 above) is both clear and crucial to explore in order to understand a social movement's concepts of justice. Since worldview is such a broad concept in itself, it is important to explore the frames that form the foundation of actors' worldview. As Lakoff (2004) states: "Framing is about getting language that fits your worldview."<sup>165</sup> Movement frame and worldview are connected in that the former helps to shape collective social identities which often seem apparent in expressions of the latter. Thus, Nudler (1990) calls conflicts over core values "world and frame conflicts"<sup>166</sup> as opposed to what is here called worldview conflicts. Actors' experience of the power relations

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<sup>165</sup> Lakoff (2004), 4.

<sup>166</sup> Nudler (1990), 197.

evident in all forms of social structure has the further effect of framing projective solutions to social contention. For this reason, Nudler (1990), admitting that world and frame conflicts are difficult to resolve, believes that, through what he calls “metaphor dialogue,”<sup>167</sup> such conflicts can also be powerful sources of learning and change. This learning entails a deeper exploration of social identity and power with the aim of getting actors to re-think their social positions.

Indeed, some have argued to a further extent that identity is nothing more than a metaphor for the relationship between an individual and her cultural context.<sup>168</sup> Thus, a social scientific inquiry into the complex concept of identity (both collective and individual) is useful to an understanding of Ambedkar Buddhists’ social contention, primarily in its probing the relationship towards the ‘other.’ Both Coser (1956) and Volkan (1988, 1997) argue that in cases of protracted conflict, in-group identity fosters a sense of out-group vilification. Gopin (2000) provides a postmodern explanation of this phenomenon, which he calls “othering.”<sup>169</sup> There is little doubt that ‘othering’ plays a role in collective identity formation by strengthening the salient similarities in worldview of in-group participants in relation to out-group enemies. Thus, worldview is, most obviously, reflexively connected to social identity. But what else is worldview connected to? Or a more appropriate question might be what is worldview *not* connected to? For, as many have argued, worldview is a very broad term that renders it, therefore,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>168</sup> Fitzgerald (1993).

<sup>169</sup> Gopin (2000), 234.

meaningless. Though in agreement that worldview encompasses a wide range of meanings, it is argued strongly here that this does not render it meaningless.

Rather, due to its broad usage, worldview requires more specific clarification. This clarification should go hand-in-hand with the frames of social identity, power, and positioning which provide the foundation for movement leaders' and followers' worldview. Depending on how the concept of worldview is approached, and/or the context of the terms' usage, one of three characteristics of worldview are visibly evident. First, as a conception of reality, worldview can be said to have an ontological character. One's worldview, in this sense, is inseparable from existence and, logically, determinate of one's categories of social reality. This all-encompassing sense is not what is intended for study here. Yet, related to this sense is a second reading of worldview that emphasizes the normative aspects that relate a person's worldview to other values he holds, such as right and wrong, and good and bad. This perspective of worldview is crucial to actors' social reality in that it acts as a sort of filter for acting on other related social values and, thus, for most instances of social contention. This is the concept of worldview that is the focus of this research. This normative-based worldview has a direct relation to social identity, positioning, and power, which I will return to below. A third characteristic of worldview is that it can be determinate of one's epistemological perspective. This characteristic has far-reaching implications for how one understands cognitive reality. In some sense, this characteristic of worldview overlaps with the normative worldview emphasized in this research, but exploring the epistemological foundations of worldview is not the main focus of this research. The distinguishing link

between these three characteristics of worldview is in the degree to which worldview pervades actors' actions. If worldview is understood from the ontological perspective, nothing can be approached outside an actor's given worldview; everything is related to this all-dominating worldview. If worldview is understood from the normative perspective, the actors' values are said to be determined by that worldview, and, thus their construction of social reality is greatly affected (but not necessarily completely determined) by it. Finally, if worldview is understood from an epistemological perspective, the conditions for knowing are likewise conditioned by worldview, which have a profound impact on one's ability to conceptualize reality. While understanding each of these characteristics of worldviews is useful for this research project, an approach aimed at understanding the normative conceptions which are constructive of actors' worldview is the focus. A return to the three frames of identity, power, and positioning will provide a path to approaching the normative in an objective fashion.

Since worldview is reflexively connected to social identity, analysis of social identity can shed further light on the concept of worldview. It is, therefore, no wonder so much ink "from psychoanalytic theory to the sociology of social movements"<sup>170</sup> has been spilled on the topic of social identity. While social identity theory highlights a relationship between conflict and social identity that can be described as multi-directional – i.e. conflict influences social identity and social identity can contribute to inter-group conflict – social identity theory has only been studied sparingly in relation to worldview

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<sup>170</sup> Brewer (2001), 115.

[see Eriksen's (2001) work on identity politics for example]. As Brewer (2001) has argued "social identity theory is primarily concerned with the process by which [sic] group-self representations are formed rather than the meaning attached to specific group identities."<sup>171</sup> Without reference to the meanings that social agents attach to group identities, the processes involved in their creation give a limited perspective on the agency and/or the long-term social change identities these processes engender. Social identity must, therefore, be understood through reference to the lived experience of narrative.

Developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) and refined by Tajfel (1981), social identity theory asserts that group membership creates in-group self-categorization and enhancement in ways that contrast the in-group to the out-group. In the case of Mahar Buddhists, the creation of a new social identity as Buddhists can be seen as a key element of the movement's organizational discourse and, thus, their worldview formation. As the external 'other' is demonized through stories of oppression, in-group identity becomes more salient and new in-group activists are convinced to join. In other words, an empathy with experiences of oppression is engendered. At the same time, an in-group identity based on education and self-respect is reinforced within the Mahar Buddhist community, creating a social identity that is juxtaposed to past narratives of oppression. As Lynch (1996) convincingly shows, narratives of identity can be converted to contested sources of difference, tension, and conflict. While different interpretations of

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 119.

Ambedkar's message abound, social identity theory helps explain how these messages become more and more singular and how social movement organization mobilizes around a singular conception of social identity. Social identity theory acts as a sort of theoretical bridge between the psychological (personal identity) and the sociological (social identity) worlds of human society. As a hybrid of psychological and sociological perspectives and positions (Harre and Moghaddam, 2003), a person's social identity and personal identity can overlap, be in conflict, or operate unknowing of the other identity's existence. Social identity theory, therefore, enriches an explanation of the worldview conflict experienced by Ambedkar Buddhists by simultaneously addressing multiple levels of analysis.

Brewer (2001a) breaks down four variations of the social identity theme in social scientific literature – what she calls person-based, relational, group-based, and collective social identities. While the focus of this work is on collective identity, the “me” approaches to identity cannot be forsaken in lieu of the “we” identities.<sup>172</sup> Again, social identity theory acts as a sort of theoretical bridge between personal “me” identities and social “we” identities. When actors find identity within a group, they do not lose their personal identities, but they can and do affix themselves to certain identities that they feel are more in-line with their core values; this is a continual and on-going process. Within a single person, therefore, personal and social identities are independently anchored but collectively influenced. In other words, persons anchor their multiple identities in

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<sup>172</sup> Thoits and Virshup (1997), 106. Thoits and Vishup draw a distinction between individual or “me” identities, which are “identifications of the self as a certain kind of person,” and collective or “we” identities which are “identifications of the self with a group or category as a whole.”

personal narratives, but these narratives are influenced by the collective reality around them. Thus, collective identities are primary to other self identities [see Taylor, Bougie, and Caouette (2003)]. Further, self identities, as dependent on the identities of others, are often commandeered for collective purposes, just as collective identities are oftentimes determined by a few strong self identities. Approached as narratives, peoples' lives can be understood as a series of climatic crescendos moving towards hoped-for conclusions. These climaxes are periods in which social actors' are outwardly seeking social reassurance from the group. Therefore, getting at the collective 'we' identity of a heterogeneous group like Ambedkar Buddhists involves attempting to understand as many of the 'me' identities as possible. Understanding the interplay between collective and self identities, though extremely complicated, plays an important role in getting at the full meaning of an Ambedkar Buddhist identity and, in turn, Ambedkar Buddhist's worldview.

Equally as important as the aspects of social identity in movement mobilization and value formation is the role played by power in these social processes. But as Nye (2001) articulately quips "Power is like love, easy to feel but hard to find."<sup>173</sup> Despite the many distinctions made between hard versus soft, behavioral versus resource [Nye (2001)], and exchange versus integrative power [Boulding (1989)], two core questions dominate the social scientific discourse on power's relation to conflict. The first question relates to defining power and the second to the characteristics which help explain power's

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<sup>173</sup> Nye (2001), 354.

relationship to conflict. Many scholars, most prominently Weber (1958), have focused on the first of these questions [see also Hadden (1997) for further explanation]. Others, expanding on Weber's work, have attempted to delimit power's characteristics [see Arendt (1969, 1970), Parsons (1968)] or broaden power's reach as an explanatory concept [Foucault (1995)]. Still, power's important role in the social construction of identity and worldview, though seemingly obvious, often remains overlooked in common usage. Further, if worldview encapsulates a temporal and constructed social conception of actors' place in the world, then it is through the exchange of power that social change occurs. As Arendt (1969) reminds us "Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert."<sup>174</sup> Of course, since power is a socially constructed resource, and change inevitably breeds discontent among some, and excitement among others, conflict inevitably follows the manifestation of various forms of power. In short, defining power entails attempting to understand its instrumental nature. Indeed, with social conflict, a transformative power is born. It is a reflective attention to this transformative power that oppressed dalits within the TBMSG must effectively use in attempting to re-balance asymmetric relationships and speak truth to power. Following Freire (2006), the "narrative character"<sup>175</sup> of the compartmentalized education system (what he call "education [as] suffering from narration sickness"<sup>176</sup>) is a symbolic cause of oppressed consciousness. Overcoming this cause of oppressed consciousness requires not just attention to power, but also reflection on social position.

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<sup>174</sup> Arendt (1969), 64.

<sup>175</sup> Freire (2006), 71.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 71.

Attention to power levels in conflict provides an instrumental perspective on conflict that is often overlooked in favor of the more functionalist approaches. Schirch (2001) outlines three overarching approaches to conflict – the rational, relational, and symbolic. “The concept of worldview, culture and identity form the core of the study of the ‘symbolic’ approach to conflict.”<sup>177</sup> While the rational squarely fits in a functionalist framework of social science, Schirch’s relational approach begins to address poor communication and imbalance of power issues. But it is the symbolic approach that provides a solid grounding to begin to describe conflict by reference to socially constructed communication patterns, social identity theory, and imbalanced power structures. “Symbolic approaches grow out of an understanding that humans have a need to symbolically understand who they are and how they relate to their environment.”<sup>178</sup> Conflict from this perspective is related to differing perceptions, cultures, and/or worldviews and is addressed by working to transform these differing perceptions. Such an approach moves away from the functionalist emphasis on process and instead directs attention to relationship. In turn, this places agency back in the hands of conflict parties, eliciting organic solutions through transparent analysis of actors’ narratives as opposed to developing a third-party-driven problem-solving process.

A final frame through which to understand Ambedkar Buddhists requires a deeper focus on the concept of power asymmetry and, thereby, invokes the important conceptual framework of positioning theory (Harre and Moghaddam, 2003). Following Arendt

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<sup>177</sup> Schirch (2001), 146.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 146.

(1969) when she argues that political power is “never a property of an individual”<sup>179</sup> – rather it is only understood as a collective phenomenon – the link between narratives of power and the social positioning of ‘untouchables’ becomes clear. Beyond mere perception, the social position of an ‘untouchable’ is marked by a power asymmetry between what has been called “a system of graded inequality” [Ambedkar (1936)]. Narratives of injustice display a power asymmetry that socially positions movement actors. TBMSG leaders and members implicitly invoke power relations as a means of both resistance and solidarity or self-help. The fact of power asymmetry, therefore, has important consequences for ‘untouchable’s’ worldview formation. Although this asymmetry is at times exacerbated by class, it is determined by it no more completely than by a history of exploitation resulting in powerlessness. As Deliege (1999) clarifies, ‘untouchables’ refers to those sections of Indian society that are economically dependant and exploited, victims of many kinds of discrimination, and ritually polluted in a permanent way”<sup>180</sup> For Deliege (1999), it is the combination of all three of these elements that sets ‘untouchables’ apart from the plethora of low castes and ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBCs) of India. In this conception, not only identity, but also power asymmetry, is a major factor in the ‘untouchable’ formulation of their social position and worldview. As Gupta and Kumar (2007) have detailed in their analysis of the *Bahujan Samaj Party’s* (BSP) recent electoral victory in Uttar Pradesh, “caste arithmetic fails

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<sup>179</sup> Arendt (1969), 64.

<sup>180</sup> Deliege (1999), 2.

again once we take a longer view...”<sup>181</sup> In other words, power, social positioning, class, and individual aspirations all play equally important roles in scheduled caste mobilization.

Though Kriesberg (1999) considers power as a base of social conflict and many other scholars have taken power to be crucial to any form of conflict resolution work, few have focused on the triumvirate of social identity, power, and positioning. Boulding, (1989) for example, defines conflict resolution as moving parties toward what he calls “integrative power.” And while Rouhana (2000) has drawn attention to the connection between power/legitimacy and social mobilization as a key factor in conflict analysis, little scholarly work has connected this important work to the ideas of positioning theory. This direct focus on asymmetry as a causal factor (Rouhana 2000, 2004, 2006) is, indeed, important for its link to the concepts of collective identity, worldview, and positioning. Rouhana (2004) argues that the most important factor in determining parties’ willingness to achieve reconciliation is the power relations between them. Particularly, he argues, that the power asymmetry that exists between conflict parties is a major stumbling block to reconciliation because an “asymmetrical in reverse”<sup>182</sup> situation exists. In other words, high power parties have less willingness to participate in reconciliation because they have more to lose, while “the most downtrodden are too powerless to fight.”<sup>183</sup> While this is an important aspect of the characteristics of power in conflict, it also points to a need to be clear to demarcate the goals of negotiated settlement from reconciliation. Lederach’s

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<sup>181</sup> Gupta, D. and Kumar, Y. (2007), 3391. See also Gupta (2005).

<sup>182</sup> Rouhana (2004), 38.

<sup>183</sup> Perkovich (2005), 80.

(1997) description of reconciliation as incorporating truth, mercy, justice, and peace is useful here. Lederach's conception of reconciliation attaches a qualitative understanding of value to the change process while a more functionalist understanding of negotiation approaches value as quantifiable. Thus, while power's importance in the process of conflict resolution cannot be overlooked, addressing it requires, as Arendt (1969) argues, a collective effort. But further, power's connection to the conceptualization of social justice becomes evident only in the processes of social positioning.

As elaborated by Harre and Moghaddam (2003), positioning theory advances the thesis that a position encapsulates a set of moral obligations and rights that are implicitly conveyed in discursive constructions of personal stories. Positions are different from what we commonly think of as roles in that they are composite constructions of moral orders. As a composite of rights and obligations, positions emerge from and reinforce the social constructs that are also associated with patterns of storytelling. Positioning theory, can, therefore, be said to provide a lens with which to link social identity with personal identities, while remaining open to normative conceptions as discursively related to facts. "The presentation of selves and the maintenance of one's standing in the local moral order – that is one's position – are intimately interrelated."<sup>184</sup> As far as studying a social movement like TBMSG is concerned, the idea of a position provides another conceptual frame that is extremely useful for analyzing the connection between identity, power, and their relations to normative conceptions such as justice. Of course, the concepts of power

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<sup>184</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999), 95.

and identity are of grave importance for developing a full worldview understanding, but being attuned to positioning can assist in gleaning actors' worldview from linguistic expressions.

[T]he concept of 'positioning' can be used to facilitate the thinking of linguistically oriented social analysts in ways that the use of the concept of 'role' prevented... The view of language in which positioning is best understood, we believe, is the immanentist view expounded by Harris (1980), according to which language exists only as concrete occasion of language in use.<sup>185</sup>

As a key theoretical link for analysts to bring contextual clarity to broad concepts such as social identity and power, positioning theory does not operate outside a local moral order. This very Wittgensteinian view of language as agentic and rules-based provides a means to explore both the normative and objective bases of identity and power.

Positioning theory draws attention to actors' normative commitments through analysis of their positions and storylines, and through relating them to the social force of these same actors' discursive actions. With this analysis, a sense of actors' power and identity can be revealed. Like the framing of collective action, the positioning of individual actor's self is crucial to understanding the wider narratives of a worldview in which social justice dominates. Analysis of Mahar dalit collective discourse and narrative provides an ideal case to be able to view the connection of identity, justice, agency, power, and frame/positioning in the process of worldview construction and social movement organization. The frames of social positioning theory, social identity, and power will resonate throughout the findings of this dissertation.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 32.

Accessed through the analysis of movement actors' stories, the aim of this research is to develop an epistemological grounding for conflict resolution practitioners to best be able to pro-socially utilize conflict protagonist's justice commitments in attempts to transform the conflict situation and dynamics. In other words, newfound knowledge of social justice is intended to inform peace-building process by providing some preliminary grounding from which future research can begin to construct a framework for addressing social justice in conflict. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to access social actors' narratives. Yet, while narrative is primary to social theory, disentangling "knowing" from "telling" can be tricky. Following Riessman (1993), Johnston (2005), and Grimshaw (1974), attempts at disentangling will draw out the connection between narratives and worldview transformation. This research can, therefore, be understood from two perspectives; as an on-going process of building "meta-communicative competence"<sup>186</sup> of Mahar culture and community; and as theory-building that unwraps the layers of worldview and, thus, in turn, new avenues for peace-building practice. The three-pronged approach to methodology (i.e. narrative and discourse analysis coupled with grounded theory) found in this research enables me to triangulate data, thereby ensuring an ability to get a 'fix' on meaning as separate from use. Such triangulation is necessary so that the most effective means for achieving social justice can be explored. Through a social constructionist epistemology and research

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<sup>186</sup> Briggs (1986), 61.

methods of narrative and discourse analysis, a model can, therefore, be developed and refined for approaching contention over social justice.

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study assumes a qualitative approach that embraces multiple methods of social scientific inquiry. Through seeking to explore how conflict protagonists formulate and deploy their own commitments to social justice in social contention, and how conflict resolution practitioners can, and should, exploit such a commitment in attempting efforts to transform the conflict setting, this research is a brand of action research. Methodologically speaking approaching a movement such as TBMSG from a completely objective position of privilege would miss an important participative aspect of the movement as family, and yield results that were not grounded in the lived experience of members. Engaging in research on TBMSG without doing some level of participatory evaluation seems to miss an important opportunity to both effect positive social change and develop relevant research questions for the real world. Park and Williams (1999) contend that “the goal of participatory evaluation is to help empower community people involved in action programs.”<sup>187</sup> They further argue that such research is a crucial link in the “reflection-action-reflection cycle”<sup>188</sup> that is crucial to success in community development. Borrowing from the methodology inherent in participatory action research, data for this dissertation were collected through participatory observation, formal and

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<sup>187</sup> Park and Williams (1999), 90.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 95.

informal interviews both in-person and over the internet, and through the development of a workshop on caste and social justice held at the Manuski Center in Pune, Maharashtra in July 2008. Taken collectively, this experiential data along with foundational written narratives provide a concrete basis for understanding the movement's successes and challenges and provides a grounding to begin to reconcile justice and peace-building in the movement's discourse.

The methods employed in this dissertation: narrative analysis, ethnographic field notes, discourse analysis, and grounded theory are all to be seen upon the backdrop of two core objectives: action and research. As inseparable, these two objectives expose my own epistemological foundations. Some have called this epistemological foundation 'action science' [see Lewin (1948), Argyris (1985), and Argyris and Schon (1978)]. Argyris (1985) speaks of action science as "enacting communities of inquiry in communities of social practice."<sup>189</sup> In such an endeavor, action science is understood as "knowledge that will serve action"<sup>190</sup> and its use as a methodological foundation assumes that knowledge has a "normative dimension."<sup>191</sup>

Researchers, in generating new knowledge, are engaged in a process of either maintaining the status quo or changing it. In either case, as a researcher, there exists a responsibility to reflect on the normative assumptions and foundations of knowledge. Action science accepts the implicit agency of the researcher and approaches research subjects as both informants and change agents. Of the existent research on the Ambedkar

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<sup>189</sup> Argyris (1985), 36.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 37.

Buddhism of the TBMSG, to my knowledge an action science approach has never explicitly been attempted and subsequently the full impact of social justice research knowledge has not been realized by either scholars or movement actors. This research aims to expose to movement members and scholars, the important necessity of reflecting on normative assumptions about social justice. Though the TBMSG movement realizes the import and impact of reflection-in-action on developing a universal message of social justice, their experience of actually doing such reflection around justice is minimal. Concerned with dharma practice TBMSG members have vast experience facilitating and processing the role of Buddhist practice in daily life, but are only beginning to foray into collectively processing how their conceptions of social justice are shaped by their Buddhist practice. The presentation of data in this research is an attempt to model such reflection, explore common themes of social justice contention, and highlight ways for conflict resolution practitioners to take advantage of social movement actors' social justice commitments for irenic ends. TBMSG members I was in contact with during this research see the benefit in such a process, but expressed uncertainty about how to organize, implement, and benefit from such reflection.

### ***3.1 Statement of Research Objectives***

The reliability of this study lies in its multiple methods and the level of research interaction with activist movement participants, as well as, a wide-ranging social-constructionist approach to narrative construction. But it is through taking an approach focused on validity, and not reliability, that multiple meanings open up and present acceptable explanations. Through interviews, facilitated dialogue, participant

observation, and archival narrative reconstruction, a multi-dimensional analysis of both the justice and injustice narratives of this movement will be provided. The idea of repeatable results is obviously irrelevant in such a qualitative and flexible research approach. On the other hand, some degree of validity can be measured. Although “procedures for establishing validity rely on realist assumptions and consequently are largely irrelevant to narrative studies,”<sup>192</sup> attempt will be made to simulate validity through a pragmatic and goal-oriented action science approach to peace-building. Such an approach provides a different view of validity that equates research validity with the researcher’s ability to assist the movement progress in its own self-defined goals. Developing a persuasive argument for the engagement of justice narratives in the creation of peace within this socially contentious movement will be the best measure of this research’s validity.

To make clear the objectives of this research a full outlining of the research hypotheses and research questions follows. Simply stated, the objective of this research is to develop an understanding of the TBMSG movement’s meaning of social justice, and meaning in this sense entails exploring its use *and* significance. The research hypotheses, as a series of statements which build upon each other, are based on an epistemological foundation in social constructionism. This means that unlike in the traditional conceptions of testable scientific method, these hypotheses must be understood in relation to processes of social interchange which is continually in a state of flux and change.

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<sup>192</sup> Riessman (1993), 64.

These hypotheses, therefore, act as a kind of map to epistemological inquiry but not testable or unchanging dictums to be proved at all cost. As Gergen (1985) states in outlining the assumptions of a social constructionist approach to inquiry “what we take to be knowledge of the world is not a product of induction, or of the building or testing of hypotheses.”<sup>193</sup> Rather, social constructionist premises are born of the “radical doubt in the taken-for-granted world,”<sup>194</sup> and assume a level of social interaction and negotiated understandings among social actors. In the social constructionist paradigm the following ‘hypotheses’ are understood as suppositions which are supported through observable social interaction and analysis, not as explanation for predetermined observations about social actions:

*Supposition One:* Concepts, such as justice, can most effectively be understood narratologically as the social world is continually being constructed by social actors.

*Supposition Two:* All social justice conceptions are connected to each other via narrative structure and the gaps between social justice conceptions are bridged by an interconnected pattern of social justice contention that is accessible to conflict resolution practitioners.

*Supposition Three:* A pattern of social justice contention which underlies social conflict can be developed into a methodology for intervening in protracted social conflict.

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<sup>193</sup> Gergen (1985), 266.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 267.

*Supposition Four:* In the deep-analysis of TBMSG narratives and narrative structures, the foundation of a framework of social justice is revealed.

*Supposition Five:* Through analyzing conceptions of social justice, the just society is recreated, social activism is recreated and empowered, and justice is given new meaning. In other words, the process of inquiry both strengthens and recreates the object of inquiry.

TBMSG is actively engaged in reflective learning from its members. Regularly holding inter-caste workshops,<sup>195</sup> one leading activist informant told me that these workshops are as much about building knowledge within TBMSG as about building understanding between the various communities with which the movement is working. Engaging in research that empowers this knowledge-building, this study has the dual aim of not only assisting TBMSG to be more effective leaders in advocating for caste change in society, but also in learning from the experiences of caste discrimination, and the conversion response, in order to explore how this experience might broaden our understanding of social justice more generally. A crucial assumption of this study is that conflict interventions that engage both justice and injustice narratives are generalizable and, therefore, exportable to other social conflict contexts. By framing the in-group identity of TBMSG's brand of Ambedkar Buddhism a methodology that helps illuminate how this in-group narrative gives meaning to interaction with outsiders can be developed

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<sup>195</sup> Inter-caste workshops here means groups of representatives from two or more typically low-caste sub-groups coming together to talk about their situation. In such workshops the similarities of the predicaments of these low-caste groups is stressed as a way to build alliances. TBMSG has not been very successful at organizing inter-caste workshops in which upper-castes are also involved.

through reference to power relations and social positioning. In light of the social-constructionist hypotheses above the study's core research questions can be grouped as four broad themes of inquiry as follows:

*Research Question One – Importance of Justice/Injustice Narratives:* What role do justice/injustice narratives play in the worldview of actors embedded in the TBMSG social movement? In other words, what role do justice/injustice narratives play in framing storytelling practices and, thus, in solidifying the standards and actions that both storytellers and story-listeners deploy and defend?

*Research Question Two – Justices' Relationship to Worldview and Peace-building:* In protracted social conflicts in which values play a primary role (here called worldview conflicts), how does one best foster social, cultural, and material change of patterned and habituated moral orders? What role do justice/injustice narratives, and religious conversion, play in peace-building?

*Research Question Three - Injustices' Relation to Social Transformation:* In the TBMSG movement, what is the relationship between injustice narratives, Buddhist conversion, and social transformation? What factors/opportunity structures assist in constructing TBMSG's vision of social justice? Does attention to these factors/opportunity structures produce unified understanding of social justice and, if not, what explains similarity and difference in justice/injustice narrative formation and framing?

*Research Question Four – Measuring Standards of an Extended Approach to Justice:* If a sense (or commitment) to justice, indeed, is shaped by a viable narrative to

engage worldview conflicts, how can we evaluate interventions involving the engagement of justice narratives? Are there standards or universal elements to dealing with justice in conflict that can be learned and transported from the TBMSG caste-conflict situation to other contexts? Approached from an outside perspective, can we extend an approach or framework, based on TBMSG-experience, to dealing with justice in other protracted worldview conflicts?

While these questions are broad and assume that both justice and injustice narratives represent a subtle and reactive space for conflict transformation, they also clearly outline the objectives of this study. In analyzing the social justice frames deployed by TBMSG movement leaders and activists the foundations of an epistemological framework for conflict resolution practitioners to approach actors' justice commitments will be developed and qualitatively grounded.

### ***3.2 Stages of Research and Research Sample***

Starting by capturing the injustice narratives of TBMSG, this study highlights not only aspects of the Ambedkar/Buddhist/Dalit movements that can be generalized but also points to aspects of local context that are distinctive to these specific social movement expressions. Having captured the injustice narratives of movement leaders and activists a set of storylines will be comparatively analyzed for their similar and dissimilar components of a narrative structure. Using both discourse and narrative analytical techniques core concepts (in particular social justice and terms closely related to it) will be teased out of the evaluative statements of leaders' and activists' narrative structure. Since often times the distinction between discourse and narrative can be cloudy, it is

important to here distinguish the differences between the analytical techniques used in their analysis. Kadayifci-Orellana (2006) provides a concise and informative delineation of these methodological approaches in attempting to develop understanding of the foundations of non-violence in Islam. Distinguishing between narratives as constituent parts of larger discourses she writes:

Discourse as a symbolic order is linguistically and culturally specific and makes it possible for all subjects who have been socialized under its authority to speak and act together (See McHoul and Grace 1993)... Narrative, on the other hand, constitutes part of a discourse. A discourse can contain more than one narrative within its body. A narrative, then “is a representation that arrests ambiguity and controls the proliferation of meaning by imposing a standard and standpoint of interpretation that is taken to be fixed and independent of the time it represents” (Ashley 1989, 263)... “A narrative typically accomplishes this structuring by adopting a perspective from which it privileges the least complex, least ambiguous elements of the text it represents” (Ashley 1989, 263).<sup>196</sup>

It is this “structuring” of narrative that will be explored in this study in order to tease out actors’ core conceptions of social justice and the relation of these concepts to TBMSG movement discourse on social justice. In effect, the narratives of injustice that have been elicited from research participants inform the development of a core set of justice narratives operating in the public sphere. By focusing analysis on the narrative structures<sup>197</sup> of both justice and injustice narratives, and by reintroducing them for reflection to the same TBMSG activists and leaders from whom they were elicited, a core

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<sup>196</sup> Kadayifci-Orellana (2006), 215.

<sup>197</sup> By focusing on ‘narrative structure,’ this study by no means assumes an objective structural-functional lens for social scientific inquiry. Rather the concept of ‘narrative structure’ is understood as providing one important means to understanding the social-psychological meanings of narratives encountered. Other means to develop understanding include positioning theory and ethnographic theories of identity and power.

set of TBMSG social justice narratives can be established and contextually grounded within wider movement discourse.

In developing such a grounded narrative theory this researcher relies on the experiences of Ambedkar Buddhists in some way connected to the TBMSG movement (predominantly former ‘untouchables’ and referred to throughout as dalits) to build further, more general theory about the role of social justice in peace-building processes. The action science aspect of this research lies in leaders’ own acknowledged need for TBMSG members and activists to practice envisioning the casteless, or socially just, society.<sup>198</sup> In exploring working class social movements Swarts (2008) argues that church-based community organizations in the United States spend exorbitant amounts of time envisioning a just society, despite the fact that they have a keen awareness of injustice, because working class participants have a difficulty “envisioning alternative futures.”<sup>199</sup> The same phenomenon afflicts TBMSG movement activists and appears in their work of developing inter-caste understanding among even the lowest of India castes. One Manuski center activist in explaining an inter-caste workshop he co-facilitated explained: “By the end [of the workshop] the participants [all representatives of low-caste communities] had no idea how to envision the casteless society. They were all silent when asked.”<sup>200</sup> Towards this dual research goal of developing social justice

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<sup>198</sup> In fact, both Manuski Center staff and some TBMSG Dharmacharis have been actively organizing inter-caste dialogues in which the task of envisioning a casteless society is broached; a subject that I will be returning to in chapters five and six, especially during the discussion of the dialogues on caste I facilitated during the course of this research.

<sup>199</sup> Swarts (2008), 53.

<sup>200</sup> Informal interview with Priyadarshi Telang, June 25, 2008.

understanding within the movement, as well as extrapolating the implications of a more developed understanding of social justice, it is important to approach the data collected from a uniform analytical perspective. For this reason a Labovian analytical framework has been adopted [see Labov and Waletzky (1967), Labov (1972), and Toolan (1988)]. Even though such a framework is constrained by an almost total structural emphasis, the uniform and systematic techniques it empowers will allow the research to draw connections between multiple case narratives. The combination of a Labovian framework and an emphasis on social psychology of group identity dynamics, with particular recourse to social positioning theory [see Harre and Langenhove (1999)], provides a nice fit to draw narratological conclusions about justice.

Taking a multiple case approach to narrative enquiry, I have approached “cases as specific theoretical constructs, which coalesce in the course of the research,”<sup>201</sup> not as either constant or ontologically separate from the process of knowing. In other words, this research approach aimed to presuppose as little as possible about the TBMSG movement prior to the start of data collection. Initially relying on the narrative of informants, participant observation of the researcher, and the discourse of movement literature, only later were activist autobiographies added to the data to be analyzed. This approach helped to develop a holistic picture of social justice.<sup>202</sup> Such an approach allowed the movement’s narrative of justice to emerge over the course of the research and

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<sup>201</sup> Ragin C. and Becker, H., eds. (1992), 10.

<sup>202</sup> Distinguishing this research from the positivist paradigm of quantitative inquiry such an approach sees complexity as useful, not problematic. As Shkedi (2005) explains: “While the postulates of the positivist position are seen by their proponents as sequential and divisible into parts, the postulates of the constructivist position are seen as multidirectional and interconnected” (3).

remain as close to the experience of the movement's members as possible. "Constructivist-qualitative researchers seek to understand a situation as it is constructed by the participants."<sup>203</sup> In adopting a multiple case approach to narrative there is an implicit argument that people rarely, if ever, experience reality independent of their normative commitments. Rather there are levels of interpretation encoded in narrative that can only be teased out through reference to multiple experiences, including the researchers' own experience. As a non-Indian from a privileged social position attention to this frame will be as important as attention to the frame of research participants that are predominantly from the middle-to-upper classes of the dalit community. My own proclivities towards a Buddhist worldview and being an agent in fighting for social justice everywhere must be bracketed, realizing that such bracketing can only be partial at best. The constant reflection on the relationship between researcher and subject allows for a modicum of realism in this work by overtly accepting the interconnectedness between me and my respondents. While the various social positions of class, caste, ethnicity, and nationality influence all interpretation, by focusing on multiple cases, and understanding that the process of analyzing case narratives is implicitly connected to knowing, these complicating variables will be at least partially mitigated. Attention and reflection on both subject's and researcher's frames is important because "frames

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<sup>203</sup> Shkedi (2005), 5.

determine their strategies of attention and thereby set the directions in which they will try to change the situation, the values with which they shape their practice.”<sup>204</sup>

Since much of my primary data has been collected through formal and informal interviews and participant observation of those involved in the work of the Manuski Center, the majority of my sample is English speaking. Due to my own lack of Mahar language skills, such a sample was both necessary and inevitable, but also presents some inherent weaknesses to a multiple case narrative/constructivist methodology. Despite the fact that in certain cases I was able to employ translators to assist with interviewing local activists and dalit families in the slum areas of Pune and Mumbai, the study’s participants are largely from what in India is often referred to as the “creamy layer.”<sup>205</sup> In other words, my sample was skewed to the most educated and economically mobile segments of the Ambedkar dalit community.<sup>206</sup> Since snowball sampling was used to recruit research participants this skewing was inevitable since the social networks of dalits, like any other sample population, do not tend to cross-cut socio-economic lines. Further, due to the need to get fully transcribed narratives for analysis, interviewing those in English provided an added control against unknown or unnoticed mistakes in translation and/or

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<sup>204</sup> Schon (1983), 309.

<sup>205</sup> The ‘creamy layer’ is a term used in Indian Politics to refer to the relatively wealthier and better educated members of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) who, it is argued, should no longer be eligible for social/ educational benefits from the government. The term was introduced by the Sattanathan Commission in 1971, which directed that the “creamy layer” should be excluded from the reservations (quotas) of civil posts and services granted to the OBCs [see The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) website of the Government of India - <http://www.ncbc.nic.in/html/creamyayer.htm> - for a detailed description of who now constitutes the ‘creamy layer.’]

<sup>206</sup> See Beltz (2005) for a well-written explanation of the many difficulties of interviewing those outside the upwardly mobile population of Maharashtrian Dalits.

transcription. At the same time, limiting speakers to only English may have limited the range of injustice narratives encountered by the researcher. While many of those interviewed had only second-hand accounts of injustice, undoubtedly due in-part to their urban and upwardly-mobile upbringing and social position, it could be inferred that the discrimination experiences of the uneducated villager may be more psychologically apparent, fresh, first-hand, and/or contemporarily relevant. Regardless of these weaknesses the socio-psychological legacy of past injustice remains noticeable in the upwardly-mobile and well-educated activist that represent the majority of this study's sample. In addition, the activists interviewed are unusual of upwardly-mobile dalits in the sense that they are trying to build cross-class and cross-caste networks of social contention and not just striving for personal success. In sum, the sample represents a diverse section of the Ambedkar dalit activist community involved in the TBMSG movement and, often times, provides a sort of channeling of village experiences of discrimination. Due to these activists' wide-range of experience and interaction with all levels of the Ambedkar dalit community they are well poised to act as conduits for the range of experiences that dalits encounter in modern India. Such a sample, while exhibiting inherent weaknesses, provides a strong window into the construction of social justice and the discourse of the movement more generally.

The research work of this study has taken place in six interconnected stages (see table 2 below for a general outline of these non-linear research design stages). The first stage involved interviews that elicited movement participant's (both leaders' and activist members') deep-seated emotional experiences of discrimination, or narratives of

injustice. Care was taken in this process to ensure that the psychological safety and social well-being of research participants was protected. For example, when interviewing movement activists, the researcher always attempted to ensure that one-on-one privacy was the norm, and, if not accepted then, at a minimum, it was offered. India is a crowded country and personal space is not understood in the same way that it is in the United States, therefore, at times interviews were less than private. Most of the interviews were conducted at the Manuski Center or during appropriate breaks at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of Ambedkar's conversion at TBMSG's Nagaloka Training Institute in Nagpur. These locales are perceived by the TBMSG membership as safe and familiar spaces. In addition, when translators were used they were students that were identified and supplied by the movement so as to ensure that trust and confidentiality were adequately understood by the research subjects. A few interviews were conducted in Ambedkar dalit homes. In such cases, a description of the research was given prior to asking any question and participants were asked to acknowledge informed consent protocols. In all cases, these dalits were eager to participate and expressed appreciation for being able to speak about their difficulties. The injustice narratives collected can be personal and emotional, therefore, secure and confidential communication between interviewer and interviewee was crucial to the success of this research stage.

Once these justice/injustice narratives were collected they were catalogued using basic content analysis and thematic grouping techniques as being representative of various expressions of victim-hood and Buddhist and/or Non-Hindu identity. Thus, stage two of the research design involved performing content 'grouping' of the collected

qualitative justice/injustice narratives. This stage involved informal cataloging of the dominant themes in the justice/injustice narratives encountered. Stage three involved the comparison of exemplar narrative conceptions via the use of Labovian and social positioning analysis techniques and theory. Once initial analysis was completed on exemplar justice/injustice narratives (stage three) the findings about the processes of narrative structuring were compared to the central elements of the discourse of the movement in stage four. This was accomplished through reference to field notes and participant observation of the movement, as well as, through reference to movement literature. Stage five involved refining and re-introducing the narrative structures and positioning analysis of justice/injustice narratives to leaders and activists in order to come to further clarity on the dominant social justice narratives deployed by movement leaders and activists. Taking the findings from the first five stages of research, the sixth stage attempts to ground a theory of the necessary elements of justice in peace-building practice. This final stage required moving back to stage three (i.e. the analysis of chosen justice/injustice narratives) and running through the subsequent stages multiple times in order to get the movement's core justice narratives correct (or saturated). A simplification of these stages is presented below in Table 2, which should in no way be understood as an expression of the linear nature of this research:

**Table 2: Stages of Research Design**

| <u>Research Design Stage</u> | <u>Specific Activities</u>  |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1                            | Elicit justice/injustice narratives through initial round of interviews with movement leaders and activists.  |
| 2                            | Perform content ‘grouping’ or cataloguing of collected narratives.  |
| 3                            | Choose exemplar narratives that address each theme identified by stage two’s grouping and analyze the structure of these chosen narratives (through both Labovian narrative analysis and positioning analysis).   |
| 4                            | Compare this narrative structuring of the exemplar narratives to the central elements of the social justice discourse of the movement (via participant observation and movement literature).  |
| 5                            | Refine and re-introduce narrative structures/positioning analysis in order to come to some clarity on the dominant social justice narratives being deployed by movement leaders and activists.  |
| 6                            | Develop a grounded theory of the elements of social justice necessary for effective peace-building practice. NOTE: This stage may entail returning to the analysis in stage three and cycling back through the subsequent stages (four and five) until a preliminary framework for understanding social justice is developed. Since the broader aim of the research is to begin to develop a ‘framework’ for practitioners to make use of justice commitment in attempting efforts to transform the conflict setting, participants’ reflections on social justice will be privileged. |

In cycling through these design stages the expected outcomes follow closely the suppositions stated above. Given that concepts, such as justice, can most effectively be understood narratologically, this research will show that underlying all protracted social conflict is a framework of social justice that is narratologically linked to other worldviews and accessible to conflict resolution practitioners. In short, it will be shown that social actors are ensnared in patterns of value commitment and that exploring the pattern conflict can be transformed. The narrative identities of Buddhist and victim

present social constructions that reify social action and become interdependent on each other. It is, therefore, only through addressing parties' narrative identities that intervention in conflicts over social justice can be successful. The action research component of this research agenda requires identifying these narrative identities and drawing conclusions from them that are potentially serviceable for intervention in other conflict settings. Based on the overarching supposition that there is a framework of social justice underlying social conflict which can be developed into a methodology for intervening in protracted social conflict, TBMSG narratives and narrative structures provide a valuable means to understanding social justice. Though defining justice is an on-going process which is inseparable, in this case, from the TBMSG's practice of activism, this research is aimed at findings that inform further action. As TBMSG leaders and activists define justice with recourse to Buddhist Dharma they both wittingly and unwittingly create new social positions, identities, and power relations. Through deep analysis new narratives are developed, social activism is recreated, and justice is given new meaning. Thus, a sort of reflective action research is reproduced in the task of developing a framework for identifying the necessary elements of justice in peace-building processes. This provides the most powerful outcome of the above research design – renewed social action - and informs all further methodological commitments.

This research, which extrapolates what are somewhat amorphous and ever-changing justice narratives, requires that the researcher have a degree of freedom when selecting his sample. Weighing elements of textual and interview analysis, this research balanced interaction with movement leaders, activists, and critics to develop a holistic

perspective on the movement's justice narratives and discourse. In total, the interview sample size was approximately twenty respondents involved directly with the TBMSG movement or its subsidiary Jambudvipa Trust, as well as an additional 10-15 people in both the United States and India with research, analysis, and/or critical observation experience/analytical insight of the movement studied. Many of these interviews were informally conducted with Ambedkarites, scholars, and social activists. In addition to eight formal interviews with TBMSG leaders and activists, three formal interviews were conducted with dalit families who had little-to-no connection with the TBMSG, but nonetheless considered themselves Ambedkar Buddhists. Such a wide and varied interview sample allowed for a robust interpretation of the data collected and varying opinions on the work of the TBMSG and its relation to both 'Buddhist' and 'victim' identities. Coupled with participant observation of daily movement activities<sup>207</sup> the diverse sample of interviews provides a nice compliment to the written movement discourse and foundational figures' writings also analyzed as narratives.

### ***3.3 Methods of Data Collection***

By collecting data on the research subject via a diverse array of methods a more complete picture of the TBMSG movement, its place in both society, and the social phenomenon of Ambedkarism more generally becomes clear. This research embraces a multi-method approach in the sense that Druckman (2005) describes as "the kind of synthesis that could not be obtained from the standpoint of one perspective or application

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<sup>207</sup> The researcher spent a total of five weeks living with movement members and supporters (2 weeks at Nagaloka Training Center near Nagpur and 3 weeks at the Manuski Center in Pune).

of one methodology.’’<sup>208</sup> The methods of data collection chosen, therefore, provide a window into various social structural and psychological identity-based positions of TBMSG members. A combination of interviews, participant observation, historical analysis, and action science provides a means to understand social justice contextually. Further, since the research is concerned with group identity dynamics as they relate to social justice such a multi-method approach is not only inevitable, but required.

To overcome the potential weaknesses of my Mahar language deficit and the subsequent potential of elite members of the movement co-opting my understanding of social justice for this group, secondary source interviews of scholars familiar with research on the Ambedkar dalits was done. Despite the fact that Ambedkar and the movement he helped spawn in Maharashtra State are well know historical events in India, the level and attention scholars have placed on Ambedkar dalits is not representative of the impact Ambedkarism has had on the social and intellectual life of modern Maharashtra. Still, since the researcher’s introduction to Ambedkar’s legacy was through academic circles it seems fitting to interview scholars of the Ambedkar movement so as to reflect on personal assumptions and potential biases.<sup>209</sup> In addition to the obvious scholarly inattention, one can see neglect of dalit issues and abilities in many facets of

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<sup>208</sup> Druckman (2005), 328.

<sup>209</sup> Since the Ambedkar movement and mass conversion is over 50 years old it has been meticulously studied by Indian and some Western researchers. Yet, most of this attention has revolved around the impact of conversion and not necessarily on the more problematic subject of inter-caste cooperation. In discussion with Zelliott, Omvedt, Lynch, and others it has become clear that despite the minimal scholarly attention that Ambedkar-Buddhists have received, these scholars provide a rich collection of secondary source material on the impact and direction of the movement and, in turn, help to place this research within a historical context and methodological progression.

Indian life. Chandra Bhan Prasad, the first (and still only) dalit writer to have a regular column in a mainstream India newspaper, has highlighted the near exclusion of dalits and their experiences in all walks of professional life.<sup>210</sup> In order to give voice to as many diverse experiences the following array of methods of data collection have been employed during the course of this research:

Primary Source Material comes from:

- A.) Formal interviews with movement leaders, activists, and scholars;
- B.) Informal interviews with movement members and other Ambedkar dalits;
- C.) Participant observation of social movement activities, public talks, social mobilization and organizing (including the reiteration of field notes);
- C.) Experiences and notes from facilitating a dialogue workshop on social justice and caste held for movement leaders and Ambedkar dalit activists;

Secondary Source Material comes from:

- E.) Analysis of historical movement narratives in the form of movement documents, leaders' autobiographies, dalit memoirs, and commentaries by scholars.

In the sections below each of the above methods of data collection are explained in more specific detail. As data points aimed at bringing one closer to understanding the social justice concerns of Ambedkar Buddhists active in the TBMSG movement and the importance of reflection on these concerns, these methods of analysis each expose a portion of the wider understanding of the movement's discourse of social justice.

### **3.3.1 Formal Interviews**

Formal interviews were conducted both in-person and over the internet/internet phone with TBMSG movement leader, Ambedkar activists, and scholars/journalists.

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<sup>210</sup> Prasad (2004). For example in investigating the Delhi School of Economics the top, state-sponsored, school of economics in India Prasad writes: "The School's library has a collection of over 2.5 lakh books [one lakh is equal to 100,000]. But it does not have the complete works of B.R. Ambedkar, the first Indian to acquire a degree in economics from a foreign university. Ambedkar stands alone in his critique of Indian social organization, but the faculty does not find it necessary to read him. This symbolically mirrors the mindset of the school" [Prasad (2004), 4].

These interviews were ‘formal’ only as compared to the unstructured narrative sharing that is described below as informal interviews. As semi-structured these ‘formal’ interviews revolved around two general themes: respondents past experience(s) of injustice and respondent reason(s) for becoming active in the TBMSG movement. While it was assumed that these two themes might be closely related, the semi-structured approach allowed the researcher to draw out the personal instances of “reflection-in-action”<sup>211</sup> on the part of the respondent. A formal set of questions that were asked to respondents, in various order depending on the flow of conversation, is attached as Appendix D. All semi-structured interviews took place at either Jambudvipa Trust’s office, or via internet/internet phone, with scholars and movement commentators.

During formal interviews, written notes were taken and a majority of the ten (10) formal interview sessions were recorded using a handheld digital recorder. Once the interview was complete and data transcribed and codified interview notes were again consulted to pick up on any nuances of meaning or observations missed. All interview notes and collected data have been securely placed in a locked file cabinet in the researchers’ home office and are password protected on the researchers’ laptop. While many of the narratives analyzed were collected through informal interviews and field

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<sup>211</sup> Schon (1983) juxtaposes the positivist framing of professional knowledge [what he calls “technical rationality” (21)] with what he calls “reflection-in-action” (21), a sort of spontaneous reframing of a problematic situation in which the professional does “not keep means and ends separate” (68). Reflection-in-action involves problem setting as opposed to simply problem solving and, thus, provides the narrative researcher an ideal window into respondents’ construction of normative commitments and framing of reality. Simultaneously, “when a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice” (310) and this new reflective awareness generates previously unexplored narrative, storylines, and narrative structures.

notes from observation, the formal interviews act as a means to verify perceptions and clarify positions. The knowledge and connections gained through the formal interview process cannot be overstated, but at the same time the formal interview process represents only one means of narrative collection.

Since, as Briggs (1986) states: “providing the referential frame for a conversation about the past presupposes a great deal of knowledge about both this era and the folkloric expressions in conveying it,”<sup>212</sup> the researcher has studied Hindi language, Maharashtra history, and the Indian print media in attempts at developing a “communicative competence”<sup>213</sup> of the Indian social context. Of course, my own self-reflection over the tendency to exhibit “communicative hegemony” over respondents’ speech acts also represents an area of vital importance for eliciting an effective picture of the movement’s conception of social justice. Following a narrative approach to interviewing, I have strived to be a partner in dialogue during the interview process. As Riessman (1993) correctly states: “provided investigators can give up control over the research process and approach interviews as conversation, almost any question can generate narrative.”<sup>214</sup> Given the research need to generate justice narratives to be analyzed and understood in relation to peace-building processes, my own research involvement in “communicative action”<sup>215</sup> must also be reflected upon and controlled.

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<sup>212</sup> Briggs (1986), 64.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>214</sup> Riessman (1993), 56.

<sup>215</sup> Habermas (1987), 3.

Because there are no specific criteria for inclusion into the interview process other than being involved with the social movement in some capacity and the willingness and time to sit down together in discussion, attention was paid to demographics only from a macro-theory perspective. Selection of respondents was through both purposive and snowball sampling, with initial respondents being identified by the researcher's initial interaction with TBMSG leaders and subsequent respondents being identified by this initial set of respondents. The narratives chosen for inclusion in the analysis and findings of this research are typical of other narratives collected and act as exemplars of the kind of knowledge and worldview that appear to be common among TBMSG movement members.

Before the start of all formal interviews, each respondent received a copy of the consent form as prescribed by the GMU Human Subjects Review Board and an explanation of the purpose of my study. Since views of justice/injustice often ignite anger, or other strong emotional feelings, care was taken to be respectful of the respondent's social condition and position in the socio-economic pecking-order. Special attention was paid to being cognizant of the interview session or facilitated dialogue's becoming detrimental to respondents' continued functioning in their given social context. Though no such situation was detected, if such problems were to be detected the interview would have been terminated, notes destroyed, and movement leadership briefed on potentially negative reactions and/or potentially negative consequences of the earlier interaction. Though many respondents revealed continuing problems with high caste landlords or bosses, the interview questions were delivered in such a way that was

cognizant of the social pressures that dalits face.<sup>216</sup> Given that research subjects are from underprivileged communities, and by their own accounts ‘downtrodden,’ I have remained vigilant in ensuring that the research methods and scope in no way empower oppressive structures or downplay the ethical importance of naming these structures.

The formal interviews conducted provide the grounding to explore social actors’ conceptions of justice. Knowledge gained through these formal interviews both informed further research and the reflective practice of facilitating workshops on caste. Though not exhaustive of all narrative structures that TBMSG members use to narrate social justice, these formal interviews do provide a base-line upon which other data collection methods provide corrective measures. The formal interviews, coupled with informal interviews, provide an unmediated, direct, and at times very personal recounting of injustice and even though justice is not simply definable as the opposite of injustice, it is through hearing and telling of these injustice narratives that justice as an ongoing ideal becomes real for both researcher and subjects.

### ***3.3.2 Informal Interviews/Observed Narrative Formations***

Informal interviews were conducted entirely in person during the course of my participant observation. These interviews were ‘informal’ in the sense that there was no pre-determined structure of interaction. Often times these ‘informal’ interviews began as simple discussions over lunch at Jambudvipa Trust offices in Pune, at the Nagoloka campus of the Nagarjuna Training Institute in Nagpur, or in a car ride to visit a Buddhist

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<sup>216</sup> A copy of the formal interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

relic or TBMSG retreat center. Despite these informants' background knowledge of my interests such discussions often began more as attempts to get to know each other than as following a line of direct questioning about topics directly relevant to the research at hand. Building this familiarity and trust allowed respondents to tell their stories and share things that they themselves might not have thought important or useful to the research. As a result, these interviews were often more informative and psychologically intense than the recorded formal interviews. As a method to collect injustice narratives the informal setting provides for a candidness that is rarely, if ever, experienced in formal interview situations. In addition, it was found that during person-to-person informal discussion informants were much more likely to make broad evaluative statements in openly sharing their personal stories than if specifically asked to do so in a formal setting in which recording had been requested. Recording detailed field notes after these informal interviews was an important aspect of this research.

Like formal interviewees, informal respondents were briefed on the research focus and asked if it was alright to use their comments in the course of writing research findings. None had any problem with such requests and were, indeed, eager to share their, often times personal, experiences. In reflection, my own presence as a researcher undoubtedly gave voice to many unheard stories, and respondents were keen to cooperate for want of being heard. But, as Briggs (1986) has cogently argued, communicative competence may be more than just language. It also entails social and cultural norms that condition both researcher and research subject. Beyond simply being 'heard' these respondents wanted me to empathize with what it was like to face 'untouchable'

oppression. In such informal discussions social and cultural norms became more noticeable than in formal interview settings. These social and cultural norms play a major role in the development of narrative structures and, therefore, reflective attention of these norms provides valuable insight into meaning. Briggs (1986) outlines three ways in which interview techniques circumvent the logical process of developing meta-communicative competence. First, ethnographic researchers skip the process of acquisition by attempting repetition, second they invert the interaction process by engaging in “communicative hegemony,” and, finally, they disrupt the cohesion of discourse by their “lack of familiarity with the relevant referential frames.”<sup>217</sup> Being aware of the shortcomings of the formal interview, the use of informal interviews provided a complementary method to be able to get at more authentic and heartfelt utterances of the research subjects and build a rapport to work towards meta-communicative competence.

Informal interviews allowed me to circumvent the potential methodological problems that are inevitable through a study that relied on formal interviews only. The information gained through informal means provide a breadth and depth to the narrative analysis done in this study by not only providing a window into the social and cultural bases of narrative formation, but also by building trust and providing space to engage in critical reflection of the research topic. Informal interviews present data that connects the often problematic disjuncture between social theory and the formal semi-structured

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<sup>217</sup> Briggs (1986), 89.

response of informants. Coupled with participant observation field notes, such data is a valuable base of this research endeavor.

### ***3.3.3 Field Notes from Participant Observation***

Participant observation was conducted during the entire period I was in the field and field notes were taken every evening before retiring. In the course of two trips to India, lasting about five weeks in total, I attended many movement events including celebrations, project and/or facility inaugurations, conversion ceremonies, puja (worship) ceremonies, movement planning meetings, and activist workshops on various topics related to both caste and Buddhist dharma. In addition, as stated above, I had the opportunity to lead a two-day workshop among movement members on caste injustice and envisioning social justice. As both a religious and social welfare organization TBMSG has many activities happening on a regular and on-going basis (and sometimes happening simultaneously). The loose configuration of various charitable trusts that make up the TBMSG family (in particular the Bahujan Hitay, literally “for the welfare of the many,” the Jambudvipa Trust, and the Manuski Center) all provided me with multiple options to attempt to understand the TBMSG movement as a community.<sup>218</sup> The two trips to India, comprising a period of five weeks spent in the field, were adequate to develop an understanding of various actors’ roles within the movement and their respective commitments to social justice. Of course, if research funding had been made available more time would have been spent doing participant observation of the

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<sup>218</sup> For a complete outlining of the TBMSG family of trusts see Chapter one of this dissertation as well as Appendix C.

movement. Given the ever-present constraints of time and money, every opportunity availed was taken to talk about and observe the life of movement members from all levels of the social-economic spectrum (including movement members' infrequent trips to the United States).

The Jambudvipa Trust provided an ideal place to experience the movements' narrative and discourse, since this subsidiary trust of the TBMSG is charged with the job of making Ambedkar accessible to a wider audience in India and abroad. Staying at the Jambudvipa Trust's offices, which also houses the Manuski Center and Ambedkar library, for three weeks allowed for regular observation of the daily life of TBMSG members, both Dharmacharis and lay order members. The library provided valuable resources, as well as, a public display of the movement's day-to-day interaction with the public. Since the majority of the staff of the Manuski Center lives and works on-site living at the center provided a valuable opportunity to observe TBMSG members' daily work and social interactions. Manuski, like TBMSG more broadly, provided the comfort and feel of a family setting. The Manuski Center is not only the headquarters of the team of young dalit social activists that Lokamitra has assembled, but it is also a meeting place and resource center for all members of the Ambedkar Buddhist community. Daily interaction with Mahar 'untouchable' Buddhists, revealed some aspects of their culture, worldview, and sense of right and wrong that were previously unclear, or unknown, to the researcher. In addition, reading the daily local English language newspapers provided insight into the socio-cultural dynamic between local ethnic, class, and religious groups and this dynamic's connection to religious beliefs and self-described identity of the

community of study. In short for three weeks, I was completely immersed in the lives and work of those TBMSG members working and operating within the Jambudvipa Trust's offices and resource center. This provided an invaluable insight into both the workings and worldview of TBMSG's dalit rights activism.

All observation was recorded in field notebooks as they occurred (if immediately possible), and further analyzed in a research diary filed at the end of each day in the field. As productions of narrative, these too have been treated as context to be analyzed. The reflective nature of the field notes and research diary allowed me to, not only, understand the worldview and justice narratives that participant observation exposed me to, but also its relation to personal and group understandings of justice. The process of locating self in the experience of others was invaluable to the research process, and to developing grounded theory based on social justice in conflict. Through participant observation a more complete ethnographic understanding of justice was developed both within the social movement observed, and between it and the 'outside' world of others. Participant observation served multiple purposes in the course of this research; it helped build trust among research participants, it contextualized the rights-based work of the Manuski Center, and it provided the scaffolding with which to understand the narrative structures of research respondents.

#### ***3.3.4 Dialogue Workshop Experience/Interaction***

Dialogue, as a balance of advocacy and inquiry, provided another means to collect narratives and understand movement discourse. This balance requires both a suspension

of reason in order to give others a "window to your reasoning" and humanity,<sup>219</sup> but also a methodological ability to ask, and work through answers, to practical questions. In developing and organizing a two-day dialogue workshop among TBMSG members on the connection between caste and social justice, my aim was to both elicit heartfelt injustice narratives, as well as, ferment authentic discussion on participant's ideal of the socially just society and TBMSG's role in realizing it. After spending some time discussing the difference between dialogue and debate, participants were taught four practical dialogue models, as well as, the basics of appreciative inquiry as a means to deal with caste-based conflict (as opposed to the dominant paradigm of problem-solving). The intent of the first day of the workshop was to provide participants with some basic tools with which to elicit dialogue on the second day of the workshop, with the hope of truly aiding in their work of facilitating inter-caste communication among sub-caste communities. As action research the dialogue workshop provided an opportunity for both the researcher and research subjects to explore how the exercise of envisioning the socially justice (i.e. caste-less) society might inform their respective work.

A crucial aspect of any successful dialogue process is the degree to which participants and facilitators are actively listening for deeper patterns of meaning in order to build group understanding. Day two of the dialogue workshop held at the Manuski Center began such a process of sharing through the facilitation of a fish bowl exercise in which participants were asked to respond to either of the following two questions based

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<sup>219</sup> <http://www.thedialogueproject.org/dialogue.htm>.

on their level of comfort: What is your personal experience with caste discrimination? And/or what brought you to work in the TBMSG movement? In the exercise participants could only speak if they were in an inner circle, and those in an outer circle could ‘tap-in’ to the inner circle only once a participant therein had already spoken at least once. This process began slowly, but soon participants were sharing both personal and more general stories of caste-based discrimination and the TBMSG/Ambedkar movement. During the second half of day two different facilitation models (the ‘buzz’ and a roundtable) were practiced with questions regarding the relation between Buddhist conversion identity and the transformed society and then later in the development of action steps for a socially-just or casteless society. At the end of the dialogue workshop both written and oral evaluations were completed by participants. The data collected through video-taped portions of the dialogue and participant feedback provide an invaluable record of data about how TBMSG members envision an ideal caste-less society. In cataloging the use of stock Ambedkarite phrases, such as “liberty, equality, fraternity” another picture of the movement’s discourse becomes available.

### ***3.3.5 Analysis of Historical Narratives (written accounts from Ambedkar, Dalits, Movement Commentators/Scholars, etc.)***

Since the methods of data analysis employed in this study involve both discourse and narrative analysis of written and spoken text, language and its specific construction are, of course, crucial to this study. Therefore, a primary focus of my research required a

process of acquiring “meta-communicative competence”<sup>220</sup> of the Mahar culture of Maharashtra. To be in a position to comprehend the local narratives of justice and ‘bracket’ personal cultural preconceptions of justice and social movement organizing, it was important to read and digest as much Mahar literature as possible (the analysis of some of this important literature appears in Chapter Five). This literature, becoming increasingly vast as more and more dalits get educated and have the tools to share their experience, is a reservoir of under-explored subaltern narratives of oppression and uplift.

Attempting to avoid the paradigmatic interview missteps highlighted by Briggs (1986), I lessened the procedural problems inherent in interviews by diversifying the means of data collection to not only include ethnographic dialogue and conversation, but also archival and literary descriptions of personal accounts of ‘untouchability.’ The basis for this literary genre can arguably be drawn back to the now hagiographic movement leader, and foundational figure, of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. But in addition to analyzing Dr. Ambedkar’s earliest stories of discrimination other written social commentary on the movement and accounts of living with ‘untouchability’ were also analyzed. Since there are so many of such stories to choose from, but only a few written in English, the selection process for these narratives involved a simple two step process: first, informally asking movement leaders, activists, and scholars what written accounts of dalit life in Maharashtra were most influential and important to them, and then narrowing this list to English translations. From this process a short list that was

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<sup>220</sup> Briggs (1986), 61.

developed which includes the autobiographical accounts of Ambedkar (1935/2002/2003), Jadhav (2003), Moon (2000), and Kamble (2008). Of course other accounts of dalits' life experience exist, but of those translated in English and focused on life in Maharashtra these represent the most widely read and influential accounts among TBMSG movement leaders and activists.

In addition to the translated Marati literature, focusing on movement framing of messaging and narrative structure in all forms of public relations documents, videos, and internet activity further helped to contextualize my primary sources of narrative and discourse data. Taking a multi-method approach to understanding justice narratives requires a holistic approach to the methodological design. Analyzing what Denzin (2001) calls “personal experience stories”<sup>221</sup> is only one variable in the complex equation of studying social movements from a social scientific perspective. Although narratives are a very important variable to developing any sense of social scientific truth about social movements, other methods of data collection are also necessary. A diverse set of methods for data collection are necessary to successfully achieve what Robson (2002) defines as “triangulation.”<sup>222</sup> Specifically, two types of triangulation techniques are employed in this study: data triangulation and theory triangulation (i.e. the use of both multiple methods of data collection and multiple social scientific theories). Without multiple data sources complex social movements, such as TBMSG, can be easily misunderstood as homogeneously focused on one set of aspirations. Thus, this research

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<sup>221</sup> Denzin (2001), 68.

<sup>222</sup> Robson (2002), 174.

is of a flexible design that includes elements of grounded theory, participant observation, and case study approaches to the process of collecting narrative and discursive data.<sup>223</sup>

The movement's public documents, like Maharashtrian dalit literature, provide a rich repository for attempting to understand both the social justice frame and historical narrative foundations of low-caste Mahars mobilized by TBMSG.

The analysis of historical narratives will be executed in the same ways that primary source data is analyzed (see below), but unlike the primary source data these historical narratives were chosen to be instances of a dominant discourse, not as representative of the system they are describing, as is the case with the primary source data. As Denzin (2001) clarifies in quoting Fiske (1994):

In discourse analysis, no utterance is representative of other utterances, though of course it shares structural features with them; a discourse analyst studies utterances in order to understand how the potential of the linguistic system can be activated when it intersects at its moments of use with a social system.' This is the argument for the method of instances.<sup>224</sup>

As instances that under-gird the current subaltern perspective, historical literary accounts provide a system's context for understanding the personal justice/injustice narratives collected.

### ***3.4 Methods of Data Analysis***

Combining narrative and discourse analysis this research takes a "template approach"<sup>225</sup> to qualitative analysis of the data. By this it is meant that primary codes (or archetypal identity constructions) were developed from initial archival research and

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<sup>223</sup> For a comparative chart of these traditions in qualitative research see Robson (2002), 165.

<sup>224</sup> Denzin (2001), 63.

<sup>225</sup> Robson (2002), 458.

secondary source readings and then adapted through reference to the data collected through facilitated dialogue, interviews, and participant observation. These templates are not static, but rather reveal patterns of understanding about TBMSG members' ideal of social justice. In analyzing the narrative structure of justice/injustice narratives, field memos, and movement discourse an attempt is made to link together data, thus creating a snapshot of the movement's social justice narratives (i.e. through a process of axial coding<sup>226</sup>). The use of this approach suggests that data analysis is an on-going process throughout the research. "Such research suggests how dominating and emerging discourses in organizations and societies provide a repertoire of concepts, which can be used strategically by members of the community to influence the social construction of identities..."<sup>227</sup> A multi-method flexible-template approach to qualitative research provides a means to blend narrative, discourse, and elements of grounded theory analysis to approach the complexity of data collected.

Taking an approach focused on validity, not reliability, allows me to remain open to the possibility of multiple meanings. The idea of repeatable results is obviously irrelevant in such a qualitative and flexible approach. On the other hand, some degree of validity can be measured. Although "procedures for establishing validity rely on realist assumptions and consequently are largely irrelevant to narrative studies,"<sup>228</sup> validity can and should be stimulated through a pragmatic and goal-oriented action research approach

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<sup>226</sup> See Robson (2002), 194 and 494.

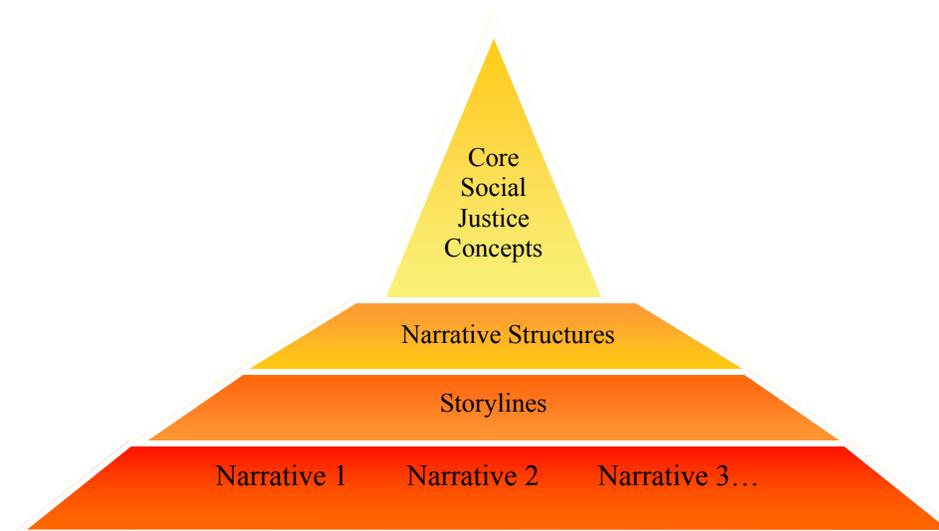
<sup>227</sup> Phillips and Hardy (2002), 32.

<sup>228</sup> Riessman (1993), 64.

to peace-building. Developing a persuasive argument for the engagement of justice concepts in creating consensus within this socially contentious movement will be the best measure of the study's validity. Further, drawing comparisons between the pro-social and anti-social aspects of the movement lends a pragmatism to the research and leads to concrete recommendation for how to generate further theory aimed at both using and evaluating the power of justice interventions.

#### ***3.4.1 Narrative and Discourse Analysis of both Observed and Historical Narratives***

Applying narrative and discourse analysis techniques to the data collected, one can envisage a sort of hierarchical model for getting at TBMSG's core conceptions of social justice. TBMSG's activist and leadership narratives, as well as literary/foundational figure narratives, provide a base for various storylines about justice within the movement. In analyzing these storylines narrative structures can be identified, which in turn provide insight into the TBMSG members' core concepts of social justice. The following pyramid-shaped figure, that I developed, explains the levels of analysis necessary to reach these core concepts:



**Figure 2: Levels of Analysis**

In analyzing the data collected (which appears as the base of the ironically stupa-shaped pyramid above) a Labovian approach to narrative structure has been used. Labov was chosen as a model for narrative largely because his foundational work, Language in the Inner City, is focused on developing “a number of devices to overcome the constraints of the face-to-face interview” and “produce narratives of personal experience.”<sup>229</sup> Since this is what I was continually struggling to do during the data collection phase, and given the importance of evaluative statements on all levels of this stupa-like pyramid, such a structural approach is rich with potential. It is Labov’s insights into both defining and analyzing narrative that provide a straight-forward and uniform model to approach the complexity of narratives collected.

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<sup>229</sup> Labov (1972), 354.

Labov (1972) defines “a minimal narrative as a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered: that is a change in their order will result in a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation.”<sup>230</sup> But it is his understanding of the “fully-formed narrative”<sup>231</sup> that is most helpful in discerning patterns in the storylines of TBMSG members. Often beginning with an abstract of what the story is about such narratives are more completely developed than a minimal narrative. Following the abstract, they often cycle through “complex chainings and embeddings of these elements”<sup>232</sup>: orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution, and coda. These six characteristic stages of a ‘fully-formed narrative’ provide a uniform means to approach seemingly disparate narrative threads and weave them into a uniform structural pattern for developing understanding. Briefly, Labov’s ‘fully-formed narrative’ exhibits the following six locatable elements, which can be more easily identified by asking an analytical question associated with each stage:

1. *Abstract (A)*: What is the story about?
2. *Orientation (O)*: Who, When, Where?
3. *Complicating Action (CA)*: What happened and then what happened?
4. *Evaluation (E)*: So what? How or why is this interesting?
5. *Result or resolution(R)*: What finally happened?
6. *Coda (C)*: That’s it – Signals the narrative is complete and the speaker brings the listener back to the present situation (No question is necessary here as this ending is usually evident – the good story teller focuses listeners in such a way that the coda literally brings them out of an almost dream-like state).<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>233</sup> Adapted from Toolan (1998), 148.

Transcribed narratives in this study are broken down in this way in order to locate patterns within the speech structure and/or similar functions across justice/injustice narratives. As may be obvious, it is statements of evaluation (element four above) that will be the most helpful in finding similar patterns of meaning in TBMSG members' often disparate conceptions of justice. As Labov says: "Pointless stories are met (in English) with the withering rejoinder, 'So what?' Every good narrator is continually warding off this question."<sup>234</sup> Evaluative statements lace many of the transcribed narratives analyzed in this study and they point not to "ideal character"<sup>235</sup> as Labov adeptly illustrates narratives often do, but to ideal society, or more simply put, TBMSG's ideal of social justice. My use of Labovian analysis of the narrative structures created by TBMSG leaders' and activists' narratives exposes TBMSG members' privileging of both Buddhist convert and victim identities, while positioning the 'other' as unjust, ignorant, superstitious, and haughty. Such positioning (which is more fully explored below) becomes clear through analytical attention to evaluative statements within the narrative structure.

Labov (1972) indeed describes evaluation as a "secondary structure" arguing that evaluation really is a "focus of waves of evaluation that penetrate the narrative."<sup>236</sup> Seeing evaluative statements within narratives in this way helps one understand their centrality to discerning meaning. Without evaluative statements narrative seems garbled and listeners are left wondering about the narrators' point. The narratives analyzed in

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<sup>234</sup> Labov (1972), 366.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 369.

this dissertation point to the centrality of evaluative statements in discerning the meaning of social justice among movement leaders and activists. This judging, though discounted as unimportant by TBMSG activists and leaders, is the crucial link between unjust pasts and idealized futures. Since evaluative statements are often uncritically assumed to be true by movement members, reflection on them and their importance in constructing social justice is easily overlooked. The narratives that appear in this dissertation were chosen for inclusion for their capacity to clearly and concisely construct an ideal frame of reference which has a potentiality to be real. In short, in using Labovian analysis to discern TBMSG's social justice meanings, irenic potentials for peace-building are exposed and explored. Of course this assumes a privileged methodological position for both social constructionism and a belief in action research. This research does not attempt to hide these methodological commitments or my own inevitable impact on research subjects. All research has some impact on subjects' epistemologies and theories of knowledge acquisition.

Adding to this Labovian narrative analysis a discourse analysis of the TBMSG movement's public documents, statements, and historical foundations, a more holistic picture of social justice can be developed. Believing that in analyzing discursive data "to be too systematic, too mechanical, undermines the very basis of discourse analysis,"<sup>237</sup> I have approached discourse throughout the study as emergent. In other words, discourse analysis was undertaken only after narratives had been analyzed and participant

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<sup>237</sup> Phillips and Hardy (2002), 74.

observation complete. As a broad-spectrum approach to validating insight gained through narrative data collection and analysis, discourse analysis was conducted to gain a ‘big-picture’ perspective of the research subjects and their aspirational frames. Returning to the idea that narrative “constitutes part of a discourse,”<sup>238</sup> the analysis of public documents is a necessary ancillary step to develop a picture of the wider discourse. Skhedi (2005) calls such data analysis “second-order theoretical analysis.”<sup>239</sup> Despite the movement’s general denial of the link between their personal narratives and contentious discourse, the fact is that an informal dialogue is continually occurring between high-caste Hindutva nationalists<sup>240</sup> and Ambedkar Buddhists. TBMSG is embedded within this discourse, and, therefore, the analysis of their public documents and historical heroes provides a needed compliment to Labovian narrative analysis. “We experience [narratives] as parts of a temporal whole, and they get their meaning from the totality of the whole to which they belong.”<sup>241</sup> Therefore, using the same categories developed in the analysis of leader and activist narratives, discourse analysis was done on a selection of key public documents of the movement. In developing discursive sub-categories of text connections are then drawn between these and narrative structures (see chapter six). Group identity theory, social positioning theory, and theories of power provide the theoretical links to develop these discursive and narrative connections into a grounded

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<sup>238</sup> Kadayifci-Orellana (2006), 215.

<sup>239</sup> Skhedi (2005), 145.

<sup>240</sup> Hindutva is a “political term denoting Hindu chauvinism or pride” (Lakshmi, Rama, *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2008). For more on Hindutva and a discussion of the public discourse between fundamentalist Hindus and Ambedkar Buddhists see the introduction and conclusion of this dissertation, as well as Ram-Prasad (2003) and Embree (1990) among others.

<sup>241</sup> Skhedi (2005), 10.

theory of TBMSG social justice narratives and reveal some insights into the role of justice conceptualization in peace-building.

### ***3.4.2 Grounded Theory Development (using positioning theory, social identity, and power asymmetry as theoretical foundations)***

Crucial to any understanding of narrative's connection to core discursive concepts of social justice is an understanding of group identity dynamics. Social identity is so often misunderstood that it is no wonder so much ink "from psychoanalytic theory to the sociology of social movements"<sup>242</sup> has been spilled on the topic. The classic social psychological treatment of social identity is found in what has become known as social identity theory. Developed by Tajfel (1981) and Tajfel and Turner (1986), social identity theory asserts that group membership creates in-group self-categorization and enhancement in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group. Yet as Brewer (2001a) has argued "social identity theory is primarily concerned with the process by which [sic] group-self representations are formed rather than the meaning attached to specific group identities."<sup>243</sup> Too often when values-based conflicts appear the rationalist response is to attempt to understand decision making structures rather than meaning structures. This research avoids this rationalist tendency by approaching identity as a group process of socially constructing virtues which support individual actor's choices and behaviors. Social identity, thus reified in the core collective narrative and discursive conceptions of justice, provides a meaning-lens with which to gain deeper understanding

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<sup>242</sup> Brewer (2001a), 115.

<sup>243</sup> Brewer (2001a), 119.

of not just social behavior, but also patterned value systems. Group dynamics and social identity theory, therefore, provide one theoretical means to ground theory of the important role of justice in both the creation of TBMSG's ideal society, but also in peace-building more generally.

Another such theoretical foundation for such grounding of the data collected is positioning theory. Positioning theory is a theory of social constructionism that attempts to bridge the social and psychological levels of analysis. Positioning theory can be said to “view action as the setting up of positions, for oneself and others, through the performance of socially meaningful (often discursive) acts within an ongoing storyline (comprising narrative understandings of the context and the contingent rights and obligations of participants).”<sup>244</sup> Based on the premise that positions are different from what we commonly think of as roles, positioning theory provides a lens through which to bring the social in line with the psychological while remaining open to normative conceptions as discursively related to facts. “The presentation of selves and the maintenance of one’s standing in the local moral order – that is one’s position – are intimately interrelated.”<sup>245</sup> The narratives we use to describe ourselves and others are inseparable from our social position. Positioning theory posits that if we can come to understand the part that positioning plays in creating discourse and narrative structure then we can ourselves take a more active responsibility towards processes of change. In other words, if users of positions are reflectively aware that they are involved in a

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<sup>244</sup> Bartlett (2006), 3.

<sup>245</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999), 95.

complex process of positioning then they will be more receptive to analytical insights and adaptations to storylines. Such a theoretical perspective has far-reaching ramifications for the development of the practical action science approach that forms the grounding of this research. Indeed, by fleshing out assumptions, a positioning analysis methodology can influence the way social actors' approach change.

Assuming that we disregard for the time being the philosophical problems of creating universal conceptualizations, as Harre and Langenhove (1999) do, we can see that critical reflective analysis of speech acts is rarely done in either social science or social life, and, in turn, this leads social actors (and particularly social movements as a collection of actors) to unfounded assumptions and groundings. Positioning theory, as a theory that does not attempt to avoid normative perspectives on the world, provides another nice theoretical foundation to ground theory about the important role of justice in TBMSG's understandings of the ideal society, and peace-building more generally. Positioning theory compliments a Wittgensteinian epistemology in which grammar acts as a 'positioner.' Conceptualizing grammar as controlling "what other concepts, what questions, and observations are relevant to a particular concept,"<sup>246</sup> Wittgenstein's epistemology assumes that no reality exists outside what is produced and reproduced in human interaction. Though Wittgenstein is often obscure, his non-linear way of thinking does enable new modes of thought to be explored and systems of knowledge to be produced.

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<sup>246</sup> Pitkin (1972), 119.

Wittgensteinian grammar, then does not relate a name to an object by teaching us the distinguishing features of that kind of object; it relates, ‘we might say, various concepts to the concept of that object. Here the test of your possession of a concept (e.g., of a chair, or a bird; of the meaning of a word; of what it is to know something) would be your ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts...’<sup>247</sup>

Starting with grammar the Wittgensteinian, like the positioning theorist, approaches narrative instances as logical constructions that can be linked to other narrative instances. If storylines make no sense, then no new knowledge is created.<sup>248</sup> For the follower of Wittgenstein, without a conception of grammar, there can be no meaning. The positioning approach is reminiscent of this epistemology in that, like grammar for Wittgenstein, knowledge of positioning in social interaction develops meaning. Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar that “controls”<sup>249</sup> our concepts finds likeness in a perspective that views skills and acts as “capacities to follow rules that shape the episodes of social life.”<sup>250</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999) in arguing that the structure of conversation is “tri-polar: it consists of positions, storylines and relatively determinate speech acts,”<sup>251</sup> provide a method for analyzing and grounding primary data collected through interviews, movement documents, and the narratives of traditional movement heroes. In analyzing TBMSG narrative and discourse new meanings emerge from engaging in positioning analysis.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>248</sup> This contrasts with MacIntyre’s narrative approach to history (MacIntyre 1984, 1988) in that these storylines are particular to a given language exchange rather than conceived as a conversation across time.

<sup>249</sup> Pitkin (1972), 119.

<sup>250</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999), 4.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

Finally, any discussion of the importance of group identity dynamics and social positioning to the development of a framework for understanding social justice would not be complete without some theoretical reference being made to power. As the sort of elephant in the room, power, and power relations are often overlooked, or assumed, in attempting to understand social conflict situations, settings, plots, and characters. Yet, the difficulty of pin-pointing power's role in casual explanation is legion. In attempting to address the questions of what power is and what influence it has on TBMSG conceptions of social justice, the transformative aspects of power are made clear. It is not only empowering, but attempting to understand the power that oppressed TBMSG members have, that exposes the reified nature of justice. Through analyzing data with an eye towards the power structures within as well as outside the movement a more complete grounding of the characteristics of justice necessary for peace-building is developed.

### ***3.5 Summary Overview of Methods/Methodology/Epistemology***

As general understandings about the world and its contingent realities, conceptions of justice/injustice imply a system of normative positioning. Approaching normative positions entails a pragmatism and resourcefulness that takes an open stance to conceptualization. The research methodology presented here outlines a pragmatic, open, and flexible design that embraces multiple methods to getting at TBMSG's meanings of social justice. Conceptions, as often contentious and always dependent on a multifaceted number of events and actions, provide the mystery and richness that make our world so infinitely interesting. The approaches outlined here are an attempt to honor the richness

while developing some tools to approach the mystery. By attempting to develop a methodological toolbox for approaching the use of justice in peace-building situations, the goal has not been to explain each conceptions of justice per se but rather to provide direction in creating situations where conflicting parties feel ‘justice’ has been achieved. Through the use of identity, power, and positioning theories, the argument points to the necessity of discriminating between what ‘justice is’ and what ‘justice should be.’ Though often conceived of differently, justice as meaning and justice as projective application both position actors and condition movement discourse and member’s use of narrative structures. They also develop a conceptual frame that is easy to overlook in conceptual analysis. In constructing legitimacy, justice must be approached as meaning-making and, therefore, can be considered changeable in application. As dynamic, justice cannot be separated from activists’ practice. The methodology used in this dissertation provides a snap-shot of TBMSG understandings of social justice and opens the door to larger questions about exploiting social justice commitments within varied conflict settings.

## CHAPTER 4: EXPOSING THE REALITY – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF LEADERS’ NARRATIVES

The role of religious leaders, religious institutions, and religiously motivated lay figures in conflict resolution has also been disregarded – or treated as a marginal phenomenon hardly worth noting.<sup>253</sup>

Ambedkar sought not just a materialistic improvement for his people but an ethical and even spiritual transformation as well. Some of this idealism seems to have survived even the co-opting influence of modern secularism among the Ambedkarites in TBMSG. Several of the new Indian order members have given up relatively lucrative jobs to work full-time for the movement, a decision that we must remember affects not just one individual, but his extended family as well.<sup>254</sup>

As stated in Chapter One, justice/injustice narratives represent a subtle space through which to study conflict as potential. In arguing against the commonly held belief that conflict over worldview is unsolvable, justice narratives present a key postulate upon which to transform conflict and build avenues for positive social change. Regrettably, justice/injustice narratives often get overlooked when rational<sup>255</sup> or realist methods of conflict analysis and resolution trump techniques that focus on more intuitive pursuits, such as the social construction of worldviews and relationships. This reality is especially

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<sup>253</sup> Luttwak (1994), 9-10.

<sup>254</sup> Sponberg (1996), 110-111.

<sup>255</sup> Schirch (2001) outlines and analyzes three divergent approaches to conflict - rational (competing interests over an issue or scarce resource cause conflict), relational (poor communication or social structures cause conflict), and symbolic (differing perceptions, cultures, and worldviews create conflict). This research explores justice narratives from Schirch’s largely unexplored symbolic frame of conflict studies.

noticeable when approaching the narratives of leaders. Despite Rubenstein and Blechman's (1999) attempt to focus conflict resolution scholars' attention on social justice they adeptly realize that "given the 'blooming, buzzing confusion' that characterizes much contemporary thinking about social justice, focusing attention on such a controversial topic has the potential to magnify disagreements within the field [of conflict resolution] and to make it less coherent as a discipline."<sup>256</sup> Yet, given the reality that in practice social actors often express unsophisticated conceptual understandings of justice the necessity of more deeply exploring the range of justice conceptions is crucial to conflict resolution and peace-building; this is a fact not lost on much of the leadership of TBMSG. This chapter, in redrawing the important connection between conflict resolution and social justice, is aimed at beginning to more deeply analyze leader's conceptions of social justice and their relation to differences in power and identity (an analysis of activist frames of social justice appears in Chapter Five and additional analytical comparison of these various "levels"<sup>257</sup> of movement members' social justice narratives follows in Chapter Six).

In exploring the range of social actors' conceptions of social justice one soon realizes that religious frames of justice often get sidelined as irrational and counter-productive as more functionalist and positivist paradigms of resolving social conflict take

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<sup>256</sup> Rubenstein and Blechman (1999), 2.

<sup>257</sup> Personal interview with Mangesh Dahiwale, May 18, 2008. When I explain to Mangesh that I was drawing a distinction between leaders and activists in my writing he explained to me "we do not have titles in the movement and, therefore, it is hard to call me a leader, it is better to talk of levels of responsibility" (Interview with Mangesh Dahiwale, May 18, 2008).

precedence.<sup>258</sup> In case after case, from Kashmir to Bosnia, Johnston (2003) illustrates how faith-based diplomacy can, and must, trump the Twentieth Century paradigm of Realpolitik. Since social scientific focus on justice has been relegated largely to departments of philosophy, too little academic attention has been focused on justice as socially constructed and connected to actor's agency, identity, power, social position, and/or their group mobilization processes. This chapter concentrates on analyzing these often overlooked elements of justice by closely scrutinizing TBMSG's leadership narratives as a first stage to envisaging the potentiality of a fully analyzed, and thus, repositioned,<sup>259</sup> TBMSG frame of social justice. This approach connects the dots between moral and positivist theory in conflict resolution. By attending to the movement's leadership and activist member narratives (see Chapter Five),<sup>260</sup> an idealized picture of justpeace emerges and missed opportunities for fostering social harmony, conflict transformation, and social justice are exposed. In exploring both spoken and written narratives, this chapter seeks to 1.) explore TBMSG leaders' common formulations of justice as deduced from their written and spoken justice/injustice

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<sup>258</sup> As Luttwak (1994) eloquently states - "Astonishingly persistent, Enlightenment prejudice has remained amply manifest in the contemporary professional analysis of foreign affairs. Policymakers, diplomats, journalists, and scholars who are ready to over interpret economic causality, who are apt to dissect social differentiations most finely, and who will minutely categorize political affiliations are still in the habit of disregarding the role of religion, religious institutions, and religious motivation in explaining politics and conflict, and even in reporting their concrete modalities" (9). See Johnson and Sampson, eds. (1994) and Johnson, ed. (2003).

<sup>259</sup> 'Repositioned' here has an analytical and pragmatic meaning. The assumption being that full analysis of social justice frames will have the effect of repositioning the TBMSG and its members within the conflict setting.

<sup>260</sup> This rather arbitrary distinction between leader and activist member narratives is determined by the level of responsibility one has within the movement. As mentioned in footnote number 5 above, the TBMSG shuns titles and prefers to talk about "levels of responsibility" as opposed to hierarchy of roles (Interview with Mangesh Dahiwalé, May 18, 2008).

narratives, and; 2.) demonstrate how these justice concepts uncritically influence attempts at creating social justice.

#### ***4.1 Justification for an Ideal: Choosing Narratives***

As an example rich with socially constructed justice narratives, the social movement of Ambedkar Buddhists in Maharashtra State presents a superlative case through which to explore the role of justice in peace-building processes. Ambedkar Buddhists are engaged in constructive social change, born of grievances and oppression associated with being categorized and socially ostracized as ‘untouchable.’ Attempting to re-position thinking about India’s development of a just society, the justice/injustice narratives of the Ambedkar movement aim at the present while simultaneously projecting a future in which their vision of social justice is actualized. Even though social justice conceptions may change as particular sub-movements gain legitimacy or power within the movement, the future orientation of every movements’ social contention strategies and tactics highlight the primarily instrumental character and use of framing in social movements. Omvedt (1993) has termed such modern movements “new social movements” in the sense that “they themselves, through the ideologies they generate, define their exploitation and oppression, the system that generates these and the way to end this exploitation and oppression.”<sup>261</sup> Regardless of whether or not such movements represent anything ‘new’ by way of concerns over social justice, both their recent global reach and increasing local significance represent a changing awareness of self, strategies,

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<sup>261</sup> Omvedt (1993), XV.

and tactics to overcome oppression. Yet, despite the fact that focus on strategies and tactics has become the vogue in any social scientific study of modern social movements, the projective character of their justice/injustice narratives as movement frames go largely un-scrutinized.<sup>262</sup> In other words, a focus on the pragmatic use of justice to right injustices leaves deeper analysis of the projective qualities of justices' expression unanalyzed.<sup>263</sup> In the Indian context the reservation (quota) system has been the offspring of such an un-scrutinized focus on pragmatism; the systems' supposed 'accomplishments' (i.e. greater numbers of 'backward castes' in good paying government jobs) overshadow the need to think of social justice more holistically.

The results of increased socio-economic uplift for some mask the need to explore the continued experiences of injustice for the many. As Nordstrom (2004) has so eloquently stated:

The present has meaning because it is embedded in a matrix of past realities and future possibilities. Our sense of self comes from memories (history) projected onto the (future) horizons of our lives. To choose one action (over another) is to choose a goal (over another); and that is to craft a future. Life takes meaning

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<sup>262</sup> This fact is not only true of academic approaches to the movement, but also pragmatic ones. I was reminded of this when listening to the Founder and President of the International Commission for Dalit Rights (ICDR) say that "Despite the fact that many different Dalit groups employ different strategies, our goal is the same." (BD Bishwakarma, May 17, 2008). Despite having said this, no illumination of this "same" goal was forthcoming and little reflective analysis of justice goals seems to be the norm within the Dalits rights community.

<sup>263</sup> Take as a conflict resolution example of this phenomenon Black's (2003) discussion of caste conflict and social identity. Black's focus on "conditions under which change may occur" (135) is projective, yet the social identity he focuses on is the subjugated contingent reality defined from above, not below. Such a social identity does not necessarily help envision the constructed future ideal to thwarting oppression, Ambedkar Buddhism, on the other hand appears to provide the psychological repositioned identity necessary to reflect on the projective qualities of social justice. See Cheldelin, et al. 2003 for Black's treatment of caste and social identity.

through these choices – through the directions chosen and the reasons for the choice; through linking the here-and-now and the imminent.<sup>264</sup>

The narratives chosen for analysis in the two chapters that follow highlight not only tactical or strategic choices of movement leaders and activist members, but the projective, or instrumental, implications of the frames which these narratives create. As representative of the projective quality of TBMSG narratives, the narratives presented here provide a picture that is ripe for deeper analysis (see Chapter Six for a further scratching of the surface of such analysis).

These narratives analyzed herein also beg the following question: what would the social justice frame of a fully reflective and re-positioned TBMSG leadership look like? From the narratives analyzed here an idealized, but still broad, picture can be created. Such a social justice frame would straddle the need to differentiate ‘new’ social movement members from the ‘others’ they are fighting, while at the same time privileging the equally important need to co-exist in the same social and political spheres with these ‘others.’ Unfortunately, the rhetoric of emancipation often fails to balance these needs. The result is a lack of understanding that through a redressing of injustice the salience of other common ideals, such as empathy and compassion for (or equality towards) the ‘other,’ in turn decrease. In effect, the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ characteristics of social identity formation overshadow the need for injustice narratives to be voiced and appropriately processed by the wider group. In turn, such overshadowing blurs the line between moral ascription of negative traits to the ‘other’ and the pro-social ascription of

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<sup>264</sup> Nordstrom (2004), 85.

positive traits to self.<sup>265</sup> In such a process an inverse of Buddhist doctrine is engendered; uncritical analysis of key virtues, such as justice, conditions a focus on both the personal and collective identity and a decrease in compassion and empathy for the other. Despite TBMSG members' and leaders' insistence that such a focus on identity and self-worth are primary to building either a sense of empathy or compassion in the hearts of ex-'untouchables,' the result seems to be in conflict with TBMSG's framing of their social justice ideal of an inter-dependent Buddhist world. The TBMSG movement's goals do, at times, conflict – a focus on conversion does not completely jive with a yearning for social justice and this relationship demands further analysis.

It should by now be clear to outside observers of TBMSG that, there exists a need to intentionally and continually reassess the expression and conceptual formulations of the movement's core virtues. Without such a continual re-assessment the goal of self-help overpowers the movement's goal of defeating social oppression (or vice versa) and larger goals associated with structural change can not be actualized. Still, a focus on exposing structural violence as synonymous with social injustice [ala Johan Galtung's (1969) view of social justice's relation to peace] seems to miss the continued need to live in a world with oppressors. It is the realization of this problem of being simultaneously different from *and* interconnected to oppressive 'others' that is crucial for the success of the TBMSG movement's social justice ideal. This realization highlights the need to understand that as Buddhist converts a 'new' identity is born, but that this new identity

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<sup>265</sup> See Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) for a detailed discussion of the role of "threat narratives" in violent conflict.

cannot exist completely devoid of where it came from. It is a realization that TBMSG members and leaders have yet to completely realize, and much less actualize. The narratives analyzed in this chapter and the next will not only make the reality of the connections between the need for identity, equal power, and social positioning evident to fellow researchers, but also to movement leaders and members alike.

#### *4.2 Narratives for Analysis*

The narratives analyzed in this chapter, and the next chapter, highlight the fact that the critical reflective analysis of TBMSG's conceptions of social justice have gone, until now, almost completely unanalyzed by movement leaders, activist members, and outside observers. Not because of a lack of interest in Ambedkar followers struggle for social justice, but rather due to the limited power of voices from below, narratives, like the ones here addressed, have received little academic attention.<sup>266</sup> The narratives chosen for analysis here are, therefore, intentionally representative of the various levels of responsibility that together comprise the movement's narrative structure. They are narratives which draw stark lines of social contention and force one to question, not simply tactical implications, but normative foundations that bridge both collective political and religious worldviews. In short, such narratives frame the movement's social justice discourse. The chosen narratives are not exhaustive of possible TBMSG narratives of justice/injustice, but they are indicative of the kinds of narratives often heard

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<sup>266</sup> The academic attention that these narratives have received usually have come from either a comparative religion perspective [see for example Sponberg (1996) and Queen (1996)] or a sociological perspective [see Omvedt (1993) for a detailed analysis of the anti-caste movement's relationship to the socialist tradition in India, and Beltz (2004) for a discussion of Buddhist discursive practices], but not from a multi-disciplinary conflict resolution perspective.

being discussed among those in the movement and dalit activists involved in both social justice contention and Buddhist re-awakening. Such narratives are representative of the TBMSG corpus of knowledge on, and epistemology of, justice. In providing a discursive analysis of the narratives of these leaders a storyline can be re-constructed and TBMSG's narrative structure of justice/injustice can be unveiled. While these narratives are by no means exhaustive of the possible justice conceptions available, they do provide a means to ground the work of creating a meta-competency of social justice<sup>267</sup> within the TBMSG movement.

The assortment of narratives chosen provides a glimpse of the movement from various levels and perspectives. Beginning with current leadership narratives we can begin to see how leaders frame the issues facing their community. Despite the fact that leadership narratives are just one expression of social reality, the leadership narratives of justice and injustice have an uncanny ability to guide and position the community's own conceptions of core values such as justice. Playing a key role in social movement organization, leaders' narratives have a powerful resonance beyond their spoken life. For this reason the leadership narratives chosen appear first and take a prominence in this study. This does not imply that activist member narratives are irrelevant or less worthy of study, but rather that, due to both the difficulty of collecting them and the low degree

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<sup>267</sup> The development such a meta-competency of social justice, as the overarching aim of this project, would provide both activists and researchers with a case-based framework for utilizing commitments to justice in contexts of peace-building. As an important idea to understand, such meta-competency of social justice entails movement participants collaboratively reflecting with conflict resolution scholars on the creation of their ideal. See the discussion in Chapter Five of the dialogues on caste that were organized by me in July 2008 as one example of a process aimed at this type of meta-competency.

of mobilizing potential, member narratives appear less influential in constructing the movement's narrative structures. While "narratives are laced with social discourse and power relations, which do not remain constant over time,"<sup>268</sup> it is a movement's leadership that controls and evokes these power relations and, thus, plays the primary role in the construction of social reality. The symbolic foundations of these leadership narratives of justice are the autobiographic stories of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's own memories of injustice and social ostracism. These stories, which will be the focus of the second section of this narrative analysis, are by now almost hagiographic in nature. They are re-enacted in ritual performances among various dalit communities,<sup>269</sup> provide the foundational stories for leaders to ferment support, and afford the symbolism from which to draw connections to current injustices and mobilize social action campaigns. Along with leadership narratives these written autobiographical narratives provide an important window through which to look more deeply into the TBMSG's justice/injustice narratives and their conceptual foundations.

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<sup>268</sup> Riessman (1993), 65.

<sup>269</sup> My understanding of these re-enactments comes from my own experience of the presentation of such stories at the Bahujan Hitay Girls Hostel, Gorewada Nagpur in October 2006 and Joel Lee's presentation at the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual South Asia Conference in October of 2007 entitled "Theater of Assertion," in which he discussed the use of these stories by a Dalit street theater company in Uttar Pradesh. For further ethnographic analysis see also Lee (2008).

By his own account, the earliest memories of injustice that Dr. Ambedkar can remember appear in a short monograph he wrote called “On the Way to Goregaon.”<sup>270</sup> Beginning with this story and analyzing the autobiographical stories of Ambedkar’s life that are most commonly referred to among movement members, the focus of analysis will begin to shift away from concentration solely on leadership narratives to another wellspring of justice narratives - those of activist movement’s members (Chapter Five). In attempting to express the range of the movement’s scope and appeal interviewing adequate informants that fall outside the elite “fruit of the movement” has been difficult due to language, cultural, educational, and travel constraints.<sup>271</sup> While the TBMSG is dominated by highly educated, urban Mahars, they support and are, thus, supported by many poor rural populations that converted to Buddhism along with Dr. Ambedkar (or as a response to his historic conversion). Even though every attempt has been made to include a cross-section of the diverse membership of TBMSG, including the voices of those who often get no voice, the realities of researching a social movement like TBMSG makes the dominance of elite leadership narratives unavoidable. Still, by attempting a multi-level approach<sup>272</sup> to the justice/injustice narratives of the TBMSG movement, an understanding of the many TBMSG storylines of justice becomes manageable. Further,

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<sup>270</sup> This is the title that the short autobiographical note is given in Valarian Rodriguez’s Essential Writing of B.R. Ambedkar. The story was first published by the People’s Education Society, Mumbai, in 1993 [Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 12, edited by Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1993), Part I, pp. 661-691], in a compilation of autobiographical manuscripts under the title “Waiting for a Visa.” The version used in this analysis is reprinted by Navayana Publishing, 2003 and is given a subtitle of “I Was a Boy of Nine When it Happened.”

<sup>271</sup> For a clear expression of similar research difficulties see Beltz (2005).

<sup>272</sup> Similar to Lederach’s (1997) pyramid approach to peace-building.

by analyzing both written and spoken narratives one is capable of seeing the power of both mediums in shaping the social reality. The narratives chosen, though not as individual cases all-embracing as explanatory models, do indeed, as a whole, illustrate the centrality of social justice to Ambedkar Buddhists and to the critical need for its' closer analysis. Among other effects of analyzing the narratives to follow, they also illustrate for us the contours of the movement, its many dialectics and contradictions, and the fine line that is implied in any attempt to distinguish social theory from social practice.

#### ***4.3 Spoken TBMSG Leadership Narratives***

Whether a vanguard attempting to control the accretion of class consciousness in society, or a spiritual leader advocating salvation for the uninitiated, the common element of success in social mobilization lies in a movement's leaders and leadership. Leaders are the prime purveyors of a socially constructed vision of a movement's idealized future. Their narratives unveil core beliefs and worldview commitments of movement members and insiders. Even though narrative as representation implies a level of interpretation,<sup>273</sup> it is leaders, invested with social authority and legitimacy that provide members with the frames with which to mediate understandings of social reality. Effective leadership requires the language and structure of a well-formed narrative and conjures up a mental image of the actualization of movement goals.

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<sup>273</sup> Riessman (1993), 2.

The spoken and written narratives analyzed below give access to an understanding of why movement leaders frame social reality in their own particular way. In turn, this understanding can help one to understand the movement, its contours and its constraints, form new perspectives, and develop strategies for increased effectiveness. By taking a number of examples from the anti-caste Ambedkar Buddhist movement across roughly a one-hundred year time-span, a more complete picture of the role and importance of leadership narratives can be gained. Here, the focus is on structure and function of the narratives chosen and the discourse that these narratives re-enforce, not necessarily, on historical accuracy or objective ‘truth’ of these narrative accounts. For as Johnston (2005) appropriately points out, “historical knowledge and narrative truth can be very different entities depending on who is telling the story and the amount of time that has elapsed between the actual event and telling.”<sup>274</sup> Exploring and understanding both the uses and meanings of leadership narratives provides a means to not only critique movement direction, but suggest new directions. Deeply exploring leadership narrative provides a means of creating conceptual clarity on key movement values and directions.

#### ***4.3.1 Leadership Narrative One: Lokamitra’s Story***<sup>275</sup>

The story of the TBMSG is intricately intertwined in the life stories of three men - Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, Dennis Lingwood (a.k.a. Sangarakshita), and Jeremy Goody (a.k.a. Lokamitra) [for a more complete account of the lives of these foundational figures of the TBMSG movement see Chapter One]. The third one of these figures - the actual

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<sup>274</sup> Johnston (2005), 280.

<sup>275</sup> The following account represents the reconstruction of a narrative I witnessed Lokamitra tell during a speech at a girls hostel near Nagpur in September 2006.

founder of the Indian TBMSG movement in 1979 - is originally an Englishman, who after joining the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) took the Dharma name Lokamitra. While both Ambedkar and Sangharakshita were crucial to the formation of the TBMSG's 'ex-untouchable' base of support, it took the leadership of Dharmachari Lokamitra, to organize and empower the community to act. Jeremy Goody joined Sangharakshita's Western Buddhist Order (WBO) in 1972, and became ordained in 1974. In June 1974, while looking for a spiritual home for the FWBO, Lokamitra (the now ordained Goody) was "invaluable in mobilizing the energies of the movement,"<sup>276</sup> and raising funds. In October 1977, Lokamitra, now one of Sangharakshita's most senior disciples, decided to take a six-month study tour in India with some fellow FWBO yoga practitioners. Even though Sangharakshita had given him contacts and hoped that the FWBO could rekindle some of the work that Sangharakshita had left undone, it was by chance that Lokamitra happened across a rally in Nagpur, on the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the famous Ambedkar conversion. This event was the catalyst for Lokamitra's interest in Ambedkarite ex-untouchables. Writing from Pune, Lokamitra saw the importance of the Buddhist community in India to the overall success of the FWBO:

I think it is very likely that once the FWBO gets going in India, among ex-untouchables, it will be the fastest growing area of our activities... Twenty years ago a few million people changed their religion. They therefore want to know how to live, practice, and develop as Buddhists. It is vitally important to them... As far as I can see there is no one, besides Sangharakshita, and no other movement besides the FWBO, capable of working with the situation.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Subhuti (1995), 141.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid (1995), 147.

When he returned to England in March 1978, Lokamitra had already decided to return to India, and develop the FWBO in India. Within months TBMSG was inaugurated in India, by Sangharakshita himself, and more ex-untouchables were converted by the newly formed Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha (TBM), the Indian branch of the WBO. Soon thereafter the TBMSG was conceived of as the Dharma work branch of the new Indian wing of the WBO (i.e. the TBM). Following a loose interpretation of the Buddhist Vinaya (rules for monks and nuns), like Sangharakshita before him,<sup>278</sup> Lokamitra left his robes and himself married an untouchable woman. Since that time Lokamitra has been the main consistent Western presence in the work of the TBMSG, and is largely responsible for the Indian order becoming a self-sufficient indigenous movement. The TBMSG is now run almost entirely by ex-untouchables, but still relies heavily on financial support from England and the continued leadership of Dharmachari Lokamitra.

I first met Lokamitra in September of 2006,<sup>279</sup> though I had been corresponding with him over the e-mail for two-to-three years before this actual face-to-face meeting. A short rather unassuming man in Indian Khadi (handspun cotton), Lokamitra is jovial and full of life. Appearing to be much younger than he really is, Lokamitra is passionate about Buddhism's ability to alleviate dalit's suffering. A capable public speaker, Lokamitra is often asked to speak having prepared nothing in advance. As a result,

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<sup>278</sup> In fact, the FWBO's current website talks of rules in this way: "You cannot create a spiritual community by force. Therefore, no rules are necessary." [www.fwbo.org](http://www.fwbo.org) – accessed May 22, 2008.

<sup>279</sup> I had the opportunity to meet Lokamitra again in June of 2008 and was again struck by his playful nature and strong desire to share his experiences with "those that are truly interested" (Personal interview, June 20, 2008).

Lokamitra is adept at improvisational oratory and almost politician-like in his refrains. Such rhetorical skills should be clear from the following account of an episode I witnessed in September, 2006, while, along with other foreign dignitaries, I was invited to an evening celebration at one of TBMSG's two girls' boarding schools (or what they call hostels).

Lokamitra at Bahujan Hitay Girls Hostel Gorewada, Nagpur, September 30, 2006

Upon entering the TBMSG girls' hostel at Gorewada, Nagpur, the electricity blinked and then failed. All that was perceptible was the din of whispering primary school girls and foreign guests attempting to find their way in the darkness. Guests bumped into hastily re-arranged chairs and tripped over crumpled ceremonial carpeting. School officials embarrassingly scrambled to light candles and provide some flashlight-strewn luminosity to the many new arrivals. The school's large events-room seemed cold, foreign, and unwelcoming. Less than ten minutes after this portentous arrival, electricity restored, I found myself sitting at the front of a makeshift stage with many spiritual dignitaries. Lokamitra, the founder and leader of TBMSG in India, not bothering to explain that this was the front stage for the event, asked if I could sit one row back since he would need to get up at some point to speak. I gladly obliged still not knowing the honorary position I was taking among all the foreign bhikkus (monks) in our party. The un-welcoming feel upon entering the dark cement building was extinguished as soon as the lighting was restored and my tardily realized attempts to move to a less-honorary and less-visible position in the audience were quashed by those sitting near. An

informality and inclusiveness filled the air and was evident on the now visible smiling faces of all present. There was really a concerted effort to keep me included despite my anthropological reticence to remain seated front and center - - inclusive and equality are qualities long-stressed in this community and this was evident, at least at this time of public ceremony. It seems that this whole scenario was a foreshadowing of the important justice narratives to which the audience of local and foreign dignitaries was about to be treated.

After a few song and dance numbers performed by the youngest girls of the school another group of older girls began a short play in the local dialect. As the narrator and translator intoned that this was a re-enactment of the discrimination and suffering that Dr. Ambedkar faced during his life my interest was piqued. The young girls first re-enacted a now infamous story of Ambedkar going to the barber, who was cutting the hair of animals, and, yet, refused Ambedkar service because he was an ‘untouchable.’ Next they re-played the story of Ambedkar and his siblings going to visit their father in a far off village (Goregaon) and at first having trouble finding a driver to escort them from the rail station, and then arguing with the driver, who refused to stop at a watering hole to allow the passengers to drink. The driver’s refusal to stop out of fear of high-caste reprisals was acted with anger and venom, no doubt instilling a similar impression in these young girls that it must have instilled in young Bhimrao Ambedkar and his siblings (see below, section 4.4.1, for more complete analysis of Ambedkar’s own written account of this narrative storyline).

The play completed and ready to break for dinner, Lokamitra sprung up on his one good hip (he received hip surgery in late-2006) and thanked the young actors and performers with a hearty smile and youthful exuberance. Stressing the informal nature of this event he said he wanted to say a few words before requesting everyone move to the adjacent room to share in a communal meal the school had prepared for all the visitors. Thanking the school headmaster he praised the progress of the school which had “been operating for thirteen years without Government of India assistance.”<sup>280</sup> Combining what Labov (1972) would classify as abstract and orientation, Lokamitra continued by paradoxically intoning that even though the school was “inaugurated in the United Nations year of the woman and was promised some small funding from the Indian government, they have, to this day, received no funds from the Indian government.”<sup>281</sup> Juxtaposing this statement with the fact that every one of the TBMSG boys’ schools/hostels (23 in total) had received some form of Indian government assistance, Lokamitra’s informal talk began to take on the feel of a political stump speech. With rising anger in his eyes and a constant smile on his face, Lokamitra then quipped:

The Government of India must not want girls to learn. All this would lead one to think there must be some discrimination here... Sixty to seventy years ago these girls would have had absolutely no chance at any education due to their status as ‘untouchables,’ but look now at what we have done!<sup>282</sup>

This statement seemed to sum up all that Lokamitra wanted to get across through the evenings’ program to the both the visiting foreigners and local TBMSG members in the

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<sup>280</sup> Personal notes, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

room; glorifying the work already done and stressing the past image of injustice evident in a needy girls school's lack of government support, Lokamitra was highlighting a narrative that he felt needed strengthening and reconstructing – i.e. various types of discrimination are alive and well and we (as TBMSG) are doing something about it; not standing idly by, but making a difference. But, just as importantly as his retrospective reminder of injustice, a projective sense of justice's 'ought' was conjured up in which girls received equal government assistance and hardships of poverty and caste were replaced by academic success and consequent increased economic opportunities for all 'untouchables.' This narrative made clear to the foreign donors and supporters from Taiwan, Thailand, Korea, Britain, and the United States that due to a long road ahead foreign support and increased awareness of both caste and gender discrimination will be necessary. The statement also acted as a call to the local dalit community present to continue to fight all forms of inequality while simultaneously taking a moment to realize the progress they had made as a community. It acted as a broad call to action as much as a means to instilling confidence in TBMSG members' sense of group identity; progress, here, is measured not just by the accomplishments of the group, but also in the sense of the shift in the Ambedkar dalit collective self.

Lokamitra's statement was at once a political statement and an impetus for self-reflective action. It was aimed at the Government of India and the structural violence the specter of a high-caste dominated government represented to those in attendance. As an overt sign of dissatisfaction with local and federal government spending and bureaucratic decision-making, Lokamitra's stinging criticism was full of rhetorical hyperbole which

invokes the real anger people have over their lack of power, sense of inferiority, and skepticism in the actualization of justice. Remaining positive in his stress of the accomplishment that ‘untouchables’ had made against structural violence, Lokamitra keenly positioned dalits as both sufferers of social inequality and agents of social change. While pointing out the need for policy change, the statement was more indirect and symbolic. Never voicing the word injustice, it was implied and, thus, understood by those in the audience. Most importantly Lokamitra’s statement was a redefinition of justice; a positioning of followers lives within a complex context of class, gender, and caste oppression maintained by the state. His statements, through revealing the assortment of actors to which the movement is continually speaking, such as the Indian government, foreign donors, and Ambedkar Buddhists both within and outside the TBMSG movement, points to the Ambedkar Buddhist belief in the crucial role of collective identity in actualizing social justice. On multiple levels the narrative storyline created by Lokamitra presented a call to justice through highlighting the community’s own ability to uplift itself. As a central concept within the wider dalit movement, self-help resonates throughout the storylines created by TBMSG leaders.

The above re-construction of this justice narrative deserves closer analysis because it provides a window into the narrative structure of the movement, especially in regards to their conceptions of justice and identity. Such narrative structures are the foundation of the movements discourse because they focus attention “on the processes

whereby the social world is constructed and maintained.”<sup>283</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999) call such speech acts third-order “accountive positioning” – i.e. positioning that occurs outside an initial discussion and acts as a negotiated storyline in the sense that it repositions self and others.<sup>284</sup> Such negotiated storylines, when viewed within the context of other movement storylines, construct a narrative structure which supports the core conceptual understandings so crucial to the movement’s discourse. Lokamitra’s justice narrative acts as a negotiated storyline upon which the movement builds its narrative structure and creates the discourse that under-girds core concepts such as justice. Attention to the processes that construct and maintain TBMSG’s social reality is crucial for the movement’s continued success and movement towards their vision of social justice.

Helpful to breaking-down Lokamitra’s justice narrative is the model and definition of narrative proposed by Labov (1972).<sup>285</sup> Providing a minimalist definition of narrative, Labov outlines a six-part structure for a fully-formed oral narrative. This six-part structure of narrative can be summarized as follows:

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<sup>283</sup> Phillips and Hardy (2002), 2.

<sup>284</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999), 21.

<sup>285</sup> Labov (1972) will serve as a model for the structural analysis of all the narratives analyzed in this dissertation because it presents a clear means to break down the structure of narrative. For a clear explanation of Labov’s six-part structure and diamond model of narrative as socially situated see Toolan (1988), Chapter 6. In addition to Labov a broader thematic analysis will also be carried out.

1. *Abstract (A)*: What is the story about?
2. *Orientation (O)*: Who, When, Where?
3. *Complicating Action (CA)*: What happened and then what happened?
4. *Evaluation (E)*: So what? How or why is this interesting?
5. *Result or resolution(R)*: What finally happened?
6. *Coda (C)*: That's it – Signals the narrative is complete and the speaker brings the listener back to the present situation.<sup>286</sup>

Using this structure, Lokamitra's narrative can be broken down and analyzed as a distinct episodic narrative in a larger movement storyline, which in turn supports a narrative structure whose discourse includes core movement concepts of justice and social justice.

From Lokamitra's first words of thanks to the hostel we are alerted to the fact that the story to come is about overcoming wrong through hard work and it is this particular abstract of the storyline that gives the narrative a central aspect of its meaning. The listeners are assumed to be aware of the context of injustice that dalits across India face – poverty, lack of educational resources, local government panchayats (administrative units) neglecting and sidelining issues deemed important to dalits, etc. Beginning with positioning the school/hostel as successful and revolutionary (“[The Bahujan Hitay Girls Hostel Gorewada has] been operating for thirteen years without Government of India assistance”) Lokamitra is at once praising the school staff and community of supporters and signaling the importance of its innovative work despite outside help. Such a statement simultaneously positions dalits as self-reliant and victims of injustice. For movement actors this abstract (A) invokes a repertoire of past examples of community progress with an emphasis that the sole agency for this progress came from the

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<sup>286</sup> Adapted from Toolan (1998), 148.

community itself. In thanking the headmaster of the school Lokamitra provides a familiar abstract (A) of the injustice in having to do this work without the assistance of the government. Marking the school's origins in the "United Nations Year of the Woman" both the human rights legacy of the United Nations, and the lack of international attention to the rights of dalits is invoked. Pointing to the lack of Indian government funding signals the school's continued need, as well as, some of the ironies of male Brahmin control of the Indian polity. This orientation (O) of the audience to the beginnings of the hostel in the United Nations' Year of the Woman provides Lokamitra with the opportunity to use the paradoxical history of the hostel to express a complicating Action (CA) to this initial orientation (O). The moral capital that should accompany the fact of Lokamitra's orientation (O) is lost by the depravity of support for women in education since that auspicious beginning (CA). The complicating action (CA) of the schools' success, in spite of government ineffectiveness and lack of support, leads to the evaluative (E) implication that there must be some conspiracy or general policy within the government that states that girls should not learn. The implication of this statement is that Lokamitra is able to position the Indian government as uncaring and unconcerned about educating girls, while simultaneously positioning dalits as capable and, yet, also victimized. The positioning of the Indian government as uncaring and indifferent about dalits makes the creation of a group identity as both self-reliant and lacking social justice much easier. In the context of the evening's program this evaluative (E) statement is juxtaposed with an unspoken result (R) of the schools' obvious success. Lokamitra's judgment (E) brings his audience back to the present reality of the schools' bright and

smiling students and the result (R) of the community's overcoming of impossible odds to develop opportunity where there was none. Finally, in ending the story (C) Lokamitra calls everyone to the dining room adjacent to the hall to share in a meal, an act that upon the backdrop of the legacy of the caste system is radical in itself, since inter-caste meals were a strong taboo in traditional caste-based India.

So what does such a Labovian analysis of Lokamitra's narrative tell us? On the face of it, taken singularly, this analytical categorization tells us very little. But as we will see through developing a similar approach to the stories and experiences of others within the movement, the similarities in narrative-telling and the relationships among injustice, justice, identity, and power drawn from the narratives studied will become evident. Lokamitra's use of the past to illuminate progress towards a future ideal state, where discrimination does not exist and aspirations can be actualized, places his dalit listeners in a positive storyline in which these listeners have agency and power. In similar ways movement members use stories of injustice to develop and foster a new collective identity that is contrary to the dominant cultural storyline these listeners are routinely fed by those in power. Traditionally positioned as worthless, uneducated, incapable, 'untouchable,' and unwanted by the powerful within Indian society, dalit identity has been de-faced; dalit self-esteem has been muffled. Yet, Lokamitra's listeners are moved to a re-constructed storyline and, in-turn, a different self-image – one that has positive connotations as agents of change rather than ignorant or de-based offspring of karmic misdeeds. The overcoming of this psychological legacy of discrimination is crucial to Lokamitra's meaning (as we will also see it plays a crucial role in movement

activist member's stories) and provides an integrated vision of social justice for all in the audience (foreigner, dalit, and Buddhist).

Lokamitra's use of 'we' to simultaneously foster dalit and Buddhist solidarity is geared towards empowering an inter-caste sense of collective self. Allowing listeners into prior discussion that he has had with high ranking civil servants in the Indian Government, Lokamitra is not only positioning himself as on the side of right, but also re-positioning his followers as newly empowered through his/the movement's agency. He is symbolically giving these Ambedkar Buddhist followers access to the halls of power. Despite their lack of economic resources and education these dalit listeners are, thus, given respect and hope that positions them as a party to negotiations with the Indian government and as working towards something greater than their own particular predicament. This shared sense of meaning is crucial to developing a more than parochial sense of oppression and we will see that it represents a foundational aspect of all movement narratives. In providing a "rhetorical redescription of the event"<sup>287</sup> Lokamitra is able to choose what portions of discussion with the Indian government he wants to invoke. The instrumental nature of Lokamitra's account and his particular choice of words and phrases, therefore, hold important clues to the meaning and significance of movement discourse, especially with respect to both identity and power.

Lokamitra's choice of the word 'untouchable' to describe a past state of affairs, a term rarely used among dalits, demarcates his listeners' identity as special and changed.

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<sup>287</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999), 21.

No longer are ‘we’ to be seen as ‘untouchables,’ but rather as Buddhists, Ambedkar followers, and self-reliant change agents within an unjust social structure dominated by high-caste elites. The negotiated storyline created is that ‘we’ are on a journey and that that journey must continue. Further, the fight to end discrimination must have active self-aware bodies and monetary support for it to succeed. The audience at the school this evening is, thus, positioned as capable of providing the people, funds, and ideas to succeed in deconstructing the system of graded inequality. While dalits provide the ‘bodies,’ the movement provides the ideas, and the foreign guests (British, Taiwanese, Korean, and American) provide the funds and growing international awareness to increase dalit education and, in turn, produce social opportunities. These social opportunities will, in turn, trickle down to create a more just social order. This diverse set of actors is, therefore, positioned as co-equals; willing and capable of continuing a long fight for the social justice of dalits. Pride in what this collective ‘we’ has done thus far must be recognized at every chance. For the potential future donor such recognition has practical implication – if the movement is seen to be ‘doing’ this important work, then future funding should be more forthcoming. For the Ambedkar Buddhist the pride in what is ‘done’ supports a precarious new identity. This new identity is what Lokamitra wants to grow and germinate. Though within an unjust social structure, these Ambedkar followers are being re-positioned by such leadership narratives to work to break out of this structure. Juxtaposed as caring and self-respecting against the uncaring and indifferent Indian government, these Ambedkar Buddhists are being asked to play this new position forward, leaving behind the animosity and anger that years of oppression

and injustice have left them with and focusing on the positive aspects of their own self-respect and self-reliance. Forgoing the oppressive identity fed to them by the Brahmin elite, Ambedkar Buddhists are being given a morally-laced alternative conception to these more negative identity conceptions. In accepting this new position Ambedkar Buddhists are attempting to transform the social structure to one that is humanistic and rational rather than based on the mythic or religious. By identifying themselves as Buddhists and not dalit, Mahar, or any other caste-based grouping, Ambedkar Buddhists are rejecting the status system of the past and simultaneously constructing a new identity meant for a future ideal society in which they have access to power. It is this projective aspect of Lokamitra's narrative that marks it as a justice narrative.

Still, while Lokamitra's example of third-order positioning (i.e. positioning that involves "talk about talk"<sup>288</sup>) bolsters the groups' sense of in-group identity it also limits conversational space through which the conditions of justpeace (Schirch, 2004) can be achieved. Creating a storyline in which 'we' are on a social justice journey of equality, fraternity, and liberty, positions others as discriminators, hostile, uncaring, and unjust. The Indian government in the above narrative storyline is certainly seen in this negative way, and such black and white conceptions leave little or no room for in-between. The fact is that the positioning of dalits as past sufferers of injustice both empowers and encumbers the dalit community as a whole. Such narrative storylines empower a super-ordinate identity in which self-actualization becomes possible, but also encumbers the

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 21.

community's ability to engage in authentic conversation with an 'other' that has been positioned as elitist, status quo, and/or belligerent towards low-castes. Despite the fact that there are many 'others' in the system of graded inequality which forms the basis of caste, the identity position created by Lokamitra's narrative – one that envisions dalits as outside that of the others' system - is revolutionary, liberating, *and* potentially generative of destructive conflict. Lokamitra's narrative is to harness the power of a newly minted Ambedkar Buddhist identity without alienating those who oppose change (or the speed of its dissemination). But, how are his speech acts to overcome the distrust that this narrative storyline of self-pride and in-group identity formation engenders in other communities?

Despite the fact that TBMSG members do not seem concerned with expending time and energy on relations with those outside their community, some answers to the above question may well come from returning to the justice narrative itself. The congratulatory nature of a narrative which is embedded within a justice framework (for example: "look at what we have done for dalit girls that have the right to learn") is telling for its projection of a within-group vision of justice which is in contrast with other's vision. Celebrating successful action is indicative of much of the movement language of TBMSG. Through empowering a sense of pride and identity, Lokamitra's leadership narrative draws attention to injustice and names social justice as the movement's common goal. Yet, movement leaders and their followers deploy these narratives devoid of a clear understanding of their full impacts on the various 'others' within their social structure. Not fully analyzing all aspects of their own conception of social justice, all

levels of movement participants are unaware of the full impact of their narrative agency. By failing to explore the broader implications of their social justice vision on those that are assumed to have the power and resources to fend for themselves, movement leaders unwittingly shorten the conversational space between high and low castes and raise the potential for destructive conflict. Such a dynamic is probably most clearly seen in TBMSG leaders' dogmatic insistence on the creation of a Buddhist identity. Such an insistence on creating Buddhist identity at all costs and despite other potential avenues for social change has left higher castes the public space to simply equate Buddhism with low castes and disregard it outright. Despite the fact that many high-castes seem uninterested in engaging with low-castes and that social agitation is necessary for creating social change, the fact remains that the rhetoric of exclusion flies counter to the movement's desire for, and in-group practices of, inclusion. Focused on transformation through the dharma and modeling the dharma practice in social life, TBMSG leaders seem to be un-phased by the charge that their rhetoric may appear exclusive to some. It is as if they are in a dalit community cocoon unaware that their narratives and narrative structures may have negative consequences as well as positive ones. Regardless if any high caste 'others' desire dialogue, TBMSG movement leaders' attention to their own justice/injustice narratives is crucial to both defining and realizing social justice assertion.

A prime example of the movement's inattention to narrative structures can be seen in their strict adherence to the original 22 vows taken by Dr. Ambedkar upon his

conversion to Buddhism.<sup>289</sup> The continued adherence to these vows, over fifty years after conversion, provides further reason for one to call for increased critical analysis. As Christopher Queen has insightfully stated in this regard:

These people *need to* live in a world with Muslims and Hindus and all the rest. Dr. Ambedkar wanted to reconstruct the Buddhist tradition so it met the needs of his time. But can the Ambedkarites do the same with Ambedkar's own ideas? Nagaloka (TBMSG's University) should be teaching comparative religion and they really need to drop the 22 vows.... They need to say what they are for, and leave aside what they are against.<sup>290</sup>

Though constitutive of a new identity, the vows' positioning of others as unjust, and as the cause of the caste problem leaves little room for future re-positioning and/or inter-caste dialogue. Such vows also reinforces traditional patronage systems in the Indian polity by arguing that Hindu practices are elitist and superstitious as opposed to Buddhist ones that are egalitarian and pragmatic. TBMSG leaders' attack on the traditional belief system of 'others' unwittingly dismantles much of TBMSG's potential social justice effectiveness. In short, the rhetoric does not always support the reality; creating social justice through the rhetoric of naming and blaming injustice, and injustice's purveyors, has the potentiality for unwanted consequences. The fostering of self pride and in-group identity present a double-edged sword - - TBMSG, thus, represents a pro-social (as

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<sup>289</sup> On 15 October 1956, when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar finally decided upon Buddhism as his new choice of religion he publicly took the 22 vows of his own creation. These 22 vows, like much of Ambedkar's thought and writing are as much social and political as spiritual and religious. In particular vow number nineteen ("I renounce Hinduism, which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion") is problematic in regards to constructing a clear conception of social justice and understanding the extent of one's narrative agency. For a Full list of the 22 vows see Appendix B.

<sup>290</sup> Vishvapani (2006), <http://www.ambedkar2006blogspot.com/> - quoting Dr. Christopher Queen of Harvard University on his reaction to Buddhist conversions by TBMSG followers - italics added for emphasis.

opposed to ant-social) movement of Ambedkar Buddhists with a newfound sense of self-respect and a negative underbelly of retribution or revenge. If one were to think of Ambedkar Buddhists' position as a negotiated storyline in which negotiations with ideological 'others' happens in interactional cycles and where the very efforts that persons make to solve problems and reduce conflict actually anchor and perpetuate conflict,<sup>291</sup> it is clear that unreflective leader narratives, like the one above, can actually add to conflict cycles rather than dis-empower them. As Cobb (2006) has noted, in realizing instances of irony in similar negotiated cycles, turning points can be molded. The problem is that first irony must be identified and critical narrative analysis is needed to do that. While the practice of critical analysis of inclusive narrative structures is lacking in the TBMSG movement, it is never too late to become attuned to the range of implications implicit in narrative construction.

#### ***4.3.2 Leadership Narrative Two: Mangesh's Story***

Mangesh Dahiwale is part of a new young vanguard of TBMSG dalit-rights activists that Lokamitra has been cultivating and grooming for some time. Vibrant and full of zeal for the cause of stopping caste discrimination and atrocities through the spread of the Buddhist dharma, Mangesh is my junior by only a little over a year. As a second generation Ambedkar Buddhist, he is a well-educated Ambedkar devotee who was attracted to TBMSG by both the personage of Lokamitra and the core self-help values of the organization. Having read and digested nearly everything that the prolific

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<sup>291</sup> Cobb (2006), 147-148.

Dr. Ambedkar wrote, Mangesh has gained the reputation within the movement as a sort of resident scholar on Dr. Ambedkar's thought - a role he seems to relish. Despite the fact that Mangesh has quipped to me that he "doesn't enjoy speaking at universities" and doesn't "consider [him]self an academic,"<sup>292</sup> in reality he is extremely articulate, possesses analytical skills that could compete with the finest of scholars, and is extremely perceptive when it comes to the sociological and psychological implications of his advocacy. In speaking English with the vocabulary and cadence of an academic (his uncle is, indeed, retired from a professorship at Pune University), Mangesh's advocacy, centered on "Buddhist methods to transform self and societies,"<sup>293</sup> forms the core of his worldview and influences his choice of language and tactics.

Both of Mangesh's parents converted to Buddhism in response to Ambedkar's own calls to do so in 1956, and Mangesh clearly sees himself in relation to the formative stories of both Ambedkar's and his parents' experiences of caste and conversion. In fact, in describing his career choice Mangesh explains that "we are the fruit of the movement,"<sup>294</sup> motioning to the others with whom he works at the Manuski Center. His father, a government servant, and his mother, a housewife, were well-placed educationally and economically to overcome the social stigma of their Mahar birth. Reaping the benefits of his parents' ability to climb the social ladder and provide him with a sound education, Mangesh went to Mumbai University for a bachelor degree in Electronic Engineering. Upon completion of his studies Mangesh passed the civil service

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<sup>292</sup> Personal conversation with Mangesh Dahiwale, May 15, 2007.

<sup>293</sup> E-mail interview with Mangesh Dahiwale, August, 2007.

<sup>294</sup> Personal conversation with Mangesh Dahiwale, June 24, 2008.

exam and took a much coveted civil service job in New Delhi. He served in the Government of India's Ministry of Commerce for four years, serving as an Indian negotiator during the Doha Round of World Trade Organization trade negotiations. Despite his insistence that he left his civil service post "because [he] found something worthwhile to do about [his] life - that is to devote [himself] to the study and practice of Buddhism,"<sup>295</sup> he also expressed a feeling that he was not reaching his full potential as a civil servant. Frustrated with the slow pace of the Indian bureaucracy, Mangesh took work with TBMSG's Jambudvipa Trust based on a deep personal conviction in the Buddha's individual prescription and a belief in Lokamitra's approach and long ties to the dalit movement and Ambedkar community. Feeling that he could accomplish more change working for the TBMSG, he left the security of the civil service for a less financially stable, but more rewarding, life as a Buddhist and an activist – two roles that he sees as inseparable. The socio-political form of Ambedkar Buddhism that Mangesh embraces serves as the foundation of his adult identity and provides the justification for his passionate activism. His work with TBMSG has become inseparable from his being; as fruit of the dalit movement he sees his life in the context of planting new seeds, and actively supports many younger members of the Ambedkar Buddhist community (even by providing funds for their education out of his own pocket).

As the leader<sup>296</sup> of a young cadre of devotees that see their task as both political and the embodiment of a particular, some would call religious, way of life (and in fact as

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<sup>295</sup> E-mail interview with Mangesh Dahiwalé, August, 2007.

<sup>296</sup> Though Mangesh himself might shun the thought that he is a 'leader,' the fact is that others on the Manuski staff look up to him and deeply respect his approach, knowledge, and decision-making skills.

un-definable as either/or), Mangesh has no specific title within Jambudvipa Trust or the Manuski Center, but clearly is a principal voice in these relatively new dalit uplift institutional formations. When asked about his title Mangesh says “at TBMSG we do not believe in titles,”<sup>297</sup> a statement that confirms both the inclusive and egalitarian foundations of the TBMSG movement and Mangesh’s sense that he is working within a broader spiritual framework. Though easily mistaken as trite, Mangesh’s sincerity and commitment to social justice through building a peaceful community in which everyone has the ability to reach their potential, is not simply lip-service to a vague altruism - - it is lived. His Buddhism is more humanistic than sectarian or scriptural; more philosophical than overtly spiritual. Yet, the inclusiveness of the TBMSG family of organizations is not simply an expression of pragmatism either. The members who carry the mantle of the TBMSG movement are, first and foremost, believers in dharmadatu (all living beings’ inherently possess the Buddha-nature), and this belief provides philosophical grounding for an egalitarian social prescription aimed at re-defining karma in the Indian society as rational and not supernatural. As an Indian, but humanist above all else, Mangesh is representative of a young generation of modern Indians that is newly curious about the world outside of India and eager to integrate Western political ideals with Eastern conceptions of the examined life.

It is in explicitly following Ambedkar, as archetype of the dharma, where Mangesh’s own identity as an educated Buddhist activist can be very powerful. Mangesh

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<sup>297</sup> E-mail interview with Mangesh Dahiwale, August, 2007. Interestingly enough in March 2008 e-mail correspondence with Mangesh he uses the title of Director, International Relations for Jambudvipa Trust.

turns on its head the stereotypical opinion of dalit Buddhist converts. As typically poor, undereducated, and socially frustrated, the dominant stereotype of dalit Buddhists is one of a socially expedient latcher-on, rather than well-educated devotee of the dharma. Mangesh believes full-heartedly that a focus on inner change is a priori to attempts at social justice and peace-building and, therefore, teaching of the practice of Buddhism is crucial to the community that he aims to assist. This is a rational, not spiritual belief – the Buddha, from the Ambedkar Buddhist perspective, provided guiding principles to achieve inner change. Yet, this dogged insistence on rationalism and pragmatism, in some sense, threatens to stunt the full potential of the movement. As Schirch (2001) has articulated, the symbolic use by movement members of ritual and stories can, and does, get lost when a rational problem-solving approach to the world is privileged.<sup>298</sup> This is not to say that Mangesh's (or TBMSG's) commitment to social change is weak or even unjustified by experience, but rather that a combination of both inner and outer change can be problematic. Just as a focus on rational approaches to problem solving can limit TBMSG's ability to affect lasting change on the local level, a focus on inner-change marginalizes strong believers in other religious and normative systems and simultaneously decelerates the realization of TBMSG's wider social justice ideal. In other words, framing their contention to outsiders as rational problem solving hampers TBMSG organizing at the local level, but advocating what works on the local level (namely a focus on the symbolic nature of Buddhist inner change) hampers attempts at

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<sup>298</sup> See Schirch (2001), 147.

wider social justice based change. That sustainable social change can only come with inner-change may be a truism, but it also places limits on TBMSG appeal and deftness to claim secular support and partnership from the wider dalit rights movement or to argue for symbolic approaches to conflict resolution. This poses a number of practical problems for the movement, which I believe the narratives re-constructed in Appendices F and G highlight well. The narrative transcripts in these two Appendix sections are exemplar of Mangesh's combination of political and normative arguments for TBMSG's approach to social justice. Beyond that, they are indicative of the secular framing that TBMSG leaders use to position their work as the only or best option for true change in the caste system.

What does focusing on inner change presage for the movement's ability to create mass-appeal? For being able to interact with others who do not share their a prior religious or philosophical assumptions? Is Mangesh's faithful acceptance of foundational Mahayana concepts like dharma-dhatu and the bodhisattva ideal a liability when approaching other non-Buddhists both secular and religious? These questions open the door for a broader and more important question - - is Mangesh's, and, in turn, the TBMSG movement's, conception of social justice limited by an insistence that it is possible only through an inner-change brought on by conversion? While conversion surely has important impact on the TBMSG members' conceptions of social justice, in attempting to quantify and qualify that impact it becomes necessary to separate the rhetoric of conversion from that of emancipation. It also becomes important to look

beyond simply rational problem-solving explanations and to incorporate insights gained through symbolic meaning structures.

Mangesh traveled to the United States in April/May of 2007. The narrative analysis that follows is based on two short narratives reconstructed from a brown bag talk Mangesh presented on Ambedkar Buddhism and the Problem of Caste at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution on May 15, 2007 (see Appendices F and G for numbered transcriptions of these narratives). The first of these narratives positions Ambedkar Buddhists as attacking the thinking of "Hindu fundamentalists" as "superstitious" and promoting un-scientific ideas that are trying "to enslave human minds."<sup>299</sup> In this narrative, Mangesh acts to position TBMSG's Ambedkar Buddhists as fiercely rational and starkly different than Hindus. Chosen for its clear normative positioning of a collective self in relation to collective 'others' this leadership narrative highlights a normative assumption among TBMSG leaders. That assumption is that rationality always explains actors' moral justifications.<sup>300</sup> Indeed, in the case of both TBMSG and Hindu fundamentalists, it seems quite obvious that rather than simply rational calculations many of the expressions of moral certitude in the narratives of movement leaders are reciprocal reactions to the discourse (including actions) of others. In short, such narratives are part of a discursive interaction that wittingly and unwittingly occurs between high-caste elites and lower-caste have-nots. Such discursive interaction, which is mostly subtle, and seldom discussed, casts a wide

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<sup>299</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwalé and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007.

<sup>300</sup> See MacIntyre (1984).

shadow over the TBMSG movement. This shadow is projective towards the future and problematic for the present since it acts to reproduce the same systems of repression it aims to destroy. Despite TBMSG members discounting such narratives relative importance, it is my contention that members must critically analyze their place in such discursive interaction for broad social change to occur and last.

Mangesh's positioning of Ambedkar Buddhists as consistent believers in scientific process, while exposing the rational assumptions involved in narrating justice, also acts as an attempt to justify a moral stance via de-legitimizing the other. MacIntyre (1984) would label such a process as falling within "the limitations of... moral particularity,"<sup>301</sup> and he cautions: "When men and women identify what are in fact their partial and particular causes too easily and too completely with the cause of some universal principle, they usually behave worse than they would otherwise do."<sup>302</sup> By reference to these narratives, it is not presumed that they engender bad behavior among movement members, but rather that they miss an important realization of the potential for destructive behavior created by the identity they enforce. The analysis, here, of the first of Mangesh's narratives will highlight the role of social/psychological positioning, identity, and rationality in the development of moral statements. This forces one to question the practical implications of failing to critically analyze these normative foundations' inter-subjective meanings. As indicative of missed opportunities for

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<sup>301</sup> MacIntyre (1984), 221. MacIntyre's (1984) task of an historical accounting of virtues sheds light on the foundations of moral assumptions and provides explanation for why moral theory has traditionally been absent from social theory.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 221.

movement leaders to fully make use of the conflict setting, such narratives are implicitly filled with agentic potential. The wider discursive practices that such statements engender are foundational to social contention and, therefore, must be analyzed and employed for positive social change *and* carefully watched and curtailed for possible negative impacts.

On the other hand, the second narrative reconstruction, found transcribed in Appendix G, accounts an atrocity that occurred in October 2006. Quickly linking this atrocity narrative to an Ambedkar Buddhist conception of injustice, Mangesh is positioning the TBMSG movement as filling the void of inaction by the local government and other civil society groups. This second narrative serves as a launching pad to a larger discussion by Mangesh of the “kind of work we do”<sup>303</sup> and takes on an assumptive quality quite normal in recounting injustice. On the deepest level this narrative of violent injustice acts as a means to link rational retrospective ‘fact’ with moral judgment. Of course ‘fact’ is always open to interpretation, and as social actors TBMSG leaders, like Mangesh, exhibit extraordinary agency in this process. As instrumental stories link agents’ fact and moral judgment; leaders like Mangesh exhibit a form of power that often goes unnoticed and unanalyzed.<sup>304</sup> Drawing attention to such an injustice narrative and the contingent realities of power, identity, and positioning the analysis of the second narrative provides a public admonishment of those with power. Positioning the ‘other’ as resistant to change and even complicit in the atrocious rape and murder of an entire

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<sup>303</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007.

<sup>304</sup> See Hoffer (1951) for one of the few psychological studies of the power of leaders and followers.

family, this second transcribed utterance provides a narrative frame for developing normative assumptions about the ‘other’ and questioning their hold on power.

Transcript One: Attacking Fundamentalists as Superstitious and Against Science<sup>305</sup>

The following narrative analysis is based upon the author’s own observation and transcription of the utterances of Mangesh Dahiwale on May 15, 2007. In this narrative Mangesh introduces non-Indian listeners to Dr. Ambedkar and positions his fight as a fight against “any ideal system which was based on any scripture.”<sup>306</sup> Due to the constraints of space, and the ease of readability, the fully transcribed speech segment from which this narrative storyline is reconstructed appears in Appendix F. Following the analysis and transcription method of Labov (1972), the full transcription shows a number of points where an evaluative statement (E) follows on the heels of observed facts, what Labov calls orientation (O). In Labov’s own words, speakers recounting highly emotional narratives that form part of their biography seem “to undergo a partial reliving of that experience” and are in turn “no longer free to monitor [their] own speech”<sup>307</sup> as is normally done in an interview type context. Describing the evolution of Ambedkar’s social analysis of caste and strategy against the Hindu-order, in the context of presenting a brown bag lunch at GMU-ICAR, Mangesh says:

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<sup>305</sup> The full transcript of the narrative analyzed here can be found in Appendix F.

<sup>306</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 1, Appendix F].

<sup>307</sup> Labov (1972), 355.

And the third and the most important strateg[y] that he used was the conversion. So he found that if the people are wanting to really... ahh... have the positional change in that social order nothing is going to happen unless there is a structural change and that structural change can be ensured if the people come out of that system. So, in order to bring people out of that system, he [Ambedkar] adopted that there should be conversion from the Hinduism.<sup>308</sup>

It should strike observant readers as telling that Mangesh talks of positional change as dependant on structural change, but that close attention to the processes of social positioning in Mangesh's own later speech acts seem to go almost completely unnoticed by the speaker. In other words, the context in which Mangesh is speaking (i.e. at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution) seems to draw out an enthusiastic desire to reference the important role of social position, but little self-analysis seems to accompany this initial enthusiasm. Subsequent speech acts by Mangesh seem to privilege a certain normative position over others rather than the processes associated with that position's creation. Positioning Ambedkar Buddhists as rational humanists and Hindu practitioners as superstitious anti-rationalists only concerned with pleasing the gods, Mangesh is unconcerned with his own moral denigration of the other and the processes of positioning this type of de-legitimization models to others.<sup>309</sup> Mangesh's ascription of un-scientific characteristics to others that are associated with under-education, or lack of rational capabilities, positions Ambedkar Buddhists as freed from the fear of superstition through education and Buddhist practice. Such malignant

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<sup>308</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007.

<sup>309</sup> Despite the fact that this was an entirely American audience, I have since heard similar speech acts from Mangesh in talks that he sees as aimed at "radicalizing" people to the caste issues. In such talks both foreigners and Indians have been present.

positioning is a hallmark of TBMSG leaders' speech acts. Freedom from superstition is seen as liberating in more than one way; liberating in the sense of being based on methodological reliability, but also in a sense creating an epistemological freedom. Furthermore, Mangesh's own relived experiences of this anti-rationalist thinking provide an emotional energy which legitimizes Mangesh's speech. Paying attention to both the uses and processes of social positioning within Mangesh's attack on fundamentalist Hindus as superstitious provides a means to understand TBMSG's social justice narratives upon a spectrum of interconnected meanings.

Coming in the context of Mangesh's description of Ambedkar's sociological analysis of the caste system, this narrative transcription exhibits an opposition between rational and ideal conceptions which is immediately apparent in line one. Positioning Ambedkar as opposed to any ideal (future) system based on scripture, Mangesh develops the image of Ambedkar as an egalitarian freedom fighter. The ideological 'other' becomes the antithesis to actualizing liberty, fraternity, and equality. More than simply pejoratively categorizing mythical or idealistic social constructions, the privileging of the rational as normatively more valuable and as implicitly congruent with equality has the effect of positioning the superstitious as irrelevant and un-democratic (i.e. transcription on line 6 - "more than [one man one vote] what is important is one man one value"). Anti-rationalists are thereby equated with anti-democracy's proponents; simple-minded ideologues are de-legitimized. Invoking Gandhi in line 9, Mangesh is drawing attention to the unacknowledged role of Ambedkar in the independence movement while at the same time branding Gandhi (and his supporters) as advocates of future aspirations

ungrounded in reality. The implication of such utterance is that if these future aspirations are ungrounded in reality then they are bound to produce unjust social relations and structures. By contrast, the TBMSG ideal is grounded in a scientific methodology, and, thus, from a pragmatic view, it is attainable. Unaware of the full spectrum of needs in society these Gandhians are ‘utopian’ thinkers with little by way of concrete analysis and/or proscription for creating their utopia. In citing examples like Rama Raj (line 10) and test-tube babies (line 16) Mangesh is essentializing all Hindus as superstitious - - equating Gandhi followers with Hindutva nationalists or extreme fundamentalists (a far cry). Though subtle this positioning process is intentional. Creating a sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ such crude associations have the effect of reinforcing a TBMSG belief in social uplift through the personal empowerment of education and Buddhist practice. In the context of this speech act,<sup>310</sup> Mangesh is positioning himself and his movement as the original purveyors of Indian democracy and scientific rationalism. To an audience of foreigners, the Ambedkar Buddhist is positioned as providing a logical method for explaining the world (and for, therefore, proscribing change) while the Hindu is the cause of the stereotypical view of India as nonsensical and mystical (thus making them incapable of instituting equitable change). Nuanced and multi-faceted, Mangesh’s narrative holds multiple levels of meaning the aspects of which are often overlooked by either movement members or outsiders.

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<sup>310</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999) remind us that “Positioning always takes place within the context of a specific moral order of speaking” (23).

On one level, the transcribed narrative in Appendix F is an attempt to position Hindus as falling outside the Western scientific community - as pre-modern and mythical in their worldview.<sup>311</sup> In line 22, Mangesh uses an evolutionary metaphor (“the big fish ate the small fish”) to explain the Hindu justification for caste. This metaphor is then discredited as “a very crude form of social Darwinism” (lines 22, 23). Since social Darwinism tends to be negatively, rather than positively, ascribed the use of metaphor is aimed at further discrediting the non-rational and non-methodological approach of the other. The metaphor provides another example of caste Hindus attempts to justify the inequities of the Indian social system as having a rational basis, but Mangesh’s de-legitimizing it as social Darwinism re-positions the view as un-scientific (or at least not founded on the scientific method) and a-historical. In cycling through orienting the listener (lines 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 16), developing complicating actions (lines 4, 8, 21, 22, and 23), and evaluating the situation (lines 10, 13, 14, 15, 19, and 20), Mangesh is positioning un-scientific culture as detrimental to society and an Ambedkarite restructuring of society as the only prescription able to correct this flaw. Only through seeing the failure of current social constructs can change become possible, and the Ambedkar Buddhist analysis provides the lens to identify this failure.

It is also helpful to return to this narrative from a perspective which pays close attention to the pauses and other aspects of speech processes apparent in Mangesh’s talk. Such analysis of the transcription tells us not only something about the speaker, but also

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<sup>311</sup> Cassirer (1946) has argued “mythical and verbal thought are interwoven in everyway.” And it is only through metaphor, Cassirer argues, that one is able to see the “unity” and “difference” of the verbal and mythical worlds (83).

the “reflection-in-action”<sup>312</sup> aspects of scripting the talk to his specific audience. Speaking in English obviously requires a shift from his native Marathi dialogue and periods of pause, for Mangesh, are undoubtedly periods of actively choosing specific words and word phrases suitable for this particular context and audience. But, in addition, such pauses are also used for dramatic effect. Invoking Gandhi in line 9 (unquestionably a known figure to those in the American audience) provides a means to understand Mangesh’s own identity as inter-related with his minority sense of nationalism. After debunking the ideal of the Rama Raj (Line 10), Mangesh having equated this idea with the father of Indian nationalism seems to stumble in finding an adequate example to illustrate the superstitious nature of the caste-based ideal which underpins this idea. It is interesting to note that majority of the long pauses in the transcript which appears in Appendix F come between lines 11 and 20/21. These lines are the ones in which Mangesh is quite obviously jumping between various examples to orient the listener and provide evaluative statements in order to develop a complicating action understandable to both himself and listeners. These lines (11, 20 and 21) are also lines in which he is trying to simultaneously describe and evaluate a vaguely understood ideal (what he labels superstition). In setting up the Hindu nationalist ideal (exemplified by the well-known personage of Gandhi), Mangesh then challenges this ideal as scientifically un-grounded and superstitious and casts the work of TBMSG as attempting “to challenge those ideas, the ‘so-called’ religious ideas” (Line 24). Essentializing the

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<sup>312</sup> Schon (1983), 21.

idea as ideal, Mangesh struggles to find language to adequately express these ideas. Forced to explain through example and analogy, Mangesh invokes a traditional ideal (Rama Raj), a modern discovery (test tube babies), and a scientific theory (Darwinism) as tools to expose the injustice of a social stratification system supported most fiercely by irrational actors. His pauses represent rhetorical reassessments of his context and audience, providing a passion and gravity to his speech that mere words could not accomplish. From a Labovian perspective these pauses represent the struggle to adequately express evaluative statements (of the 10 lines between 11 and 21 five are evaluative statements). The prosody of these lines adds legitimacy to his evaluative statements and helps to play on the audience's Western scientific worldview.

Still, in a sense there is a sort of revivalist tendency within the TBMSG movement. Though they are harkening for a modern scientific worldview they are also invoking a revival of anti-traditionalist tendencies within the Indian society. Embracing modernity and technology, TBMSG always draws its narrative back to the historical Buddha - - placing the genesis of their thought in a time of antiquity. Such a recourse to an idealized past can be very effective in mobilizing support, as many religious movements have noticed. In this sense, TBMSG's approach is not revolutionary. Still, Mangesh's words, as well as the processes through which they evolve into a narrative construct, provide a window into the identity and projective sense of justice that TBMSG members envision. By recourse to constructed past ideals and an unrealized future implementation of a new set of ideals, such speech acts are the foundation of the TBMSG movement. Simultaneously alienating and cohesive, such speech acts provide the

foundation for a reconstructed identity that is coextensive with a sense of both justice and injustice. In a sense, the reconstructed identity acts as a means to express injustice. The narrative that follows provides a direct re-counting of this sense of injustice; a recounting that TBMSG is becoming more and more willing to voice.

Transcript Two: “Every day violent incidents happen:” The Atrocity at Khairlanji, Maharashtra<sup>313</sup>

If, in the first transcribed narrative, Mangesh is subtly pointing to the transformation of the dalit community through an enlarged awareness of their own identity, the second transcribed narrative (found in Appendix G) provides a more sober assessment of dalit’s relative power in society and their progress towards social justice. As the abstract that begins this narrative structure concedes: “but the glass is not completely full.”<sup>314</sup> In arguing that, contrary to popular belief, not all is right in India, Mangesh is expressing a narrative heard only infrequently in the mainstream of Indian society. The metaphor of the glass provides an interesting analytical evaluation of the social condition of dalits. As dalits represent about one fifth of the total Indian population, by saying that the “one fifth of the glass is full”<sup>315</sup> there is an implicit assumption that all dalits have awakened, but others have not. Indeed, such derogatory utterances make most economically content Hindus argue that such talk is anti-nationalist

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<sup>313</sup> The full transcript of the narrative analyzed here can be found in Appendix G.

<sup>314</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwalé and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 1, Appendix G].

<sup>315</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwalé and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 2, Appendix G].

and unpatriotic. Mangesh's second narrative is a narrative that calls for action by pointing out the "form(s) of injustice happening in India."<sup>316</sup> But it is also a narrative that gets sidelined and maligned by those un-desirous of changing the status quo. Having praised the strides that Ambedkar followers have made since Ambedkar's untimely death, Mangesh goes on to describe the underbelly of the current situation. To illustrate the kind of "violent incidents" that happen "every day... in some small village,"<sup>317</sup> Mangesh focuses on what has become infamously known within the Indian dalit community as the Khairlanji Massacre. Tying such broad language to a specific case of injustice accomplishes multiple aims. Mangesh, in positioning caste discrimination as possible everywhere (even in Maharashtra long thought of as the bastion of dalit rights), uses this narrative to develop an empathetic frame of mind in his listeners and provide proof positive that caste discrimination is still alive and well in India. Such recourse to the audience's sense of justice is both calculated and effective. As Lind (1995), in arguing for the role of what he calls "justice judgments" in social conflict, has stated: "What matters most to the judgment that one has been treated fairly, it seems, is information that the group has positive regard for the person's ideas, their dignity, and, above all, for the person's status as a full member of the group."<sup>318</sup> Mangesh's reference to the Khairlanji incident constructs a common bond between himself and the audience; a bond based on some shared understandings of humanity and 'justice' as fairness. Constructing a sense

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<sup>316</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 5, Appendix G].

<sup>317</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line numbers 4 and 5, Appendix G].

<sup>318</sup> Lind (1995), 7.

of membership and position among this educated audience, that he does not always have recourse to in addressing Indian elites, Mangesh is able to not only tell dalits' stories, but also frame their contention and appropriate responses to the expression of injustice. Beyond simply aimed at creating awareness, Mangesh creates an empathy which comes with an additional caveat - - one must take action to engage this hidden scourge of inhumanity and lack of fairness. Mangesh often talks about a "silent revolution"<sup>319</sup> and using such broad language as 'everywhere' and 'every day' he aims at shocking both members and supporters into empathy and action. Mangesh very much sees his job as both building awareness *and* initiating new members into this revolution – and he is not discriminating about who can and should be radicalized. Portraying such atrocity as commonplace is a means to an end. Such a narrative frame allows Mangesh to provide a number of solutions to the caste problem. Implying the problem is caused by the caste system (line 13) lends to a social analysis that entails restoring the "social fabric."<sup>320</sup> Pragmatically aimed at progress towards the end of 'social justice,' Mangesh positions dalits as not only victims, but also social actors that possess agency. In looking more closely at the description of this specific instance of an injustice narrative it becomes possible to see the movement's conception of social justice – a conception that certainly

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<sup>319</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007, [introductory remarks]/personal correspondence with Mr. Dahiwale.

<sup>320</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 13, Appendix G].

requires providing all with the ability to reach their individual potential and “live with respect and dignity.”<sup>321</sup>

The Bhotmanges were one of only two dalit (Mahar) families among approximately 150 families living in the non-descript village of Khairlanji in Bhandara district of Maharashtra [the other families were made up of Powars and Kalars which are classified as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Indian parlance].<sup>322</sup> On the evening of September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006 a mob of angry Caste Hindus, desiring revenge for Mr. Bhotmanges’ recent testimony to the authorities against one of their own, descended on this families’ hut and raped and murdered the occupants (Mr. Bhotmanges was, himself, not at home). Mangesh sums the brutality of this event up by stating “four members of the five member family were lynched” (line 7). His use of the term ‘lynched’ is telling. It shrewdly calls to mind the brutality and inhumanity of racial violence in the US,<sup>323</sup> and is used in this context for the effect it will have on the predominantly American audience. Having built a relationship with the audience around a common conception of humanity, Mangesh is drawing connections to similar cultural reference points in order to position both self and others. The use of such language evokes a distinct image and conveys an inhumanity that words like murder, killing, and slaughter are incapable of doing. Reference to lynching is an attempt to succinctly summarize brutality and provide

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<sup>321</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 14, Appendix G].

<sup>322</sup> <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article4101>

<sup>323</sup> The term lynching indeed probably came from the Virginia colonies’ early political battles over power and in fact, initially had nothing to do with racial violence or, even, vigilante justice. The common usage changed in the 1800s and the term became synonymous with vigilante racism. See Waldrep (1999) for a full discussion.

recourse to the visual imagery of mob violence. As Waldrep (1999) argues in his study of the discursive politics and narrative strategies of lynching, “the word lynching can be a powerful vehicle in the hands of a skilled polemicist.”<sup>324</sup> The use of the word by Mangesh is intended to provide a clear cultural reference point to listeners, making the vagaries of Indian village life, and caste discrimination in the village, more accessible and understandable to the foreign audience. But as Cooper (1989) has argued “when public discourse occurs, the roles of advocate and audience do not necessarily remain stable.”<sup>325</sup> It is within this shifting nature of the roles of advocate and audience that Mangesh adeptly positions TBMSG’s work within the same moral community as that of the listeners. By the end of this short narrative transcript, Mangesh had mediated between both his own, and his audiences’, sense of a moral community, and in turn, created a shared meaning of justice based on dignity and self-respect.

Mangesh, in describing the events in Khairlanji in more specific terms (Lines 8 and 9), attempts to classify such acts as beyond simply unjust, but rather inhuman and callous. In line 10 Mangesh says: “They were not only raped, they were treated like animals.” From a rhetorical perspective such talk assumes a classic Aristotelian classification of epideictic oratory (i.e. oratory that results in the community’s praise or blame of past action based on present-day standards),<sup>326</sup> but from a positioning perspective such talk can be approached from the dynamic relationship it creates between

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<sup>324</sup> Waldrep (1999), 229.

<sup>325</sup> Cooper (1989), 23.

<sup>326</sup> See Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (1954), 1358b for a distinction between this type of public oratory and what Cooper (1989) has called deliberative and forensic, 26-27.

both the audience and the speaker. Equating speaker with audience such talk has the ability to support a dynamic relationship between speaker and audience in which the differing conceptions of social justice become blurred. In building a common sense of justice as representing both civilization and fairness, talk of what social justice will look like becomes static and assumed; differences in social justice concepts, thus, go unanalyzed. Beyond simply going unanalyzed, the very concept that one would *need* to analyze the foundations of social justice becomes unimaginable – we all know what social justice is not, therefore, we know what it is! Such a narrative turn is, in part, accomplished through Mangesh’s use of the shift of tense. Between lines 4 and 5 there is a subtle shift from past tense to present – the effect is one of engendering a realization in listeners that caste-ism remains a prevalent social problem and one with which they have an ability to engage. In line 6 there is a return to past events as a means to interpret present reality. In constructing the present reality, which is created throughout the rest of this narrative transcript by reference to this past incident at Khairlanji, a sort of performance is enacted in which an ideal of the future is made visible.

Mangesh’s “performative positioning”<sup>327</sup> also assumes a great deal about the audiences’ values as liberal intellectuals interested in conflict resolution and peace-building. Simultaneously, such performative positioning, in turn, positions Mangesh as an advocate for human rights. Appropriating the individualistic language of human rights, Mangesh maintains a communal frame of reference aimed at empowering human

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<sup>327</sup> Following Harre and Langenhove (1999) Mangesh’s speech act could be called third order performative positioning because it is presenting past acts as a means to challenge present broader assumptions, 21.

rights for his community. As opposed to focusing on the specific victims of this atrocity a more general description is provided to depict the event's aftermath ("kind of a demonizing the whole human personality"<sup>328</sup>). Problematizing this atrocity as something greater than an individual human tragedy, Mangesh invokes the caste system as the key problematic. This allows the effects of the event to be described in broad communal terms as tearing "apart the social fabric" (line 13). Mangesh's positioning of himself in relation to injustice in line five ("even as I am talking here there might be some form of injustice happening in India... in some Indian village...") has set the stage for this enforcement of communal conceptions by presenting a mental image of him as innocent bystander and those he is an advocate for as blameless beneficiaries in need of TBMSG assistance. Such manipulation of time and space also has the effect of reinforcing a sense of the urgency for action by turning the audience into witnesses. By line 13 the full moral force of this positioning becomes clear. The moral implication of Mangesh's narrative positioning is that caste Hindus are devoid of an understanding of human rights. Positioning the actions at Khairlanji as inhumane and unjust implies both a present reality and a future ideal.

Yet, interestingly, this positioning, while implying a lack of respect among these 'others' for individual rights, also assumes that communal mentality has, in modern global society, become irrelevant to Hindu elites who have bought into a Western individualistic materialism. As Howard (1996) has argued "human rights are

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<sup>328</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 11, Appendix G].

‘inauthentic’ in many cultures because they challenge the ingrained privileges of the ruling classes.”<sup>329</sup> So despite many caste Hindu’s recourse to communal rhetoric in denouncing both Muslims and low-caste dalits as anti-nationalist or opportunists of class change, in reality this is portrayed as simply rhetoric; caste Hindus are positioned as neither supportive of individual rights nor truly interested in communal and democratic solutions. As Joshi (1982) has stated in describing cases of untouchable violence “The issue in these cases is not so much ‘law and order,’ as it is ‘Whose law, whose order.’”<sup>330</sup> Mangesh’s statements position the events that occurred at Khairlanji in order to challenge both caste and class based assumptions about human rights. In so doing, broader movement assumptions, such as the Marxist attempt to connect caste with class and the role of power, go unaddressed. In exploring the historical roots of what she calls “class-caste” analysis Omvedt (1994) argues that such analyses “have proved rather sterile as indeed have all ‘additive’ theories put forward in reaction to the new social movements of today.”<sup>331</sup> Yet, while using the idea that individuals have rights irrespective of their communal place in the wider society, Mangesh is not only challenging the assumption that caste is the foundation for community and status, but he is also making a Marxist argument that unequal distribution reinforces the caste foundation. The solution, therefore, implies a reshuffling of power relationships.

The frame of power is clearly evident in the narratives of TBMSG members.

Still, while the focus of the Manuski Center’s response to the events at Khairlanji has not

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<sup>329</sup> Howard (1996), 318-319.

<sup>330</sup> Joshi (1982), 682.

<sup>331</sup> Omvedt (1994), 27-28.

been on the incident of mob violence itself, as much as on slow local police response to the incident, the real mobilizing force of such an act lies in one's ability to describe the event in graphic, yet respectful, language. And it is mobilizing around this event that Manuski has done well. Providing a graphic account of this crime germinates a common sense of humanity and a sense that a suitably just response will be, or should have been, forthcoming. Describing the event as "the worst" and "happening everywhere," (line number 12 and 13) TBMSG and Manuski followers are able to use the anxiety created by such atrocity, and its spread, to sensationalize the event, ferment outrage, and move the authorities to action. Branding the event a caste atrocity limits other explanations of the event and allows for Mangesh to ascribe innumerable horrors to caste, both social and personal. Further, such talk enlivens a conception of social justice in which such atrocities become unthinkable, yet leaves this vision of social justice vague enough that there is room for some degree of cultural relativism. Caste, as limiting people's potential to "live with respect and dignity," (line 14) is, therefore, diagnosed to be the cause of all social ills. Consequently, peace-building in the Indian context requires first and foremost attention to caste, while social justice as a concept can remain vague and unbounded. Such a frame of power, and power's creation, goes back to the life of Dr. Ambedkar.

#### ***4.4 Hagiography and Symbolic Foundations: Written Leadership Narratives***

Dr. Ambedkar's life has become the basis of legend; a mythological foundation upon which to construct concepts, support value judgments, and create an ideal vision of social justice. The oral stories one hears about Dr. Ambedkar's early life not only represent important episodes in his development as a thinker, but also acts as a guide to

right action for contemporary dalit Buddhists. As Cassirer (1946) astutely realized “language never denotes simple objects, things as such, but always conceptions arising from the autonomous activity of the mind. The nature of concepts, therefore, depends on the way this active viewing is directed.”<sup>332</sup> Nothing could simultaneously encapsulate the truth about Dr. Ambedkar’s hagiography, and the difficulty in actually analyzing it, more completely than Cassirer’s sense of ‘active viewing.’ Each subsequent re-creation of Ambedkar’s own written stories of injustice and hardship is an expression of ‘active viewing;’ a re-enactment of the pain and humiliation so familiar to those acting it out. Across India, these stories are continually recreated in street theater; re-lived as painful reminders of what it is like to be ‘untouchable.’ Ambedkar, as hero of the downtrodden, has in this process become deified. As if to say ‘look how *our leader* responded to this inhumanity and injustice,’ these stories are cited and re-enacted to empower and inspire; they are a post-modern expression of a new Buddhist understanding of the eightfold path’s ‘right action.’ The fact that these stories are continually being re-interpreted through a process of ‘active viewing’ makes explaining the written stories’ intent not only difficult, but futile. It is the stories’ significance to not only Ambedkar’s own personal development, but also the continuing development of the Ambedkar Buddhist movement that gives meaning to these stories. Regardless of their accuracy, the rhetorical and moral power of these, now hagiographic, stories provides an important

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<sup>332</sup> Cassirer (1946), 31.

foundational storyline of awakened identity to both the activist member and leadership narratives of the TBMSG movement.

Ambedkar wrote vociferously<sup>333</sup> about caste and his own experiences at the bottom of this status system of graded inequality. While The Annihilation of Caste (1936) is considered his magnum opus on the sociological analysis of caste, his own personal experiences, written as short monographs and letters, have taken on a life of their own within the wider dalit community and particularly within the Ambedkar movement. Ambedkar's own autobiographical record, though brief, provides one of the earliest English language accounts of caste as experienced from below. As O'Hanlon (1985) points out in discussing nineteenth century Maharashtra: "Even when lower caste leaders were able to read and write, few possessed a command of fluent English, and none of them wrote substantially in English."<sup>334</sup> This remained true into the twentieth century and to a large extent remains the case today. That Ambedkar penned these in English, is only less exceptional than the fact that they had such a profound impact on such a wide audience of dalit reformers. The short manuscripts chosen for analysis here, written in his own words, are detailed accounts of early injustices that Dr. Ambedkar himself suffered and retained as lasting memories. They are well-known stories within the Ambedkar movement of Maharashtra and come from only four written autobiographical accounts of the indignities Ambedkar suffered which have been published to date (having been published as part of the government of Maharashtra's

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<sup>333</sup> Rodriguez (2002) makes the point that Ambedkar "privileged the written word" (Rodriguez, 2) and the breadth and range of topics that he covered over a 40 year career in writing is both daunting and humbling.

<sup>334</sup> O'Hanlon (1985), 3.

sixteen volume collection entitled Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches and edited by Vasant Moon<sup>335</sup>). In these short narratives the humiliation of one of India's most well-educated men is palpable and the psychological impact on its writer is evident. Just as these stories were foundational to Dr. Ambedkar's desire for equality they have since been foundation to the movement for social justice which his conversion and subsequent death spawned.

The collection of narratives that follows provides a critical link to the symbolic foundations of the growth, and subsequent development, of the Ambedkar movement. Primary to the leadership narratives discussed above, these autobiographic narratives develop the hagiography of India's first dalit leader.<sup>336</sup> They catalogue the irony and humiliation of a Western educated intellectual being discriminated against by lower-class and less-educated Hindus.<sup>337</sup> In highlighting the endemic nature of caste, even across India's religious lines, these narratives have become a means of resistance. They invest

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<sup>335</sup> The text for the two I have chosen to analyze have been taken from a re-printing of all four autobiographical stories by Navayana Press (2003) in a collection entitled Ambedkar Autobiographical Notes. Combined with stories of Ambedkar's interaction with Muslims and fellow 'untouchables' in an unknown Maharashtra village these four autobiographical stories form a comprehensive social analysis of 'untouchable' interaction with identities long considered convivial to untouchables. The addition of Ambedkar's own retelling of others' particular poignant cases of 'untouchable' discrimination, this compilation of notes exposes the harsh ironies of an 'untouchable' living in India.

<sup>336</sup> Jaffrelot (2005), 1.

<sup>337</sup> Other autobiographical stories included in Ambedkar's Autobiographical Notes address discrimination of untouchables by both Parsis and Muslims. The last of these autobiographical notes ends with the statement "I gave one instance to show that a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also untouchable to a Parsi. This will show that a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also untouchable to a Mohammedan" ["The Dheds Have Polluted the Tank" in Ambedkar's Autobiographical Notes (2003)]. This conclusion is telling for two reasons: Ambedkar clearly saw these collected notes as a whole and he was careful to expose untouchable discrimination equally across India's diversity of communal identities.

the reader and/or the hearer with a sense of transitional justice<sup>338</sup> and in so doing have a performative character. The performative character of Ambedkar's own injustice narratives are a result of his rhetorical articulation of the absurdity of his situation. Like the girls at TBMSG's Girls Hostel in Gorewada, Nagpur many dalits have reenacted this absurdity as a means to project a view of justice; to perform an idealized future. The stories' significance to Ambedkar's own personal development and evolution as a leader is trumped only by the stories' meaning to the Ambedkar Buddhist movement. In fostering the symbolic foundations for the social justice claims of the movement and creating a hagiographic archetype of liberty, equality, and fraternity the autobiographical narratives deserve closer analytical attention.

#### ***4.4.1 Ambedkar's Autobiographical Narrative: "On the Way to Goregaon" also titled "I Was a Boy of Nine When It Happened"***<sup>339</sup>

Without just recreating here the text of Ambedkar's reminiscence of this painful childhood event, the plot of this now-hagiographic story will be paraphrased and then actual quoted sections of the text (as if they were transcribed spoken narrative) will be analyzed from a positioning perspective. This will provide the ability to move beyond simply the macro-implications of the story and begin to assess both the story's personal and public meanings as significant to the TBMSG movement's narrative conceptions. Of

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<sup>338</sup> In quoting Bickford (2004), Cole (2007) defines transitional justice as "how societies address past human rights abuse, mass atrocity, and other forms of serve social trauma, including genocide or civil war, in order to build a more democratic, just, and peaceful future" [Cole (2007), 168.].

<sup>339</sup> Many of Ambedkar's monographs have eventually been published by professional publishers and in the process many of the titles of his works got changed or revised [See Rodriguez (2002), 535.]

course due to the fact that Ambedkar died in 1956, focusing on the personal narratives<sup>340</sup> of Ambedkar is inevitably relegated to analysis of his written or recorded words. His written words are rich with keys to Ambedkar as a person and as an archetype for low-caste empowerment. Like spoken narrative, these written words demonstrate the process and impacts of social positioning. Providing Ambedkar with social legitimacy his written words exemplify the distinctions between meaning as function and meaning as significance. Functionally, Ambedkar's words not only position him with a moral agency, they position 'others' as devoid of a similar moral frame. While one typical response to atrocity and injustice is to attempt to banish them from awareness,<sup>341</sup> Ambedkar's story of his early childhood travels to Goregaon is aimed instead at creating awareness about such events' existence.<sup>342</sup> This functional meaning of awareness is empowered by Ambedkar's own historical significance as a leader of the independence movement and drafter of India's independent constitution. The moral force of the narrative becomes amplified through a reading of meaning as significance. The significance of these words, as coming from Ambedkar, provide TBMSG members, and other dalits, with a sense of control – a sense that their own narratives can re-construct present and future reality.

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<sup>340</sup> I am here following Riessman's (1993) definition of personal narratives as simply "talk organized around consequential events" in one's life [Riessman (1999), 3].

<sup>341</sup> Herman (1992), quoted in Riessman (1993).

<sup>342</sup> On a trip to India in June/July 2008 I was able to visit the Ambedkar Museum in Pune. There one can find a photo-copied original of the text of these stories, hanging on the wall in a very prominent position in the stupa-shaped hall. Just as performances by school children such prominent re-telling and positioning of these stories is an attempt to make them available and known in the public sphere.

One could even argue that this written narrative is itself an example of violence in the sense that it is attempting to create a power-over others by empowering the less-powerful. When one thinks of violence they are typically conditioned to think of negative conceptions based on aggression and fear, but there also exists a conception of violence that “implies pressuring somebody to induce compliance or consent.”<sup>343</sup> As Krohn-Hansen (1994) has eloquently argued “all uprisings and revolts among poor or marginal groups define social spaces for argument about violence in the sense of injustice or illegitimacy.”<sup>344</sup> Ambedkar’s autobiographical writings provide TBMSG movement members with a mental map upon which to bridge the divergence between the real and the ideal. They function as both witness and re-modeling contractor for a fragile and flawed social structure.

The story of Ambedkar and his siblings going to visit their father in a far off village begins as a short family history. The story represents one of the few accounts of Ambedkar’s early childhood. By Ambedkar’s own recollection it is “the first incident, which I am recording as well as I can remember.”<sup>345</sup> In 1901 Ambedkar lived in a village named Satara, which was then the district governmental center. His father, having taken a job within the British government administration in the same district of the Bombay Presidency, but at some distance away from his family, summoned for young Bhimrao Ambedkar, his older brother, and a cousin upon their summer break from school. These

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<sup>343</sup> Krohn-Hansen (1994), 370. Krohn-Hansen calls this conception of violence, moral violence.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 372.

<sup>345</sup> Ambedkar (1935/2003), 5. By “incident” of course he is referring to experiences of discrimination as an ‘untouchable.’

three ‘untouchable’ boys’ journey from Satara to Goregaon is the subject of this narrative reflection and provides foundational elements of the creation of a new vision of social legitimacy for illegitimate ‘untouchables.’ Upon arriving in Masur, “the nearest railway station for Goregaon,”<sup>346</sup> the boys waited in vain for their father, or one of his peons, to pick them up for the final leg of the journey. Once the boys mistakenly revealed their true identity as Mahars, the story-line of oppression and discrimination is set in motion. The station-master, previously helpful, but now “overpowered by a strange feeling of repulsion”<sup>347</sup> no longer desired to assist them in finding a driver to escort them from the rail station. Recalled to action only by the desire to be rid of these ‘untouchable’ boys, the station-master, after some time, brokers a deal with a bullock-cart driver in which the boys will pay double the fare and drive the cart themselves. The story-line continues through a number of humiliations, including arguing with the driver, who refused to stop at a watering hole to allow the boys to drink, the inability to eat due to no access to water to wash down their food, and having to sleep outside in the bullock cart so as not to pollute a toll-collector’s hut. Written in a disparaging tone, the story, ending with their safe arrival to their father’s residence, provided a psychological catalyst for Ambedkar’s later work for the eradication of ‘untouchability.’

In taking three injustice narratives from this longer autobiographical narrative and engaging in both a positioning and Labovian narrative analysis of these injustice narratives we can see how the use of the story for both practical and symbolic purposes

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 7.

has helped make Ambedkar into a mythological archetype of the uplifted out-caste. Of Ambedkar's four autobiographical narratives that have been published, this story ("On the Way to Goregaon") in particular has become a cultural resource for those attempting to contest social oppression. Often cited and re-enacted by Ambedkar devotees, the suffering expressed has become collectively understood in the dalit community and its overcoming has become the ultimate example of social attainment. From a Buddhist perspective these stories represent foundational elements of Ambedkar's transformation to a Bodhisattva – an enlightened being that forsakes the ultimate release from this world of suffering and vows to first save all beings. As Ambedkar's earliest recollection of discrimination, it provides both a psychological window into Ambedkar as a person, but also a sociological picture of collective value re-enforcement. As stories that all Ambedkarites were brought up hearing, the narratives chosen for analysis here are foundational to the Ambedkarite and Ambedkar Buddhist worldview. Taking a closer look at the actual text of this story from a positioning analysis perspective, we can see both shifts in Ambedkar's social position and hints of the foundations of the movements' idea of the just society. Through uncovering three distinct storylines within the autobiographical account, the injustice narratives presented will be subjected to the same Labovian analysis as the leadership narratives of Lokamitra and Mangesh (above). I will call these three storylines: finding a bullock-cart, finding water, and finding an anchor for

identity;<sup>348</sup> and will attempt to more closely analyze them below by first recreating the narrative and then providing some closer analysis of it. All the recreated narrative storylines below are directly quoted from Ambedkar's Autobiographical Notes (2003), "I Was a Boy of Nine When It Happened," pages 5-12 and have only been condensed in instances where complete elaboration is unnecessary for rhetorical effect.

### Finding a bullock-cart

The narrative storyline reconstructed below illustrates a number of important insights about the social construction of identity and justice – namely that their definition and locative force are contingent on a complexity of social processes, and that to truly understand concepts meanings an awareness of social positioning processes present a key starting place. The power of a storyline, like the one recreated below, to produce symbolic and metaphorical understandings in listeners cannot be overstated. As will become clear through positioning analysis the "logic of the ostensible topic and the storylines, which are embedded in fragments of the participants' autobiographies,"<sup>349</sup> provide the context for hagiographic re-construction. The fact is we narrate our identities through our own stories as well as through those of others. Through this narration value-based conceptions of our place in the world are invoked and continually re-constructed.

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<sup>348</sup> Note that I have broken down this analysis into these storylines for ease of comparative analysis. The titles I have given each of these storylines are summative, or in Labovian terms they present abstracts – what the story is about in a nutshell. They are not intended to add to the analysis, rather to provide the reader some separation between storylines. If one were reading "On the Way to Goregaon" there would be no separation between these storylines and in this sense their inclusion here is artificial.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 38.

To illustrate this social construction of “identity justice”<sup>350</sup> a closer look at the storyline of Ambedkar’s finding a bullock-cart at the Masur railway station is helpful. Below is a short reconstructed storyline, from Ambedkar’s larger text, in which the fluidity of social positions can be seen and understood as being reconstructed through the ascription of negative normative attributes to ‘others.’ Following the written transcriptions Labov’s six-part structure is invoked as a means to explore other possible functions of such a narrative storyline.

- (1) ...we were waiting for father or his servant to come... neither had turned up... and... we did not know how to reach Goregaon. [A]
- (2) We were well-dressed children. From our dress or talk no one could make out that we were children of the untouchables. [O]
- (3) Indeed the station-master was quite sure that we were Brahmin children and was extremely touched at the plight in which he found us. [O]
- (4) As is usual among the Hindus, the station-master asked us who we were. [CA]
- (5) Without a moment’s thought I blurted out that we were Mahars. (Mahar is one of the communities treated as untouchables in the Bombay Presidency.) [CA]
- (6) He was stunned. His face underwent a sudden change. [CA]
- (7) We could see that he was overpowered by a strange feeling of repulsion. As soon as he heard my reply, he went away to his room and we stood where we were. [CA]
- (8) ...my reply to the station-master that we were Mahars had gone round among the cart-men and not one of them was prepared to suffer being polluted and to demean himself carrying passengers of the untouchable classes. [E]
- (9) We were prepared to pay double the fare but we found that money did not work. [E]
- (10) ...a thought seemed to have entered [the station-master’s] head and he asked us, “Can you drive the cart?” [R]
- (11) Feeling that he was finding a solution for our difficulty, we shouted “yes, we can.” [R]
- (12) With that answer he went and proposed on our behalf that we were to pay the cart-man double the fare and drive the cart on our journey. One cart-man agreed as it gave him an opportunity to earn his fare and also saved him from being polluted. [C]

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<sup>350</sup> Rothbart and Korostelina (2006).

The storyline's abstract and orientation, in lines 1-3 above, positions Ambedkar and his traveling companions as both in need of assistance and worthy of assistance due to their tidy appearance and perceived social position. As vulnerable and dependent on the help of others these unfamiliar boys are initially positioned as deserving and respectable, while the station-master is positioned as an empathetic problem-solver both willing, and able, to help. These positions are arrived at largely via perceptions and judgments on the part of both the station-master and the boys themselves. The tone of Ambedkar's simple sentence "We were well-dressed children" generates a narrative position that both forecasts an injustice yet to come and positions Ambedkar and his family members as socially appropriate, and therefore, entitled to basic respect and assistance. In line 4, a shift in the storyline is created by the station-master's question (a typical question that often has the intent of determining caste affiliation). Upon young Ambedkar's response Ambedkar's retinue is positioned as undeserving of assistance, despicable, and more exposed and vulnerable than as first oriented. Ambedkar's reflexive response that they were Mahars repositions all the stories' social actors. The repositioning of this complicating action occurs, as much as a result of the station-master's abrupt cutting off of the conversation, as from his physical cues of stunned revulsion. While the station-master eventually, in line 10, returns to a position of problem-solver, he never returns to a position in which empathy is engendered. His return, in line 10, to a position of problem-solver, of course, has different motives than the altruism of his initial empathetic position. Concerned that the boys move on from his platform (and out of

conflict with others that occupy his social space) the station-master cannot completely disregard them; their mere presence becomes a nuisance.

With the advent of the complicating action at least a thin veil of social obligation remains in the station master; if not social obligation to the boys then to the other patrons of the rail station in clearing the station of undesirables. Meanwhile, the Ambedkar entourage's position grows more precarious, moving father and farther away from an initial position of deserving kids in need of assistance to unworthy problems with which the station-master must, now, deal. In this processes the boys' rights and duties are severely curtailed, while the station-master's rights remain intact and his duties transformed. Maintaining a position of authority, although now not based on age or occupation, but on caste, the station-master is nevertheless bound by the duty of his employment to act as problem-solver. Finally, coming to some 'solutions' in lines 10-11, the re-positioning of Ambedkar's retinue is complete and, in fact this new position 'follows' them as the autobiographical story continues (see the "Finding Water" section below, which analyses the second storyline in this autobiographical account).

This sort of positioning analysis tells us a great deal about not only how positioning processes work, but also about the ability of social positioning to effect a group's conceptual understandings. Often times the process of positioning blurs the distinctions between attempts at functional and symbolic understanding. As Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) eloquently state in explaining the nature of in-group 'threat narratives:' "Listeners are carried, as it were, across an analytical boundary between what is true about the act to what is wrong with the criminals. The capacity of the threatening

‘Other’ to act becomes inseparable from their morally degenerate character.’<sup>351</sup> This connection of actor’s purposive action with the ascription of moral degeneration masks the judgmental assumptions of the speaker, but through a positioning analysis we see they both exist *and* determine actions. The station-master’s re-positioning of the boys as ‘untouchable’ makes the ‘truth’ of their impurity indistinguishable from the judgmental feeling of disbelief in the audacity of ‘untouchables’ to travel so lavishly and dress so nicely. Ascribing generic attributes of the ‘untouchable’ allows the station-master to judge these specific boys in relation to past experiences and project new future judgments based on past definitions, not necessarily present realities.<sup>352</sup> In looking at the storyline in this way, the representational character of positions is exposed; always in the past and future, positions are rarely analyzed for their operational or purposive role in present conditions. Though understanding of present conditions is always impossible, the attention to the shift in positions across time is crucial to understanding ideological conceptualizations.

In subsequent retellings of this storyline, ‘untouchables’ understand the station-master as not only unjust, but as completely lacking in morality; as superstitious and ignorant. It is as if the station-master is conceived of as lacking the intelligence

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2.

<sup>352</sup> In his interpretive interactionist approach to explaining war, aggression, and violence Riches (1986) makes a distinction between operational and representational models. Operational models are conceptualized in terms of purpose and are, thus, placed in the here and now (present) of the event, while representational models are conceptualized in terms of commentary and judgment and are, thus, placed in the past or future. This distinction seems to help explain how social actors describe undesirable events – leaving out the purpose of events and their conceptualization and focusing on the representational judgments that accompany these descriptions.

necessary to understand the meaning of moral community. As victims of discrimination, the boys are re-positioned through the retelling of the narrative to become not only victims, but exemplars of self-reliance and social struggle. This autobiographical storyline is enacted among dalit communities around India and especially in Maharashtra<sup>353</sup> as a cry for justice. Its' re-enactment represents the expression of a dalit justice narrative, one that TBMSG has been colonized and assumed to be congruent with dalit desire for the uplift of their community. In re-enacting this story, TBMSG leaders and activists are implicitly creating a new moral community; refashioning old conceptions of justice through a foundational story of injustice. The story of the station-masters' re-positioning of Ambedkar and his family becomes an instrument with which TBMSG can itself re-position dalit Buddhists, not just as victims, but as agents of social change. Through re-positioning Ambedkar Buddhists as first having self respect TBMSG is re-positioning dalits as agentic and, not passive sufferers. Non-dalit actors are positioned as opposed to this dalit identity as active social agents. Yet, stories of injustice primarily act as a means to support the new identity of self-respect, not as a means to re-position 'others.' Ambedkar's earliest memory of being re-positioned as an 'untouchable' is operational only in the sense that it conveys a symbolic and representational judgment of what it means to be untouchable, not by what it means to be a perpetrator of casteism. The moral force of the story provides a rallying cry for movements like TBMSG because it highlights the agentic role of dalits with self-respect.

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<sup>353</sup> The above reference to re-enactment of such stories at the TBMSG's girls' school at Gorewada is a case in point. See also Lee (2008) for discussion of such hagiographic stories of Ambedkar's life being performed in the street theater of Uttar Pradesh and other parts of India.

Further, in some sense, Labov's argument that structure is function appears useful to understanding this storyline which I have entitled "Finding a bullock-cart." Told in the way that it is, the storyline embedded in Ambedkar's fuller autobiographical account, is laced with evaluative statements which construct a moral community and "permeate the telling."<sup>354</sup> In line 8 above the cart-men at the station are described as "not being prepared to suffer being polluted" and "demean[ed]." Such evaluative statements construct a moral community based on the concept of purity above humanity. Next we are told that Ambedkar and his retinue are prepared to circumvent this moral community by offering double fare to any cart-man in return for that cart-man's potential risk of pollution. Despite the attempts to circumvent the moral proscriptions on impurity by offering more money, driving the cart themselves, etc., the force of Ambedkar's evaluative statements resonates throughout the story. Indeed in ending this storyline, evaluation as capitulation reappears in the coda. In line 12 one cart-man finally agrees to take the children and Ambedkar describes this decision as "an opportunity to earn his fare and also saved him from being polluted." Though subtle, this seeming capitulation to the moral system of purity and impurity, acts as a final expression of protest by making explicit the absurdity of this situation.

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<sup>354</sup> Toolan (1988), 148. Toolan (1988) provides a nice overview of Labov's theory of narrative structure and points out the relative importance of evaluative statements in narrative structure.

## Finding Water

Later within Ambedkar's autobiographical narrative of "On the Way to Goregaon" he relays the storyline of yet another injustice episode. In the face of this injustice an attempt is made to construct an artificial, yet socially legitimate, identity to overcome the anticipation of discrimination. The failure of this attempt provides further support for the argument of focusing on social position and clarifies important elements of identity and justice that often are overlooked by straight functionalist accounts of injustice. In the process of analyzing this storyline, insight into not only what it must feel like to suffer injustice, but the effects of a lack of a "stable reference group" against which to "develop a healthy personal identity"<sup>355</sup> also becomes clear. In the storyline that follows, Ambedkar's attempt to re-position himself through a change in identity is questioned by a toll-collector. Despite the slightly-arrogant, classist, and sardonic tone of Ambedkar's description of these events the psychology of being positioned as an 'untouchable' that is unable to establish a stable personal identity, in turn, lends to an assumptive approach to instances of injustice. Since we do not know for sure that the toll-collector would have discriminated against an untouchable we can see some degree of assumptive positioning on the part of young Ambedkar. The brief section of the narrative that follows represents one of Ambedkar's earliest attempts to personally circumvent the system of 'untouchability,' as such, it is an extremely important narrative

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<sup>355</sup>Taylor, Bougie, and Caouette (2003), 213.

for TBMSG followers as it bestows upon them a personal agency they until then had not had.

- (1) The owner of the cart proposed that we should halt there and have our meal as we might not get water on our way. [A]
- (2) We agreed. [O]
- (3) He asked us to give a part of his fare to enable him to go to the village and have his meal. [O]
- (4) My brother gave him some money and he left promising to return soon. [O]
- (5) We were very hungry and glad to have the opportunity to have a bite. My aunt had pressed our neighbors' women folk into service and had got some nice preparation for us to take on our way. We opened our tiffin basket and started eating. We needed water to wash things down. [E]
- (6) One of us went to the pool of water in the river basin nearby. But the water was really no water. It was thick with mud and urine and excreta of the cows and buffaloes and other cattle who went to the pool for drinking. In fact, the water was not intended for human use... [E]
- (7) [Later, upon his return] we asked our driver whether it was possible to get water. [CA]
- (8) He warned that the toll collector was a Hindu and that there was no possibility of our getting water if we spoke the truth and said that we were Mahars. He said "Say you are Mohammedans and try your luck." [CA]
- (9) On his advice I went to the toll-collector's hut and asked him if he would give us some water. [CA]
- (10) "Who are you?" he inquired. [R]
- (11) I replied that we were Muslamans. I conversed with him in Urdu, which I knew very well, so as to leave no doubt that I was a real Musلمان. But the trick did not work... [R]
- (12) ... his reply was very curt. "Who has kept water from you? There is water on the hill if you want to go and get it, I have none." With this he dismissed me. [R]
- (13) ... we could get no water because we were untouchables. [C]

In line 1 above, the driver of the cart, forecasting that water might be difficult to obtain for his passengers on the journey, suggests that they stop at a watering hole. This positions the children as in agreement with the cart-man as it is getting late in the day and all parties are hungry. This position is in stark contrast to the previous positioning of the

driver as concerned only for himself. Yet, in line 6 above, when the boys discover that “the water is really no water,” their positioning of the cart-man returns to the previously more unfavorable assessment of him as immoral, caste-conscious, and self-concerned. Having taken money to go to the nearby town and have dinner, the cart-man is returned to the previous position as uncaring and selfish. Instead of being positioned as having some modicum of humanity the cart-man is re-positioned upon his return as loathsome and immoral (a position that is reinforced clearly as the boys wait in hungry anger for his return – a portion of the narrative between lines 6 and 7 that was left out here in this transcription). In lines 7 and 8 the cart-man returns and the storyline continues with what Labov (1972) would call a complicating action (CA). Questioned on water again the cart-man suggests trying the Hindu toll-collector’s house. Ambedkar is, then, sent to ask for water from the tollbooth collector. Undoubtedly, the cart-man’s fear of being found to be carrying impure ‘untouchables’ in his cart underlies his motive for providing the boys’ advice to deceive the toll-collector. Attempting to re-position the boys as Muslims, the cart-man is in a sense pre-positioning himself in case trouble arises. Given the boys’ attempts to position themselves as completely outside his moral community, the cart-man is also challenging this attempt. In the telling of this story, the unsuccessful attempts at finding water reinforce the boys’ position as victims and the cart-man’s position as oppressor.

This sort of positioning analysis tells us a great deal about not only the moral community within which the storyline takes place, but also the equality-based conception of social justice that is crucial to TBMSG’s self-help movement frame. Caste is a

pervasive and cross-cutting reality of this moral community. Purity, place-of-origin, and birth/occupation are seen as defining morality and any re-definition of the bases of morality would require new normative starting points (this is what the cart-man is attempting to do by re-casting the boys as Muslim). Indeed, as general understandings about the world and its contingent realities, conceptions, themselves, imply a system of normative positioning. In other words, how one identifies themselves (as Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.) determines the framework with which they conceive of abstract concepts such as liberty, fraternity, and equality. While one can attempt to change their identity and trick others into getting what they want, their normative conceptions change much less readily. Ambedkar ends this storyline with the refrain “we could get no water because we were untouchables” (line 13). This pattern of the denial of needs runs through all of Ambedkar’s storylines and signals a common element in his leadership narratives. It is through the lens of injustice that we come to understand social justice. Ambedkar’s attempts to overcome injustice have developed his own story as hagiography and animates listeners’ sense of injustice. While such stories are retrospective accounts of injustice, they are simultaneously projective expressions of social justice. They bind the Ambedkar community together in much the same way that religious commitment does.

### Finding an Anchor for Identity

Finally, in broadly summarizing the impact of these traumatic events, Ambedkar writes about how these experiences influence his own self-identity and ego development.

A focus on ego influences helps expose the, often unexpressed, psychological legacy of discrimination and injustice. Of course, in the case of Ambedkar, this legacy germinated into a pro-social social analysis and perspective, but just as often such injustice experiences can reconstruct egos' towards an anti-social response. In his 1959 Identity and the Life Cycle, Erik Erikson outlines a theory for the development of personal ego and elaborates on each stage as a polarity between these pro-social and anti-social extremes (i.e. industry vs. inferiority, intimacy vs. isolation, etc). Erikson's stages of the life cycle were an attempt to reconcile what he believed was a correct Freudian conception of the ego, with variables with which Freud did not himself pay particular attention. These variables culminated in crises throughout the life cycle and were important for the healthy development of the individual. "Erikson regarded culture and history as giving life to mind, as the medium within which shapeless biological potentials can be transformed into a distinctly human life."<sup>356</sup> Erikson downplayed the role of the unconscious in his work, and stressed the role that ego development played in the formation of identity. Ambedkar's memories of discrimination during his formative school years definitely had an impact on his ego development as well as his future social identity as leader of the downtrodden. Ambedkar admits as much at the end of his autobiographical account of the incidents that happened on his way to Goregaon. Below is Ambedkar's concluding storyline in "On the Way to Goregaon:"

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<sup>356</sup> Mitchell and Black (1995), 144.

- (1) This incident has a very important place in my life. [A]
- (2) I was a boy of nine when it happened. [O]
- (3) But it has left an indelible impression on my mind. [E]
- (4) Before this incident occurred, I knew that I was an untouchable and the untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discriminations...[O]
- (5) ... But this incident gave me a shock such as I never received before, [CA]
- (6) and it made me think about untouchability which, before this incident happened, was with me a matter of course as it is with many touchables as well as the untouchables. [R, C]

In some sense, as a narrative embedded in Ambedkar's larger narratives of injustice, the above could be read as simply coda. But more than coda, this narrative structure reveals important aspects of Ambedkar's ego identity. Reading this one cannot only see Ambedkar's insistence on the importance of these events to his own personal development, but also the lesson that Ambedkar wants this incident to teach his followers. As he stated in his other writings: "A man's power is dependent upon (1) physical heredity, (2) social inheritance or endowment in the form of parental care, education, accumulation of scientific knowledge, everything which enables him to be more efficient than the savage, and finally, (3) on his own efforts."<sup>357</sup> In such a storyline Ambedkar is stressing, through his own experience, that it is education, self-work, and reflection that will create social change.

In one of Erik Erikson's later works, which he calls "originology,"<sup>358</sup> Erikson discusses Gandhi's "mixture of detachment and commitment" as a way to understanding his 'truth' (both spiritually and psychologically). This individual level analysis, while

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<sup>357</sup> From Ambedkar's The Annihilation of Caste (1936), quoted in Rodrigues (2002), 276.

<sup>358</sup> The idea that you can find the causes of a man's development only by delving further and further back into his childhood and eventually to his birth. See Erikson (1969), 98.

difficult to argue with completely objective criterion, provides a useful additive to providing a psychological basis for social positioning. As Harre and Langenhove (1999) convincingly argue:

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.<sup>359</sup>

In positing an admixture of social and psychological process to describe the creation of identity, Harre and Langenhove (1999) are highlighting the power of our positions in the maintenance of social reality. Ambedkar's position, or vantage on the world, was clearly influenced by a number of events in which he experienced a strong sense of injustice.

While these events were, later, resourced by Ambedkar's followers in order to support their own social positions, for Ambedkar they represent both an important stage in his own ego development and an illustration of the power of self-discipline. In providing more clarity to this interactive process of social and psychological, Harre and

Langenhove (1999) add:

An individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is, that is, what sort of person one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices...<sup>360</sup>

Attention to the psychological aspect of ego development in positioning underscores the impact that traumatic events and memory can have on social positioning.

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<sup>359</sup> Harre and Langenhove (1999), 35.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 35.

Positioning analysis that is cognizant of both social and psychological factors tells us a great deal about not just about Ambedkar's personality and ego development, but also about the ability of one's social position to effect conceptual self-understandings of reality, and in turn to create social change. The concluding storyline of "On the Way to Goregaon" confirms that Ambedkar was, indeed, changed by the events described in the previous sections. But as Erikson (1959, 1969) would argue this is but one stage in his ego development. Later stages will see Ambedkar shift from one extreme of the social activist to the other. Moving from what Koestler (1945) calls the "Commissar" to the "Yogi" end of the social activism spectrum<sup>361</sup> Ambedkar, late in his career, changes his approach and his social position as one focused on means rather than ends; religious conversion and mobilization around a new identity of self worth rather than legal or structural change. Without delving into this later shift of activist focus here (see Chapter One for a brief introduction and Chapter Six for a deeper discussion ), we can see that this early ego positioning has a profound effect on both the development of Ambedkar's understanding of injustice and the modern religious activism of the movement that he help spawn.

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<sup>361</sup> Koestler (1945) imagines an instrument that could "break up patterns of social behavior as the physicist breaks up a beam of rays" (3). On one end of this spectrum Koestler describes the "commissar" as a revolutionary focused on ends, which, if achieved, justify all possible means. On the other extreme of this spectrum would be what Koestler calls the "Yogi." The Yogi believes that the "end is unpredictable and that the means alone count" (3). (Note that while Koestler argues that: "it is easy to see that all that is wanted is a synthesis – the synthesis between saint and revolutionary; but so far it has never been done" (4), some would argue that Ambedkar is a character who has come very close to this ideal).

#### ***4.5 Conclusion: The Salient Features of Leader' Narratives in the Search for Social Justice***

Leaders' narratives are crucial not only to mobilization, but also to provide direction to movements' goals and aspirations. Whether current movement leaders or hagiographic stories told of past leaders, the success of social movement lies in the ability of the movement's leadership to tell stories and capture members' attention to cooperate towards fulfilling determinate goals. Despite the fact that the rhetoric of emancipation often fails to balance the need to differentiate movement members from 'others,' while simultaneously privileging the need to co-exist in the same social and political space with these 'others,' attention to leaders' narrative types, structures, and word usage can help provide direction and definition to social justice. This chapter has explored leaders' narratives in order to reveal patterns that manifest the central elements of social justice and begin to explore the implications of these movement frames on the realization of social justice. Leaders, as the prime purveyors of a socially constructed vision of a movement's idealized future, provide an ideal means to explore the structure and function of these broad movement frames.

As broad calls to action as much as a means of instilling confidence in TBMSG activists' sense of group identity and agency, the leader narratives detailed and analyzed in this chapter present a foundation upon which to develop further understandings of the TBMSG movement and its' levels of activism. The hagiographic and symbolic nature of these narratives cannot be overstated, and the impact that their telling has on movement activists must, therefore, be more fully explored (see Chapters Five and Six). Relatively

stable throughout all the above narrative analyses is the fact that injustice provides a structure from which to understand the various functions of social justice. The ideal or just society is envisioned through the persistent lack of humanity, equality, and sense-of-self that are the current reality. The injustices faced by the under-educated women Lokamitra described corresponds to Mangesh's description of the Bhotmanges' rape and murder and Ambedkar's difficulties on the way to Goregaon because all act to both retrospectively recognize injustice and projectively envision justice. While the level of severity of injustice found in Ambedkar's autobiographical storylines might not seem as blatantly evil as these other narratives, all these narratives present a pattern of discrimination, denial, and neglect that illuminate some initial elements of what the TBMSG movement means by social justice.

Ultimately optimistic these leaders' narratives provide a hopeful vision of what change may look like. They develop an inclusive picture of the ideal society in which cooperation between castes overcomes traditional beliefs and practices in which purity and status predominate. These narratives present a picture of self-help and self-reliance through which change becomes possible. Regardless of the level of injustice done, the naming of it, and intentionally positioning ones' self in relation to it, provides an accounting of the salient features of social justice, even though such accounting has become almost routine to movement activists. From these salient features some patterns necessary for the creation of social justice can begin to be both illuminated and developed. Social justice entails a progression of activism that begins with the self and only once complete radiates to others. It entails an element of remembrance of the

injustice of the past. Social justice is an ideal that is never fully reached, and, therefore, must be continually discussed by leaders as a means to continually reshape the ideal and re-position movement activists and their activities.

The chapter that follows is intended to provide narrative analysis from a movement activist perspective. By listening to the voices of ‘foot soldiers’ of the movement, these leadership narratives will take on new meaning and importance while at the same time acting as a sort of anchor for the ideal. Such narratives provide a foundation for movement activists to organize and influence disempowered segments of the dalit community to rise up and become active participants in the “silent revolution” these activists, themselves, embody. The salient features of social justice that these leadership narratives teased out will be returned to in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER 5: WORKING THE IDEAL – PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF ACTIVIST NARRATIVES

Millions perished but their essence of truth and morality did not. This endured, seeped into the soil, and enriched it.<sup>362</sup>

Whatever we had to be told was said by Ambedkar. His teachings are finished, his speaking finished, his commands finished. But don't let your mind be deceived that we are adrift and destroyed – Ambedkar has lifted us up, liberated us. Don't lose your strength in sorrow, keep the wisdom that is life. There is no benefit in futile sobbing, remember who you are; Don't give scope to treachery, backbiting, infighting, these are such insignificant things, but be wary of them.<sup>363</sup>

'Untouchable' assertion of rights can be said to manifest itself in two distinct periods of Indian history: pre- and post- Ambedkar. As such a towering figure in the awakening of dalit identity of assertion, Ambedkar's life presents an ideal, or a model, for successive generations of young activists to follow. In working towards, and for, this ideal, the young Buddhist activists of the TBMSG movement try to not only live a life of learning and self-perfection, but also strive to provide opportunities for others to do the

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<sup>362</sup> Kamble (2008), 62.

<sup>363</sup> The song writer Manohar Nagarle quoted in Moon (2000) from a song written upon Ambedkar's death.

same.<sup>364</sup> The activist narratives analyzed in this chapter open a window into both individual and communal understandings of a socially just, ideal, society. In being attentive to the structure and significance of these activist narratives, individual and collective identities, as well as, power and social positioning of TBMSG members become transparent. The narratives chosen for analysis in this chapter express a dalit assertion that, though long felt, only became fully expressed in the modern area and upon the backdrop of Ambedkar's important influence and psychological impact on the community. The limited number cases presented here provide an ability to engage in a deeper analysis of Ambedkar Buddhist activists' conceptions of social justice. The narratives in this chapter provide a representation of TBMSG activists' reliance on an Ambedkar Buddhist identity. This is not to say that there are not other Ambedkar Buddhist identities available to researchers, but rather that the narratives chosen for analysis here are exemplary of the Ambedkar Buddhism of the TBMSG movement.

Focusing on Ambedkar's influence on TBMSG activists is not to discredit or de-emphasize the importance of other low-caste leaders. Jotirao Phule's "historical materialist theory of caste"<sup>365</sup> was very influential to the development of the dalit movement. Yet, despite the fact that Mahatma Phule was the first to move the non-

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<sup>364</sup> This striving often takes the form of programs aimed at socio-economic uplift for low-castes. For example, TBMSG activists advocate right livelihood activities with a project called Jambhala Services Pvt. Ltd. (JSPL), which is working in the financial services industry and providing opportunities for low-caste people to move up India class hierarchy (Jambhala in Buddhist lore is the wealth-giving incarnation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion). Further, Jambudvipa Trust has embarked on an ambitious partnership with a Pennsylvania company called Temp Solutions, Inc. in which social workers from low-caste backgrounds are given support to come and work in the United States (See Wax, E., August 20, 2007 and Jha, S., May 3, 2008).

<sup>365</sup> Omvedt (1994), 23.

Brahmin movement away from simply racial constructions of caste, it was Ambedkar who galvanized people around the idea that it was the religious and cultural system of Hinduism that was at the root of India's legacy of caste suffering.<sup>366</sup> The fact that Eleanor Zelliot was able to argue in her 1969 dissertation of the Mahar movement that "it seems clear that the level of integration the 'untouchables' have reached came about because of an earlier stress on political and religious separatism and compensatory discrimination"<sup>367</sup> is telling of the importance of activists' strategic focus on separating themselves from others. But this "earlier stress" really only takes shape in the late career of Dr. Ambedkar (say after the 1930s). It is this radical anti-Hindu attitude that runs through the Ambedkarite movement and, indeed, provides one with an important foundational support for the work of TBMSG. As not-Hindu, TBMSG activists delegitimize enemy others, casting them as superstitious Hindu oppressors who victimize them in every aspect of social and cultural life. This stance complements the other foundation of TBMSG activism – the construction of a new identity as agentic Buddhist. These two identities as both oppressed victim and engaged justice-seeking Buddhist run through the activist narratives in this chapter and at all levels of the movement's discourse. Indeed, the roots of these identities can be easily identified with reference to the leadership narratives of the previous chapter. As both a Labovian structural analysis and a positioning analysis are used to better understand these activist narratives, the

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<sup>366</sup> As Omvedt outlines the important themes of Ambedkar's thought she aptly includes: "a conviction that the eradication of caste required a repudiation of 'Hinduism' as a religion, and an adoption of an alternative religion, which he found in Buddhism, a choice which he saw as not only necessary for the masses of Dalits who followed him but for the masses in India generally" (224).

<sup>367</sup> Zelliot (1969), 300.

identity, power, and social position of two key narrative storylines emerge: one of victim of an oppressive caste structure and the other of a politically aware Buddhist. These storylines present a narrative structure that is directly connected to the movement's core concepts of social justice. The suffering of the past is regenerated in the social activism of today and the future ideal of tomorrow.<sup>368</sup>

The narratives chosen for analysis here, similar to Chapter Four, highlight not only tactical or strategic choices of movement members, but the projective, or instrumental, implications of the frames which these narratives create. As representative of the projective quality of TBMSG narratives, the narratives presented here provide a picture that is ripe for deeper analysis. These narratives were chosen for the fact that their projective quality is exemplary of the voice of many Ambedkar Buddhists of the TBMSG movement. As the leading agents of social change within the TBMSG movement, the leaders and activists that are the focus of the narrative utterances in this chapter, as well as Chapter Four, hold a collective power to construct and reify TBMSG's vision of social justice. Of course, a research focus on these narratives does not imply empirical certainty on either the content or character of Ambedkar Buddhists collective identity. But, such a focus does expose a general pattern of collective contention, which underpins a broader conception of social justice.

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<sup>368</sup> An awareness of this dynamic is nowhere more clear than in Gopal Guru's (2008) reading of Kamble's The Prisons We Broke. Guru argues that Kamble's dalit autobiography offers important insights into the tension between tradition and modernity by writing that: "it is through the every day response to this tension between modernity and tradition that the dalits are determined to chart out their journey to modernity, which according to the author is epitomized in Ambedkar" [Guru (2008), 163].

### ***5.1 Activist Narratives***

As should be clear from the preceding chapter, the line between Buddhist activist and victim of oppression is a fine one. Further, since justice's definition is developed in the reflective process, it also seems logical that distinguishing between activist and leaders is to some extent complicating and arbitrary. Ambedkar Buddhists are engaged in multiple narratives of justice that both support and contradict each other. Yet, while TBMSG members take on differing levels of responsibility with the movement there is some relative importance attached to the social position and authority from which actors make claims. In this chapter a more comprehensive analysis is conducted on some exemplars of the many activist narratives encountered during research in order to both further contextualize the social justice commitments of the Ambedkar Buddhists of the TBMSG and provide fuller naming of the identities and social positions dominant in these narratives.

As narratives of personal experience the activist narratives analyzed here provide only a window into the motivation of activists, yet they offer a rich prospect for exposing social justice commitments. While personal motivation is difficult to measure collective goals are not, and the activist narratives chosen here are exemplar of TBMSG's collective goals. Through analyzing the narratives and discourse of all level of movement actors a textured understanding of collective agency can be developed. While some might argue that the distinction between leaders and activists is arbitrary, the sociological reality is that collective dynamics are such that leadership skills are rewarded within movements and in this process values are reproduced and reinforced. Understanding the

“lifeworlds”<sup>369</sup> of others does involve a degree of subjectivity, but it is upon this normative reality that pragmatic statements of future actions can be garnered. Though the distinction between activists and leaders may appear at first blush to be slight, determined only by the level of responsibility within the movement, the comparative analysis of leader and activist narratives in Chapter Six below will develop a theory about the relationship between identity, power, and social positioning in the formation and engagement of assertions about social justice. As the activist piece of this narrative puzzle, the narratives analyzed in this chapter expand understanding of TBMSG’s unique expression of social justice and provide a fuller meaning to the identities and social positions dominant in movement discourse.

Finally, a few words must be said about Ambedkar’s influence on TBMSG activist narratives. Despite the fact that TBMSG activists are relatively open to the expression of ideas, as well as, to developing outlets for these expressions, they are also dogmatic in stressing the importance of Ambedkar and his message of annihilating caste through spiritual transformation. As the father-figure for the movement, Dr. Ambedkar is infallible and historicized as nearly omniscient (usually in the form of a modern bodhisattva and donned in picture form, front and center, in every TBMSG vihara). Rights-based Western discourse on ‘human rights’ is just beginning to infiltrate the discourse of TBMSG movement activists. This discourse may never provide a core social justice vision for TBMSG activists because of Ambedkar’s focus on a converted

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<sup>369</sup> See Habermas (1987).

identity as Buddhist and insistence of an all-Indian focus to achieving social transformation. This transformation begins for activists with the dharma (Buddhist teaching) but is introduced to others through their own modeling of the dharma as duty (in this sense an almost traditionalist devotional tendency to follow Ambedkar as a modern bodhisattva of compassion). Rights, while protected through laws are, in the minds of TBMSG activists, subordinate to a commitment to the value of compassion to all. To these activists, Buddhism, as a prescription for both personal and societal ills, is seen as the ultimate insurer of rights. While forming a Buddhist identity is simply seen as another skillful means to disseminate the dharma (the teaching), there is an understanding that following this teaching (i.e. following a Buddhist, rather than Hindu, sense of dharma) is a necessity for true social transformation away from the experiences as past victims of oppression and towards a society overflowing with liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar is the archetype of this specific Buddhist dharma, even more so than the Buddha himself. Still, this mythic representation of Ambedkar threatens the potentially positive impact of these movement-activists by a process Habermas calls “uncoupling of lifeworld.”<sup>370</sup> In other words, the dogmatism of the Ambedkar mythology, while creating a positive psychological effect of self-awareness and self-worth, also has a negative potential of stifling both anger over victim-hood, and activists’ ability to envision a victim-less, or socially just, world. Exploring the activist narratives

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<sup>370</sup> See Habermas (1987), 153. As Habermas eloquently states: “Myth binds the critical potential of communicative action, stops up, so to speak, the source of inner contingencies springing from communication itself” (159).

in this chapter will both highlight this tension and signal possible means of overcoming it.

So, looking more carefully at the activist narratives below a number of dialectics of the TBMSG movement will be revealed. These narratives should be read as research in the service of action and, therefore, at times their analysis may appear unorthodox or as lacking a uniform consistency. As both reconstructed narratives and transcribed narratives from formal interviews, the activists narratives analyzed below expose complex models for both understanding social movement organization and dynamics and for actualizing these movements' goals. The activist narratives analyzed herein reveal a pattern of experiential social interaction. This pattern can, and should, be explored and exposed in order to create viable and lasting social transformation of oppressive systems.

### ***5.2 Dr. Amitamati's Story: An Informal Interview at Nagaloka Institute, Nagpur***

As a means to explore the modern reality and immediate emotive import of activist narratives, the life story of a TBMSG Dharmacharini named Amitamati is illustrative. Having been introduced to Amitamati by some Western women working within the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) and TBMSG in India, together we found time to talk informally during a lunch break at the second day of TBMSG's 2006 Conference celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism. Standing in line to receive a vegetarian meal of rice, subji, chapatti, and fruit we began to introduce ourselves to each other. Amitamati, a dalit medical research doctor from Mumbai, very much identifies herself as a dalit, a Buddhist, and a woman – a list of overlapping identities that have caused a palpable degree of hardship in her adult

life. With an Indian Medical degree, which was paid for with the help of the Indian government, Amitamati received a reserved post within one of the main government hospitals in Mumbai. As she spoke of her personal story, she stressed that she really did not meet with discrimination throughout her childhood and schooling, but only encountered it after she began her professional working life.

Growing up in an urban setting (Mumbai), Amitamati was in a sense immune to much of the caste discrimination and degradation that pervades her ancestral village. Living in the metropolis of Mumbai, among people from various villages and regions of India, less attention is paid to caste affiliation than to the social, class, and professional networks one has been able to create. While the impersonal nature of modern urban life in India fosters a blending of castes and a breakdown of the traditional caste structures, the urban economy does not completely derail a legacy of caste inequality, as some dalit activists have contended [See Prasad (2004) and Kapur and Prasad (December 3-5, 2008) for example]. While a move from a collectivist village culture to an individualistic urban culture has neutered the sting of caste discrimination in day to day life, it does not necessarily transform its degrading and dehumanizing expression in certain professional settings and social networks. This is particularly true within the ‘culture’ of the coveted Indian civil service.<sup>371</sup> In such settings the cultural and structural violence of caste is being pragmatically combated by the reservation system – a sort of affirmative action in

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<sup>371</sup> Caste after all is an intricate combination of discrimination constructed on a religiously-based worldview that privileges both birth grouping (jati) and certain determinates of occupational status (varna). Despite the fact that in the modern impersonal city ethnic birth becomes harder to discern, occupation remains a visible and public identifier, and, thus, the ideal space for caste contention.

the Indian government context that is being used to level the playing field among high castes, low castes, and other backward classes (OBCs). But, this blunt force approach to transforming centuries of caste-based social conflict is simply one means of transformation and any thought that it holds the key to solving the myriad of caste problems is both idealistic and dangerous. As with affirmative action here in the United States, the reservation system has both its share of supporters and doubters, and it is, therefore, upon this issue that public debate over caste is sustained.<sup>372</sup>

The recipient of an Indian civil service position, Amitamati met with contention and jealousy from day one on her job. Sought after for their financial as well as job security, civil service jobs are seen as life-long career paths and a fraternal deprivation is engendered when your group is denied the access and security of such posts. Article 311 of the Indian constitution makes it virtually impossible to demote a corrupt or lazy civil servant and next to impossible to fire him/her.<sup>373</sup> Animosity and anger over decisions on government positions sparks riots and clogs court systems in every Indian State. The contentious feelings are so deep-rooted that twice during our informal interview Amitamati came to the verge of tears describing her life story and on-going professional problems. One could sense the pain in her eyes when she described the feeling of being

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<sup>372</sup> Interestingly enough, many research informants and TBMSG activists stated that the reservations debate has taken away much of their voice. Despite the obvious assertions of some scholars the “the burden of caste may weigh more heavily on the lower than the upper caste person,” (Fuller, 2004) the reservations debate has given upper caste a means to counter injustice with injustice. Upper caste arguments that an unjust corrective measure is being applied to a system that should be merit-based masks the reality that some people have more access to resources than others. In other words, as an issue that has created hegemonic control over the caste discourse, the reservations debate almost completely ignores the complexity of the narrative experience of those on the bottom of the system.

<sup>373</sup> Luce (2007).

“left out”<sup>374</sup> at work; the emotion in her voice expressing authentic response to deeply held values being left unsatisfied. Her sense of professional community was clearly shaken by the experiences she had just recently lived through at work. The fear and dread of having to continue to live such future experiences played heavily on her psyche. She spoke of her first day at work and how not a single colleague came into her office to greet her. Rather many of these colleagues stood outside her door gossiping about her and pointing through her office window as if she was “a zoo animal.”<sup>375</sup> Despite this treatment she remains at this job. While she would love to leave that situation she needs the job to be able to survive in an ever more expensive Mumbai; a Mumbai that she adamantly refuses to leave for greener pastures in America or Europe.<sup>376</sup>

Though many at work exhibit outright animosity towards her, seeing her as a recipient of a system they perceive as unfair and unmeritorious - the reservation system - she feels that she is more qualified than many with whom she works. From Amitamati’s perspective it is completely unfair that her professionalism should be questioned based on her caste status. When her current job as a medical researcher became a reserved position it had not been filled by a member of a scheduled caste for a long time. Her predecessor (a Brahmin woman) had held the job on a provisional basis while an on-going search for a scheduled caste or OBC to fill the reserved position was conducted. Repeatedly reporting “no adequate applicants found” Amitamati’s predecessor had managed to hang

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<sup>374</sup> Personal interview with Amitamati, October 1, 2006.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> When asked why she remains in Mumbai given her experience and credentials she replies incredulously “Mumbai is my home.” Personal interview with Amitamati, July 5, 2008.

on to the position for many years. But, when Amitamati had gotten the job in late 2002 this woman who had held the job “provisionally” lodged a formal protest in the courts. Amitamati has been battling this woman in court, over her appointment to the position, ever since. Along with another case which has been lodged by a low-caste runner-up for the position, this high-caste’s case remains open in the overloaded Indian court system. Confident that she will eventually win both cases, Amitamati is nevertheless frustrated that she has to physically and emotionally confront her oppressor, as well as, the system of structural violence that has been inadequately dealt with by the Indian government, on an on-going basis in the courtroom. Further, she rhetorically asks: “what cost will winning have on my sanity”<sup>377</sup> adding a sentiment that this woman’s strategy is indeed aimed at attempting to destroy her self-confidence as much as it is about getting her old post back. Such open contention and psychological tactics obviously adds stress to an already stressful job environment and leads one to admire Amitamati’s strength of character for persevering under this shadow of disrespect and outright discrimination.

At face value, Amitamati’s involvement with TBMSG came later in life and seemed more focused on understanding Buddhism than on any moralistic desire to alleviate the injustices either she, or fellow dalits, continue to face. As a third generation Ambedkar Buddhist a major portion of Amitamati’s identity is expressed in her understanding of Buddhist faith as dedication to self-cultivation. Her grandparents had converted to Buddhism with Ambedkar, but were illiterate and did not have any guidance

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<sup>377</sup> Personal interview with Amitamati, October 1, 2006.

after Babasahib's death. Her parents were brought up 'Buddhist,' in name, but really did not do much in terms of practice besides "sit and be quite at home."<sup>378</sup> Only once Amitamati became older did she start to want to learn more about Buddhist practice. She went to Ambedkar's University (founded by Ambedkar before his conversion), a fact of which she is clearly proud. Only while in University did she decide that she should learn more about Babasahib's teachings on Buddhism. During this time she got introduced to the TBMSG/FWBO and now volunteers for them teaching dharma classes and helping with medical programs for the poor and downtrodden. Going to villages outside of Mumbai and surveying village residents to screen them for serious health indicators she is helping to collect an historical record of the inadequate health services provided to dalits in Maharashtra. The disparity she has experienced between the government's medical services for wealthy Mumbai residents and those provided for low-caste villagers has drawn her closer to the work of the TBMSG movement and awakened in her a desire to help others realize their self-worth through Ambedkar Buddhism.

As our discussion progressed, Amitamati became more open and really seemed to appreciate the attention given her. As a dalit woman she was clearly not used to the attention and the informal narrative she delivered was unbroken and expressive of authentic emotion. An invaluable example of an activist narrative, Amitamati's story revealed a wider justice narrative that incorporated multiple aspects of her worldview. Religious beliefs, professional ethics, values learned during her upbringing, and her sense

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<sup>378</sup> Personal interview with Amitamati, October 1, 2006.

of community were all combined in a rich narrative of injustice and discrimination - - a narrative that was as unique as the person telling it, yet as ordinary as the numerous people who had undoubtedly experienced like situations of structural violence over thousands of years of caste-ism in India. Such suffering, though difficult for a white American male to fully understand, clearly provides the motivation for passionate social justice activism.

Once asked to contribute to an office kitty for a planned Ganesha puja for an upcoming local Hindu festival, Amitamati refused explaining that she was not a Hindu. This response was met with anger and misunderstanding by her upper-caste colleagues who, undoubtedly, saw this as an affront to the nation and the values they held dear. Reprisals and discrimination followed this incident as her co-workers argued that as a “Buddhist” she was still a Hindu. Arguing that not only was the Buddha, in their mind, just an avatar of Vishnu, but also that she was born a Hindu and could not just choose to change her religious identity, they continued to pressure her to show her support for the Hindu God Ganesha. Interactions like these have hardened her desire to continue her dharma study and practice and, thus, brought her closer to the work of the TBMSG.

Reflecting back on this informal interview, there are a number of structural and thematic features that can be noticed as it is temporally reconstructed above. From a Labovian perspective we can see a clear temporal progression and structure to her narrative. Beginning from her childhood she takes the listener through an orientation of the players and ideas that are central to her story and then develops the complicating action of a major bump in her professional trajectory. In following this with important

and telling evaluative statements about this situation, and then leaving the listener with the current state of a lack of resolution, a visible anxiety is apparent on Amitamati's signaling of the end of the narrative. Evaluative statements, like "why should my professionalism be questioned based on my caste status,"<sup>379</sup> are expressed as in the words of Toolan (1988) as "something that can permeate the telling."<sup>380</sup> Amitamati's story follows the "characteristic two-part structure"<sup>381</sup> of TBMSG activist narratives. Each element of her story exhibits the push and pull of two identities: Buddhist practitioner and victim of oppression. The evaluative statements that emanate through the narrative are engineered to voice the connection between these two identities. Amitamati's point is to illustrate that a particular Buddhist identity, as exhibited in the practice-orientation of TBMSG, is the means to overcome the constraining victim-hood of oppression. As Labov and Waletzky (1967) argued in their now famous "diamond picture of the progression of oral narrative"<sup>382</sup> it would be "a mistake to limit the evaluation [to particular lines of the narrative] since evaluative devices are distributed throughout the narrative."<sup>383</sup> A Labovian analysis of the structure of Amitamati's narrative reveals not only her current identity, but her future projection of both identity and justice. The evaluative statements about co-workers or family members that appear throughout this

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<sup>379</sup> Personal interview with Amitamati, October 1, 2006.

<sup>380</sup> Toolan (1988), 148.

<sup>381</sup> Labov (1972), 368 describes Black English fight narratives in this way. Analyzing the narrative of a Harlem fight between two boys, Labov's says that "each part shows a different side of his [the boy telling the story's] ideal character" (368). Similarly Amitamati's story also highlights two crucial parts of her ideal character: Buddhist and victim, but even more it points at characteristics of the ideal society.

<sup>382</sup> Toolan (1988), 148.

<sup>383</sup> Labov (1972), 369.

narrative (for example the statement that her parents practiced Buddhism “by just sitting at home” or that her co-workers “left” her out) provide a rich description of what Rothbart (2006) calls “identity justice,” Booth (2001) calls “memory-justice,” and Lind (1995) would call “justice judgments.” It is such evaluative statements that run throughout the activist narratives analyzed here, highlight the important connection between self and society, and provide opportunities for movement organizers and activists to reflect on their own critical consciousness.

As would be immediately apparent to anyone who has received a gift, Amitamati’s eagerness to share her personal experience with others exhibited both a genuine curiosity about her own predicament and a gratitude for the opportunity to be heard. As a low-caste woman, what some in the movement refer to as “double dalits,”<sup>384</sup> Amitamati was not accustomed to being the center of attention. The gift of Buddhist practice has given her both a means to approach her encounters with injustice and a quiet strength to be heard. By empowering a new Buddhist identity, Amitamati’s activism with TBMSG provides a new hook upon which to hang her identity, a new vehicle with which to comprehend her socially created status. Injustice experiences have opened in her a desire to not only understand the past structures that encouraged such injustice, but the future means to overcome it. In her, as well as, many other TBMSG activists’ minds, this future means is inseparable from the TBMSG aspiration to spread their particular form of Buddhist dharma as social practice. And it is this Buddhist identity that is

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<sup>384</sup> Informal interview with Mangesh Dahiwale, May 2007. ‘Double dalits’ refers to the doubled degree of oppression dalit women encounter from both higher-caste men and women and their own dalit husbands and sons. It is a phrase that was prevalent in Dr. Ambedkar’s day as well.

created and maintained through the negative past feelings of injustice. Such activist narratives, thus, can also be explored and explained from a functional perspective using positioning analysis. As Gopal Guru points out in his reading of The Prisons We Broke (2008): “In the autobiographies written by the dalit male, woman is projected as a sacrificing mother or a mother patiently enduring pain and suffering, but very rarely as the agency for change.”<sup>385</sup>

Activist narratives, like Amitamati’s create “boundary conditions”<sup>386</sup> between self and other identities. As Benson (2003) has argued these ‘boundary conditions’ are what stabilizes or maintains positive self identity.<sup>387</sup> By positioning herself as a particular type of Ambedkar Buddhist (one whose practices are inseparable from social change), Amitamati is simultaneously making the statement that she is neither the long-standing oppressor nor the oppressed. Through compassion and dedicated practice of the dharma, Amitamati tells stories that position herself as someone who has transcended the ancient structures of caste and all the dichotomies that accompany such a system. In such a way, she is incapable of passively accepting injustice, or even acting in an unjust way towards others. She is, as professional medical research doctor and Buddhist, an agent of social change not passive victim of structural violence. As Benson eloquently writes:

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<sup>385</sup> Guru (2008), 162.

<sup>386</sup> Benson (2003), 61. Benson (2003) defines these identity defining boundaries, which he argues are constituted by negative feelings, as a set of emotions that “maintain any ‘self’ as *this* sort of self and not *that* sort of self” (62).

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

In more abstract terms, subjectivity and intentionality co-constitute conscious experience. The investigative implication of this is that neither the subject nor the object should be the primary term of analysis in the first descriptions of phenomena of experience, but rather the relationship that constitutes them as *this* subject and *that* object at this time.<sup>388</sup>

The function of Amitamati's telling of her narrative storyline reveals not only evaluative statements that provide a window into her current identity and normative ideals, but also an idea of how she might be prone to act in this culture to envision her particular ideals. Similar to Baby Kamble's autobiographical narrative (see below section 5.4.2), Amitamati's sense of self is partly constituted by her life story, but "acquires larger meaning only in the context of the narrative of the community. Thus it not only represents a promising future for the individual, but also for the community."<sup>389</sup> A positioning analysis, along with a Labovian focus on evaluative statements, provides an ability to explore both the psychological and sociological implications of movement members' narratives.

Amitamati's story from the perspective of positioning theory (Harre and Van Langenhove, 1999) could be retold from a more functionalist perspective. In other words, one could inquire as to how this specific storyline fits into the projected future that Amitamati is attempting to create. In self-positioning herself as an on-going victim of caste discrimination at work, Amitamati insinuates her exclusion from other social identities: Hindu, unqualified, under-educated, defeated woman, etc. In assuming this strategy she engages in first order positioning of herself as a moral agent in a world of

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>389</sup> Guru (2008), 160.

malice and craving. As an Ambedkar follower, and Buddhist, Amitamati positions herself as qualified, educated, empowered, having reached a minimum level of Buddhist attainment, and victimized. When others at work cast her as both unworthy of her job and unable to shed her Hindu-birth identity, Amitamati engages in second order positioning, dismissing attempts of her co-workers to subsume her identity into theirs (for example in her stubborn refusal to provide any support for the office kitty for Ganesha). Amitamati's telling of this pain and suffering to the researcher is an example of third-order positioning – a recounting not devoid of attempts at re-positioning her first and second order accounts. In the retelling her story, despite the human desire to feel validation, Amitamati is repositioning herself in relation to the Ambedkar movement's historical legacy of victim-hood and the TBMSG movement's relatively new identity as Buddhist. Her story, like so many of the activist narratives encountered, provides a “thick description”<sup>390</sup> of the context of TBMSG's conception of social justice. Such narrative also highlights both the structural and functional realities of being both Buddhist and victim at the same time. The narratives analyzed below will further draw out the substance of activist narratives and their relation to the maintenance and discovery of TBMSG's unique perspective on social justice.

### ***5.3 Dialogue and Interviews with Manuski/Jambudivipa Activists***

The next two sections (5.3.1 and 5.3.2) outline and describe two different, yet typical, varieties of narratives encountered in the course of both interviewing and leading

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<sup>390</sup> Geertz (1973).

a dialogue on caste with Manuski/Jambudvipa activists. The first set of short narratives highlight the sub-conscious aspects of caste identity and the need to re-make, or awaken, a sense of self that is outside the traditional, and often sub-conscious, boundaries imposed by the caste system and its view of history. Manuski/Jambudvipa activists' response to this first type of narrative is to find recourse in Buddhism and an Ambedkar Buddhist identity. The second set of narratives tells of victimization and psychological suffering brought on by discrimination in the wake of natural disaster. Manuski/Jambudvipa activists use such types of victim narratives, as means to build a sense of self through an Ambedkar Buddhist identity, and to, in turn, project a vision of social justice. But this second variety of victim narrative differs from the narrative of Buddhist self-awareness in that such stories of victimization are intended to engender a sense in listeners of the need for change. In effect, victimization provides the problem setting for an envisioned 'best' solution of problem solving to be found in Buddhism. Both types of narratives paint a particular portrait of the insidious nature of any system of status inequality, but it is victimization that grabs people's imagination and makes a discussion of Buddhism as solution possible. Taken together these stories provide a context for better understanding movement activists' motives, and leaders' calls, to act.

Before laying out these narratives for analysis a few words of explanation are in order. In organizing a second data collection trip to Maharashtra in the summer of 2008, I was requested by movement friends to give a "lecture" on conflict resolution and the preliminary results of research completed-to-date. Despite the cultural insistence that I do a lecture or talk, I decided that an interactive dialogue workshop would be more

effective for both my research goals and the work of the TBMSG movement. Together with the assistance of the staff at the Manuski Center, I then developed a two-day workshop entitled “A Dialogue on Caste: What Does a Caste-less and Socially Just Community Look Like?” Fifty to sixty calls were made to announce this workshop to Manuski friends, supporters, and activists in and around the Pune area. Relying on the Manuski Center to identify and contact the participants for this workshop had both advantages and disadvantages. Manuski staff’s calling and organizing of activists for this workshop gave me legitimacy with local activists that alone, as an outsider to this community, would have been impossible. At the same time, relying on movement activists to decide who to call and notify about the workshop allowed Manuski activists to define who they considered as activists and who they deemed would benefit from their own understanding of this broad thematic workshop. This could be seen as both an advantage, since it provided me with a pragmatic definition of what Manuski activists themselves defined as ‘activist,’ and a disadvantage, since dalit activists outside the Ambedkar Buddhist fold were not brought into much needed dialogue with Ambedkar Buddhists.<sup>391</sup> Further, since participants were limited to those who spoke English one additional weakness of the workshop may have been that sampling was skewed towards educated and upwardly mobile Ambedkar Buddhists. In total, 19 people participated in the full two-day workshop and eagerly shared their experiences and ideas. As is typical in India, in addition to the 19 core participants, a few interested visitors to the center

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<sup>391</sup> Though the Manuski Center is actively working to branch-out to other non-Buddhist dalit communities, both in Indian and the West, it is still in the beginning stages of this process.

participated for some shorter portion of the workshop. Though participants were predominantly those working within the Manuski Center's network of activists, also included were some Pune University graduate students and Ambedkar Buddhist pensioners living in Pune.

The discussion in this two-day workshop was rich and textured, providing a means to collect many narratives in a short time-span and draw broad connections between various levels of activists. The workshop was designed to provide an interactive overview of dialogue processes by first outlining some common models of dialogue and then trying them out as a group. The theoretical structure for the workshops was based on appreciative inquiry [see Watkins and Mohr (2001)]. Participants who were not comfortable sharing their past experiences of injustice were asked to engage in an appreciative inquiry approach to critiquing their own connection to the TBMSG movement. This two-day workshop, and particularly the fish-bowl discussion on personal experiences of discrimination, was invaluable to the development of this research. The caste dialogue participants' handbook in Appendix L provides some additional overview of the format and schedule of the workshop. Following the initial Manuski/Jambudvipa activists narratives in section 5.3, narratives from Ambedkar dalit literature (section 5.4) will be explored in an attempt to broaden the scope and range of activist narratives analyzed. Such an approach is necessary in order to draw some connections between grassroots activists of the TBMSG and the pockets of impoverished village communities that have embraced Ambedkar's Buddhism.

### ***5.3.1 Dialogue on Caste:<sup>392</sup> Selected Narratives from a Fishbowl Full of Suffering.***

The narratives analyzed in this section were all collected in the course of a fishbowl dialogue exercise in which participants were asked to share their personal experiences of discrimination, or, if this was too uncomfortable, then to explain why they had joined the TBMSG movement. Each of these narratives, in their full transcription in Appendix H, represent a Buddhist perspective on suffering that exhibits a unique emphasis on the impermanent nature of the oppressive and endemic structures of caste. They also present an activist desire to move beyond simple victimization and instead stake claim on the importance of personal responsibility. Armed with the belief that one cannot change the world without first changing themselves, TBMSG activists are disputing the commonly held belief that to overcome injustice one must continually name it.

When people are asked to describe an incident when they have been wronged they are likely to go back to a formative experience in their thinking and recast that episode based upon subsequent experiences and beliefs. In this recasting process people replay the episode in a way that presents them in a very kind light while simultaneously presenting others as immoral. Indeed, Lind (1995) has argued that these “justice judgments affect other types of behaviors, such as obedience to law and performance in work settings, and that justice judgments affect other cognitions, such as self-esteem and

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<sup>392</sup> For a copy of the handbook used and distributed to participants during this “Dialogue on Caste” see Appendix L.

loyalty to groups, organizations, and authorities.”<sup>393</sup> Given that fairness has been found to be so crucial to both procedural outcomes and distributive justice perceptions [see Lind, Thibaut, and Walker (1979) and Lind, Kray, and Thompson (1998)], it is not surprising that narrators’ descriptions of these experiences are often interpreted by out-group listeners as calculated platitudes in support of one’s cause. But, beyond sounding cliché these statements reflect a certain lived-experience that is often hard to express openly and non-emotionally in public settings. For these, and other, social-psychological reasons such narratives often just do not get discussed since the secure public space necessary for their open discussion is often lacking.

The three short narratives analyzed below express not only the suffering of injustice, but the psychological inferiority that such continued injustice often creates. The fully transcribed narratives, found in Appendix H, provide a representative overview of themes activists themselves identified as most pressing in order to create a caste-less society. While these narrative transcriptions represent only very small sections of an hour and a half fish-bowl dialogue transcript, they are representative of activist thinking in the sense that they are narratives that activists told directly to each other. In minimizing the role of the interviewer to one of facilitator of a fish bowl dialogue session, participants were constrained in their speech in different ways than they would have been as formal interviewees.

From the activist standpoint there is a sort of reflection-in-action that occurs in the

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<sup>393</sup> Lind (1995), 3.

group telling of such stories, not just resulting in the connective sharing of a diverse set of experiences, but also in providing insight into the foundations of social justice agitation. The activist narratives chosen for analysis in this section show that dalit assertion takes many forms and that the complexity of dalit experiences leads to a diversity of, at times, conflicting approaches to working to create social justice.

Anurag's Belief in the Importance of Being Assertive: Analysis of Appendix H, Transcribed Lines 1-10

Anurag is an Indian civil servant. A model of success in the Ambedkar Buddhist community, Anurag participates in workshops, retreats, and other TBMSG gatherings when time permits in his busy schedule. Having traveled eight hours by train from where he works as a civil servant with the Indian Rail service, Anurag was an eager participant in the fish-bowl dialogue this researcher conducted. Openly sharing experiences of his school, work, and private life with other participants, Anurag clearly exhibited a leadership and activist zeal that was fairly common in this particular group of scheduled caste activists. In the narrative excerpt chosen for analysis here, he entered the discussion in an attempt to illustrate his agreement with Dr. Ambedkar's analysis that the dalit problem is largely one of self-esteem. Anurag's narrative, from his university days, tells of his classmates' surprise when he openly and confidently talks of being a scheduled caste. Such a story is a testament to the fact that the psychological effects of oppression, like the caste systems itself, are also impermanent.

In orienting his narrative around other participants' almost continual reference to Dr. Ambedkar's counsel on overcoming caste (line 1), Anurag quickly launches into a personal story of assertion from his experiences at university. He explains that during a discussion of the reservation system, people were "visibly stunned" (line 4) when he said that he was from a schedule caste community. The break with normative convention he describes in line four leaves the others in his narrative not only surprised, but visibly uneasy. Employing an evaluative statement embedded within the complicating action of the story, he then says, in the following lines, that "I was not disturbed by what I said... But, it is other people who were disturbed..." (lines 5 and 6). These evaluative statements validated and reinforced a group dynamic in the fish-bowl dialogue that was primarily concerned with feelings of not being heard or respected in modern Indian society. Such statements convey the apprehension among movement activists over how much to portray themselves as victims and how much to show the progress they have made through being assertive. Taylor, Caouette, Osborne, and King (2008) call this the "positioning paradox"<sup>394</sup> and activists within the TBMSG are engaged in a continual justification of their reasoning for arguing one side or the other of this paradox. The evaluative statements of Anurag highlight the point of his story, but they also reveal an important dialectic within the movement. An internal struggle exists over the question of whether activists should frame their contention from the perspective of a victim or from the perspective of a self-aware Buddhist.

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<sup>394</sup> Taylor, Caouette, Osborne, and King (2008), 154. In defining this paradox, the authors' state: "in order to maximize group advantage, group members may feel compelled to focus on the group's state of disadvantage" (154).

It is Anurag's evaluative statements<sup>395</sup> that form the core of his story – they illustrate, or model, a confident scheduled caste identity, something that is stunning and “bothering” (line 10) to others. In making these evaluative statements Anurag is taking a stance on the victim versus self-aware Buddhist dialectic, placing himself squarely in the court of those emphasizing Buddhist self-awareness and assertiveness. Taylor, Caouette, Osborne, and King (2008) have argued that “further investigation into the unique experiences of elite disadvantaged group members is warranted,”<sup>396</sup> by highlighting the social-psychological biases towards focusing on the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Anurag's evaluative statements point to often neglected meanings within elite disadvantaged sub-groups. These evaluative statements represent one illustration of the complex variation of disadvantaged narratives of social justice within TBMSG.

Explaining that others “were disturbed by the very thought that I had...I had... been so assertive in arguing that I am a scheduled caste” (line 6) is the point in Anurag's narrative. The fact that the narrator stumbles with how he will express his reflection of his past action (of being assertive) is a telling of the deep-rooted psychology of oppression apparent within the Ambedkar dalit community. Anurag's narrative is a series of evaluative statements that at times provide a “temporary suspension of the

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<sup>395</sup> As Toolan (1988) describes Labov's six stages of the well-formed story he writes: “evaluation consists of all the means to establish and sustain the point, the contextual significance and tellability, or reportability, of a story” (151).

<sup>396</sup> Taylor, Caouette, Osborne, and King (2008), 160.

action,<sup>397</sup> as in line seven. This ‘temporary suspension’ provides the ability to embed an evaluation as coming from another person and, therefore, strengthen the import and legitimacy of the narrative. Anurag’s evaluative statements point to a means to overcoming oppression – being assertive. On a means ends continuum assertiveness would be one aspect needed for the creation of a socially just community.<sup>398</sup> By providing corrective to the current unjust reality (“what we have come across is generally people hiding that they are from a scheduled caste” – line 8), assertion and confidence must be characteristic of any dalit community that actualizes social justice. Further, the narrative position of victim so visible in the narratives of leaders (Chapter Four) is, here, in this context, virtually absent. The narrative position of victim, though certainly a familiar milieu to these activists, forms a sort of un-spoken backdrop to this portion of the fish-bowl discussion. The tacit knowledge of the communities’ victimization, though ever-present, is secondary to and de-emphasized in relation to a position of assertive self-awareness brought about by Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism.

Pradeep’s Anger over Lack of Intellectual Honesty: Analysis of Appendix H, Transcribed Lines 11-26

Another characteristic of the just community that came out during fish-bowl discussions was a need for intellectual honesty within the dalit community. Activists identified this as a problem, or frustration, within their community and shared knowing

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<sup>397</sup> Toolan (1988), 153.

<sup>398</sup> Caste Dialogue, July 2-3, 2008.

glances when a particular episode was used to illustrate this missing element of their conception of just community. In drawing participant's attention to discourse not unlike to accusations of modern attempts at segregation in America, Pradeep orients listeners to a recent debate at Pune University on the proposed creation of a separate hostel to house scheduled caste students (line 12). Pradeep complicates the action of this story by informing his listeners that this "was a discussion under the chairmanship of vice-chairman of Pune, Dr. Narendra Jadhav" (line 13). The invocation of Dr. Jadhav's name presents the chance for the predominantly Mahar dalits participants to weigh-in on a familiar sub-category of the larger debate about Mahar inclusion within Indian society: the communities' expectations of those from within their community who have become successful in Indian society. As an educated and powerful dalit, Dr. Jadhav is revered, but also held under critical scrutiny by his own Mahar community. The status he has acquired as Vice-chancellor at Pune University seems to make him a lightning rod for dalits' questions about his intellectual honesty.

Dr. Jadhav is clearly a controversial figure who has become a symbol of both dalit uplift and betrayal. Yet, despite the fact that Dr. Jadhav is well known in the dalit community, Pradeep (in lines 18 and 19) feels the need to explain Dr. Jadhav's relevance as a dalit writer and intellectual. The showing of some deference and respect for Dr. Jadhav's 2003 book Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of The Caste

System in Modern India<sup>399</sup> is aimed at highlighting the import of Pradeep's evaluative question (in line 15): "Why he is thinking like that?" In explaining what Dr. Jadhav *should* think Pradeep is making the case that Dr. Jadhav, though the beneficiary of past injustices, is out of touch with the current needs of his community. Positioning Dr. Jadhav as both from the community and standing outside it, Pradeep is able to argue that he is disconnected and undeserving of the status he has achieved. In fact, the invocation of Jadhav's name is a signal, or meaning sign, to the community - - a means to make clear that increased status alone is not the full answer to the legacy of injustice. Referencing Dr. Jadhav elicits both strong positive and negative responses from scheduled caste listeners. For Pradeep, and undoubtedly many other scheduled castes, Dr. Jadhav elicits anger; anger over the sense that he is not being "intellectually honest."<sup>400</sup> In other words, there is a feeling among many scheduled castes that Dr. Jadhav has in all his success not lived up to his dalit roots, but rather succumb to Sanskritization.<sup>401</sup>

In lines 14 and 15 of Pradeep's narrative the sense of anger and betrayal shows in the way that Pradeep struggles to find the words to express his feelings. Speaking of the University of Pune discussion on opening a scheduled caste hostel he says: "and he was

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<sup>399</sup> This book was originally published in India as I and My Father. Further discussion of Dr. Jadhav's book can be found in section 5.4 of this chapter on dalit literature.

<sup>400</sup> Dialogue on Caste Discussion, July 3, 2008.

<sup>401</sup> "Sanskritization is the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community" [Srinivas (1966), 6]. See also Jaffrelot (2000) for a good discussion of the process of Sanskritization and its' effect on dalit identity.

involved... ahh...he was in support that ...ahh...ahh...to be... ahh ...found ...ahh... separate hostel for scheduled caste students... and I was shocked that...ahh... why he is thinking like that” (Lines 14 and 15)? This combination of orientation and evaluation helps to exhibit the frustration and helplessness that Pradeep feels as a member of the ‘lower level’ of a disadvantaged subgroup of scheduled castes. In other words, relative to the “elite disadvantaged subgroup,”<sup>402</sup> (i.e. what others in India might call the creamy layer) which Dr. Jadhav finds himself a part of, Pradeep is expressing a common dalit value judgment about how many of those now part of the ‘creamy layer’ have forgotten their community. This is a particularly relevant issue within the TBMSG community as they trace their foundation back to Dr. Ambedkar, the model of giving back to the community. In addition, this perspective provides a whole new fold to the ‘positioning paradox’ described above. Instead of movement activists struggling to determine whether to frame their dissent from the out-group perspective of either a victim or Buddhist identity, there is, in addition, the complicating element of status within the group that plays into these framing decisions. In other words, motivation for framing may depend more on a person’s individual identifications of what their in-group is than on outsiders’ attempts to position that person as a part of a particular in-group. As Taylor, Caouette, Usborne, and King (2008) explain:

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<sup>402</sup> Taylor, Caouette, Usborne, and King (2008), 159.

The positioning issue for this influential group is whether they will position themselves as promoters of all members of their disadvantaged group, or whether they will position themselves so as to maintain their elite status and relative advantage compared to other members of their own disadvantaged group.<sup>403</sup>

So as Dr. Jadhav may see himself as a Vice-Chancellor first and foremost, those within the dalit community are likely to see him as dalit and then only after that as a Vice-Chancellor. So not only do elites face a self-positioning problem, but members of disadvantaged groups also face a problem of positioning dalit elites. Are they one of us or not?

In line sixteen Pradeep uses a type of internal evaluation that Labov sub-classifies as what he calls a “comparator.”<sup>404</sup> In saying: “instead of [thinking that way] he should...ahh...he should have think that scheduled caste students should...should stay with another students,” Pradeep alludes to a desired state of affairs. Later in the narrative (lines 25 and 26 in particular) he goes on to paint a picture of what Dr. Jadhav’s vision in actuality creates, but it is this hint of what Dr. Jadhav’s vision is not that is Pradeep’s point. This is the crux of what Pradeep sees as missing from the dalit community and crucial to the creation of a just society. But, while the need for a unified and integrated dalit community is strong not everyone agrees of how to build it. In line 21 Pradeep introduces a third interlocutor (a “professor” at Pune University) and again asks the question more generally: “Why you people are thinking like that?” It is the statement

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>404</sup> Toolan (1988), 156. As Toolan (1988) describes: “Evaluations are grouped by Labov into four sub-types: Intensifiers, Comparators, Correlatives, and Explicatives... comparators evaluate indirectly by drawing attention away from what actually happened by alluding to what might have but didn’t happen” (155-157).

“and he has no answer at that time” (line 23) that again highlights Pradeep’s point: a lack of unity among dalits as exhibited through such expressions of intellectual dishonesty. This, coupled with a lack of clear vision for the integrated society, has left dalits un-unified and individually oriented from Pradeep’s perspective.

So as Dr. Jadhav considers himself part of the Indian elite, Pradeep believes that his position as a scheduled caste (or dalit) should come before any other identity, such as one among the privileged, Vice-Chancellor, or member of the intelligentsia. The activist assumptions are that dalit sub-groups are less important than the wider group that can be generalized as either scheduled caste or dalit, or, in TBMSG’s case, more tightly configured as dalit Buddhist. Accompanying this initial assumption is the presumption that being intellectually honest requires obedience to the wider group goals, and inversely that any expression of individual interest for maintaining elite status should be subordinate to this obedience to the wider disadvantaged group. In a society that is captivated with status, these altruistic sentiments may be a set of assumptions that are hard to legitimize in reality. Given India’s chronically communal social stratification, balancing group needs with individual wants muddies the waters of attempts at a casteless society. Intellectual honesty presents an interesting set of normative assumptions that activists are often professing, but rarely reflectively analyzing.<sup>405</sup> From my data collection experience, I believe that such continued and on-going reflection is needed for the creation of the socially just society. Ambedkar dalits themselves need to

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<sup>405</sup> Note that this fish-bowl dialogue was the first time for most participants to share such feelings and experiences publicly with their colleagues.

hear each other reason out the complexities of the nexus between both their beliefs about, and their vision of, social justice.

The fact is that activists rarely ask who is deciding which type of statements or actions are ‘intellectually honest.’ They are also not asking what possible constraints they themselves would face in maintaining their normative position if they were in Dr. Jadhav’s shoes. Rather, underlying the TBMSG ethos lurks an assumption that any attempt at elevating status is an outward display of intellectual dishonesty since it disregards the continuing needs of the wider group. This anti-materialist perspective of the TBMSG, while typical of faith-based organizations, presents a complex set of dialects for social movement organization. Further, calls for intellectual honesty also reveal the ever-present underlying dialectic between victim and Buddhist identities within the TBMSG movement. Betrayal by elite sub-group members is seen as a re-victimization. This betrayal and anger is not approached from the Buddhist identity perspective of non-attachment, but rather from the more familiar perspective of the raw experience and emotions associated with being victimized. As many research subjects expressed, there exists a dalit psychology of oppression, the legacy of which has crippled and stunted the development of dalit activism. The underlying psychology of narratives such as Pradeep’s, point to a motivation for activism that is not based on some Buddhist identity or ideology, but on an identity as victim and an ideology of revenge. Compared to Anurag’s identification of assertiveness as a means to the creation of just society, the charging of others as intellectually dishonest presents scheduled castes with a familiar position as victim. The visioning of a society in which intellectual honesty is respected

and prized, though as subjective a measure of the realization of social justice as assertiveness, points to an underlying psychology of oppression. As Paulo Freire writes: “I must intervene in teaching the peasants that their hunger is socially constructed and work with them to help identify those responsible for their social construction, which is, in my view, a crime against humanity.”<sup>406</sup> Such work entails a reflective analysis of the underlying assumptions of both activism and the groups’ desires for a socially just ideal society. Pradeep’s narrative is an exemplar of the need to continue to reflect on this dialectic between the identity of victim and that of Ambedkar Buddhist. While Jambudvipa is beginning to do this work through holding inter-caste dialogues<sup>407</sup> at their retreat centers around Maharashtra, they are only scratching the surface as the third narrative of the fish-bowl dialogue further reveals.

Haresh’s Resentment of the Insidious Caste System - A Communal Perspective: Analysis of Appendix H, Transcribed Lines 27-45

Haresh’s experiences of discrimination in the midst of natural disaster, further outlined and analyzed in an example of third order positioning in section 5.3.2, provide an illustration of the reach and endemic reality of the caste system. Viewed in relation to the need for assertiveness as voiced by Anurag, or the frustration with a lack of intellectual honesty as expressed by Pradeep, Haresh’s narrative illustrates the range of impacts caste has on the voiceless villager. As crime creates ripples of impact in a

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<sup>406</sup> Macedo and Freire (1995), 379 - quoted in Freire (2006).

<sup>407</sup> These inter-caste dialogues have all been among low-castes groups only. Jambudvipa has organized or facilitated no inter-caste dialogues in which higher-castes were present.

community, we see that caste and caste thinking creates ripples of psychological dependency among neighbors within the village. Haresh's story, like Pradeep's, points to the basic human need for a sense of community and alludes to the importance of maintaining community in the face of discrimination. Community provides a meaning structure that will allow for the actualization of individual instances of assertiveness and intellectual honesty, as well as, distributive justice. Haresh's resentment of high-caste villagers' control of earthquake surveyors' needs assessment processes provides a vision of social justice as primarily a communal endeavor. While assertiveness and intellectual honesty present more individualistic perspectives on the socially just society, Haresh's narrative balances this with the rural communal reality of the Indian village. The result is a view of social justice that is created and maintained by relational ties and communal realities, not individual psychology alone. Haresh's narrative in the fish-bowl dialogue represents a structural sub-system analysis of how to reach the just, or casteless, society.<sup>408</sup>

Setting the stage by explaining that he was doing needs assessment in Gujarat following the massive earthquake in that state in early 2001, Haresh complicates the action of this potentially inspirational context by telling the story of slowly figuring out how the damages to 'untouchables,' who have traditionally lived outside of the village, were being systematically missed by his team of surveyors. In line 38 of the narrative

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<sup>408</sup> When one looks at these three fish-bowl narratives based upon a nested model of conflict [see Dugan (1996)], it becomes clear that Anurag is focused on an issue-specific analysis to the caste problem, Pradeep is focused on a relational analysis, and Haresh is approaching the problem from a structural sub-system perspective. Each of these analytical approaches leads to a focus on unique aspects of a socially just projected future.

(see Appendix H), after being given the run-around as to the identity of those not being allowed to participate in the village assessment, Haresh frustratingly asks the higher caste villagers “OK – But who are they?” Such a question is laden with both frustration and multiple meanings, and is often used in modern India to indirectly inquire about caste affiliation.<sup>409</sup> The response he receives is that they (the ‘untouchables’) are not part of the village and Haresh sums up this chain of events by saying: “...but the point is that such can you know they are part of the village so you can go to the next village... and they were suggesting us and...ahh... in fact guiding us which part we should go and who [to meet].”<sup>410</sup> This combination of evaluation and continuation of the complicating action is not rare in movement injustice narratives and indeed signals that caste calculus is tied up in every village social interaction. Labov calls this type of evaluation “correlative”<sup>411</sup> evaluation, in that multiple actions are described simultaneously. As villagers were responding to his inquiry they were simultaneously suggesting that the survey was complete and guiding the surveyors to move on to the next village. Indeed, through Haresh’s narrative we are told on three occasions by the villagers that the survey is complete and the surveyors can move on. That these two actions become correlated implies an underlying conspiracy; a sub-system inequality that the narrator is determined to reveal.

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<sup>409</sup> In India, it is taboo to ask ‘what caste are you?’ but there are other more subtle ways to inquire about caste, including ‘where are you from?’ ‘what is your [sur]name?’ or more bluntly ‘who are you?’

<sup>410</sup> Appendix H, line 42.

<sup>411</sup> Toolan (1988), 156.

Evaluation, as a key indicator of important facets of the narratives' meaning, appears throughout Haresh's narrative. Even within the coda of the story, Haresh manages to insert a very powerful and heartfelt evaluative statement:

So you are not part of the village... you, your not part of the country, you are not part of the culture, you are not part of the civilization. You are just out-caste, out-nationed, out-civilized. You are just there for serving, serving, and serving.<sup>412</sup>

As stated above, evaluation “permeates”<sup>413</sup> the telling of narrative; it is as if narrators get their point across by infusing evaluative statements into every other structural component of their narrative. Haresh's adept ability to do this infuses his narrative with an emotional power and conviction that is undeniable. Haresh's use of correlative evaluation also exposes structural inequality and points to a communal aspect of the TBMSG conception of social justice. Squarely focused on the identity of dalits as victims, Haresh's narrative expresses the endemic nature of caste-ism and the injustice of the caste system. Even in the midst of natural disaster, powerful stories of discrimination appear. This implies that radical changes in social structure are needed to create the just society. While some within the movement might argue that it is through Buddhism that such changes will appear, Haresh seems to be stuck in an us versus them mentality of victim-hood. Being assertive or intellectually honest are tactics that individuals can and should pursue, but Haresh seems to be saying that broader strategies are needed. A further example of Haresh's third order positioning will illustrate this focus on the victim identity further.

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<sup>412</sup> Appendix H, line 44.

<sup>413</sup> Toolan (1988), 148.

### **5.3.2 *Haresh's Story: Who is the Real Victim?***

On June 28, 2008 I conducted an hour and a half formal interview with Haresh Dalvi. The one-on-one dynamic allowed for thoughtful reflection on the part of Haresh and revealed the importance of his formative professional experience of working in post-earthquake Gujarat. During that interview two short narratives of his Gujarat experiences seemed particularly relevant in conveying the social justice commitments of not only Haresh's activism, but also those of TBMSG activists in general. Those two narratives, transcribed in Appendices I and J, are analyzed here as a means to expose the deep psychological impacts of oppression as well as the ever-present social implications encountered when combating it. Haresh's Gujarati earthquake narratives are exemplary of TBMSG activists' commitment to creating a socially just Indian society despite a psychological legacy of oppression and underlying feelings of inferiority. Such narratives run the gambit of social identity, social positioning, and power asymmetry central to the social construction of Buddhist and victim narratives so important to TBMSG mobilization. In addition to a social justice conception that is unified by, and instilled with, individual values of honesty and self-awareness, Haresh's narratives represent an activist pragmatism that reflexively realizes the scope of the engrained caste mentality that his work is aimed at destroying. Typical of the frustration and disappointment so common in activist narratives, Haresh's narratives of post-earthquake Gujarat highlight the important identity-based conceptions of committed TBMSG members.

The first of Haresh's two narratives analyzed here (transcribed in Appendix I) comes in response to a question about why he joined the movement and if there was any relation between his joining and past experiences of discrimination. Like many other activists interviewed, Haresh eschewed the notion that he had personally faced extreme instances of discrimination. Nonetheless, after providing a context beginning from his childhood, Haresh begins to narrate a formative story of discrimination from his young professional life. Orienting the listener to his post-graduate experience in post-earthquake Gujarat, Haresh narrates his difficulty in finding lodging as a dalit aid worker. This story, reminiscent of Dr. Ambedkar's autobiographical story entitled "Scoundrel! You Have Polluted the Parsi Inn!,"<sup>414</sup> draws on a long tradition of dalit reactions to identity conflicts. Haresh's story describes the amazement and indignity of being positioned as polluting despite an economic and educational attainment far greater than that of those who were questioning him. Like Ambedkar before him, Haresh was saddened and frustrated by the fact that caste affiliation was more important to average people than educational or class attainment. Relative to one's personal attainment, caste affiliation is shown, through the narrative, to determine basic social relations. The story, though not as shocking as many stories of village discrimination and atrocities against

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<sup>414</sup> Written by Dr. Ambedkar in 1935, this story is an autobiographical account of a 1918 experience in what is now the state of Gujarat. In this autobiographical story, having recently returned to India from studies in the West, Dr. Ambedkar begins working in the Baroda-based administration of his educational patron the Maharaja of Baroda. Upon arrival to this new job, he faces much difficulty finding housing due to his low caste status. Like Haresh's story, Dr. Ambedkar's story represents an influential episode in the young adulthood stage of what Erikson (1980) would call the stages of the life cycle. Similarities between the two stories are indeed uncanny, and it is no-doubt that Haresh would be familiar with Ambedkar's account of his own experiences. As the frames are undoubtedly familiar to Haresh one can assume that the psycho-social impact is also similar.

dalits, is exemplary of the common attempts to diminish the identity and personhood of dalits. In turn, such de-humanization conditions the strategies and tactics dalits use to combat such indignity.

Haresh, responds to this attempt to diminish his identity in a way that is unique to educated and urbane dalits and characteristic of most members of the TBMSG community. Cutting off the interviewers' follow-on question (Then how did you find...?) by first justifying the evaluative statement to come, Haresh goes on to explain "they were putting me at some trouble, but I was very firm that you want to put me or have me, then this is my identity."<sup>415</sup> This assertiveness, born of both an educated dalit and Buddhist identity is a trait relatively recent to dalits, and still devoid in most Indian villages (even Ambedkar tried to hide his identity in "Scoundrel! You Have Polluted the Parsi Inn!"). Historically oppressed by power imbalances and the legacy of structural violence most dalits would have been reticent to respond to the indignities of caste bias at all. Lulled into passivity by generations of psychological subjugation and physical violence, the average dalit has little ability to voice their own opinion. This acquiescence to the status quo may seem strange from the privileged perspective of white America, but like early twentieth century black Americans the legacy of oppression greatly overshadows dalits' belief that they could effect real change. It is only in the last fifty or sixty years that dalits have developed a renewed sense of an independent identity through

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<sup>415</sup> Appendix I, Line 12.

either a spiritual realization or recourse to a secular education, and with this new identity they have emerged from behind the shadow of oppression and fear.

As a further illustration of the fragile nature of this identity Haresh, in line 17 of the transcribed narrative (Appendix I) decides to re-orient the listener to a story of discrimination that happened to a friend in the same post-Gujarati earthquake environment. The remainder of the transcription in Appendices I and J refers to this second-hand, yet formative, experience of discrimination and its psychological effects on the original teller, as well as, on Haresh as a listener. While surveying a *Dharba* (*Kshatriya*<sup>416</sup> – high-caste, but not the highest caste of Indian society) family about their earthquake damages, the man of the house asked the surveyor what his name was (a typical means to determining caste). Though this is immediately recognized in India as a politically correct means to determine one's caste, the surveyor unabashedly provided his full name. In response, the head of the house stopped answering questions and saying nothing stood up, walked over to the surveyor, and “kicked with his leg to the stool where... the surveyor, was sitting”<sup>417</sup> In the telling of this story it is not the pain inflicted by being “thrown to the ground”<sup>418</sup> that is such a shock to Haresh, but the outward expression of the ingrained and endemic nature of the caste mentality in average people.

In Appendix J, lines 4 and 5 Haresh explains: “he was trying to help to the victim of the earthquake... But even though everything was ruined by this natural calamity the caste mentality of the person was not allowing him to think like a human being.” This

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<sup>416</sup> See footnote # 5, Chapter 1 of this dissertation for further explanation.

<sup>417</sup> Appendix I, Line 27.

<sup>418</sup> Appendix I, Line 29.

response, which came in reaction to my attempt to return to the discussion to “the psychological trauma of your friend’s story,”<sup>419</sup> is an important indicator of Haresh’s social justice commitments. Such evaluative statements point to important, and elusive, aspects of activists’ view of the ideal casteless society. Primary among these ideals is the vision which privileges the desire to eradicate social actors’ bias towards caste-based decision-making. The evaluative statements in Haresh’s storyline highlight this bias, while at the same time hinting at ways to overcome it. This is an important aspect of evaluative statements: they play the dual role of identifying (and at times sanctioning) both resources and constraints to achieving a socially just ideal. In Haresh’s evaluative statement assertiveness as a resource is juxtaposed to the uncritical nature of the caste mentality as a constraint. Yet it is the constraint of the caste mentality that provides the necessary grounds for the creation of a resource such as assertiveness. Activists, therefore, face the difficulty of deciding how regularly or consistently they need to mention constraints in order to develop resources. This is especially important since continual mention of constraints (such as people’s caste mentality) can re-enforce the exact constraints activist are trying to destroy.

Like Haresh’s earlier narrative, this second-order injustice narrative invokes experiences of discrimination and psychological suffering as motivations for asserting a new identity. Unwittingly, in their storytelling, TBMSG social activists are re-enforcing the caste-based mentalities that the stories are aimed at destroying. As Polletta (2006)

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<sup>419</sup> Interview with Haresh Dalvi, June 28, 2008.

has argued “when groups challenge the status quo, the familiar stories they tell themselves as they strategize sometimes make it difficult for them to come up with tactics that are truly new.”<sup>420</sup> But beyond the difficulty such narratives re-enforce in relation to tactics, they also re-establish and reify dominant group identity formations and power relations. Despite activists’ belief that their accounts reaffirm their social justice goals, often their unwitting reification of the status quo makes the realization of their social justice ideal problematic. It is as if activists walk a tightrope between speaking truth to justice on the one hand and moving beyond the injustice to create a new identity on the other. Haresh’s narratives of his first and second hand experiences in the aftermath of the Gujarati earthquake exemplify this dialectical difficulty of problematizing victim-hood and injustice while also trying to create a new positive identity of assertiveness and confidence.

Haresh’s narratives forces one to ask ‘who is the real victim: earthquake survivors or dalit surveyors?’ Like other activists narratives encountered, Haresh’s narrative juggles dalits’ identity as victims with that of educated and self-confident Buddhists. It is in this juggling that the movement’s social justice potential is either realized or overlooked. Activists’ construction of such justice narratives is both deliberate and unmindful: deliberate in its’ forward looking projection of justice as the absence of indignities and oppressive structures and unmindful in the assumption that dalits are *always* victims. That activist narratives are both calculated and simultaneously

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<sup>420</sup> Polletta (2006), X.

haphazard is not completely surprising. From the position of the powerless (or less powerful) when one tactic does not produce the desired change another one must be tried. Strategic interactions are conceived of very differently depending where one sits in relation to power. Haresh's social position as dalit Buddhist activist conditions strategies that highlight his experience and stem from a belief that these experiences are not heard or understood by social actors of different social position. This activist desire to be heard often times outweighs the strategic import of the story itself. As Haresh says "even the earthquake or natural calamity is not able to clear or clean the mind... so this is what is the real grief."<sup>421</sup> From such a statement we can see that the evaluative import of the story is that no new learning or moral community has been created though the inevitable structural changes brought on by calamity. Haresh's narrative is an exemplar of other activists' accounts in that the storytelling practices and social construction of reality mediates between past victimization and a projective conception of social justice.

#### ***5.4 Self and Community: Some Narratives from Dalit Literature***

This final section of Chapter Five is aimed at exposing the connections between narratives of dalit literature and activists' storytelling practices. Mahar's in particular have gravitated towards the personal narrations that are now so prevalent in dalit or subaltern literature. As we have seen above in Chapter Four, Dr. Ambedkar himself wrote autobiographical stories of past injustice. These stories, enacted in street theater and sung about in songs, have been a key inspiration for the burgeoning of this genre of

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<sup>421</sup> Appendix J, Lines 7 and 8.

self-expression in dalit literary circles. Further, the Dalit Panthers movement of the 1970s embraced such literature as a model of not only social critique, but also social uplift. Omvedt (1993) describes the rise of the Dalit Panther movement in this way:

The Panther founders were, almost without exception, young poets and writers; their previous meetings and discussions had centered on the homes, office cubicles, public libraries, and teahouses where prominent dalit writers and critics held audience; the name of their new organization had been planted in a discussion of 'Negro literature' at a dalit literary conference earlier that year [1972].<sup>422</sup>

It was dalit literature that brought many young activists into low-caste rights movements by simultaneously encouraging both excellence in education and the acknowledgement of oppressive structures. Such literature gave dalits agency through literary voice and, in turn, adapted the meaning of 'dalit' identity both domestically and internationally.

Domestically the term dalit, first introduced en-mass by Dr. Ambedkar, took on an even more forceful connotation than was previously understood; it became understood as not just 'downtrodden,' but also awakened. Challenging the ubiquity of the term 'untouchable' in the Western world, the dalit literature of the 1970s provided space for a renewed discussion of caste oppression. As can be evidenced by the increasing appearance of subaltern narratives of injustice in public spaces,<sup>423</sup> any analysis of activist narratives that failed to include such literature's influence would be lacking.

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<sup>422</sup> Omvedt (1993), 47.

<sup>423</sup> On a recent search on the subject 'untouchable' at my local Alexandria library in Virginia, Jadhav's (2003) Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of The Caste System in Modern India was a hit for the query. South Asian studies scholars are also beginning to put more focus on redefining what it means to be 'untouchable' and marginalized - - take as evidence of this the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on South Asia held at the University of Madison in October, 2007 in which out of nine sessions filled with panels about South Asia a majority revolved around caste issues. Another example would be the first ever Dalit Studies conference in the United States entitled: "Dalit Agendas: Emancipation, Citizenship, and Empowerment" held in December, 2008 at the University of Pennsylvania.

While many of the Mahar dalit narratives that were the genesis of this activist groundswell have yet to be published in English, a few important works have recently made it to English speaking audiences. This section will highlight narratives from three writers that have moved Mahars' in their local Marathi, as well as a wider English speaking readership. All three of these narrative accounts were first written in Marathi and then, due to their wide success, translated into English. In analyzing short narratives from Jadhav (2003), Kamble (2008), and Moon (2000) section 5.4 aims to draw out important connections between the narrative positioning, identity, and power of TBMSG activists and auto/biographical life stories of being a Mahar dalit. That other expressions of dalit frustration and assertion abound in English-language publication does not take away from the choice to analyze these particular stories as exemplary of the foundational victimization narratives of Ambedkar Buddhist activists. Despite the fact that, writers such as Prasad (2004), Teltumbe (2005, 1997), and Omvedt (1993, 1994, 2003, 2004) provide a reader with a politically left-of-center reading of the dalit experience, and Mason-John (2008) provides readers with the experiences of Mahar women converts to Ambedkar Buddhism, the narratives chosen for analysis here were chosen for their unmediated expression of the Mahar dalit experience. Kamble's (2008) and Moon's (2000) autobiographies, along with Jadhav's (2003) biographical account of his parents life, paint pictures of Mahar life in three distinct regions of Maharashtra (Satara, Nagpur, and Mumbai). These narratives represent a direct telling of the experiences of living as a Mahar and the awakening of that community that can be traced to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

By way of introducing some comparisons between dalit literature and activist narratives, Jadhav's popular 2003 work provides a good starting point. In his 2003 biographical tome on 'untouchability' as experienced by his parents, Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of The Caste System in Modern India, Narendra Jadhav tells a story about Mahar activist organizing and resistance at an annual Ganapati festival (a 10-day festival celebrating the birth of Ganesha which culminates in the immersion of Ganesha idols in nearby rivers, lakes, and/or wells). Given the spread of an unfounded rumor that dalit revelers in the area were planning to hang the idol in effigy, many upper-caste Hindus were publicly threatening to stop such a disrespectful display in the weeks leading up to the festival's culminating procession. Police protection was afforded to the last day of the festival's annual procession to Chunabhatti creek in Mumbai. As the dalits in the area began marching to the waterfront to immerse the idol of Ganesha, as was the tradition, Jadhav narrates, through the voice and experience of his mother, what happened next to the religious procession:

Suddenly, someone hurled a stone. This created a commotion and people began screaming abuse and trying to locate the miscreants. Some people threw stones back in the direction the stone had come from. Soon it became a fight. Stones were flying in all directions. The volunteers blew shrill whistles trying to quiet everyone and bring the situation under control, but things only got worse...<sup>424</sup>

The chaotic picture of this event that Jadhav paints is reminiscent of not only the spontaneity of what Horowitz (2001) calls the "deadly ethnic riot," but also of the potentiality for violence that I felt while a participant observer in the large crowds of

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<sup>424</sup> Jadhav (2003), 148.

revelers at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of Dr. Ambedkar's conversion in October 2006. While only a feeling, that personal feeling was pregnant with future possibility as one can only imagine the moments leading up to this narrative's climax must have been. While every moment is pregnant with infinite future possibilities, including violent ones, rituals, as vessels of meaning, are heavy with this pregnancy. That large crowds often take on a life of their own is well documented [see for example Horowitz (2001)], but any attempt to explain crowd dynamics by maintaining an enlightenment focus on rationalism must be seen as problematic. Such episodes of collective violence can not be explained with recourse to the rational thought of rational actors. Rather, often such episodes are a combination of rational and groundless responses by multiple individuals. A postmodern radical reappraisal of assumptions about the rationality of human agency in such situations leads one to re-explore the connections between self and community; between rituals and the mundane; between the ability of rational actors to explain psychological processes grounded in the situated-ness of the moment.

Jadhav achieves this postmodern critical reflection once again through the voice of his mother:

I became so enraged at their [the miscreants] behavior that I snatched a baton from one of the volunteers. Emboldened by me, even Najuka snatched a baton and together we started hitting the miscreants. We hit them so hard that finally the police intervened. The police threatened that they would put us behind bars if we did not stop. I complained to them that they were not able to do their duty well, and therefore we had to step in. The police finally succeeded in taking control of the situation.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 148.

Jadhav's mother both provides justification for her actions, but also hints at the irrationality and spontaneity of her agency. Such a narrative resonates in dalit communities because it not only glorifies the past, but it also tells a story that is so familiar to those that listen. But, it is not that such a narrative makes everything clear. In fact, it is the ambiguity of Jadhav's mother's telling that gives the narrative its power. As Polletta (2006) has so eloquently written:

...we tell stories to persuade but also to make sense of the unfamiliar. Stories assimilate confusing events into familiar frameworks while recognizing that things are no longer as they were and we are no longer who we were... stories contain rather than resolve ambiguity.<sup>426</sup>

This element of storytelling, often overlooked by social scientific researchers, is crucial to recognize in the stories of both dalit autobiography and Ambedkar Buddhist activism. The telling (and writing) of dalit narratives such as Jadhav's place the ambiguities of dalit life squarely in the public sphere in much the same way that Ambedkar Buddhist activists conflate the identities of victim and self-actualized Buddhist. The narrative power of such stories lies in the indefinite way in which it 'solves' the injustice that dalits face, and thus, instills activists with a partial and incomplete framework for their continued agency. It is the evaluative statements in such narratives that reify the dominant discourse among activists. In the ending, or coda, of Jadhav's story we are exposed to a litany of evaluative statements. In response to an old woman from the community who refers to Jadhav's mother's actions as "unfeminine behavior"<sup>427</sup> Jadhav's mother responds:

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<sup>426</sup> Polletta (2006), 134.

<sup>427</sup> Jadhav (2003), 149.

‘How long do we take things lying down?’ I blurted out. ‘We are not allowed to enter their temples. We can’t drink from their wells. We are not allowed to worship Ganapati because we honor Babasaheb alongside. And now, we are not to have a procession to immerse our idol. We won’t let them bully us in Mumbai. This is a big city, not a village.’<sup>428</sup>

This outburst exhibits the spontaneity and frustration of Jadhav’s mother and serves as a sort of moral to the story. Readers are beseeched to take action, stop taking oppression lying down, to organize, educate, and agitate. Such stories are read and internalized by TBMSG movement actors (see the discussion of Jadhav and his lack of “intellectual honesty” in the Fish bowl narrative analyzed above), and represent formative expressions of activists own work to create an ideal society.

Jadhav’s narrative represents the kind of dalit narratives that are the building blocks of activists’ contention. From a Labovian perspective we can see a clear historical progression and structure to the narrative of Jadhav’s mother. Beginning with an orientation to the Ganapati Festival and its rituals, the reader is taken through the complicating action of a clash with higher caste Hindus over the proper ritual implementation. Important and telling evaluative statements about this situation are interspersed throughout the narrative by the use of terms like ‘culprit’ and ‘miscreant.’ Further, through the use of such words a process of narrative positioning of a new identity as awakened agents of change is created. This new identity challenges the dominant power structures of society (i.e. caste-structure with its attentive elements of class-structure). Evaluative statements, such as “we are not allowed to worship Ganapati

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 149.

because we honor Babasaheb alongside,”<sup>429</sup> are expressed as “something that can permeate the telling.”<sup>430</sup> In analyzing Mr. Casey’s story of the ‘famous spit’ in Joyce’s Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man, Toolan (1988) says: “we could argue that this type of story lies somewhere between the purely oral narrative and the purely written one.”<sup>431</sup> Jadhav’s mother’s narrative could be explained in the same way, as the evaluative statements ‘permeate the telling’ to a degree that separating them from the story becomes not only difficult, but impossible. The evaluative statements are the story and the ambiguity that they create provides the story with a transformative power. Jadhav’s biographical retelling of this story reinforces the dominant activist discourse of self-reliance and self-assertion. The way in which this narrative account was received, and the subsequent ease with which it can be found in the public sphere, is telling of the fact that the underlying narrative structure of the story resonates with movement activists and acts as one of many exemplars for their social contention.

Though not all dalit literature is an expression of activist yearning for social justice, all such literature relies on witnessed accounts of past injustice. This witnessing of injustice can be questioned from a perspective of cultural deconstruction [See Spivak’s (1988) reading of Mahasweta Devi’s short story “Draupodi” for example], but nonetheless the resonance it has with local activists seems to make such postcolonial critique unnecessary. In saying this, I am not discounting postcolonial critique in order to argue that there are not difficulties inherent in using a subaltern lens to view the world

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>430</sup> Toolan (1988), 148.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 149.

(Spivak repeated warnings to be vigilant about our own subjective biases in constructing the subaltern are well received), but rather to say that the use of such a lens seems particularly unsuited to social movement analysis. Most social movement analysis has not embraced the emotional and symbolic aspects of the subaltern, but rather objectified the subaltern as an identity through which mobilization occurs.<sup>432</sup> Still, while Spivak (1990) correctly argues that unless one “problematizes the positionality of the subject of investigation”<sup>433</sup> one will assume they, as researcher, are immune from the colonial mentality, she fails to adequately take into account the fact that such positionality adds another layer for researchers’ to overcome as they excavate the social construction of reality. The two further narratives analyzed below add to a social movement analysis that privileges a perspective which looks at the creation of a social justice ideal from below. While some post-colonial theorists have convincingly argued that traces of colonial education have created a bias evident in Western scholarship that has, in turn, infected, the development of post-colonies, it is through a focus on the structures of social movement story-telling that the following narratives of dalit literature can best be understood. These narratives provide ambiguous meanings which mobilize activists. In agreeing with Polletta (2006), “[t]he emotional identification that stories produce may compel moral action but may also undermine rational action.”<sup>434</sup> In creating and sustaining a shift in the meaning of both community and self’s relation to power, these written autobiographical accounts represent a significant keystone to unlocking the

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<sup>432</sup> See for example Laue (1989).

<sup>433</sup> Spivak (1990) quoted in Abraham (2007), 5.

<sup>434</sup> Polletta (2006), 2.

foundations for collective activism. In turn, by creating political opportunities such stories illuminate the way to a social justice ideal.

**5.4.1 *Vasant Moon's Growing up Untouchable: A Dalit Autobiography and Baby Kamble's The Prison's We Broke***

Both the works of Vasant Moon and Baby Kamble provide a sweeping impression of the life of ordinary dalits in mid-twentieth century Maharashtra. As autobiographical catalogues of their entire life stories (with particular emphasis on their Ambedkar dalit roots and identity), both present multiple narratives inside a larger narrative structure. The titles of these works themselves hint at meaning as both intent and significance, exposing the lived experience of Mahar caste-based identity. But, regardless of the overall intent of these stories, the meanings of these narratives lies in the significance that the Ambedkarite community has afforded them. Published first in Marati, and then in English, both stories, and subsequently their authors, are well-known among TBMSG activists. The particular narratives that were chosen here are examples of formative childhood experiences of both writers. These particular narratives were chosen for the child-like honesty with which they problematize the multiple identity issues that challenge Mahars as they are radicalized by the thought and personage of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.<sup>435</sup> As typical narrations of the issues and problems that poor dalit children face, as well as the community of support which they have as a resource, movement activists can, and do, relate their work to such stories. When talking about the re-writing

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<sup>435</sup> Sen (2006) very convincingly argues for this need to understand identity in the plural. He writes: “The insistence, if only implicitly, on a choiceless singularity of human identity not only diminishes us all, it also makes the world much more flammable” (16). It is this view of identity that works such as Kamble’s and Moon’s help to clarify through providing a multi-layered expression of the life of Mahars.

“history from below” Mangesh Dahiwale and other activists cited the writings of Moon, Kamble, and other Mahar dalit literary figures as crucial to this process.<sup>436</sup> These activists feel as if dalit history had been lost, or better yet, systematically forgotten since those in power become those who write history. The activists of Jambudvipa in particular see a major part of their task as reclaiming this Buddhist history<sup>437</sup> and replacing dalit contributions as instrumental in India’s long history. The personal narratives of Moon and Kamble reverberate throughout the activist community and are exemplary of a particular conception of social justice not dissimilar in many ways from the leader and activist conceptions outlined above. In fact, what makes these autobiographical accounts so important in relation to activists’ and leaders’ narrative constructions of justice is that such accounts have become almost inextricably imbricated in the social justice constructions of both TBMSG activists and leaders; they act as a common movement experience and provide broad foundations and epistemological starting points for movement members’ visions of social justice. The overarching experience created by these common stories occurs in such a way that linkages are built between the competing identities of oppressed victim and educated or self-actualized Buddhist. As the accounts of common people, they are different from Ambedkar’s own autobiographical accounts (see Chapter Four) in that they elicit not only sympathy, but a

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<sup>436</sup> Personal Interview with Mangesh Dahiwale, June 25, 2008. Another TBMSG activist expressed the influence of these works by saying “when we started reading the book page we started reading about ‘untouchables’...it gave me some sense and solidarity and the practical understanding [to do something]” (Personal Interview with Priyadarshi Telang, July 4, 2008).

<sup>437</sup> Jambudvipa itself is reference to “the ancient Buddhist name for the Indian sub-continent” and “represents for us the transformation of society and culture through ethical and spiritual values” (Jambudvipa’s website - <http://www.jambudvipa.org/index.html>).

level of empathy that is more accessible to the common person. The vernacular popularity of these works signal not only the strength of the communal nature of caste mentality, but also that the reconfiguration of this strength around newly created identities (in particular Ambedkarite, educated dalit, and Buddhist).

In Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography Moon tells the story of his own early education and his Uncle Hari's support of it. Representative of the community of support that young Vasant Moon received, Uncle Hari tells Vasant's impoverished family that he will provide anything necessary for young and bright Vasant's education. Still due to the high cost of tuition and the need for books and supplies, Moon states "I did not have all things needed for school."<sup>438</sup> Feeling "embarrassed to ask Uncle again and again for money"<sup>439</sup> one day as the other boys headed out to recess, the young Vasant seeing a painting brush that one of his friends had carelessly dropped on the ground he "snatched the brush and threw it in his bag."<sup>440</sup> The whole night this dishonest act tormented the young Vasant and, therefore, he slept very little. In recalling his torment, Moon rhetorically asks: "Why did I steal? Wouldn't Uncle have given me a brush?"<sup>441</sup> In the morning young Vasant heads to school having decided to give the brush back to his friend, but, when he arrives, the class is engaged in a process of searching for the missing brush. Afraid, Vasant decides not to tell his friend that he had accidentally taken it, as was his plan. Instead as a search of students' bags is

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<sup>438</sup> Moon (2000), 35.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 35.

conducted young Vasant begins to realize the difficulty of his predicament. When the teacher gets to Vasant to check his bag, Vasant is holding the brush with tears streaming down his face. This short narrative ends with the teacher “giving a sermon on Mahatma Gandhi’s experiments with truth.”<sup>442</sup> Such a story, common to many poor Mahar’s, operates on many levels: caste, class, moral, political, and psychological. It is this multi-level reality that provides its meaning<sup>443</sup> for dalit listeners and readers.

This story, obviously a traumatic event in the young life of Vasant Moon, can be analyzed and deconstructed upon the backdrop of activist identity and psychology. While the story is one of a number linked together by Moon to express the Mahar communities’ unity and underlying psychology, it is also representative of the emotions and cognitive dissonance of Ambedkar Buddhist activists. Such stories relive activists’ common realities of injustice, structural violence, and discrimination, but also envision an overcoming of that past. The significance of writing and telling such narratives is that this overcoming becomes co-constructed as past victim-hood competes with new foundations of identity and helps movement activists to notice the often contradictory relationship between significant events of the past and these events relation to a future projection of social justice. It is in this way that Moon’s narrative becomes significant in the Mahar Buddhist community. Ambedkar Buddhist activists relate to such stories through reference to their own experiences of injustice and the cognitive dissonance that it creates for them within a structurally violent caste system. But, this meaning as

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>443</sup> Here, meaning is understood as significance and involves a tying of the event back to similar personal experiences of listeners.

significance is often lost at every levels of the movement. Though the feelings of embarrassment, guilt, and humiliation that Moon expresses in this story are well know among dalits, the connecting of them to a new commonly agreed upon identity is more problematic.

Though Moon's 2000 autobiography is filled with references to newly constructed identities for a newly mobilized Mahar community, the ambiguity of these references provides activists with fertile grounds to re-build these identities in their own image. In the story re-told above, for example, Moon refers in the coda to Gandhi's philosophy of spiritual truth. The pejorative description of the teacher's lecture of young Vasant as a "sermon" insinuates that a Gandhian identity has been rejected by the Mahar community – a fact that is indeed quite evident among Mahar Ambedkarites today. Gandhi's Satyagraha ("truth' and 'force' in literal translation"<sup>444</sup>) though accepted by Ambedkarites as a pragmatic means to creating structural change was soundly rejected as a viable foundation for the sustenance of social justice. Gandhi's reliance on the village system to create an independent and just Indian society was antithetical to low-caste experience of the structural violence-laden Indian village. Therefore, such vague references to Gandhian thought, signals a need to link the experiences of the village with activists experience of its hegemonic reality as opposed to some revivalist ideal of harmony. Moon's narrative provides activists with both familiar and ambiguous storylines which position them as agency-filled victims and weave a foundation for the

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<sup>444</sup> Erikson (1969), 198.

construction of new identities which challenge the dominant discourse. In short, Moon presents a version of the injustice and structural violence of growing up ‘untouchable’ that provides valuable support for Ambedkar Buddhist narrative structures. Below, a similar version of injustice as outlined by Kamble (2008) is analyzed for its relevance to activist narratives of social justice. Like Moon’s narrative, the narrative below provide a retrospective vision of injustice as a means to projecting a vision of justice.

Baby Kamble’s The Prisons We Broke provides a rare women’s perspective of the indignities of growing up a Mahar in rural India. If autobiography as a genre of literature was traditionally absent from India due to a Hindu lack of metaphysical emphasis on individuality, as Gopal (2008) argues, then this absence could be observed at least ten-fold when it comes to any female expressions of self. But Kamble’s book is remarkable not just because it was written by a woman, but because it both exposes the difficulties of life as what some have called the “double dalit”<sup>445</sup> (i.e. dalit women) and it inspires activists to challenge socially constructed assumptions, be they conditioned by caste, class, or gender. This growing awareness of the multiple identities of Mahars has led to continual innovations in social mobilization. Through the proliferation of civil society organizations in India these multiple identities are given voice. Although some of the women activists of TBMSG have criticized the movement’s organization for not challenging the patriarchal assumption of Indian society, TBMSG activists seems to be more aware of such gendered assumptions than average Indians. Still, ordained TBMSG

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<sup>445</sup> Personal Discussions with TBMSG activists – see footnote #384, above.

women have begun to develop their own trusts to help low caste women help themselves. On a visit to the *Arya Tara Mahila Trust*, a registered charity that was formed by TBMSG women Dharamcharinis, one can see pictures of Ambedkar's first wife, Ramabai, alongside Savitribai Phule (as opposed to the ubiquitous pictures of Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule found elsewhere in TBMSG movement offices and Ambedkar dalit homes). Baby Kamble's work is an inspiration to these women and as such radicalizes many new activists into the movement.<sup>446</sup>

Like Moon (2000), Kamble (2008) weaves what Rege (2006) has called testimonies into a narrative structure that forces activists to re-live their own childhood and attempt to mediate their personal experiences of discrimination and identity conversion with those of the movement. Like the activist narratives encountered above, Kamble's story veers back and forth between activists as past victims and activists as Ambedkarite Buddhist converts. The ambiguity expressed in the multiple identities of formerly 'untouchable' activists creates what Tarrow (1998) calls "political opportunities"<sup>447</sup> in which activists become keen to mobilize and organize. Though seemingly mundane, the stories that Kamble weaves together are exemplars of activists' storylines; they outline the trials and tribulations of an identity as victim and the hope and aspirations of a newly created identity as Buddhist.

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<sup>446</sup> In July of 2008, Jambudvipa Trust hired its first woman activist to join its paid team of movement activists. In informal conversations many women activists cite Kamble as an inspiration.

<sup>447</sup> Tarrow (1998), 71.

Take as an example of this weaving of difficulties and aspirations the childhood story she tells about entering the Ram temple at Shankar market.<sup>448</sup> After an extensive orientation in which Kamble introduces the reader to both school No. 5 and the ten to twelve Mahar girls who attend this largely Brahmin school, Kamble describes how the Brahmin girls visit the nearby Ram Temple during their recess. This remembrance is problematized through the jealous envy with which Kamble describes the Brahmin girls as compared to her and her dalit friends. “Dressed in nice long skirts and blouses, with flowers in their hair and their fair skins glowing, to us they looked very beautiful, flitting around like colourful butterflies. We were like fiery gadflies burning for vengeance.”<sup>449</sup> From such statements one can see the deep psychological morass that these dalits found themselves in, but juxtaposed with the dialogue and actions that follows we see the burgeoning of a new sense of identity as well. The dalit girls, Kamble included, eventually decide to go take a look at the temple. This decision is not arrived at hastily, but rather via a sort of on-going theological debate, in which after one girl argues that polluting the gods will unleash a terrible and unknown wrath, and another responds: “Stop it! That’s rubbish. Had these gods been real, do you think our Ambedkar would have challenged them?”<sup>450</sup> This still common debate among particularly rural dalits acts as a signifier to link a past identity of dalit as victim with a future identity of dalit as rational Buddhist. Such a linkage cannot be overlooked as unimportant to dalit activist

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<sup>448</sup> This narrative appears in Chapter 12 of *The Prisons We Broke*, pages 129-132 and Kamble begins this chapter with the statement “I am a product of the Ambedkar movement” (125).

<sup>449</sup> Kamble (2008), 129-30.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 130.

mobilization and TBMSG members as both dalit and Buddhist activists gravitate toward such linkages. Kamble's story, which continues with the girls orchestrating a well-planned foray into the Ram temple, provides fodder for TBMSG movements' activist to use the past as a means to work for an ideal. The recourse to multiple identities in such young activist stories creates opportunities to envision new conceptual combinations of social justice by highlighting the ambiguities of being dalit.

Like the broad range of activists narratives shared above, Kamble's narrative recasts past experience as social protest. Young girls' curiosity to see the forbidden god Ram becomes, in re-telling, a protest against Brahmin control. Once in the temple the six girls, upon seeing the eyes of the god's guards, become terrified that "the god has sent demons after us" and describe themselves as "easily fitted there like cockroaches in a corner."<sup>451</sup> The positioning of themselves as unworthy and polluted is compared with the Brahmin priest as "a god"<sup>452</sup> who saves them by kicking them out of the temple upon hearing their screams of terror. These conflicting social positions, unquestioned during the original event, are thereby questioned in the event's retelling. In much the same way that Haresh only later comes to see the structural violence inherent in the responses to those he surveys in the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake, Kamble, too, in re-telling this story comes to see the roots of her own activism in the story of her childhood foray into the Ram temple. In fact the coda to this story indeed exposes the importance of this revelation for Kamble's own thinking. She writes: "That was my first active participation

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 131.

in Baba's movement."<sup>453</sup> Kamble's simple and elegant re-telling of her childhood story acts as a bridge connecting the archetype of Ambedkar to the psychological dissonance created by both discrimination and the multiple identities that are socially constructed as a result.

### ***5.5 Conclusion: Activist Narratives, Self and Community, Victim and Buddhist***

This chapter has provided exemplars of TBMSG storytelling practices from an activist perspective. Activists of the TBMSG understand their work as inseparable from the experiences of their community and have constructed their social justice ideal around the rhetoric of uplifting the community. At the same time there exists among TBMSG activists an underlying moral impetus for this rhetorical focus on the community - - an inward focus on a Buddhist self. It is in the interaction between self and community that activists' narratives build claims of social justice. As an important recurrent theme among movement activists such connections and contradictions between self and others provide a canvas on which to paint both past injustice and future visions of justice. Taking account of such recurrent themes is important in assisting movement actors to reflect on long-term goals and visions. The narratives analyzed in this chapter speak to the contextually dependent social justice that has evolved through the creation of ambiguity between the multiple identities and social positions of dalits, Mahars, Buddhists, and Ambedkarites. This ambiguity, though a source of psychological dissonance within activist selves, is also a source mobilization among them. Activists'

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 132. Baba, is of course a reference to Dr. Ambedkar.

mix of references to dalit, Mahar, Buddhist, and Ambedkarite cultural identities support a sense of progress, but it is not always clear among activists as to where they are progressing.

Similar to the leadership narratives analyzed above (see Chapter 4), the activist narratives analyzed herein are connected to each other by the fact that, in each, injustice provides a structure with which to understand the structures and functions of social justice. More pessimistic than the leadership narratives analyzed, these activist narratives focus on the ideal as the complete absence of the real. But, from the analysis of activists' narratives it is not always clear that TBMSG's social justice ideals are either uniformly understood within the movement community or constitutive of a clear vision. Further, the real or socially constructed reality that activists face is often assumed to be homogeneous. As Gil (1998) has argued "social change activists need to differentiate short-range goals or emergency measures from long-range goals."<sup>454</sup> In the case of TBMSG activists it is not always clear that they are aware of the need to do this and/or if their understandings of the real and ideal would allow them to do so. Amitamati's story (from the beginning of this chapter) illustrates this point well. In arguing that a Buddhist identity can be the means to overcome the victim-hood of oppression, Amitamati seems more concerned with the short-term reality of the oppression of her professional predicament than with long-term conceptions of what constitutes the socially just. While the evaluative statements of activists like Amitamati point to a future projection of

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<sup>454</sup> Gil (1998), 33.

justice, this projection is left vague and unbounded. It has been argued in this chapter that there is a degree of intentionality in this ambiguity, a point that will be returned to in Chapter Six.

Though not exhaustive of Ambedkar Buddhist conceptions of justice, injustice, or social justice, the activist narratives analyzed in this chapter have exposed a general pattern of collective contention, which underpins a broader conception of social justice. In this sense, TBMSG activist narratives provide a ‘thick description’ of the context for TBMSG’s conception of a social justice ideal. In so doing these narratives highlight the realities of being both pro-social Buddhist and psychologically frustrated victim at the same time. The ambiguity created by such juxtaposing of sub-group identities is both effective short-term and problematic long-term. In the short-term activist recourse to injustice narratives mobilizes low-castes around a sense of anger, while combining this sense of anger with a sense of hope in Buddhism creates a set of answers to immediate issues - - for example self-help through education will bring immediate social change. But in the long-term, activists do not seem to have fully considered the difficulties they may face in trying to decouple people’s hurt from hope. In both the dialogue on caste and the formal interviews conducted with activists, the ease with which activists mediated between victim and Buddhist identities was apparent, but an ability or desire to distinguish the two was often difficult for these same activists. In order to construct a well-conceived vision of social justice TBMSG member’s aspirations need to be explored outside of the confines of just past injustice and reparation. The dialogue workshop that I created and facilitated was aimed at doing this exploration with an appreciative inquiry

approach in mind, so as to focus on what could be rather than what has been wrong. It is in this dialectic between the expression of injustice and the expression of a new Buddhist identity that the ideal of social change is envisioned by TBMSG activists. The identities, positions, and power relations of this dialectic need further and continual exploration. This analysis of activist narratives, like leaders' narratives, constitutes a beginning of such an exploratory process and provides the keys to draw out the connections between TBMSG's practices and constructions of social justice.

In numerous interviews with TBMSG leader and activist Mangesh Dahiwale it was clear that he sees his life work within the framework of developing an Ambedkar Buddhist understanding of social justice and in the process empowering a broad-ranging peace-building process among all castes. While some, including Mangesh, have argued that dissecting the movement into leaders and activists is unhelpful, the narratives we have analyzed in chapters four and five seem to indicate that with different levels of responsibility within the movement there is some relative importance attached to the social position and authority from which actors make their claims. Despite the fact that this chapter has analyzed some exemplary activist narratives in order to both further contextualize the social justice commitments of Ambedkar Buddhists and provide fuller naming of the identities and social positions dominant in these narratives, it may still be criticized for the partially false dichotomy that it creates by separating leaders from activists or for its reliance on a relatively small sample of narratives to make a claim for a general sense of collective social justice. On the other hand, such a dichotomy has served the purpose of enumerating the themes of TBMSG's conception of justice and

highlighting the problems inherent in the movement's own attempts at both naming and realizing social justice. In addition, the reliance on these particular stories has privileged the, often sidelined, voice of Ambedkar dalit activists and one movement's leaders. The next chapter will take up a discussion of what these narratives have exposed about any attempt to make activists' and leaders' ideals real.

## CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHOSEN NARRATIVES – MAKING THE IDEAL REAL

[Traditional] theories imply a dialectic between mental maps and the physical world – between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real.’ The structure of the physical world is continuous, while the structure of mental maps is discontinuous. Reality flows; the ideal is fixed. Maps falsify reality; reality challenges maps.<sup>455</sup>

Having spent Chapters Four and Five outlining and analyzing the social justice narratives of Ambedkar Buddhist leaders and activists, this chapter is intended to ground<sup>456</sup> a vision of the TBMSG social justice ideal.<sup>457</sup> Movement activists, though acutely aware of the work of Dr. Ambedkar and other social theorists, continually express their difficulty with not only envisioning the socially just society, but also simultaneously assisting a diversity of dalit communities to proactively do the same. Movement leaders

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<sup>455</sup> Krohn-Hansen (1994), 372.

<sup>456</sup> Here ‘ground’ is intended to imply the creation of an understanding of TBMSG’s social justice ideal which will provide a foundation upon which to build on the broader implications of the connection between justice and peace-building.

<sup>457</sup> While the terminology of real and ideal may carry a very Western significance (especially in relation to time - Indian culture has traditionally held a much more cyclical view of time than the linear view of time understood in the West), the leaders and activists of the TBMSG do use such terminology. Activists and leaders talk of creating an ideal society in which practicing Buddhists are in control and caste mindsets do not exist. While my use of the concept of an ideal might be more broadly conceived than many in the TBMSG membership, it is intended to relate to TBMSG activists’ and leaders’ expressions of the ideal as much as is possible from an outsiders’ perspective.

and activists, though rarely forthcoming with their uncertainty<sup>458</sup> about social justice or its application for contemporary society, do exhibit an implicit hesitancy in the narrative structures they deploy. As a continual balancing of both injustice narratives and a socially constructed identity of newly converted Buddhists, the narrative structures of TBMSG activists and leaders expose both competition and confusion over the creation of a unified Ambedkar Buddhist conception of social justice. Still, through reflection on the key themes evident in both leader and activist narratives a realistic understanding of movement members' social justice praxis can be exposed and further explored. This chapter focuses on making TBMSG's social justice ideal operative, as well as, exploring this ideal's relation to Buddhist conversion as a response to the reality of injustice variously defined as discrimination, oppression, and social stratification. It is in the dialectic between the expression of an identity of injustice and the expression of a new Buddhist identity that the ideal of social change is constructed by TBMSG leaders and activists. Just like this identity dialectic, a broader dialectic between an idealized future and the realities of the past, is also exposed through the analysis of the narrative structures of TBMSG leaders and activists. In the identities, positions, and power relations of TBMSG members this dialectic between the 'real' and the 'ideal' is not just revealed, but it becomes open for utilization by peace-building practitioners.

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<sup>458</sup> Though many of the TBMSG leaders and activists at the Manuski Center expressed a sense that the movement as a whole did not have a very good sense of what social justice looked like, the Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis involved more directly with the TBMSG movement seemed less concerned that such lack of a clear conception was a problem, and indeed some expressed no sense that these was any uncertainty in the TBMSG social justice vision.

Invariably, in realizing social justice one must begin, as was done in Chapters Four and Five, with a focus on the pervasiveness of the negative reality of injustice. The problem with such a beginning is that, often, focus on the negative reality of numerous experiences of injustice leads to an inability to look past these traumatic experiences to develop a unified vision of a positive ideal. Such a reality has plagued the TBMSG movement much like it has many other social movements before it. It is for this reason that the dialogue on caste that I facilitated was focused on a process of Appreciative Inquiry (AI).<sup>459</sup> As a method of inquiry AI attempts to address the past with a focus towards the future. Just as the Krohn-Hansen's (1994) quote above reveals about the anthropology of violence, any description entails a set of conflicting subjective assumptions about past happenings and future aspirations. Such a primary past-future/ideal-real dialectic is exposed through the analysis of TBMSG leaders' and activists' narrative structures. As Krohn-Hansen (1994) further articulates about this dialectic between the ideal and the real, it "leads to maps being altered to fit the world, and the world being altered to fit the map."<sup>460</sup> In a sense then, we need to develop a new language to overcome this dialectic. But, this 'new' language necessarily relies on the language conventions of the past. It is in the analysis and reflection of these conventions that clarity about a movement's social justice vision gets created and negotiated. During such social construction and negotiation processes ambiguity provides dynamic

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<sup>459</sup> Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a system of asking questions that "focuses on the generative and life-giving forces in the system, the things we want to increase" [Watkins and Mohr (2001), 14]. See Appendix L for a sense of how AI was used in the caste dialogue workshop that was held at Manuski Center in July 2008.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 372.

opportunities for movement actors narrating for change. It is toward developing a better understanding of this process of the making the TBMSG ideal real that this chapter is geared.

In making the ideal real the often hidden realities of structural violence are made public. Such public reckoning of structural violence is neither pretty, nor easy, as many groups stand to oppose attempts to bring structural injustices to light. Further, the amorality induced by a thousands-year-old caste structure has left a deep legacy of psychological pain that condition certain approaches to social action. As Loy (2008) quotes from John Ralston Saul's The Doubter's Companion:

Immorality is doing wrong of our own volition. Amorality is doing it because a structure or an organization expects us to do it. Amorality is thus worse than immorality because it involves denying our responsibility and therefore our existence as anything more than an animal.<sup>461</sup>

Caste structures have conditioned a lack of individual responsibility, which, in turn, have created a collective identity crisis that has positioned social actors in dualistic opposition either for or against caste oppression or believing or disbelieving its very existence. TBMSG's ideal must overcome such dualistic amorality and the first step to doing this is to reflectively expose the structural violence inherent in the system. In realizing the interconnected nature of their current predicament, TBMSG activists at the Manuski Center are attempting to re-negotiate the conditioned dualism of 'us' versus 'them,' but, they struggle to do so while also overcoming a predominate public sentiment that structural violence no longer exists (especially post constitutional legal safeguards against

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<sup>461</sup> Quoted in Loy (2008), 88.

caste discrimination and post liberalization of the Indian economy). These activists are only in the preliminary stages of a very long and complex process.

Given the narratives that have been scrutinized in the preceding chapters using a Labovian structural analysis, some direction can be gleaned for this very long process of exposing and eradicating structural violence. But, what does TBMSG's social justice framework for engaging in such peace-building look like, and how does their complete social re-positioning of a collective self inform the ideal? In attempting to develop answers to these broad questions, the chapter that follows aims to achieve the following three objectives:

- 1.) Innumerate the key themes inherent in the analysis of TBMSG member's own justice narrations;
- 2.) Comparatively analyze the TBMSG narratives collected via reference to these key themes, and;
- 3.) Attempt to ground TBMSG's social justice ideal in a way that can expose broader categories and implications of justice in peace-building.

Both broad and ambitious these objectives will provide a deeper texture to the powerful stories analyzed in the preceding chapters and set a scope for future research to be described in the dissertation's final chapter.

In the process of pursuing the three objectives above this chapter will outline the broad sketches of a theoretical model for use in understanding and engaging justice/injustice narratives and exploring the subsequent relationships between identity, power, and social positioning that dominate the construction of movement storylines. This model, a graphic representation of which is found in Appendix K, will, in turn,

expose practical insights about the processes of social justice creation and the articulation of the ideal of justpeace. In short, a comparison of TBMSG justice narratives allows one to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal. By stripping away the layers of Ambedkar Buddhist's reality a pattern of experiential social interaction is revealed which links the real with the ideal and begins to fill the gap between them. Like the threads of a burlap sack this pattern has both a utility and a dynamic elasticity of potentiality. By mapping reality using TBMSG's own narrative creations, patterns can be exposed and a basic framework for TBMSG's social justice commitments is revealed.

Attention to such a model may seem like a pedantic academic endeavor to those most affected by institutionalized injustice. Despite the frequent invisibility of structural violence and injustice to those at the top of a social system, to those at the bottom such structural violence is omnipresent and real. As one political philosopher writes, "in the poorest countries, people do not need a theory to tell them that there is something wrong with [the] world."<sup>462</sup> Yet, the practical utility of a model which demystifies the often hidden threads of structural violence cannot be overlooked as simply theory-building. Rather, such a model can provide some practical grounds for building active response to injustice. For both those that are seeking to redress the injustices of the caste system and those that believe the caste system is a thing of the past, modeling provides a means to

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<sup>462</sup> Barry (2005), 3.

practically and methodologically utilize narrative meaning.<sup>463</sup> Models, by providing clarity to the patterns and elements of justpeace, do have practical uses. They provide clarity to complex and dynamic reality and without such clarity, the ideal remains simply an ideal; the mental maps do nothing to explain the world. A basic model is, therefore, needed for those that wish to effectively do something about the reality of structural violence, oppression, and injustice. Without a model the oppressed have no practical understanding of (no map or framework for) how to overcome what their experience tells them they know is wrong. While TBMSG's activism is both continually and proactively building this map, the movement remains in search of direction towards their social justice ideal.

### ***6.1 The Key Themes of TBMSG Justice Narratives***

Religious movements survive, and indeed thrive, on ambiguity. As on-going attempts to demystify the mysterious and win adherents, religious movements beckon back to their ancient foundations by attempting to revive a positive narrative of the traditions' history, while at the same time constructing a future narrative that is completely new and ideal. In order to position themselves comfortably between these seemingly disconnected and ambiguous narrative storylines, religious movements often

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<sup>463</sup> Rothbart (2004) in his introduction to Modeling: A Gateway to the Unknown, a Work by Rom Harre outlines three ways in which narrative is, indeed, like a model. First, storytellers, like model builders, are in control of the processes of construction. Second, narratives, like models, rely on some conception of past experience/events. And third, both narratives and models have a future "projective dimension" [Rothbart (2004), xi]. The important element of such a comparison is time. Time is a crucial element in both models and narratives. In models, time shapes what is known and unknown, in narratives time is as crucial an element to understanding meaning as plot or characters.

mediate between what philosophers have called conventional and absolute truth.<sup>464</sup> In the case of the TBMSG movement one example of this balancing between conventional and absolute truth occurs in an Ambedkar Buddhist reading of Buddhist history that identifies early Buddhists as the original ‘untouchable’ outcastes of traditional society. Such a reading allows for the Buddhist way life to be seen as liberating in the here and now and on the ‘right’ side of justice in a conventional sense. In this way, both justice and injustice can be said to exist conventionally, while, at the same time, the broad-based ideals of justice, injustice, and social justice, are also understood to be created only through the soteriology of the Buddha’s dharma (an ideal). Though comparative religion scholars have called such historicity into question,<sup>465</sup> religious movements’ reliance on understanding the conventional world via reference to absolute truths often leads to the assumption that ideals cannot be questioned. This reliance on a conception of reality that can be understood only by reference to absolutes has the further effect of reinforcing hardened identities. The hermeneutics of absolute truth mark the past as contended territory in the present and makes the clarification of any ideal a moving target.

As Keller (2006) has correctly realized in his own reappraisal of the link between justice and peace, “understanding the past is the first step towards understanding

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<sup>464</sup> Conventional truth being what we know to be true from our primary experience (i.e. this chair exists) and absolute truth being that which we, as humans, cannot fully know. In Buddhism this is sometime referred to as the two truths doctrine, and is often credited to Nagarjuna (sometimes referred to as the St. Augustine of the Buddhist tradition), Mahayana Buddhism’s most important philosopher, but probably dates back to even earlier philosophers of the Abhidharma tradition [See Williams (2000, 1989)].

<sup>465</sup> See Musuzawa (2005), 134. Musuzawa writes: “This all-important notion that the historical Buddha challenged and ultimately rejected Vedic authority presided over by the Brahman priesthood – just as Luther had rejected papal authority – appears to be based upon rather modest evidence” (134). See also Williams (2000).

ourselves.”<sup>466</sup> It is with just such a perspective that TBMSG members attempt to negotiate the present and lay the seeds of transformation for the future. Though subtle, this vision of Buddhism as, from its historical core, emancipative is crucial to the narrative structure of TBMSG leaders and activists. Buddhism, in the TBMSG conception, is a “methodology of awakening to reality”<sup>467</sup> and this awakening is understood from both a personal and collective perspective. Neither fully Theravadan nor fully Mahayanan TBMSG’s brand of Buddhism is a hybrid collection of praxis ideals.<sup>468</sup> This Buddhism is both path to personal liberation and means to a new social vision, one that represents a transformation of the conventional truths about society; a making the ideal real. Not only is such a hermeneutic of Buddhist liberation so foundational to TBMSG’s narratives of their work, but such a vision of Buddhism also forms the foundation for a set of key themes running through the discourse of TBMSG movement leaders and activists.

It is not surprising, therefore, that while the evaluative statements of activists like Sameer (Chapter One) or Amitamati (Chapter Five) or leaders like Lokamitra or Mangesh (Chapter Four) point to a future projection of justice, this projection is left vague and unbounded. Whether intentional or unintentional such evaluative statements serve to justify what Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) have called “identity justice”<sup>469</sup> – a

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<sup>466</sup> Keller (2006), 49.

<sup>467</sup> See Rahula (1959).

<sup>468</sup> This hybrid hermeneutic of Buddhism stems directly from the founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), Sangarakshita, who was indeed ordained in the Theravada tradition, but was then allowed to practice independent of his ordinal master (a Mahayana tradition). See Subhuti (1995), 39.

<sup>469</sup> See Rothbart and Korostelina (2006).

complete blending of a groups' identity with its calls for justice. Such ambiguity serves the purpose of establishing and mobilizing a broadly-defined Buddhist identity, but also reinforces in-group/out-group positioning, which, in turn, reinforces and re-constitutes power asymmetries within society.<sup>470</sup> The degree of intentional ambiguity in TBMSG narratives and discourse reinforces a TBMSG belief system in which, injustice is both known from experience, and the ideal of social justice is accepted as, at least partially, unknowable. As the TBMSG vision of social justice has increasingly been assumed to be an unknowable absolute, less and less attention has been paid to collective reflective analysis of justice as a concept. At the same time, more and more energy has been expended on the creation of a new Buddhist identity. This combination has left TBMSG's vision of social justice ambiguous and unbounded.

While TBMSG movement narratives prioritize patterns of injustice, attempts to articulate ideals for a just society seem to be far more elusive for TBMSG movement members. As TBMSG's conception of social justice becomes more and more difficult to articulate as identity positions are re-constituted and hardened, it is also becomes more difficult for members to self-reflectively analyze either on their role in the re-production of the system or on their role in creating system-wide change. Such a dynamic cycle is, therefore, reaffirming of the movement's own assumptions and makes the movement resistant to radical reconsiderations of strategies and tactics. But, since such conceptions are articulated through both leaders' and activists' statements of narrative evaluation it is

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<sup>470</sup> Many Ambedkar Buddhists complained to me that now when they self-identify as Buddhists they are discriminated against and automatically assumed to be dalit.

through close attention to these that developing an understanding of how to make the ideal real must begin. The activists of the Manuski Center do seem to realize this dynamic cycle and have begun to brainstorm ways to constructively engage it, but this is a slow process, only in its formative stages.

Religious movements provide a unique opportunity to provide a moral basis to underscore the critical elements of a social justice ideal, and to understand the processes by which that ideal is constructed and deployed. Buddhism provides an ideal way to both engage the ‘other,’ but also value the ‘other’ in oneself. By providing the shared space to ask the reflective question of what a fully analyzed and repositioned social justice reality would look like, TBMSG has the cultural currency to help co-construct the ideal. While a primary doctrine of Buddhism is anatta (no-self), a belief in this doctrine, coupled with an understanding of co-dependent origination (i.e. that nothing has a first cause), leads to the logical realization that all sentient beings are interdependent. But as Sallie King appropriately asks in her reading of Thich Nhat Hanh’s activism during the Vietnam War: “the question at stake is how it might be possible to reconcile Mahayana non-dualism (here, unity with oppressed and oppressor) with concrete social action.”<sup>471</sup> King’s response to her own rhetorical question is that Buddhists’ “opposition to suffering is a noncompromisable absolute to which all other concerns are subordinate.”<sup>472</sup> It is for just such a reason that TBMSG activists can claim to be with both the oppressed dalit and the oppressive Brahmin. But, the promotion of such an application requires putting this

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<sup>471</sup> King (1996), 346.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., (1996), 346.

noncompromisable absolute into practice. Here, I believe that TBMSG misses an opportunity to work for structural change. Despite TBMSG deeply held belief in alleviating suffering, there exists in the TBMSG movement an all too common tendency to focus on only the suffering of those within their community.

The fact is movement leaders and activists do not consistently practice what they preach. For one, very few Brahmins, or high-castes, are engaged in the work of the movement on any level. This, in itself, does not sustain the critique of TBMSG as non-dual in theory but not in practice, but it does highlight the difficulties of putting a noncompromisable absolute, such as non-duality, into practice. In other words, despite the inclusive social justice vision that is supported by TBMSG's belief in Buddhist doctrine, in practice it is, often, much harder to give life to such inclusiveness. This is true for a number of reasons. For one, despite a foundational belief in non-dualism, such noncompromisable compassion requires discipline. Many TBMSG leaders I spoke with argued that this discipline comes from knowledge of the Buddhist dharma, and that, further, many Ambedkar Buddhists just do not have the knowledge of Buddhist dharma that is necessary for such discipline. Movement members' consensus seems to be that TBMSG has the courage of moral leadership in a strong cadre of dharmacharis and dharmacharinis, but lacks a strong enough community of practice to mobilize the

widespread social action needed to consistently model this non-dualist absolute.<sup>473</sup>

Though the TBMSG movement consistently expressed a collective consciousness of the value of Buddhist practice, this consciousness alone is not enough to realize such an ideal.

Having begun to realize the need for this collective and reflective co-construction of the ideal, many Manuski Center activists have taken steps to create the space for inter-caste dialogue.<sup>474</sup> Yet, their internal analysis of the key themes of their own justice narratives is just in its beginning stages. Further, unable or unwilling to branch out to other stratifications of society with competing interests and worldviews, the activists of the Manuski Center are only engaged in intra-caste dialogue, or projects that encourage interaction between only the lowest-caste sub-groups within society.<sup>475</sup> Below some key TBMSG movement themes, which have reoccurred during both the data collection and structural analysis of narratives, have been outlined. The themes identified here are ones that have reoccurred in movement interaction and represent important narrative threads

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<sup>473</sup> Further, a more secular rationale proffered by movement leaders for why such inter-caste engagement has not happened is that low-castes are not psychologically ready to engage given a historical legacy of injustice and oppression. While both these arguments certainly represents a strong and legitimate argument for why the TBMSG has not engaged higher-castes in a more robust way, it does seem to me to be at least minimally presumptive to assume that the Ambedkar Buddhist community is either inadequately prepared in the Buddhist dharma or psychologically incapable of productive, assertive, and non-aggressive engagement with ‘others’ from higher-caste backgrounds. It is my contention that such contact, if done correctly and with proper preparation of all parties, can build both confidence and knowledge in dalits and understanding in higher-caste communities.

<sup>474</sup> As mentioned previously, these inter-caste workshops have involved low-caste sub-groups only. Nonetheless, these interactions do represent an important first step as TBMSG moves toward working to build bridges between communities and could easily serve as a foundation for future work with higher castes.

<sup>475</sup> When asked why they are not in any formal dialogue with higher-caste Hindus many TBMSG leaders and activists responded “Why should we talk to people who do not want to talk to us?” (Various interviews with TBMSG informants).

for movement members. These themes will, therefore, act as a map upon which to return to a discussion of the common elements of identity, positioning, and power that require closer attention for either the co-construction of a TBMSG social justice ideal, or for the use of TBMSG as a case to develop a normative framework for justice in peace-building. While providing broad, and seemingly simplistic, generalities these themes provide a snapshot of the movement's core concerns and provide some sense of movement aspirations at this point in time.

1. Caste Discrimination Abounds in Modern India and a Primary Need to Focus on the Psychological Aspects of Caste's Legacy Exists.

Without necessarily returning to the introductory quantifications and studies of caste presented in Chapter One, the stories encountered in this research expose how prevalent instances of caste discrimination remain in Indian society today. Every dalit encountered during the course of this research expressed their own story of oppression or discrimination (including dalits that did not consider themselves, in any way, associated with TBMSG). Whether an actual incident, or a description of the psychological legacy of being labeled an 'untouchable,' without exception the identity of victim was central to informants' self-conception. Nevertheless, the leaders and activists that were interviewed both formally and informally are representative of low castes' fulfillment of middle-to-upper class urban aspirations. This fact is telling in that these informants consistently articulated stories of injustice despite the fact that one could assume that with their resources, personal accomplishments, sense of assertion, and urban existence they are

probably less likely to have experiences of blatant discrimination than their rural, poor, and under-educated caste equals. This is indeed the story these informants themselves tell. Throughout the research period, consistently voice was given to the fact that “things are much worse in the village.”<sup>476</sup> In addition, informants’ initial reticence to discuss their personal experiences of discrimination was as much a function of their feeling that their own story of injustice was minor in comparison to others, as it was a function of a lack of long-term rapport between interviewer and interviewee. Despite these initial obstacles to the collection of injustice narratives, the TBMSG members encountered all had some story in which discrimination or oppression had affected their lives in some profound way. The expression of these stories also always hinted at the psychological toll it had taken on the storyteller and his/her wider community.

Anurag’s short narrative from Appendix H (discussed in Chapter Five; section 5.3.1) epitomizes this recurring sentiment. Calling for the need to assert themselves as dalits, Anurag argues that what is typical is that “generally people hid[e] that they are from a scheduled caste.”<sup>477</sup> Other activists voiced difficulty in finding “the confidence to communicate”<sup>478</sup> or the reality of being “broken completely,”<sup>479</sup> a sentiment that has become synonymous with the concept of dalit (i.e. not simply downtrodden, but also one who is broken psychologically). One activist, in explaining that he had had no single example of direct discrimination meted against him, explained: “But certainly when I was

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<sup>476</sup> Informal interviews with numerous TBMSG leaders/activists.

<sup>477</sup> Fishbowl dialogue with Anurag, July 3, 2008, see Appendix H.

<sup>478</sup> Formal interview with Haresh Dalvi, see Appendix I.

<sup>479</sup> Formal interview with Haresh Dalvi, see Appendix J.

growing up there was some sort of inferiority complex as well in me. That I was from a backward community... scheduled caste community...and I was not able to speak very clearly in school.”<sup>480</sup> All these examples point to the immediacy of the need to develop what Taylor, Bougie, and Caouette (2003) call “a stable template against which the individual can articulate a personal identity.”<sup>481</sup> It is a Buddhist identity which is this template and from which a new sense of psychological self-worth is grown. All levels of the TBMSG are quite aware of this and do not hesitate to state the relative importance of this need.

TBMSG members seem to have realized that only a ‘new’ identity will address this immediate need for the creation of a stable collective social psychology. Though TBMSG organization around Buddhism does not discount an identity as victims, it does psychologically complicate it. As Sen (2006) has written of identity:

There are two distinct issues here. First, the recognition that identities are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others. Second, a person has to make choices – explicitly or by implication – about what relative importance to attach, in a particular context, to divergent loyalties and priorities that may compete for precedence.<sup>482</sup>

TBMSG activists’ consistently voiced need to reflect on the psychological legacy of caste oppression highlights an understanding of the need to address the sociological root causes of a continually re-constructed caste system in order to break the vicious psychological cycle of oppression. Buddhist identity takes precedence because it provides a foundation from which to address this root cause. With each successive generation a subordinate

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<sup>480</sup> Formal Interview with Priyadarshi Telang, July 4, 2008.

<sup>481</sup> Taylor, Bougie, and Caouette (2003), 197.

<sup>482</sup> Sen (2006), 19.

psychology helps to construct a socially oppressive structure. For those of the TBMSG, it is this more than anything that needs rectifying; it is this psychological legacy which forms the core of the root and allows caste-ism to abound.

2. Unjust Structures of Power are Insidious and Invasive in the Lives of Ambedkar Buddhists and the Only Means to Overcome them is to Realize our Interconnectedness.

The above referenced collective feelings of inferiority and psychology of low self-esteem is both a direct result and a root cause of the invasive power structuring of society which a system like caste creates and supports through habitual reinforcement of certain norms and customs. Systematic oppression and calculated discrimination breeds power-over, thereby limiting the opportunities to create structural change. But, as Sharp (2005) reminds us, “Power relationships are not fixed and unchangeable. Instead, the power capacities of the State and other organizations of society are variable...”<sup>483</sup> The challenge for TBMSG activists is to overcome the very real power structures that exist in Indian society without completely de-constructing all of society’s social norms. But, often, these power structures seem like insurmountable obstacles, and extricating them from more desirable societal norms seems impossible. Again, it is in the creation of a new identity, as Buddhist, that TBMSG members see a means to triumphing over the weight of the ubiquitous asymmetrical power relationships they daily encounter. But, more than simply the creation of a Buddhist identity, what is needed to overcome the

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<sup>483</sup> Sharp (2005), 27.

dominant power asymmetries in society is a way to engage the ‘other’ without disenfranchising or decoupling themselves from the ‘other.’ Such interconnectedness can be found in Buddhist doctrine, but the work of putting that doctrinal absolute of non-dualism into practice remains, at least partially, elusive for TBMSG members.

### 3. The Problems Faced are both Intra and Inter-communal

In complaining that “only one community was part of the participation”<sup>484</sup> in dalit activism in general, activists consistently voiced a sense that intra-caste rivalries are as problematic to organizing for social change as inter-caste rivalries. Further, competition between low-caste groups was consistently voiced as a corollary problem for low-caste mobilization for action. The structure of a system of graded inequality, in which you do not simply have high and low, but rather high, higher, highest, and low, lower, lowest, creates layers of complexity in communal relations. While TBMSG leaders and activists realize both the internal and external conflict that exists within dalit communities, attempts at creating social change has been largely focused internally (i.e. among various dalit communities). While such internal focus is important for both the organization and mobilization of social change the inclusive reality such internal focus creates can further complicate the realization of social change. TBMSG’s limited exposure outside of dalit communities, in turn, limits the movements’ ability to influence inter-caste communication and relationship change.

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<sup>484</sup> Formal Interview with Priyadarshi Telang, July 4, 2008.

When asked about why those outside dalit communities were not being directly engaged through dialogue or some other form of direct and coordinated contact, Lokamitra responded: “we are not there yet.”<sup>485</sup> There are, at least, two dominant rationales which explain such a sentiment: one is a feeling that too much work remains to be done to overcome the intra-communal dalit psychology of caste oppression to engage in contact with those that have benefited from such a system, the other is based on a feeling of anger that many feel about their continued social exclusion - - i.e. if high-castes will not accept dalits why should dalits try to engage with them? In other words, there is both a fear of being collectively ill-prepared psychologically to engage with the ‘other’ and a frustration over why dalits should be the ones that have to initiate engagement with those who have oppressed them and, indeed, still do not want to engage with them. Add to this, dalits’ own lack of a clear and unified sense of how to productively engage the ‘others’ who have collectively oppressed them and you have a perfect recipe for prolonged social conflict. It is my contention that for lasting change to occur both intra and inter-caste interaction across all levels of the caste system must be aggressively pursued and sustained.

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<sup>485</sup> Personal interaction with Lokamitra, October, 2007.

4. TBMSG's 'Religion' Affords a Rational Sociological Lens with which to Empower Identity, Social Re-positioning, and Equal Opportunity and, thus, Provides a Multifaceted Response to the Problems of Caste.

From the perspective of many TBMSG leaders and activists, the Buddhism that they are actively promoting is not conceived of as a religion. Despite the theoretical difficulties inherent in parsing what constitutes 'religion,' such a perspective represents a realistic attempt to be inclusive – something that voluntary (also called 'universal') religions strive to be despite the exclusive nature of conversion experience. In the words of one activist, "Buddhism is not a religion it is a way of life."<sup>486</sup> This fits well with TBMSG activists' reliance on Ambedkar's social analysis of the root cause of the caste system as being rooted in the superstitions of Hinduism. Further, such a rationalistic focus provides a means to engage 'others' through reference to one's self as the primary condition for change. TBMSG activists are guided by a familiar moralism the foundation of which is that before change can be created in 'others,' one must first create change in oneself. Without debating the philosophical merits and de-merits that such a belief implies for Buddhists, who have a foundational doctrinal belief in anatta (no-self), for TBMSG activists the focus on self-perfection has a number of visible social movement advantages. Such a belief provides a rational means for movement members to ground frustration over slow progress towards transforming the caste system. A belief in self-transformation as foundational to social change also provides opportunity structures for transforming institutional oppression. In short, through organizing to improve the self,

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<sup>486</sup> Informal discussion with Mangesh Dahiwale, May, 2007.

social networks and skills are developed which can act as a resource for campaigns of social justice contention. Buddhism is just a vehicle in this organizing for self help.

From this perspective, Ambedkar's legacy is seen from its secular roots and Buddhism is used as an *upaya* (skillful means) to mobilize assertive and self-confident dalits to break the shackles of oppression. As one TBMSG leader and activist, in describing TBMSG's work, said to a group of American academics: "so we try to challenge those ideas, the 'so-called' religious ideas, which like, kind of, fit into the system and try to enslave the human mind."<sup>487</sup> Such evaluative descriptions of the movement's work attempt to position a Buddhist identity as important to not only mobilization, but both personal and societal transformation. Important to such a 'secular' conception of the movement (and this is to some extent a function of audience) is the need to position dalits in the lexicon of rights-activism. While this conception of the movement is much more prevalent among the young activists working in the Manuski Center, than among the older dharmacharis and dharmacharinis of the TBMSG, it does point to a certain practical rationality within the movement. This practical rationality sees religion as a useful means to organize and mobilize the oppressed to effectively create societal transformation. But, religion in this sense seems to epitomize Berger's postmodern idea of the "heretical imperative,"<sup>488</sup> in the sense that ultimately modern man is faced with a choice of which pre-modern traditions to affirm and which to reject. The Ambedkar Buddhism of TBMSG in providing a powerful solution to caste discrimination

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<sup>487</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007.

<sup>488</sup> Berger (1979), 60.

presents a choice to followers, which, in positioning them as heretics, leaves their construction of Buddhism open and unbounded. Such a liberal and post-modern perspective on Buddhism allows for a rational application of Buddhism for social change and avails a creative potential for eradicating caste.

5. Change, Though Slow, is Occurring and such Progress Must be Celebrated.

One generation perished but the next generation would be ready to serve mother earth and the monsters ruling over it. On the one side, there was the entire society, arrogant and insolent, enjoying wealth and comfort; and on the other side there were people dying without food, like fish out of water. But character, truth and morality among the oppressed did not die.<sup>489</sup>

The theme of slow progress that the above quote from Kamble's (2008) autobiographical journey out of poverty highlights is persistent in the Ambedkar dalit community. Mahar dalits' faith in progress and change is deep and enduring. Despite many of the obstacles to the creation of a justpeace for dalits which have been outlined above, most dalits questioned during this research voiced the belief that life has gotten better since Ambedkar's conversion. In interviewing a dalit family in *Dapodi*, Pune's largest slum, three generations of a single family expressed with universal agreement that life was better for the youngest teenage daughter of the family.<sup>490</sup> Consistently respondents expressed the belief that while direct discrimination has always been more prevalent in the village, this discrimination seemed to be dissipating and that this was due in large part to increased movement of people between the city and the village. One

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<sup>489</sup> Kamble (2008), 104.

<sup>490</sup> Informal interview with three generations of dalit women, Dapodi Slum, Pune, July 1, 2008.

urbanite recounted the story of returning to his village and refusing to pay for milk from a higher-caste woman that refused to sit and have tea with him and his family.<sup>491</sup> Stories of such nonviolent assertion of rights in the face of ingrained discrimination were prevalent among the well-educated respondents interviewed for this research. Such stories express an increased awakening of self-assertion and self-confidence among the more urban and elite segments of the Ambedkar dalit community, but they also represent a growing belief that change is increasingly possible.

India's economic liberalization in the 1990s had the effect of opening dalits to this potentiality for change (as well as the global world). With increased self-esteem and economic opportunities, dalits, as a whole, have steadily progressed since the 1950s, but post-liberalization this progress has been particularly marked. Citing Prasad and Kapurs' forthcoming research on economic impacts on caste currently being funded by The University of Pennsylvania Center for the Advanced Study of India, Emily Wax reports:

...survey results showed that discrimination is decreasing, at least in this village. In 1990, 88.1 percent of families questioned in Gaddopur [Uttar Pradesh] were seated separately during public dinners organized by upper castes. Now, only 30 percent said they were asked to sit apart.<sup>492</sup>

But such examples of progress are by no means universal among dalits, and much remains to be done even in the qualification as to what 'progress' itself means. Wax herself reported, not even a year earlier than the above quantification of progress, that "India may be booming, but not for all those who occupy the lowest rung of society."<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Informal interview with Dharmachari Vivekmitra, June 20, 2008.

<sup>492</sup> Wax, E., *The Washington Post* (August 31, 2008).

<sup>493</sup> Wax, E., *The Washington Post* (June 21, 2007).

Despite varied degrees of progress throughout India, what has indeed changed, in Maharashtra at least, is dalits' own sense of self and optimism. TBMSG taps into this spirit of self-assertion and optimism of post-liberalization India by actively promoting the social mobility of its diverse membership.<sup>494</sup> TBMSG activities to increase dalit social mobility add to an overall impression among Ambedkar dalits that progress is occurring and that dalits are taking an active role in creating it. But as more widespread than just within TBMSG circles, the sense of modern progress and optimism has swept across Indian dalit communities and appears as a main storyline in the emancipatory narrative and discourse of dalits of all stripes and regions.<sup>495</sup>

Cognizant of the power of a storyline of progress, TBMSG activists and leaders deploy co-extensive storylines and celebrate them at every possible instance. Whether it is Lokamitra proudly exclaiming “look at what we have done”<sup>496</sup> to encourage fellow activists at the Girls Hostel in Gorewada, Nagpur, or Amitamati (see Chapter Five; Section 5.2) narrating her own personal accomplishments as a medical doctor, progress is to be both regularly acknowledged and actively celebrated within the TBMSG community. But, despite the symbolic power of acknowledging and celebrating progress, the meaning of progress itself is rarely questioned. If TBMSG leaders and activists want to make the ideal real, a need exists to more critically approach the notion of progress.

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<sup>494</sup> Jambudvipa Trust and the Manuski Center are actively engaged in various projects to increase dalits social mobility – see the discussion in chapter one about the Manuski Center's work with Temp Solutions in Philadelphia, PA and Jambudvipa Trust's Jambhala project for the creation of right livelihoods.

<sup>495</sup> This fact may be most visible in the level of excitement that both the fourth term election mandate of Mayawati (a dalit) as the Chief Minister of India's most populous State, and the Obama victory in the 2008 U.S. presidential elections, have generated within dalit circles worldwide.

<sup>496</sup> Personal notes, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

Much like Mander (1991), they will need to not only learn to recognize the representations of the ideal, but also learn to critique mere representations in relation to what is real.<sup>497</sup> TBMSG's storyline of progress is useful for dalits (both psychologically and symbolically), but a more critical assessment of that 'progress' and its relation to TBMSG's social justice ideal is needed for social and structural change to take hold.

## ***6.2 Elements that Contextualize Justice and Construct a Social Justice Ideal***

While the above recurrent themes play a key role in constructing the TBMSG social justice ideal, the crucial question for TBMSG leaders and activists remains practical - how do we realize our constructed ideal? Like all social movements, within the TBMSG there is a diversity of experiences and interpretations of both the ideal and how to best implement it. Some think a strict focus on the Buddhist dharma is the only way, while others (such as those within the Manuski Center and Jambudvipa Trust) believe that TBMSG as a broad-based movement must be more aggressive and radical in its approach to social action. Though many TBMSG members realize the diversity of approaches, no systems or structure seems to be in place to develop a unified conception of, or action plan for, tapping the potential of such diversity. Faced with the question of how to overcome internal and external conflict over identity, power, and social position to build an inter-caste realization of their social justice ideal, TBMSG leaders and activists have not been able to effectively resource the diversity of their members' perspectives. Returning to the narrative structures of movement members, this section

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<sup>497</sup> Mander (1991) provides multiple modern examples of critiques on progress, the most memorable of which is his own social de-construction of a family trip to Disney's EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow) Center [Mander (1991), 152-157].

argues that movement actors' stories are confined by dominant conventions of storytelling and that, as a result, the realization of the TBMSG social justice ideal is hindered. Polletta (2006) calls these dominant conventions of storytelling "a popular theory of narrative and knowing, a narrative epistemology."<sup>498</sup> Such a theory of narrative knowing acts to maintain a set of boundary conditions for movement expressions of social justice. At the same time, such a narrative epistemology positions the movement as simultaneously real and ideal. While such narrative epistemology is institutionally specific to the TBMSG, at the same time it is more generally malleable to wider normative and cultural commitments. So, for example, a TBMSG members' narrative of victimization is imbued with a moralism that assumes that changing others begins with perfection of self, while at the same time it implies a ubiquity of suffering that 'fits' the normative landscape of modern Indian's engagement with the wider global society. Likewise, a narrative of progress toward an ideal of social justice is simultaneously a brief moment of rejoice, an opportunity for the self-reflective re-organization of TBMSG members' goals, and a nationalistic expression within a wider Indian context. Attention to the analysis of movement narratives exposes the layers of diversity involved in creating a practical theory of knowing. While narratives are embedded into any epistemology of change they are also constructive of a status quo. What Polletta (2006)

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<sup>498</sup> Polletta (2006), 111.

calls the “canonical story lines”<sup>499</sup> of knowing must, therefore, be deconstructed and transcended in order for social change to take place.

But, it is this ‘narrative epistemology’ that needs to first be grounded in the sense that knowledge of it can provide the foundation for practical attempts to create the ideal. Only once an awareness of a movement’s narrative epistemology is realized can a process of theory-building occur. TBMSG leaders and activists, as well as, conflict resolution practitioners in their pursuit of the creation of a social justice ideal must, therefore, attempt to grasp the narrative epistemology of movement actors so as to build theory for successful social change. In identifying the elements that contextualize justice for Ambedkar Buddhists, the processes of the social construction of a social justice ideal can be identified and, thereby, used for the transformation of society. Further, such identification makes transparent the power of agency. As Polletta (2006) cogently argues, “if the prevailing epistemological assumptions about how storytelling works make it difficult for members of a disadvantaged group to gain credibility, activists can set their sights on transforming those epistemologies.”<sup>500</sup> This section, in returning to a focus on identity, positioning, and power as important elements of justice in TBMSG narratives, is aimed at grounding a practice for making TBMSG’s social justice ideal, real. Given the key movement themes outlined above, such grounding involves a complex interplay among and between identity, positioning, and power. It is my contention that such a focus on practice can enhance the important contributions that this

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 113.

research has already provided to an understanding how injustice narratives shape the contours of the movement and embody its many contradictions.

### ***6.2.1 Identity: The Dialectic of Simultaneously Separating Self from Others While Maintaining a Belief and Practice of Interdependence***

An untouchable child, particularly in a village, is subjected to a stigmatized identity from the time he can begin to walk and to touch things and people... Later, as an adult, he may either accept or reject this identity, or do both partially.<sup>501</sup>

For TBMSG members, caste-ism, as both ideology and social structure, is opposed by the construction of a Buddhist identity. This Buddhist identity is grounded in the public political statement of conversion. But, in attempting to deconstruct caste identity in this way, TBMSG members' conversion to Buddhism creates a dialectic in which simultaneously they are disconnecting themselves from those whom they are demanding recognition and connecting themselves to a counter-public,<sup>502</sup> through adherence to a particular interpretation of Buddhist doctrines. This dialectic presents major obstacles that TBMSG continually struggles to overcome. In attempting to realize a social justice ideal in which justpeace is said to reign, TBMSG must constructively critique the political dialectic inherent in a conversion identity.

The fact is that the creation of a Buddhist identity is both useful and problematic. Bringing social justice through self-awareness, a conversion identity is a political statement, a soteriological commitment, and a psychological bandage all rolled into one.

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<sup>501</sup> Thorat (1993), 67. Quoted in Jenkins (2003), 179.

<sup>502</sup> The idea of a counter-public, initially a critique of Habermas' too narrow conception of a 'public sphere' where people come together in critique and dialogue about the activities of the state, has been used by many feminist theorists as a means to describe the work of activists claims to power from below. See Brueck (2008).

Wrapped up in this conversion identity are various motives for and interpretations of conversion. TBMSG's creation and encouragement of a conversion identity has both positive consequences and a more insidious underbelly as well. Such a new identity reifies notions of 'us' versus 'them' mentality and increases the chance that caste-based conflict will continue and/or intensify through new, yet equally polarized, identity formations. While "any relationship between ingroup identification and outgroup hostility is progressive and contingent rather than necessary or inevitable,"<sup>503</sup> the creation of strongly differentiated ingroups does increase the potential for conflict. As Brewer (2001) clearly articulates:

Such intense outgroup hostility is not a necessary or inevitable concomitant of strong ingroup identity, but the basic processes of social categorization that give rise to differential treatment of ingroup and outgroup lay the groundwork for distrust and vulnerability that make escalation possible.<sup>504</sup>

Thus, the 'us' versus 'them' characteristics of TBMSG's social identity formation as converted Buddhist intensifies the polemics of the injustice narratives they deploy, while at the same time solidifying in-group solidarity. While such processes blur the line between moral ascription of negative traits to the 'other' and the pro-social ascription of positive traits to self,<sup>505</sup> they also engender the inverse of many traditional interpretations of Buddhist doctrine. Despite TBMSG members' and leaders' insistence that such a focus on identity and self-worth are primary to building a sense of compassionate action in the hearts of ex-untouchables, the result seems to be in conflict with TBMSG leaders'

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<sup>503</sup> Brewer (2001), 35.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>505</sup> See Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) for a detailed discussion of the role of "threat narratives" in violent conflict.

and activists' framing of their wider social justice ideal as the creation of an inter-dependent Buddhist world.<sup>506</sup>

Returning to leadership narrative number one (Chapter Four: Section 4.3.1), one can clearly see how Lokamitra mediates between these identity dialectics of new Buddhist versus past victim, as well as, separate ingroup versus interconnected community. In attempting to foster what Gil (1998) calls "critical consciousness,"<sup>507</sup> in the narrative that he presents at the girls hostel in Gorewada, Nagpur, Lokamitra is framing TBMSG members' identity as in both continual conflict with outgroup 'others,' and as conscious of their own ability to act. A structural analysis of Lokamitra's narrative shows that the complicating action of the schools' success, in spite of government ineffectiveness, leads to the evaluative implication that there must be some government conspiracy against girls' education. While Lokamitra's evaluative statement is an explicit jab at the power asymmetry between the Indian government and regular dalits it is also an implicit attempt to de-legitimize traditional decision-making structures within society. This ability to mediate between seemingly ambiguous meanings gives potency to Lokamitra's narrative. In positioning dalits as capable of overcoming their victimization and oppression, Lokamitra's important evaluative statement (the 'so what' of the story) is calculated to operate on the various primary identities of TBMSG members and activists. Lokamitra's statement both empowers TBMSG members as a

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<sup>506</sup> The Jambudvipa Trust's annual newsletter for 2007-2008, called the *Padmapani*, states: The Jambudvipa Trust envisions a society free of caste and other social barriers, in which all people, whatever their background can participate fully" (*Padmapani*, 2007-08, p.4).

<sup>507</sup> Gil (1998), 39.

separate community of Buddhist converts capable of fending for themselves and reaffirms the impact of a critically conscious collective that remains dependent on the ‘other.’ As Gil (1998) argues: “social life proceeds simultaneously on two interacting and interdependent levels, neither of which can function without the other: the level of concrete behavior, and that of consciousness, of individual members of society.”<sup>508</sup>

Lokamitra’s narrative recognizes these two levels of social life and pragmatically mediates between them in order to maintain and mobilize a complex Ambedkar Buddhist identity.

A similar mediating process can be seen through the analysis of the narrative structures collected during fishbowl dialogues with TBMSG members (see Chapter Five: Section 5.3.1 and Appendix H). In making the evaluative statements that pepper his storyline of being assertive, Anurag is taking a stance on the victim versus self-aware Buddhist dialectic.<sup>509</sup> In such narratives the identity of victim, so visible in the narratives of leaders like Lokamitra, is virtually absent. Such an identity of victim, though certainly an implicit worldview frame for activists, forms a sort of un-spoken backdrop to a pragmatic focus on behavior. The tacit knowledge of the communities’ victimization, though ever-present, is secondary to a practical realization that societal transformation first entails personal reflection and acceptance. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism, for these activists, is the model for such reflection and eventual personal transformation.

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<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>509</sup> For example, Anurag in explaining that others “were disturbed by the very thought that I had...I had... been so assertive in arguing that I am a scheduled caste” (Appendix H, line 6), emphasizes the need for activists to focus on Buddhist self-awareness and assertiveness. This emphasis on self-perfection assumes victimization but does not make it explicit.

TBMSG leaders and activist narrative structures expose both the complexity of identity and a conversion identity dialectic that exhibits both positive and negative social consequences. When viewed comparatively, the narrative identity of TBMSG members underscore not only the power asymmetries and processes of social positioning unique to Indian society, but also an epistemology of social justice that is conventional and available for appropriation in the creation of justpeace. Leaders' and activists' continual, and at times ambiguous, shifting between identities as Buddhist convert, victim of injustice, ingroup community member, and interdependent agents of social change provides opportunity for both social justice confusion and clarity. In order to make a unified conception of social justice real, TBMSG members need to explore these identities and from this exploration "devise and implement strategies aimed at facilitating the emergence of 'critical consciousness.'"<sup>510</sup>

### ***6.2.2 Social Positioning: The Dialectic of Leaders and Activists; Victims and Oppressors***

Positioning theory offers a way to reach into the background of persistent conflicts to at least make clear the psychological frameworks of beliefs that underlie them.<sup>511</sup>

Just as the complexity of identities can be explored and analyzed with the goal of developing strategies to ground and realize social justice, the processes of positioning can also be exposed with the same goal in mind. As discussed in Chapter Five, Section 5.2, activist narratives, like Amitamati's, create what Benson (2003) calls "boundary

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<sup>510</sup> Gil (1998), 39. This point will be returned to in section 6.4. below.

<sup>511</sup> Moghaddam, Harre, and Lee (2008), 18.

conditions”<sup>512</sup> between self and other identities. Following Benson’s (2003) argument that these ‘boundary conditions’ are what stabilizes or maintains positive self identity,<sup>513</sup> analysis of activist narratives like Amitamati’s can reveal both the identity and justice commitments of TBMSG members. By positioning herself as a particular type of Ambedkar Buddhist activist, Amitamati is making the statement that she is no longer either a passive recipient of oppression, or socially connected to oppressors. Through compassion and dedicated practice of the dharma, Amitamati’s narrative positions her as someone who has transcended the ancient structures of caste and all the dichotomies that accompany such a system. In such a way, she positions herself as both incapable of passively accepting injustice or in acting in an unjust way towards others.

Amitamati’s narrative storyline reveals not only a set of evaluative statements that provide a window into her current identity, but also conditions a conception of how she might be prone to act on her identity in her given context. In other words, her storyline reveals her normative commitments; normative commitments that are conceived of as impervious to injustice. Amitamati’s positioning of herself as Buddhist, demarcates her from the many Hindus around her, giving her not only a new identity, but a new moral framework. The point of Amitamati’s narrative is to illustrate that a particular Buddhist identity, as exhibited in the practice-orientation of TBMSG, provides a means to both overcome the constraining victim-hood of oppression and implement an inclusive conception of social justice. The complimentary nature of a positioning analysis and a

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<sup>512</sup> Benson (2003), 61.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 62.

Labovian focus on evaluative statements presents a more complete picture of social justice. The narrative commitments exposed in such analysis highlights the role that social position plays in motivating action. While evaluative statements permeate the telling of such stories and provide keys to their meaning, positioning theory provides a psychological framework for interpreting that meaning within a particular moral order.

Haresh's narratives of work in the aftermath of the Gujarati earthquake provide a further example to compare TBMSG members' problematic positioning dialectics. Telling of the "contradiction"<sup>514</sup> that dalit activists continue to face as they are socially positioned, Haresh's second-hand, yet formative, experience of his friends' discrimination expresses an uncertain correlation between victim and oppressor. While performing a needs-assessment survey on an upper-caste family's loss after the earthquake, Haresh's friend was asked his name (a typical means to determining caste). In response to his friend's answer, the head of the household stopped answering questions and violently kicked the surveyor out of what remained of his house. During the recounting of this story Haresh explains: "he was trying to help to the victim of the earthquake... But even though everything was ruined by this natural calamity the caste mentality of the person was not allowing him to think like a human being."<sup>515</sup> Haresh's evaluative statement acts to re-position the upper-caste character in a way that his friend's initial attempt at re-positioning as needy of help was unable to accomplish. As an educated and urban student of social work, Haresh's friend had tried to re-position the

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<sup>514</sup> Formal interview with Haresh Dalvi, June 28, 2008, Appendix J, Line 7.

<sup>515</sup> Interview with Haresh Dalvi, June 28, 2008, Appendix J, lines 4 and 5.

rural upper-caste man as needy of his professional expertise. This attempt at social positioning having failed, Haresh's described his friend as "really upset."<sup>516</sup> Yet, in Haresh's evaluative statement the absurdity that a victim of an earthquake would refuse assistance on the basis of caste is normatively positioned as "the real grief."<sup>517</sup>

In problematizing who exactly was the victim, Haresh's narrative points to the difficulty in labeling people as either 'victims' or 'oppressors.' The boundary divisions between such seemingly opposite tropes are, indeed, blurred by the extensive realities of structural violence. Dissimilar to assertiveness being juxtaposed to the psychological legacy of caste discrimination in many TBMSG activist narratives, juxtaposing victims and oppressors is more complex. Since such labels are social constructions, just as any social justice ideal, their never completely determined or uniform meaning leaves their relation more blurry and ambiguous. Activists, therefore, face difficulties deciding how to highlight their identity and in what contexts to engage in attempts at social re-positioning both themselves and 'others.' This is especially important since continual mention of certain identity positions (such as activist's victim-hood) can re-enforce the exact social constraints activists are trying to destroy. This is an important side consequence of affirmative action programs which Taylor, Caouette, Usbourne, and King (2008) call the "positioning paradox."<sup>518</sup> Simply put, such a paradox arises from a group focus on equity. As Taylor, Caouette, Usbourne, and King (2008) state: "in order for a group to benefit from programs designed to reduce inequity, the group needs to project a

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<sup>516</sup> Ibid., line 9.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., line 8.

<sup>518</sup> Taylor, Caouette, Usborne, and King (2008), 154.

public image of being disadvantaged.”<sup>519</sup> The paradox arises because any individual advantage though a step forward in reality, provides a counter-example to the groups’ disadvantage. To support the affirmative action storyline the disadvantaged must never be seen to have achieved advantage. Thus, for fear of losing disadvantaged status, activists position themselves as victims even if they are no longer disadvantaged or their victimization is no longer their primary concern. Despite activists’ stance that their social position reaffirms their social justice goals, often their unwitting reification of the status quo makes the realization of their social justice ideal problematic.

In Chapter Five, section 5.3.2, the dialectics of social positioning were described as walking a tightrope between speaking truth to justice on the one hand and moving beyond the injustice to create a new identity on the other. Hareh’s narratives of his first and second hand experiences in the aftermath of the Gujarati earthquake exemplify activists’ dialectical difficulty in having to problematize victim-hood and injustice, while also trying to create a new positive identity of assertiveness and self-confidence. An insecure hesitancy of expression overarches Hareh’s narrative, which I believe is representative of TBMSG members’ positioning dialectic (and not necessarily a vestige of the legacy of psychological oppression). But further, this dialectic also highlights a subtle gap between activists and leaders. Despite movement members’ assurances that role distinctions in the TBMSG movement are based only on “levels of responsibility”<sup>520</sup> and not any hierarchical chain of command, this dialectic hesitance is less pronounced in

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 154-55.

<sup>520</sup> Personal conversation with Mangesh Dahiwale, May, 2007.

leadership narratives. So when Mangesh's describes Hindu nationalist thought as "a very crude form of social Darwinism" in Chapter Four, victim-hood and Buddhist identity are assumed and no hesitance in the narrative formation is evident. Viewed from a positioning analysis though activists and leaders motives may be different and, therefore, their utterances take on different urgency. Walking a tightrope between the need for a victim or Buddhist identity leaders reflexively know when each of these narrative storylines is appropriate to deploy, while activists are more hesitant.

The dialectics of social positioning will continue to dog TBMSG leaders and activists until agency on all levels of the movement is collectively understood as something broader than the realization of past injustice or the act of conversion. In asking if it is inevitable that storytellers reproduce the status quo, Polletta (2006) argues that it is not and says that "by combining discordant ideas or feelings, [activists] stories have forced the reader or listener to struggle to make sense of an unfamiliar experience."<sup>521</sup> It is in effectively using these "narrative strategies that are familiar to literary critics" that TBMSG leaders and activists "may be able to style victims as guides to the social bases of inequality,"<sup>522</sup> without being trapped by the dialectic constraints of stereotypical conceptions of either victims or oppressors. In such a process, the subtle distinction between leaders and activists will also fade away.

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<sup>521</sup> Polletta (2006), 140.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 140.

### **6.2.3 *Asymmetric Power: The Dialectic of Conversion as Both Inclusive and Exclusive Soteriology***

Conversion identity, as an important means around the various dialectics outlined above, provides TBMSG members with both an inclusive and exclusive Buddhist soteriology. This dialectic of inclusion versus exclusion is most clearly visible in the asymmetric power relations described in the autobiographical justice/injustice narratives of dalit literature. As stated in Chapter Four, autobiographical accounts become almost inextricably imbricated in the social justice constructions of both activists and leaders. Such accounts act as a common movement experience and provide broad foundations for the epistemological starting points of movement members' visions of social justice. These visions of social justice, as a means to transform power relations, expose both an inclusive sense of conversion psychology and an exclusive sense of the means of political change. The conversion experiences of TBMSG Buddhists act as a way to further ground social justice narratives in the critique of existing power relations, as well as, a way to unwittingly reinforce them.

Ambedkar's own writing serves as a prime example of this inclusive versus exclusive dialectic of Buddhist approaches to power. Ambedkar's narratives of injustice provide TBMSG members, and other dalits, with a sense of control – a sense that their own narratives can also re-construct present and future realities; they provide TBMSG movement members with a mental map upon which to bridge the divergence between the real and the ideal. From a Buddhist perspective Ambedkar's narratives also represent foundational elements of Ambedkar's hagiographic transformation to a Bodhisattva – an

enlightened being that forsakes the ultimate release from this world of suffering and vows to first save all beings. But, they also engender a more exclusive approach to Buddhism, which sees changing one's religion as a necessity for those being excluded from society. Through changing a core element of actors' moral worldview, Ambedkar Buddhists believe that social transformation will follow.

Returning to the autobiographical story of Ambedkar's attempts to find a bullock-cart at the Masur railway station, it is possible to explore the role that injustice narratives play in creating inclusive and exclusive power positioning, and to reveal how such processes have been internalized by the movement. In this autobiographical narrative, Ambedkar and his traveling companions are immediately positioned as worthy of assistance due to their tidy appearance and perceived social position. The initial power-over the station master quickly changes when Ambedkar heedlessly shouts out that his retinue is from the Mahar caste. Not only does a new asymmetry of power infuse the interaction after this admission, but the boys' inability to even be included in a discussion among caste-equals becomes apparent. Whereas the power-over was initially based on a socio-economic perception of the station-master, the powerlessness-under created after Ambedkar's admission of a low-caste identity sanctions an excluded social position in which an exclusive response quickly grows. Ambedkar's attempts to re-position himself fail repeatedly. It is this repeated failure of such past stories that act to re-confirm 'untouchables' experiences of social exclusion in the present. The mental maps that such stories create assist in solidifying past positions towards social justice and conditioning future responses to injustice. While such stories provide a foundation for the social

construction of a social justice ideal, they also simultaneously empower a new agency among Ambedkar followers.

In the case of TBMSG leaders and activists, this new agency is grounded in the political identity of conversion. But this identity as both separate from others and interconnected to them, included in society and excluded from it, also presents problems in its attempt to re-construct existing power asymmetries as anything other than conflict generative. Since it is through the exchange of power that social and structural change occurs, TBMSG leaders and activists struggle to expose the transformative power within narratives of injustice, while simultaneously maintaining a social position which allows them to be included in society. TBMSG's agency is, therefore, in certain respects limited by the ambiguity over a radical redressing of injustice and a more conservative creation of a new identity as Buddhist.

A second autobiographical injustice narrative further exposes the paucity of taking a purely functionalist approach to power. Like the TBMSG narratives encountered above, Kamble's (2008) autobiographical narrative veers back and forth between activists as past victims and activists as Ambedkarite Buddhist converts. The ambiguity expressed by Kamble (2008) in these multiple identities of formerly 'untouchables' creates what Tarrow (1998) calls "political opportunities,"<sup>523</sup> but it also clarifies the TBMSG movement response to structural power imbalances. In outlining the trials and tribulations of an identity as victim and the hope and aspirations of a newly

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<sup>523</sup> Tarrow (1998), 71.

created identity as Buddhist, Kamble's autobiographical narratives are both powerful and problematic for movement activists.

Kamble's (2008) childhood story about entering the Ram temple at Shankar market<sup>524</sup> provides further illustration of the asymmetries of power inherent in the Ambedkar Buddhist's dialectic of conversion. After orientating the reader to the many injustices the ten to twelve Mahar girls of her school face on a daily basis, Kamble describes in detail how the Brahmin girls visit the nearby Ram Temple during their recess fill her, and her friends, with envy. Kamble and her friends, therefore, commit to visit this forbidden temple one day. But it is the soteriological debate which ensues between these girls that is as telling as their eventual illicit foray into the temple. Justifying their deviance with the question "Had these gods been real, do you think our Ambedkar would have challenged them?,"<sup>525</sup> Kamble's retelling of this story invokes an often heard debate, among Ambedkar dalits. This debate between the necessity of positioning dalits as victims, or positioning them as rational Buddhists, creates political opportunities for activists. But, Kamble's narrative also exposes the dialectic of conversion to Buddhism. In expressing the anger and frustration these dalit girls felt by being banned from the temple, Kamble's story both recalls this feeling of exclusion and hints at a desire to move beyond it to a response of inclusion. Such inclusive versus exclusive ambiguity is evident in how Kamble concludes the story:

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<sup>524</sup> This narrative appears in Chapter 12 of The Prisons We Broke, pages 129-132.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 130.

I will die but never again will I think about this horrid god. I will stay away from him forever. I swear. Otherwise, I will change my name. I won't be called Baby anymore. That was my first active participation in Baba's movement.<sup>526</sup>

Kamble's ending of this story with her oath and its equation with the Ambedkar movement is telling. For her, like many dalits, this first act of conversion out of an old and into a new identity is the one of many steps towards the transformation of social oppression. Ambedkar first realized this and is, therefore, followed as a bodhisattva, irrespective of whether one chooses Buddhism or not. Thus, before becoming Buddhist one must first become an Ambedkarite. Since, after Ambedkar's own conversion he did not live long enough to model how and when to address this dialectic of inclusion versus exclusion inherent to the conversion experience, many dalits have chosen not to convert to Buddhism. The identity, power, and social position of Ambedkar Buddhists, while privileging a notion of social justice, must also reflect and respond to the asymmetries of power inherent in the dialectic of conversion.

### **6.3 Labovian/Positioning Analysis and the Limitations of Hearing Suffering using an Outside/Structural Approach**

The Labovian and positioning analysis that has been used in analyzing the justice/injustice narratives of TBMSG leaders and activists have a number of obvious limitations. For example, though the structure of narratives can tell us a great deal about the social identities that privilege Ambedkar Buddhist's notion of social justice, it tends to objectify the suffering of oppression. Labov is correct in arguing that evaluative

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<sup>526</sup> Kamble (2008), 132. Baba is here short for Babasaheb (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar).

statements involve a “brief ‘time out’ from the telling of the story”<sup>527</sup> that, in turn, “permeate the telling.”<sup>528</sup> As such, evaluative statements do represent a structure that is very telling of actors’ normative commitments. But, what Labov fails to address is the fact that such evaluative statements permeate not just the telling of narrators, but the social reality of listeners as well. Labov’s flat structural emphasis, though helpful as a tool to draw connections between multiple cases, is limited in its static lack of interactive dynamism. Based on analyzing a model of speech that is one-way, Labovian analysis allows for little ability to analyze dialogic interaction. Positioning theory provides some corrective for this limitation of Labovian narrative analysis by providing an ability to invoke the moral community and the rights and duties which it is dependent upon. But, even armed with such a positioning frame of analysis the difficulties inherent in outside versus inside, etic versus emic, approaches to understanding TBMSG’s social justice commitments remain.<sup>529</sup> For this reason, and since the movement studied is one exhibiting all the social and anthropological signs of a religious institution, some additional theoretical bases for the study, including social identity, power, and authority/legitimacy, have been invoked in order to clarify the complexity of TBMSG’s social justice ideal. The seemingly false dichotomy between leaders and activists within the TBMSG invokes important distinctions in collective conceptions of legitimacy. What

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<sup>527</sup> Toolan (1988), 153.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>529</sup> As Druckman (2005) states in regard to conflict resolution methodology: “A challenge is to develop a methodology that combines the features of all these approaches [etic, emic, qualitative, and quantitative]” (11). As should by now be evident this research has attempted to rely on an emic approach without disregarding the importance of an etic focus on the social consequences of action [see Druckman (2005), 10.

remains, though, is to explain how TBMSG's ideals, and the religious worldview of TBMSG members, add to repertoires of social activism. Beyond the structural-functional theories of social change, TBMSG's social construction of justice must be understood via reference to the wider symbolic and spiritual meanings of a Buddhist worldview.

As the only world religion<sup>530</sup> which defines life itself as suffering (rather than focusing on a suffering savior and/or suffering as disobedience to some higher being), Buddhism provides an important basis for social transformation. While a burgeoning literature has attempted to define and justify modern examples of engaged Buddhism,<sup>531</sup> what has been missing is scholarly analysis of the stories engaged Buddhists tell themselves to justify their practice as Buddhist. While there is much research that still needs to be done in this area, the stories analyzed here have begun to ask many foundational questions related to engaged Buddhists self-conceptions. How do injustice narratives construct collective responses to social transformation? Are such narratives necessary for sustained social action? And, if so, what does that say about Buddhist doctrines such as no-self, non-attachment, and co-dependent origination, among others? Buddhists' sense of time may hold some philosophical answers to the above questions, but the Ambedkar Buddhist narrations of social justice encountered in the research point

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<sup>530</sup> Though the term 'world religions' is somewhat problematic [see Masuzawa (2005)] it is used here to refer to the modern categories that a majority of the world's population profess to be a part of – i.e. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, as well as, other smaller syncretic faiths like Sufism, Sikhism, and Baha'i.

<sup>531</sup> See for example, Chappell (1999); King and Queen (1996); Kraft (1999); Queen (2000), and; Sivaraksa (1998) among many others.

to more concrete solutions to these puzzling questions. Loy (2008) writes: “The *now* that I *have* immediately fades into the past, moment by moment, but the *now* that I *am* never falls away to the past, and is therefore the same as eternity.”<sup>532</sup> Armed with a belief in the potential of the present moment, an awareness of the problem of attachment and desire, and a working definition of the need for some form of daily practice to stay in the present moment, many modern engaged Buddhists justify their social actions by recourse to the reality of impermanence. As Swaris (2008) writes:

The Buddha’s assertion of the primacy of flux has truly revolutionary sociological implications. It demolishes ideological views that gender, class, caste or ethnic identity, social institutions, etc., are reflections of eternal and unchanging universal essences or ideas... When the Buddha declared impermanence is real, he was not replacing one dogma with another. He clarified step by step how human beings tend to perceive a kinetic actuality in terms of relatively stable ‘beings’ and ‘things’ because of the limitations of their senses.<sup>533</sup>

But, Ambedkar Buddhists seem to be more practical than philosophical and many who have taken wholeheartedly to the Ambedkar Buddhist identity have, no doubt, not fully thought through the implications of Buddhist impermanence. For many Ambedkar Buddhists awakening to reality entails more of a realization of their own political agency than an understanding of impermanence. Often, arguing that they will do “whatever works” to destroy the caste structure, TBMSG leaders and activists also hold “morality as sacred,”<sup>534</sup> thus putting some limits on their available responses to caste. This normative worldview is not understood though as fixed or permanent, but rather as constantly

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<sup>532</sup> Loy (2008), 41.

<sup>533</sup> Swaris (2008), 9.

<sup>534</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale, George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007.

changing and malleable as dependent on conditioned existence. In such a worldview, actors have agency to change social structure in infinite ways (ways that both expose and reinforce ignorance, delusion, and greed). Interaction with oppressive ‘others’ is, therefore, not impossible, or even unwanted, but at this time TBMSG members do not see such interaction as the most skillful means to achieving their vision of social justice. Right now, they believe that smaller steps are required. These smaller steps, they believe, will lead to eventual reconciliation and justpeace between victims and oppressors.

But, as these smaller steps (including the creation of an Ambedkar Buddhist identity) are pursued, often critical self-reflection, both individually and collectively, is disregarded. In such an oversight, narrative’s evaluative statements construct and maintain a hegemonic control over collective movement discourse. Stories of injustice, expressed by activists like Amitamati and Haresh, though expressions of real discontent have a dual effect of both empowering and disempowering the wider movement as it works to create social justice. They empower the movement by creating and maintaining a shared space for the voicing of grievances, but they disempower the movement by maintaining a collective self that is devoid of agency (as victims) and dependent on others (the state, Buddhist institutions, etc.) to provide answers for their grievances. To have multiple collective identities is fine, but mediating between them is often tricky. The model that follows in the next section is aimed at highlighting the important place of critical self-reflection of movement members’ storylines which TBMSG activists require for the maintenance of multiple, and often contradictory, identities, and which are, in turn, needed for the realization of their social justice ideal.

#### **6.4 Strategies and Recommendations for Making a TBMSG theory of Social Justice Real: Towards the Creation of a Model of Social Change<sup>535</sup>**

[Those who become interested in the TBMSG movement] find that there is some model which can be worked out, or run through, by using Buddhism as a tool or a means for social transformation – TBMSG leader and dharma lecturer dharmachari Meitreyanath<sup>536</sup>

The above quote from dharmachari Meitreyanath is telling of the important role that Buddhism plays in TBMSG activists' lives. Neither simply ideology nor dogma, Buddhism acts as means, or model, for improving both self and society. Conceived of as a model through which to not only understand, but realize, the unknown, Buddhist teaching provides TBMSG members a guide by which to live their lives and, in this process, change their society. As a model, there is little doubt that Buddhism is powerful; the historical Buddha, indeed, described his task with reference to a metaphor (a complex and ambiguous, yet powerful, model in its own right). The Buddha, as a doctor for the ills of the world, is said to have 'turned the wheel of dharma' in order for others to learn a solution to the suffering inherent in *samsara* (literally conditioned existence). This awakening of the self to the reality of the world happens through practice. But of course "the self is not reducible to mere introspection."<sup>537</sup> As complex and contingent, selves are constantly engaged in processes of modeling to attempt to understand the unknown; for Ambedkar Buddhists this modeling is presented as living as both the archetypes of the Buddha and Ambedkar would have. But, what does this model Buddhist life provide to

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<sup>535</sup> See Appendix K for a diagrammatic model of the process of narrative social justice transformation.

<sup>536</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007

<sup>537</sup> Rothbart, (2004), x.

selves in need of a collective conception of social justice? With a history of creating sangha (community) the Buddhist tradition, despite the common conception of Buddhism as a quest for self-attainment and enlightenment, is replete with examples of collective decision making and communal living. While Buddhist teaching provides the primary grounding for individual TBMSG activists, the model discussed below and visualized in Appendix K provides an approach to modeling the social constructionist process necessary to understand TBMSG's social justice ideal. Such a model provides *one* foundation upon which to build on the broader implications of the connection between justice and peace-building (the further implications of such a broad and basic model will be discussed in Chapter 7).

The model of TBMSG's narrative creation of a social justice ideal, as presented in Appendix K, is intended to build on a comparison between models and narrative by outlining the central role of narrative in not only the construction, but the realization of TBMSG's social justice ideal. In diagramming the two key storylines consistently invoked by the TBMSG social actors involved in this research, that of injustice and that of conversion identity, the model sketches these storylines across time. Where these storylines cross or overlap a future potential for justpeace exists, but is of course dependent on other dominant storylines apparent at that particular time. Currently, I believe that working with these two dominant storylines of victimization and conversion identity avails a creative potential for TBMSG to actualize social justice. Justice is found in this overlap of dominant storylines, but it of course is not somehow uniform or immediately evident. Realizing the broad realms of justice as simultaneously procedural

(fairness of methods), distributive (fairness of results), and relational (effect on social relations) requires reflective attention and open interactive space for narratives structures and their trajectories through time to be explored.

What makes the realization of justpeace difficult is the continually changing identities, social positions, and power asymmetries of social actors across time, as well as, the complex patterns of narratives that are infinitely productive of storylines across the gambit of multiple human experiences. What the model in Appendix K does is to visually express that the primary means to overcoming this difficulty is to look at narrative structures as a pattern of intersecting storylines across time and space. These storylines, expanding across time and experiential space, reveal patterns that are ripe for exploitation by movement activists and leaders. Since narrative is dynamic one can only work off a ‘snap-shot’ of reality, but from this ‘snap-shot’ maps of the ideal are revealed. To discern the pattern is to expose opportunities for change. In other words, the narrative structures of the dominant movement storylines of conversion and victim-hood provide a means to not only understanding TBMSG’s social justice ideal, but to also making their ideal real. This dynamic process requires developing a meta-understanding of the patterns of dominant storylines of justice and injustice and working to bend the storylines so they overlap or come closer to overlapping in the future. By reflecting, in the present, on the intersections of dominant narrative storylines (such as victim-hood and conversion, among others) future opportunities for maintaining this narrative convergence can be realized. In turn, justpeace, as the convergence and overlap of dialectic storylines, is created. But it should be noted that this is not a ‘one-off,’ in which

convergence or overlap equals a continual state of justpeace (or fixed measure of closeness to this ideal state of affairs). Rather, continual narrative reflection is necessary for the maintenance of any moments of justpeace. Having presented this broad model of the conceptualization and transformation process of storylines, in concluding Chapter Six a short list of strategic recommendations is provided to assist TBMSG members in realizing their social justice ideal (or in other words to help members bend the pattern to create convergence in storylines). The following recommendations will assist members in making the TBMSG social justice ideal real:

- Embrace the ambiguity in the social positions that justice narratives create while also critically and reflectively exploring the origin of this ambiguity;
- Provide space for the voice of victim identities (this is crucial for both the social psychology and social justice ideals of movement members);
- Balance the deployment of storylines of victim and Buddhist so as to engage a diversity of Indians in the program of realizing social justice;
- Continue creating a new Buddhist identity, but do so in a way that does not disenfranchise or decouple victims of structural violence from the ‘others’ they are attempting to transform;
- Avail opportunities provided by Ambedkar Buddhists’ unique religious worldview to underscore the crucial elements of a social justice ideal and to provide the space and structure to understand the processes by which that ideal is self-constructed;

- Vigilantly remember the interconnectedness of both oppressed and oppressor, without such remembrance the TBMSG social justice vision is no different than an expression of disadvantaged grievance;
- Provide the means (space, structure, training) for members to actively engage in reflective collective process;
- Explore various identities within the movement and from this exploration “devise and implement strategies aimed at facilitating the emergence of ‘critical consciousness.’”<sup>538</sup>
- View agency as something broader than the realization of either past injustice or the act of conversion, otherwise the dialectics outlined above will continue to dog TBMSG leaders and activists.

The implications and conclusions in the chapter that follows will return to the above strategic recommendations as a means to outline a plan for continuing research on the connections between social justice, religion, and conflict.

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<sup>538</sup> Gil (1998), 39.

## CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Peace is both task and experience. The task of peace is dealing with structural violence. The experience of peace is self-knowledge. – Abdul Aziz Said, quoted in Abu-Nimer (2001).

Conflict resolution as a field is primarily focused on a functionalist determination of the root causes of conflict and has, as a result, neglected the role that conflict actors' normative commitments play in conflict generation and processes. This dissertation has challenged this bias in the field by arguing that justice and injustice narratives, the stories that people tell about fairness, equality, justice and/or their absence, represent a subtle and reactive space through which the potentiality of continued social conflict can be limited and overcome. In arguing, along with researchers of nonviolent action, that “since violence can be supplanted as the means of conflict, the goal of curtailing violence need not always be encumbered by the separate task of resolving conflict’s cause,”<sup>539</sup> this research suggests that conflict over core values can be transformed through critical reflection of conflict parties’ narrative structures and discursive biases. Rather than accepting the traditional conflict resolution assumption that needs or values are somehow non-negotiable [see Burton (1993)], this dissertation has argued that values are mediated through discursive processes. Narrative is the point-of-access for such a mediating

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<sup>539</sup> Ackerman and Duvall (2000), 8.

process through acting as the lowest common denominator for processes of social construction. While this approach to the field conflict resolution might not seem radical, indeed, it is. It conceives of power, identity, and social position as social constructions that can each have the ability to redefine seemingly non-negotiable normative commitments and transform conflict with little focus being placed on causality. The opportunities that the analysis of narrative structures and storylines open, allows conflict resolution practitioners to transform conflict settings, situations, and dynamics.

Despite Rubenstein and Blechman's (1999) description of social justice's relationship to conflict as a "‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ that... has the potential to magnify disagreements within the field [of conflict resolution] and to make it less coherent as a discipline,"<sup>540</sup> the critical examination and reflection of expressions of social justice is crucial to social movement actors' long-term goals of peace-building and attempts to create justpeace. TBMSG's narrative identities of newly converted Ambedkar Buddhist and victim of injustice both provide untapped opportunities to understand the movement's social justice ideal and engage a diversity of 'others' to make that ideal real. The fact is that while there is a clear link between social justice conceptualization processes and the maintenance of social harmony, this link has not been the subject of critical scholarly attention. Despite the many difficulties inherent in focusing on the normative commitments of social actors in conflict, such focus has long been lacking in the conflict studies literature and, indeed, requires committed and

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<sup>540</sup> Rubenstein and Blechman (1999), 2.

sustained attention. Social actors' narrative constructions are inseparable from their value commitments, and it is through recourse to these narrative constructions that actors, and those studying them, can mediate multiple identities, explain power asymmetries, and realize collective re-positioning.

Following a cyclical action science methodology to asking a research question, determining methods of data collection, and drawing conclusions about TBMSG's social justice commitments has allowed connections between social justice and peace-building to become increasingly clear. In one sense, methodology is here seen as the model. It is through the strategic analysis of and reflection on the movement's vision of social justice and a re-introduction of this newfound knowledge that the messy process of social change is achieved. Through analysis and reflection on the values that actors deploy in narrative utterances, patterns of social interaction can be discerned and utilized for irenic purposes. C. Wright Mills expressed an understanding of this interconnected 'reality' of human existence when he wrote:

The consciousness of human beings does not determine their existence; nor does their existence determine their consciousness. Between the human consciousness and material existence stand communications, designs, patterns, and values which influence decisively such consciousness as they have.<sup>541</sup>

The pattern that is alluded to thru the model in Appendix K provides some indication of how narrative storylines have a textured retrospection and projection across time.

Critical reflection on how TBMSG storylines interact and overlap opens a pattern from which to not only understand TBMSG's core social justice conceptions, but also develop

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<sup>541</sup> Mills (1963), 375- Quoted in Denzin (2001), x.

new strategies and tactics to transform conflict situations and dynamics. Such a methodology assumes that peace (like justice) is both task and experience as Said implies in the quote above. This task and experience of peace are both existent in the present and always imminent.

### ***7.1 Summary of the Argument***

While the social justice vision of TBMSG, like any socially constructed ideal, is continually changing and evolving, an analysis of such vision maps an important path for understanding the interwoven patterns of justice and peace. This dissertation argues that Ambedkar Buddhists privilege a particular notion of social justice. This notion is conditioned by a discursive focus on past instances of injustice which are made real by socially constructed power relationships, power asymmetries, and identity positions. In unpacking the conditions which influence the social justice commitments of TBMSG members, this dissertation has aimed at exposing the rationale for understanding how, in practice, narratives are produced, deployed, and constructive of movement members' particular conceptions of social justice and social change. Such a research endeavor rests on the argument that by analyzing the narrative structures of justice/injustice stories, conflict resolution practitioners expose opportunities to transform conflict situations, dynamics, and, therefore, settings. In finding that Ambedkar Buddhist's narratives are aimed at creating and maintaining a social identity in which a particular social justice ideal becomes the central storyline from which to transform the persistent reality of discrimination and injustice, this dissertation has maintained an integrated approach to theory and practice. The fact is that, since in-group/out-group positioning becomes

increasingly pivotal for the creation of any social justice ideal, cries for social justice invariable generate, rather than resolve, social conflict. The question from a conflict perspective then becomes how do we de-escalate, and subsequently transform, the destructive elements of conflict while also privileging TBMSG member's conceptions of social justice?

Any answer to the above question requires the reflective assessment of both actor's and intervener's value commitments. But, underlying the successes of many constructive attempts at conflict transformation is an assumption that the leaders and activists of such constructive conflict transformation processes have special moral commitments and authority.<sup>542</sup> In this false assumption lies a misguided understanding of the difference between the practical and the moral. I believe a study of TBMSG not only disproves any 'special' status for moral commitments, but also makes attempts to study social movements as devoid of either practical or moral realities meaningless. TBMSG narratives weave moral and practical evaluative statements of the caste situation in India into a rich and textured vision of social justice. One TBMSG leader spoke of his work as creating "a shift in your worldview" to a place in which "morality is sacred."<sup>543</sup> Such normative conceptions of the work of the TBMSG movement run through the narrative structures of TBMSG activists and leaders. The analysis of what I have called throughout TBMSG's meta-narrative of justice (this is inclusive of all the justice and

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<sup>542</sup> See Ackerman and Duvall (2000) for refutation of this assumption in exploring the 20<sup>th</sup> Century examples of nonviolent movements for social change.

<sup>543</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007.

injustice narratives collected and analyzed in this research) leads to a broad understanding of what social justice means to TBMSG members, but also to ways in which this meaning might assist in the creation of social change towards a unique vision of social justice.

That such an argument, as a non-traditional blending of empirical and normative methods and rationales, raises multiple unsolved questions should not discourage the objective-oriented social scientist trained in positivism. Rather, the ambiguity that the study of narrative creates should be seen as a resource for further exploration and insights. This is, indeed, the symbolic power of religiously informed social movement organizations. Such movements' framing and rituals can and should be used as a resource for the understanding of social justice and should not be hindered by a view of the just society which is often constrained by a normative bias towards liberal modernism (a view which sees values as problematic at best).

TBMSG members speak of the creation of a dharma revolution, or even a "silent revolution"<sup>544</sup> in India. Buddhism forms the foundation for such a revolution by providing a social, psychological, and moral ideology for activism. In providing an in-depth analysis of the justice and injustice narratives of activists and leaders of this movement, layers of these social actor's worldviews are peeled back exposing valuable strategies and tactics for caste conflict situations, dynamics, and settings. TBMSG's use of religion to mobilize for emancipation from caste-isms' oppressive realities provides a

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<sup>544</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale, George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007. By "silent revolution" they mean social change from the bottom that no one on the top is even talking about, or aware of. See also Jaffrelot (2003) for a further discussion of this concept.

radical, complex, and creative response on the part of dalit leaders and activists. While true that, as Martin Fuchs (2004) argues, “[r]eligious articulation of modern emancipatory struggle, the (re-)entanglement of religion and politics, goes patently against the grain of dominant strands of social movement theory,”<sup>545</sup> it also creates a space where deep-seated value commitments can be collectively explored and employed alongside practical discussion of strategies and tactics. This dissertation demonstrates that through critical attention to narrative and positioning the opportunities to overcome the current social stigma of dalit Buddhists can be opened, while strategies to transform the conflict setting can be made available for utilization by engaged and reflective movement actors.

## **7.2 *Significance of the Study***

Since one key contention of this study is that critical attention to narrative structure assists movement members as they attempt to realize social justice, this study’s significance lies in its ability to provide both activists and scholars alike with some practical insights into TBMSG’s particular social justice contention. By exposing the typicality of the multiple case narratives analyzed and their relation to the creation, deployment, and maintenance of social justice, this study lays a foundation for approaching other cases of social justice contention. Though true that TBMSG members’ ideals act as a guide for their contention, these ideals also act to recreate cycles of collective movement contention. Reflective awareness of these processes by actors and

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<sup>545</sup> Fuchs (2004), 284.

researchers alike can provide important insights of working towards the creation of situations of justpeace.

In effect, the significance of this study lies in its focus on value commitments. Every social conflict entails some degree of contention over the core values of conflict parties. Far from ignoring them as un-observable objectively and non-negotiable pragmatically, social scientists must develop ways to access them as lived objective reality. Given the difficulty of extricating values from other modes of expression and classifying them as lived objective reality, the exploration of values as related to conflict resolution processes has been directed towards the values of conflict resolution practitioners and, thus, has de-emphasized the role of conflict parties' own construction of value commitments. From a conflict resolution practice standpoint an emphasis on process has resulted in increased attention being placed on practitioner focused reflexive analysis of values [à la Schon (1983)], but little attention has been paid to engaging conflict actors' core value commitments. As conflict parties' core values are often seen as problematic to any process of conflict resolution, there is an assumption in functionalist and positivist approaches to conflict that if conflict's root causes are explored and parties interests are satisfied their core values (or needs) will, by definition, also be satisfied. This dissertation questions the positivist assumption that equates interests or needs with values. By calling into view the many conflict generative situations inherent in the failure to critically analyze social actor's own narrations, the present work puts responsibility squarely in the hands of actors to 'solve' their problems. Narrations are laced with clues to actors' value commitments and, as such, represent an

untapped resource for understanding conflict situations and dynamics, as well as, developing a means to transform them.

Still, while narrative is primary to social theory, disentangling knowing from telling can be tricky. The significance of this research also lies in this processes of untangling the connection between narratives and the creation and maintenance of normative (or worldview) commitments. This research can, therefore, be understood from two perspectives; as an on-going process of building “meta-communicative competence”<sup>546</sup> of Ambedkar Buddhists’ culture and lived experience; and as a theory-building endeavor, which unwraps layers of worldview and, thus, opens new avenues for peace-building practice to take hold. Though the opportunities created by narrative analysis in this case relate to issue of caste, the structural analysis techniques and insights this case develops have broader application to other value-based conflicts. Through a social constructionist epistemology and research methods of narrative and discourse analysis the foundations of a preliminary model have, therefore, been developed and refined for approaching contention over social justice. This model, though only a basic start, unveils the ornate role that values play in narrative storylines, and, in turn the role that narrative storylines can play in social transformation. Further, the insights gleaned from such structural analysis of narratives have provided a degree of scientific knowledge in the service of further movement action. In other words, in exposing strategies and tactics for conflict resolution practitioners to transform the conflict situation, dynamics,

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<sup>546</sup> Briggs (1986), 61.

and setting, opportunities have been opened for TBMSG leaders and activists to attempt to implement this research's findings and insights.

### ***7.3 Implications of the Study***

Since a focus on justice is crucial for conflict transformation, to believe that any “positive peace”<sup>547</sup> can be achieved without engaging discourse on values (particularly re justice) is naïve and potentially dangerous. The main implication of this study, therefore, entails a theoretical shift in the “paradigm”<sup>548</sup> of traditional conflict studies. Through arguing that critical attention to narratives of justice/injustice can uncover strategies and tactics to transform conflict situations, dynamics, and settings, a non-traditional stance towards conflict studies is implied. First, beyond looking for causes of conflict (like miscommunication or misinterpretation) such an approach makes a broader claim that language and narratives are embedded in a larger meaning system that acts as a web to control and determine what gets said and how it gets said. Analyzing and reflecting on the activists' and leaders' narratives provides an opportunity to challenge the contours of this hegemonic web. Secondly, beyond arguing that professional agency in conflict resolution resides in conflict resolution practitioners, in such an approach social movement actors, themselves, are argued to be more important agents of pro-social change.

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<sup>547</sup> Galtung (2001). Galtung makes the distinction between positive and negative peace clear by tying the concept of peace to justice. “Peace can be interpreted as ‘negative peace,’ which is the absence of violence, or as ‘positive peace,’ the capacity to deal with conflict nonviolently and creatively. The more justice, the easier it is to achieve and maintain peace” (3).

<sup>548</sup> Kuhn (1996). Kuhn fittingly speaks of changes or shifts in paradigm as both uncommon and like a conversion experience. He writes: “The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced” (151).

To put these implications into context, Pradeep's narrative expressing anger over what he calls "intellectual honesty" (see Appendix H, lines 11-26) can be analyzed to expose a divergence of interests among many sub-groups within low-caste communities and, in turn, exposes an inconsistency in activist strategies to overcome them. A focus on conflict participant's role in the construction of value-based contention, while seemingly evident, is important to stress because it has too often either been overlooked or uncritically assumed to be of less importance to conflict studies scholars than participants' dyadic cycles of interaction. Thus, a key implication of this study is towards the development of a paradigm shift in thinking about how to address values in conflict settings. Through both critical and reflective analysis of TBMSG narratives of justice and injustice social justice commitments can be explored and a framework for approaching attempts to create social justice developed.

Even though "procedures for establishing validity rely on realist assumptions and consequently are largely irrelevant to narrative studies,"<sup>549</sup> this research has attempted to simulate validity through a practical and goal-oriented action research approach to conflict transformation. From such a realistic perspective, the research has already empowered movement activists to think more critically about their own social justice commitments and these commitments' role in the movement. In July, 2008 a two-day workshop was conducted in which TBMSG activists and supporters were trained in dialogue models and space was provided to dialogue about past injustice and the role of

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<sup>549</sup> Riessman (1993), 64.

the TBMSG in creating a caste-less society (activists' own identified future ideal of social justice). This experience was both important for the collection of research data and formative for movement members' attempts at drawing initial comparisons between the obvious shared altruism and more obscure collective exclusiveness of the TBMSG movement. Though much dialogue and reflection work remains to be done, this dialogue training workshop could be seen as one part of a long-term process that TBMSG, and the Manuski Center in particular, seem eager to continue. Though steps towards such a broad goal of conflict transformation are difficult to measure, the research and interaction between me and my interlocutors was, in itself, a positive implication of the study. The sharing of conflict resolution tools and lived experiences was invaluable to the work of TBMSG members who participated. Many expressed thanks for the workshop by stating that they had never had such an opportunity to share their feelings and stories of injustice publicly. In addition, one participant of the workshop wrote in response to whether the workshop was helpful: "There is a difference I found in my idea of social justice and others ideas."<sup>550</sup> Such insights, I believe are invaluable for movement activists.

The average TBMSG member feels as if her plight as a dalit has been hidden from the world. The social ostracism and economic disparities of the caste system have not only left dalits psychologically broken, but disconnected from their society and potential global sympathizers. Any positive attention that this community of outsiders is given, they eagerly accept and, indeed, actively work to cultivate. Beyond attempting to

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<sup>550</sup> Written Evaluation/Feedback from the Dialogue Workshop on Caste, Manuski Center, July, 2008.

explain this inclusiveness as simply striving to model a Buddhist mindset of loving kindness, the Ambedkar Buddhist community of the TBMSG embraces outsiders interested in their plight out of a psychological need to be heard, a pragmatic need to be counted, and a strategic need to develop their activist network. No doubt their own experience of social ostracism has conditioned dalits to be attentive to the thoughts, feelings, and insecurities of outsiders, but beyond such rational reasoning the communities inclusiveness implies something deeper. Lokamitra, TBMSG's leader and founder, even though called on by many to speak on behalf of Ambedkar Buddhists, expresses willingness to meet with anyone who shows a genuine interest in the Ambedkar Buddhist community.<sup>551</sup> An implicit consequence of this research was, therefore, an opportunity for Ambedkar Buddhist to be heard and to model a crucial element of their social justice vision - an inclusiveness born of an ability to focus on the individual and not just the more socially accepted collective. Such inclusiveness should not conceal the fact that TBMSG members' creation and insistence on a Buddhist identity also creates an exclusive element with the TBMSG movement. This research has helped expose this inclusive/exclusive dialectic for leaders and activists, for better or worse.

We should recall that in the TBMSG community, as in Indian society more widely, the individual is not usually conceived of as the most culturally important unit of the social system. In the words of Thorat (2007):

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<sup>551</sup> Indeed, when interviewing Lokamitra in June of 2008 he expressed that he is "happy to sit down with anyone who expresses more than a passing interest in the movement."

The notion of ‘human rights’ under the Hindu social system takes a specific meaning. It becomes clear that unlike other human societies, the Hindu social order in its classical form does not recognize the individual and his distinctiveness as the center of social purpose.<sup>552</sup>

What the TBMSG movement is trying to accomplish is nothing less than their own paradigm shift – a shift in people’s worldview from a place of communal thinking to a place where the individual is newly empowered and respected as the unit of transformation and analysis. A focus on TBMSG actors’ narrative constructions exposes TBMSG’s individual rights-based goals. For example, in the evaluation-laced coda of Haresh’s narrative in Appendix H (line 45) he describes the “main message” that Brahmins are trying to get across to dalits. This ending to his story is a calculated evaluative attempt to expose Brahmin’s collective conception and emphasize the power of an individualist conception from which dalit Buddhism gives sanction. In ending his narrative in this way Haresh is leaving the listener with a sense of their individual agency and a sense of the injustice of the traditional collective mentality. Such a rights-based focus places agency in the hands of the individual and provides support to a vision of social justice that sees the need for a shift in the communal worldview as crucial to such an endeavor. Thus, while a key implication of this study may be to highlight the transformative pragmatics of a reflective and critical narrative approach, an important corollary implication is that in doing so a focus on individual agency is sanctioned and supported. It is the above implications of exposing TBMSG’s social justice commitments that are addressed more fully in the three short sections that follow.

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<sup>552</sup> Thorat (2007), 288.

### ***7.3.1 Evaluative Action Research, Social Movement Dynamics, and Modeling Collective Cultural Shift***

TBMSG leaders and activists interviewed continually expressed the importance of the need for dalits to emancipate dalits. Saddled with lack of resources and knowledge the depressed communities in which TBMSG members and activists reside require skills transfer, capacity-building, and empowerment projects. This research was envisioned as, at least partially, an attempt to model such skills transfer and empowerment to the Maharashtrian dalits that were the subjects of this study.

Having said that, there is a degree to which social movements take on a life of their own. As much as discourse is recreated and reified through the speech and actions of movement leaders and members, the trajectory of movements can never be completely controlled by people. Political opportunity structures can change on a whim and are only partially capable of manipulation by single actors. But, successful social movements, as “an invention of the modern age and an accompaniment to the rise of the modern state,”<sup>553</sup> are, indeed, strategic and organized. While it is difficult to directly steer or guide a social movement’s outcomes, or ends, it is possible to strategize over the means which determine potential ends. Social justice as an end is, of course, problematic, but when approached as a movement means it opens windows for both analytical and practical opportunity. These windows of opportunity provide the ability to, over time, transform ends in ways that are consistent with learned and pragmatic best practices. For example, as argued in Chapter Four, exploring and understanding both the uses and

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<sup>553</sup> Tarrow (1998), 2.

meanings of leadership narratives provides a means to not only critique movement direction, but suggest new directions. In deeply exploring such narratives a means of creating conceptual clarity on key movement values and directions is provided. So, in analyzing Lokamitra's polemical utterance at Gorewada Girls Hostel (Chapter Four, Section 4.3.1), it becomes clear that his words act as a negotiated storyline upon which the movement builds its narrative structure and creates the discourse that under-girds core concepts such as justice. Lokamitra's choice of words and deployment of evaluative statements both perpetuate and re-create the movement's discourse. To a lesser degree the evaluative statements of activists have the same effect. Despite reliance on a limited number of cases as the basis for generalizations about TBMSG movement dynamics, the narratives chosen do provide important insight into the TBMSG movement's discourse and the strategic success of activists. Specifically, these narratives point to a collective goal to shift the worldview of movement members from a place of anger and contention to one of compassion and interdependence. The narratives chosen for analysis in this dissertation are exemplary of the Ambedkar Buddhism of the TBMSG movement. They both wittingly and unwittingly reify a Buddhist diagnosis of the problem and a Buddhist prescription for the solution. These narratives divulge the strategic motives of TBMSG leadership to create a new collective Buddhist identity among dalits, but they also expose the embedded nature of this motive in activist's own conceptions of their place in the work of the movement. In effect, the narratives of victim and Buddhist, though sometimes in competition within the movements, are mutually reinforcing of the movement's discursive goal of self help. Members who feel victimized find refuge in the

solitude of the Buddha's dharma. As reinforcing of a discursive attitude towards self help, a space for Buddhist soteriology is created and reinforced even in the victim narratives of movement activists. But, such narrative identities can also act as impediments to the realization of the wider movement goal of social justice. Despite TBMSG members' equation of Ambedkar's favorite mantra liberty, equality, fraternity with a Buddhist path of morality, meditation, and wisdom,<sup>554</sup> such a linking of the secular expression of social justice with a religious worldview acts to justify identity politics. As constitutive of hardened identities and us/them social positioning, reliance on the narrative identities of both victim and Buddhist maintain a conflict situation in which the potential for violence and disorder remain real. While it may be that from a social movement organization standpoint there is a need for the existence of this violent potential in order to keep up the number of recruits and angry energetic young activists, from the perspective of reaching a goal of social justice such potential is more problematic.

By attempting to create social justice through the rhetoric of naming and blaming injustice, and injustice's purveyors, a potential for unwanted consequences is unleashed. The fostering of self pride and in-group identity presents a double-edged sword; on the one hand it reinforces a communal reliance and respect for the collective self of a dalit counter-public, but on the other hand it empowers an underbelly of retributive aspiration or feelings of revenge within that same counter-public. While it is clear that unanalyzed

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<sup>554</sup> Participants in the Dialogue on Caste that I facilitated in July, 2008 expressed the importance of this equation for TBMSG's vision of social justice.

TBMSG movement narratives can add to conflict cycles, it is also clear that attempts to create and sustain a collective cultural shift away from the Hindu social order requires some degree of negative ascriptions towards the ‘other.’ These negative ascriptions are problematic as they will inevitably ensure discursive retaliation and undermine any Buddhist potential for interdependence and loving-kindness.

Fostering the narrative storyline of political conversion away from Hinduism and towards Buddhism just re-conceives of the ‘us’ in the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dialectic. While such Buddhist conversion opens political opportunities to create a new sense of self, it also supports a perception of all Buddhists as dalits and hampers inclusive opportunities for dialogue. So, the question seems to linger: How do movement activists create the collective cultural shift they desire in a way that maintains the two key conceptual foundations of the movement’s Buddhist conception of a social justice ideal: interdependence and nonviolence? This dissertation argues that answers to this question can only come through internal movement process of social justice theory building, which in turn open opportunities for inter-caste public dialogue. One such model for social change, which requires the critical reflective analysis of movement narratives by movement actors, is explained further in the next section.

### ***7.3.2 Social Justice Theory Building: A Model for Social Change?***

It is Ambedkar’s autobiographical narratives, such as his boyhood experience of traveling to see his father in Goregaon, which provide TBMSG movement members with a mental map upon which to bridge the divergence between their reality and their ideal. As an example of someone who broke the shackles of caste through education and the

attainment of respect from even upper caste people, Dr. Ambedkar is both a real and a mythical paragon of social justice. Similarly, in Dr. Amitamati's narrative storyline one can see that not only her current identity is revealed, but her future projection of justice is exposed. Like Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Amitamati is an example of someone who has broken many barriers, but still struggles for respect, acceptance, and a sense of fair play. In her continual trial there is a sense of what justice would look like. If we look at Lokamitra's words at the Gorewada girls' hostel in Nagpur, or Anurag's story of self-assertion we see the same powerful potential in story.

While realizing and tapping this potential are two different things, they are intricately connected through the webs of meanings that narratives create. As social actors' narrate their stories they are implicitly taking moral positions on their 'reality.' These moral positions are an actualization of narratives past and a projection of narratives desired. In fact, these normative moral positions are so intricately intertwined in the future and past tenses of narrative that their complete separation is impossible. So when Haresh passionately explains in the evaluation and coda of his story about the Gujarati earthquake response that: "you're not part of the country, you are not part of the culture, you are not part of the civilization. You are just out-caste, out-nationed, out-civilized. You are just there for serving, serving, and serving,"<sup>555</sup> he varies his tense between present, past and future. Though such narrative's conceptual tapestry brings a richness and mystery to the world, it also brings passionate debate and, at times, destructive

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<sup>555</sup> See Appendix H, line 44.

conflict. It is in tapping into the power and passion of competing narrative conceptions, and discovering their transformative qualities, towards which this research has been aimed. This implies that a realization of narrative's potential is primary to exploiting that potential, but it does not imply that these two steps are somehow separate.

If we continue to work upon the assumption that the brief taxonomy of justice that was introduced in Chapter Two - namely that justice exists in three broad realms: procedural (fairness of methods), distributive (fairness of results), and relational (effect on social relations) - provides a good starting point for contextualizing social justice, then it becomes possible to talk about evaluating the implementation of elements of social justice in particular cases. Though ambiguous and not always explicit such elements of a future social justice ideal permeate TBMSG narratives and provide a means to social transformation. Still, social transformation takes the input of multiple, often conflict prone, parties. The legacy of caste discrimination, so ingrained in both low-caste and high-caste minds will not be changed simply by understanding the role that narrative plays in social construction, but rather through active engagement and dialogue about this role and its consequences.

While the evaluative statements of activists like Amitamati and leaders like Lokamitra point to a future projection of justice, this projection is left vague and unbounded. It has been argued that there is a degree of intentionality in this ambiguity. Such ambiguity serves the purpose of establishing and mobilizing a Buddhist identity while utilizing injustice narratives to provide support for this reconstructed identity. But, such identity creation has a side-effect of reinforcing in-group/out-group positioning,

which, in turn, reinforces power asymmetries within society. The degree of intentional ambiguity in TBMSG discourse also reinforces a TBMSG belief system in which, injustice is both known from experience, and the ideal of social justice is accepted as, at least partially, unknowable (or at a minimum as impermanent). Thus, as the TBMSG movement's own construction of social justice has increasingly been assumed to be static, its future potentialities unknowable, less and less attention within the movement has been paid to the collective reflective analysis on justice as a concept. Thus, for TBMSG activists, as injustice has become an established movement narrative useful for recruitment and organizing, the conception of creating a socially just society has simultaneously become more and more difficult to clearly and uniformly articulate. In tandem with an inability to articulate a uniform conception of social justice, the desire to engage 'others' has become less desirable. As TBMSG's conception of social justice becomes more difficult to articulate, it is also becomes more difficult to self-reflectively analyze. Such a cycle, in reproducing itself, has the insidious effect of constraining the social justice goals of the movement.

Despite the complexities involved in making TBMSG's social justice ideal a reality, it has been argued here that the road to achieving this goal runs through narrative. The positive opportunities created by narrative ambiguity over social justice goals seem, at least in practice, to outweigh the negative consequences. Not only do the positive aspects of the creation of a new religious identity outweigh the negative consequences of this creation, but the dialectic created by the competing identities of Buddhist and victim acts to open creative opportunities for movement members to co-construct a pragmatic

balance of inclusive and exclusive attempts aimed at the realization of social justice.

While some have argued that the Ambedkar Buddhists of the TBMSG are not “activist enough,”<sup>556</sup> the movement in fact holds possibly the best potential for true social transformation. The combination of spiritual renewal and narrative power in the TBMSG movement positions it on the vanguard of creating social change. It is just the effective tapping of that spiritual and narrative potential which remains to be fully realized.

### ***7.3.3 Religion and Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: An Important Connection.***

The religious penchant for mobilizing, fused with a socially re-constructed moral grounding, provides TBMSG with a unique opportunity to foster wide-spread social change. While Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion sparked a movement it is TBMSG that holds the very important keys to the conversion movement’s wider reach and social justice appeal. No other Ambedkar Buddhist organization has the ability and resources to bring people of diverse backgrounds and experience together to discuss the issues of caste in modern India. No other movement has built the cultural legitimacy among so many dalit communities. Still, even though TBMSG is a strong and respected voice for the downtrodden, that cache does not extend far outside of dalit communities. Despite the fact that TBMSG leaders and activists have historically focused inwardly on their communities’ needs, the narratives that support their identities as victims and Buddhists

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<sup>556</sup> Informal interview with Kathy Sreedhar of the United Universalist Association’s Holdeen India Program. Sreedhar, a former program officer for the Ford Foundation, heads The UUA Holdeen India Program, a program which has funded a number of dalit rights activists throughout India, sponsored activists to develop innovative approaches to activism, and nominated activists for international Human Rights awards.

also privilege a vision of the future where social discrimination does not exist. In order to realize this vision their narratives must reach the ‘others’ that their narratives portray as either perpetrators or witnesses. This does not mean that TBMSG’s narratives must be completely changed for these listeners, but rather that the means and space to re-deploy them must be created and exploited. This involves first an internal coming together in critical reflective analysis on their narrative structures and then a coming together in dialogue<sup>557</sup> about their narrative experiences with ‘others.’ Since social actors’ value commitments are inseparable from their narrative constructions, such coming together is crucial to the ultimate creation of social change in the caste structures of Indian society. Religion’s role in such dialogue should not be a minor one – it provides the basis from which to both organize critical reflective analysis and legitimize a public dialogue process. Religion affords a social legitimacy to dialogue that acts as a protection for victims afraid of being re-victimized and a legitimate moral basis for those that accept the risk of engaging the ‘other.’

Though such public interfaith dialogue processes would invariably begin small, with small successes their potential to gain steam is enormous. Given the fact that many Hindus do not want to engage with Buddhists due to the social stigma that Hindus now equate with Buddhism, bringing both parties to the interfaith dialogue table will certainly

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<sup>557</sup> Here dialogue is used in the broad sense of the word, as in a people in dialogue. It connotes a deliberate process in which words and deeds over time build relationships and mutual understanding. As Smock (2002) writes: “When interfaith dialogue is confined to talk and conversation, Marc Gopin asserts, little is accomplished. Dialogue favors those individuals or groups who are more aggressive; it disadvantages those individuals or groups who are less verbally gifted. Other authors join Gopin in concluding that interfaith interaction that goes beyond talk and entails joint activities can be much more powerful” (131).

prove difficult. But, the alternative is the continued ‘othering’ and conflict behaviors so indicative of completely separate communities. In the words of David Smock “smaller groups generally lend themselves to more irenic dialogue than do larger groups.”<sup>558</sup>

Starting on a small scale, TBMSG is in a prime position to use the irenic potentials of religious affiliation to push for a more inclusive society. Some possible steps to build on this approach could be: to organize religious festivals open to the public, to organize inter-caste meals and publicize their success, or to develop ties to more progressive Hindu groups and send TBMSG delegations to their events.

The vision above is not intended as a blind endorsement of TBMSG; such endorsement would be naïve and intellectually dishonest. TBMSG has great resources and potential, but must more actively pursue this potential given the stock of cultural resources available to them. Rather than being a cause of further conflict, through the creation of an exclusive converted Buddhist identity and rhetoric of turning all of India Buddhist, TBMSG leaders and activists have the opportunity to be a model of peace-building practice. Rather than teach simply Buddhist dharma, TBMSG has a perfect opportunity to teach an inclusive pluralist understanding rooted in their chosen faith tradition – something rare in modern India. Further, arguing that TBMSG has the potential to be on the forefront of interfaith dialogue processes around caste does not downplay the major hurdles that such work must invariably overcome. The constraints that a movement like TBMSG faces are legion. From lack of internal capacity and

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<sup>558</sup> Smock (2002), 129.

psychological deprivation to the many problems associated with the building of a legitimate social position among higher-castes, TBMSG leaders and activists face numerous constraints to realizing their social justice ideal. Still, it is argued here that interfaith dialogue (broadly defined) is the most viable means to realizing a justpeace. Such dialogue provides the space and the structure for the analysis and critique of the multiple narrative storylines of all parties to caste conflict, not just one community. Through initiating a process of interfaith dialogue TBMSG movement members will develop a balanced, stern, and peaceful voice for their grievances and begin a long process of reconciliation. Though, this voice might be soft or weak at the beginning, through controlled and facilitated interaction with ‘others’ it will grow stronger.<sup>559</sup>

TBMSG’s faith-based roots provide an important key to conflict resolution and eventual societal transformation. This research highlights some of the gaps and opportunities available to TBMSG leaders and activists desirous of societal transformation.

#### ***7.4 Recommendations for Further Research***

In returning to the strategic recommendations outlined in Chapter Six, further research recommendations that explore the nexus between social justice and conflict are proposed in broad form. The short list of strategic and practical recommendations (from Chapter Six, Section 6.4) is provided again below and is then followed by some plainspoken ideas of where these practical recommendations could possibly support further qualitative research agendas. By no means exhaustive, these recommendations

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<sup>559</sup> Such change, if measured, could be considered one indicator of success. For a detailed discussion of what constitutes success in dialogue or controlled encounter models see Abu-Nimer (1999), Chapter 8.

and accompanying visions for further research provide a living document for both TBMSG members' and social science scholars alike who wish to pursue practical research agendas related to TBMSG's social justice constructions and commitments.

- *Movement leaders and activists should embrace the ambiguity in the social positions that justice narratives create while also critically and reflectively exploring the origin of this ambiguity;*

Both victims and active agents of social change TBMSG members' narratives oscillate between passive frustration and passionate activism. In finding that evaluative statements of both TBMSG activists' and leaders' narratives exhibit an ambiguity that is at times strategic and at other times unplanned, much research work that explores this ambiguity remains. Further research needs to be done to understand the passive frustration of dalit activists generally and ensure that it does not lead to aggressive behavior that perpetuates or generates conflict. Such research could take the form of problems solving workshops or other controlled communication interventions (such as nonviolent communication). In order to have a healthy collective identity, or what Taylor, Bougie, and Caouette (2003) call a "stable reference group,"<sup>560</sup> not only is critical self-reflective analysis of movement stories crucial, but such analysis is also needed to expose the social opportunities and constraints involved in embracing the ambiguity of dalits' social position. Through further evaluative action research of the role that the of TBMSG community's rituals play into this ambiguity, further means to realizing the

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<sup>560</sup> Taylor, Bougie, and Caouette (2003), 213.

social justice ends of movement members can be uncovered and a fuller picture of TBMSG's role in the creation of social justice can be discerned. This broad recommendation for movement's members provides multiple angles for further action research agendas.

- *Providing space for the voice of victim identities is crucial for both the social psychology and social justice ideals of movement members;*

Given that this second broad recommendation is related to the first, further research is needed into how to most effectively and least intrusively develop this space. It has been argued here that inter-caste dialogue, broadly defined as involving the deep analysis of social actor's narratives, is the first step, in this case, to a successful narrative encounter process. While much work remains to be done in exploring both how to bring high-castes to the table and subsequently how to most effectively engage them, the intra-caste dialogue work that Manuski Center activists are currently engaged in seems to be a nice fit for developing the skills set necessary for inter-caste dialogue processes. A further step in developing this space requires the investment of scholarly time, knowledge, and assessment of "interactive conflict resolution"<sup>561</sup> processes such as problem-solving workshops and analytical controlled communication with TBMSG members and those they are in contention with. Such controlled interaction would avail a rich set of data to continue exploring the many themes developed in this research.

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<sup>561</sup> See Fisher (1997).

It also bares saying here that one result of this research has been to bring to light an endemic societal issue of structural violence that unfortunately has all-to-often been overlooked by outside entities working in or with India. While TBMSG members are joining forces with other dalit rights activists around the world to bring awareness and action to this structural violence<sup>562</sup> the fact is dalit rights is not a major issue in the bilateral relations between India and any of its Western trade partners. Further exploration of the transnational spaces of activism available to dalit rights groups represents another important area for further research.

- *TBMSG members must balance the storylines of victim and Buddhist so as to engage a diversity of Indians in the program of realizing social justice;*

Being careful to model their inclusive beliefs to those outside the movement, TBMSG members' on-going struggle to balance these storylines highlights one of the main obstacles to the creation of their social justice ideal. Beyond simply analyzing these storylines for their irenic potential (what this dissertation has attempted to do) there is much room to explore the historical construction of these dominant tropes of dalit agitation. Exploring how that history conditions present day dalit activism has only been

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<sup>562</sup> Manuski Center activists were part of a delegation that in 2007 meet with members of the black caucus of the Pennsylvania General Assembly and urged the passage of House Resolution No. 383 on September 4, 2007 (Jambudvipa Annual Review, *Padmapani* 2007-2008). Further, given the May 1, 2007 passage by the 110<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress of Concurrent Resolution 139, which urges US citizens working in India to "avoid discrimination towards the Dalits in all business interactions" (H. Con. Res. 139, 6), there is a need to more deeply analyze the Dalit Diaspora's mobilization against, and framing of, Dalit discrimination (I, myself, presented a preliminary paper about this at the 2008 South Asia Conference in Madison, Wisconsin entitled "Transnational Advocacy and the Dalit Rights Movement: Secular versus Religious Social Justice Narratives of Assertion in Diaspora Mobilization). Such legislative activities and lobbying provide rich opportunities to explore the transnational dalit rights movement and TBMSG's place within it, as well as, such strategies effectiveness for creating lasting change.

touched on here [see also Omvedt (1994) for further discussion]. Further, how present-day dalit activists of the TBMSG modulate their message for local and international supporters or potential donors, has only been a side theme of this dissertation research. Future research needs to be done on the strategic thinking of movement leaders' and activists' use and deployment of various storylines for various actors. Such research would serve to supplement this dissertation by providing a deeper understanding of the range of movement members' constraints and motivations. Finally, further research could be done to explore the role of history in creating the dominant storylines that the TBMSG movement deploys. Multiple questions remain about not only why activists chose to deploy which storyline in which particular context, but also about why they chose collective action at certain points in history as opposed to others.

- *Continue creating a new Buddhist identity, but do so in a way that does not disenfranchise or decouple victims of structural violence from the 'others' they are attempting to transform.*

The creation of a new Buddhist identity has a number of advantages for both dalits and the TBMSG movement as a whole. Such identity acts as an anchor for reconstructing a psychology and self-esteem which can put Ambedkar Buddhists in a place to productively engage with 'others.' But, complete reliance on this strategy runs the risk of closing off interaction with other communities all together and severing any potential for creating cross-cutting bonds<sup>563</sup> that dalits and non-dalits may be able to develop or

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<sup>563</sup> See Pruitt and Kim (2004), 141.

maintain. In such a context, interfaith dialogue is only one means of engagement. Further study is needed on the role that ritual, social performance, and economic mobility play in engaging the ‘others’ at the opposite ends of the Hindu caste system. This research touches on some of these themes, but leaves open broad questions about how to encourage the formation of a strong Buddhist identity, while also finding ways to franchise those that do not see this new identity as crucial for change or, even, see it as detrimental to local or national progress. Further research on how social networks and social bonds are made and maintained would provide valuable insight into TBMSG’s strategic use and deployment of an Ambedkar Buddhist identity.

- *Ambedkar Buddhists unique religious worldview provides unrivaled opportunity to underscore the crucial elements of a social justice ideal, and to understand the processes by which that ideal is self-constructed.*

Until now the TBMSG movement has been studied as a political conversion movement representing a religious revolution, or a foreign revival of Buddhism in the country of its origin, but little time has been focused on the comparative analysis of political goals and religious commitments either within the movement or to other like movements from different cultural contexts. Eleanor Zelliot as the dean of American scholarship on Ambedkar Buddhism has endeavored to build a historical understanding of Ambedkarism. While her contributions are invaluable in this respect, I believe what is missing is an attempt to bring out what is essential in Ambedkar Buddhism that can not be found in other religious revival movements. Zelliot’s focus on Ambedkar has been so historically complete and sociologically consistent that I believe it has left discussion of

political contention and conflict strategy too flat. Owen Lynch, another eminent American scholar of Ambedkar Buddhism has added a political dimension to his scholarship of Ambedkar activists' contention, but here too future commitments and potentials go unexplored. Further study of the doctrinal foundations of TBMSG's hermeneutic of Buddhism would be invaluable additive to the research that is currently available. Such research would help to clarifying TBMSG political goals and act as a basis to construct effective strategies to realize them. De-bunking the assumption that everyone knows what social justice is, the present research has only begun to open up questions about the link between social justice and TBMSG's religious interpretations and commitments. Much remains to be done here.

- *Vigilantly remember the interconnectedness of both oppressed and oppressor, without such remembrance the TBMSG social justice vision is no different than an expression of disadvantaged grievance.*

The narratives analyzed in this dissertation point to TBMSG leaders and activists need to overcome traditional classifications as either victim or oppressor. While leaders and activists seem to grasp the problems inherent in too completely classifying themselves and their actions as either one or the other, they also seem to deploy either victim or Buddhist identities devoid of an integrated strategic plan. TBMSG members consistent blending of these narrative identities, while at times strategic (I think of Lokamitra's story discussed in Chapter Four) is often haphazard and incidental (I think of many activists stories from the Fish Bowl Dialogues described in Chapter Five).

Further research to determine the link between activists' narrative strategies and beliefs in interconnectedness is required to fully understand the degree to which activist narratives are either simply grievances or strategies to create a moral economy. In other words, do activists have a worldview in which such classifications of oppressed and oppressor represent false dichotomies? Given that such false dichotomies often feed problematic dialectics, further research work on overcoming these categories needs to be undertaken.

- *Provide the means (space, structure, and training) for members to actively engage in reflective collective process.*

As stated repeatedly above, such space, structure, and training have been lacking in the dalit community. TBMSG's strategy seems to be to develop the space, structure, and training with-in their own community to uplift themselves, since no one else is looking out for them. While this is a practical approach to the reality that dalits' daily face, their circle must widen. Without social networks that cross-cut both dalit and non-dalit communities, reflective collective process is impossible. Further action research is needed to explore with dalits how to develop the space, structures and training needed to move Ambedkar Buddhist engagement to a new level. This research has pointed to some initial means that Manuski Center activists are using to internally develop this space,

structure, and capacity, but more training and capacity building is needed in the Ambedkar Buddhist community to make reflective collective processes viable.<sup>564</sup>

- *Explore various identities and from this exploration “devise and implement strategies aimed at facilitating the emergence of ‘critical consciousness.’”*<sup>565</sup>

Ambedkar Buddhists of the TBMSG are engaged in an on-going process of developing their sense of critical consciousness. Given that defining critical consciousness depends upon a normative framework and that TBMSG leadership is involved in developing, within the Ambedkar dalit community, a strong sense that Buddhism and Buddhist identity are crucial for taking a critical stance vis-à-vis the current caste system, the movement risks missing opportunities for other identities to play a part in the construction of critical consciousness. The result could be that the consciousness that is constructed by TBMSG movement members is less than critical. Further research is needed to determine the role that TBMSG’s hardened Buddhist identity plays in the construction of activists’ critical consciousness. The question here is not only if such identity creation is problematic for the creation of justpeace, but what affect a strong Ambedkar Buddhist identity plays in activists construction of their own contentious goals and collective self-perception. Beyond the view of building a strong personal identity, there is a need for TBMSG to also analyze the multiple identities that build on opportunities for collective shifts in consciousness.

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<sup>564</sup> In a formal interview with Dharmachari Karunika (an English order member that has been in India helping out the TBMSG movement with administration for about 3 years) he stated that the biggest problem facing the TBMSG movement in India is a lack of capacity, June 27, 2008.

<sup>565</sup> Gil (1998), 39.

- *View agency as something broader than the realization of either past injustice or the act of conversion, otherwise the dialectics outlined above will continue to dog TBMSG leaders and activists.*

Like most social scientists, TBMSG leaders and activists have a narrow view of agency. As outlined in Chapter Six, until agency on all levels of the movement is collectively understood as something broader than the realization of past injustice or the act of conversion, TBMSG members are going to be complicit in the process of reproducing the status quo. Caste, as understood as tearing at the “social fabric”<sup>566</sup> of society, is understood by many dalits to be unchangeable. Leaders and activists of the TBMSG, in attempting to change this defeatist mentality, deploy injustice narratives and conversion stories as justice narratives. While these stories act to persuade the uninitiated that change is possible, they also unwittingly re-constitute caste oppression. Though necessary for the development and sustenance of the movement, reliance on these narrative structures alone is problematic. Further research on how to develop and deploy new narrative storylines that both win new adherents and construct a vision of life after conversion is critical for TBMSG’s success as a movement for social change.

In returning the Paul Williams quote that began this dissertation it now seems clear that TBMSG members’ goals, like the Buddha’s, are also teleological. Williams was quoted at the beginning of Chapter One as follows:

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<sup>566</sup> Brown Bag Talk by Mangesh Dahiwale and Dharmachari Maitreyanath, George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, May 15, 2007 [Line number 13, Appendix G].

The teaching of the Buddha is through and through goal-oriented (teleological). It is entirely dependent upon its goal of freedom from suffering and ultimate frustration. And the Buddha's concern is not discussion. It is not pondering or mulling things over. It is action.<sup>567</sup>

But TBMSG's brand of teleology must to some extent be separated from a Buddhist practice commitment that is in pragmatic opposition to "mulling things over."<sup>568</sup> In the context of caste oppression this 'mulling things over' must also be understood as a form of action; a means to an end. The dedicated leadership and activists of the TBMSG movement must dedicate themselves to a more radical and self-conscious means of expressing their core values – this will involve mulling over not just their spiritual practice, but their collective activism as well. The Manuski Center is on the forefront of this process (by working with a network of activists and communities to communicate collective needs and wants), but they have much ground to cover before the narrative structures of both justice and injustice can fully inform the strategies and tactics of their contention. When these narrative structures are fully analyzed and understood by movement members new strategies and tactics for the realization of justpeace are exposed and present themselves for use.

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<sup>567</sup> Williams (2000), 36.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 36.

APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF SOME IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF DR.  
B. R. AMBEDKAR AND THE TBMSG MOVEMENT

- Born an untouchable Mahar (a sub-caste) in Maharashtra State of India, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1891.
- Graduated from high school, 1907 – Only the second Untouchable to ever do this!
- Awarded an MA from Colombia University in 1915.
- Wrote Castes in India, May 1916.
- Returned to India to serve the Maharaja of Baroda, 1917.
- Founded a small journal called the *Mooknayak* (Leader of the Dumb) in his native language (Marathi), 1920.
- Resigned his governmental post and with financial help from certain reform-minded Brahmins returned to London to get his MS and law degree from University of London, London School of Economics 1920-23.
- Returned to Columbia University and received a PhD, 1926.
- Mahad Conference and Satyagraha march to the Chowdar water tank, March 1927.
- Began publishing a new periodical in his local Marathi language called *Bahishkrit Bharat*, in April, 1927.
- Asked by the British to be a witness on the Simon Commission on constitutional reform, May 1928.
- Nashik Kala Ram temple Satyagraha – trying to get temples to admit untouchables or as he called them the scheduled classes, March 1930.
- Representative at Round Table Conference in London, 1930-32.
- Poona Pact of 1932 in which Ambedkar was forced to compromise on the issue of separate electorates for untouchables in order to save Gandhi from a death fast.
- Yeola District, Nasik Conference, Ambedkar vows that though unfortunate to be born a Hindu, he would certainly not die one, October 1935.
- Ambedkar writes Annihilation of Caste, 1935-36.
- Writes his “Reply to the Mahatma,” July 1936.
- Helped form Independent Labor Party, August 1936.
- All India Scheduled Caste Federation formed at Nagpur, April 1942.
- Appointed as Labor Minister in the Viceroy's Executive Council, July 1942.
- Wrote What Congress & Gandhi have done to the Untouchables, June 1945.
- Appointed Law Minister in Independent India, August 1947.
- Appointed as Chairman, Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India, August 1947.
- Resigned from Union Cabinet, September 1951.
- Buddhist Society of India formed, May 1955.

- Embraced Buddhism, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1956, by taking 22 vows<sup>569</sup> and leading a mass conversion of between 500,000 and 800,000 Mahar Untouchables to Buddhism.
- Dr. Ambedkar dies, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1956.
- Buddha & His Dhamma, published posthumously 1957.

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<sup>569</sup> See Appendix B for the list of the 22 vows.

## APPENDIX B: 22 VOWS TAKEN UPON DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR'S 1956 CONVERSION TO BUDDHISM

On 15 October 1956, when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar finally decided upon Buddhism as his choice of religion, he publicly took the 22 vows below. The mass conversion that followed these vows is thought by many to be the largest religious conversion the world has ever seen. Severing the bond with Hinduism, as he had promised to do 21 years earlier, these 22 vows, like much of Ambedkar's thought and writing are as much social and political as spiritual and religious.

1. I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh nor shall I worship them.
2. I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnation of God nor shall I worship them.
3. I shall have no faith in 'Gauri', Ganapati and other gods and goddesses of Hindus nor shall I worship them.
4. I do not believe in the incarnation of God.
5. I do not and shall not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be sheer madness and false propaganda.
6. I shall not perform 'Shraddha' nor shall I give 'pind-dan'.
7. I shall not act in a manner violating the principles and teachings of the Buddha.
8. I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins.
9. I shall believe in the equality of man.
10. I shall endeavor to establish equality.
11. I shall follow the 'noble eightfold path' of the Buddha.
12. I shall follow the 'paramitas' (knowledge) prescribed by the Buddha.
13. I shall have compassion and loving kindness for all living beings and protect them.
14. I shall not steal.
15. I shall not tell lies.
16. I shall not commit carnal sins.
17. I shall not take intoxicants like liquor, drugs etc.
18. I shall endeavor to follow the noble eightfold path and practice compassion and loving kindness in every day life.
19. I renounce Hinduism, which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion.
20. I firmly believe the Dhamma of the Buddha is the only true religion.
21. I believe that I am having a re-birth.

22. I solemnly declare and affirm that I shall hereafter lead my life according to the principles and teachings of the Buddha and his Dhamma.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> This list of his vows comes from [www.angelfire.com/ak/ambekar.html](http://www.angelfire.com/ak/ambekar.html)

## APPENDIX C: OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE OF THE TRAILOKYA BAUDDHA MAHASANGHA, SAHAYAK GANA (TBMSG)

The **Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha, Sahayak Gana (TBMSG)** today is the largest indigenous Buddhist organization on the Indian sub-continent. Professing to have over 10 million Indian Buddhist followers, TBMSG is larger than many Christian religious denominations in the United States, and is indeed much larger than their parent organization the **Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO)** in England.

The TBMSG is the Indian wing of an international Buddhist Movement founded in 1967 by Sangharakshita and known in the West as the FWBO. Much of this modern interest in reviving Buddhism in India can be traced back to three important reform figures, and their religious as well as political thought. The lives of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, architect of the Indian Constitution and ‘untouchable’ leader, an English Buddhist monk named Sangharakshita, and one of his first disciples named Lokamitra, all intertwine to create the story of the TBMSG. All reform-minded individuals it was Lokamitra that was encouraged by Sangharakshita, and inspired by the story of Dr. Ambedkar, to move to India in 1978 and begin the work of the TBMSG.

TBMSG stresses a social doctrine and socio-political interpretation of historical Buddhism. Placing a primary importance on the individual, TBMSG brand of Buddhism is often referred to as Protestant Buddhism. The basic guiding principle of the TBMSG has been to form a civic-life and community outreach around the idea of a renewed Buddhist *Sangha* (community), as well as, concepts of *Kalayana Mitra* (spiritual friendship) and Dharma as social practice oriented.

Specifically the TBMSG seeks to put the Dharma into practice in three ways:

1. By giving Dharma course lectures;
2. Through retreats of intensive Buddhist practice and;
3. Through the creation of Dharma communities in which members work together for the common good of that community.

The first two of these institutional goals were immediately taken on by the TBMSG and have, indeed, expanded into child and adult literacy through libraries, competitive exam centers, and an extensive educational hostel system for the disadvantaged. The third goal was a bit more problematic due to the socio-economic realities of India. In order to overcome obstacles of both program funding and the often desperate economic situation of movement members, to achieve the goals of this third practice of the Dharma, the Indian-run **TBM Trust**, the institutional board of the TBMSG movement, decided to create a social work arm of the organization. Thus the **Bahujan Hitay (BH)** “for the welfare of the many” was created, and TBMSG’s first health and education projects were started in Pune, Maharashtra.

**The BH** runs community health, cultural, and education projects for the disadvantaged members of society (mainly dalits). For over a decade BH has run educational hostels and community centers to uplift the community through education and organizing. TBMSG's BH now has 19 hostels<sup>571</sup> operating in four different Indian States.

**The Jambudvipa Trust**, in taking the ancient Buddhist name for the Indian sub-continent, was founded by Lokamitra to support initiatives that do not easily fit into the TBMSG or BH structure or that could be managed more appropriately in other ways. In envisioning a participatory society free of caste and other social barriers, the Jambudvipa Trust can be understood as embracing the agitation and organization roles that Dr. Ambedkar saw as co-equal with educating. The Jambudvipa Trust raises funds for community uplift and helps guide various Ambedkar Buddhist projects to self-sufficiency. Among the larger of these projects are: The Manuski Center and the Nagarjuna Institute.

**The Manuski Center**, based in Pune alongside the Jambudvipa Trust offices, runs a number of inter-related projects aimed at fostering humanity, compassion, and respect. As advocates, organizers, and agitators the staff of the Manuski Center are engaged in building social awareness among Ambedkar Buddhists and the dalit community more widely. Their activities include organizing inter-caste dialogues (thus far among low-caste groups only), publicizing atrocities against dalits across India, and building networks of dalit rights activists both locally and internationally.

**The Nagarjuna Institute** at Nagaloka (near Nagpur) is a training Institute that Jambudvipa Trust has developed with the help of funds from Taiwanese Buddhists. Their goal is to train people from all over India in Buddhism as well as basic social work. Courses lasting one year have been taking place since 2002. The training is unique in India as it brings together students from all the different parts of India to study the Dharma and how it can be an agent of change in their home communities. Two-hundred and eighty-two students from 15 different states of India have been trained in the Nagarjuna Training Institute and have added to the further mission of the Institute as a centre for interaction between Buddhist followers of Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhists from different backgrounds in India, and Buddhists from abroad.<sup>572</sup> Interestingly, the Nagarjuna institute practices its own form of reservations among the dalit communities it serves, reserving seats for dalits from regions outside of Maharashtra so as to spread the dharma and educational resources it provides, the institute selects students based on region, potential impact, and need.

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<sup>571</sup> Lokamitra (1999), 32.

<sup>572</sup> <http://www.jambudvipa.org/sec3a.htm>.

In order to understand the above arms of the TBMSG movement it is important to understand where seed funding and continued financial support comes from. **The Karuna Trust** was started in 1980 by members of FWBO in London to raise funds for the Buddhist social work activities organized by the TBMSG and BH in India. Initially fundraising door-to-door, Karuna soon expanded to access foundation support, as well as, diversified its' pool of beneficiaries to include "anyone regardless of their background."<sup>573</sup> Karuna funded project promote dignity and self-confidence and are aimed at the "breaking down of caste and religious barriers."<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> <http://www.karuna.org/about/>

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

**Chronological Flow of the Organizational Arms of the TBMSG Movement:<sup>575</sup>**

**The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO)** – Western wing of the Buddhist Order founded by Sangarakshita 1968.

**Aid for India (1980) and Karuna Trust (1987)**  
Charitable Trusts and Foundations to Support Social and Dharma Work Projects in both the West and India.

**Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha (TBM)** – Indian Wing of the order Sangarakshita founded.  
Now organized under various Trusts based on region (i.e. Pune, Nagpur, etc.)

**Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG)** – Dharma Work Branch of TBM, founded 1979

**Baujan Hitay (“For the Welfare of the Many”)**  
Social Work Branch of the TBM, founded 1979

**Jambudvipa Trust** – Founded in 1999 by Lokamitra to bring disadvantaged people of “different backgrounds together through spiritual practice to transcend barriers.”<sup>576</sup>

The Manuski Center, 1999  
The Nagarguna Institute, 2002  
Samata Mahila Society, 2007  
Relief Work  
Community and Retreat Centers

**The Arya Tara Mahila Trust** – Founded in 2005 by TBMSG Dharmacharinis to “empower women to help themselves and their community.”<sup>577</sup>

<sup>575</sup> Adapted from Sponberg (1996), 91.

<sup>576</sup> Lokamitra, *Padmapani Annual Review of Jambudvipa Trust* 2007-08, 3.

<sup>577</sup> <http://indiansisters.org/main.html>

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

CODE:

**Disclaimer:** I am about to read you a few short questions. The purpose of these questions is to assist me in research I am doing as a doctoral student at George Mason University. The topic I am researching is related to views of justice among Ambedkar Buddhists. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, and if you feel you do not want to answer any question, for any reason, just let me know and I will move to the next question. Names and identity will remain strictly confidential, and my questions will only take about 45 minutes to answer. I thank you in advance for your assistance and hope that you find this interview enjoyable. First off do you have any questions of me?

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Duration of Interview:

\*\*\*\*\*

**Name (Optional):**

**Relationship to the Social Movement:**

**Age:**

**Sex:**

**Ethnic Identity:**

**No. of Children:**

**Kind of work you do:**

**Highest level of education completed:**

**Are you an active Buddhist?**

- a. *if so, what kinds of activities do you most often do?*
- b. *if not, what is your relationship to the TBMSG movement/Jambudvipa Trust?*
- c. *Are most of your acquaintances involved in some aspect of the TBMSG movement?*
- d. *Would you consider your personal connection to the TBMSG movement to be:*
  - a. *Very Close*
  - b. *Close*
  - c. *Not very Close*
  - d. *Distant*
  - e. *Very Distant*

\*\*\*\*\*

1. **Please explain what you think is the most important contribution the movement has made to the Indian subcontinent? In other words, what is the most important accomplishment of the movement?**
2. **What do you see as the primary goal of the movement?**
3. **What was your life like before your involvement in the movement? Please describe as much as possible.**
4. **Do you have any personal experiences or stories of being treated unfairly or unequally due to your social position, caste, or religious affiliation?**
5. **How has your life changed since being involved in the movement?**

**Follow-up questions:**

- a. *Are you thankful that you joined the movement?*
  - b. *If you did not join the movement how do you think your life would be different?*
  - c. *What role has the movement played in crafting a new life for you?*
6. **What do you do, a) as a community and b) as an individual person, to help yourselves/yourself to realize a more just society? Please be as specific as possible.**

**Follow-up questions:**

- a. *How would you define justice?*
  - b. *Do you think your idea of justice is the same as others in your community? Your Country?*
    - b.1. *If yes, then how is it similar?*
    - b.2. *If no, then how is it different?*
- 5.1 **(For social movement leaders) Please describe what kind of activities you perform in attempting to realize your view of justice?**

**Follow-up questions:**

- a. *What are the conditions needed in order to make this view into a reality? Please enumerate.*
- b. *How will you realize these conditions? Please be specific.*
- c. *Who, do you think, has the best opportunity to realize these conditions? Please be specific.*

**5.2 (For those who are movement participants). Please describe the kind of activities your movement leaders engage in which bring about a more just society?**

**Follow-up question:**

- a. *Do you always agree with these activities?*
- b. *What kind of activities would you perform if you were the leader of the movement?*

**6. If the founder(s) of the movement were alive today, do you think they would agree with the movement's current focus and activities?**

**7. Anything else you that would like to say or add regarding your participation in the TBMSG movement?**

*Thank you very much for your assistance!*

.....  
Interviewer's remarks/observations

1. *The environment where the interview takes place*
2. *Non-verbal gestures/unspoken language of the participant*
3. *Process of the interview*
  - a. *How did it go?*
  - b. *Obstacles encountered during the actual interview*
  - c. *Things that could have been done differently*
4. *Personal feelings*
5. *Additional Notes (over)*

## APPENDIX E – LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Below is a list of formal and informal interviewees/informants that were consulted during: two field visits to India (September-October 2006 and June-July 2008); various programs in the Unites States; and numerous on-line interactions with scholars and movement members. Due to a very large number of people that I met and conversed with during these trips and over a research period of nearly five years, invariably some names of informal interviewees/informants may have been overlooked here. Such oversight is completely unintentional and along with many thanks to all these inspiring individuals, I would also like to apologize in advance for any unintentional oversight. I am indebted to these individuals, and many others, for their willing nature and compassionate interaction. Their names appear here in alphabetical order.

### *Formal Interviews:*

- 1.) Dharmacharini Amitamati - Doctor and TBMSG member/volunteer
- 2.) Dharmachari Karunikka – FWBO Member living in India
- 3.) Dharmachari Lokamitra – Founder and Head TBMSG, Jambudvipa, Manuski
- 4.) Dharmachari Meitreyanath - Manuski Center Staff
- 5.) Haresh Dalvi - Manuski Center Staff (TATA graduate – now studying in the U.S.)
- 6.) Mangesh Dahiwale – Manuski Center Staff
- 7.) Pradeep Bansode – Manuski Center Staff
- 8.) Priyadarshi Telang - Manuski Center Staff

### *Informal Interviews/Informants:*

- 1.) Lalit Khandare – Manuski Friend Studying in the U.S.
- 2.) Anurag Meshram – Manuski Friend working in the Indian Civil Service
- 3.) Anil Tulse – Jambudvipa/Manuski Office Manager
- 4.) Kumresh Kamble- Manuski Center Staff

- 5.) Rahul Gajbhiye – Doctor and Manuski Friend now working in the U.S. with Temp Solution, Inc.
- 6.) Prashant Niswade - Manuski Center Staff/Recipient of Financial Support for BA/Master's Studies
- 7.) Sharad Barahate– Dharmacharini Amitamati's husband (and Dharmachari-in training)
- 8.) Sameer Taware – Manuski Center Staff (TATA graduate)
- 9.) Vaishali Jagtap - Arya Tara Mahila Trust's Computer Center Manager
- 10.) Vinod Patil - Manuski Staff
- 11.) Dharmachari Amritsidi – TBM Board Member
- 12.) Dharmachari Aniruddha - TBM Board Member/NVC Trainer
- 13.) Dharmacharini Karunamati – FWBO Member
- 14.) Dharmacharini Karunaprabha - Arya Tara Mahila Trust Co-Founder/TBM Board Member
- 15.) Dharmachari Kumarajiva - TBM Board Member/NVC Trainer
- 16.) Dharmachari Jnanraja - TBM Board Member
- 17.) Dharmachari Subuti – FWBO Member/early disciple of Sangarakshita along with Lokamitra (travels to India on a regular basis/supportive of NVC work)
- 18.) Dharmachari Virgosh - TBM Board Member
- 19.) Dharmachari Vishvapani - FWBO Member
- 20.) Dharmachari Vivekmitra - Manuski Center Staff
- 21.) Dr. Deepak Gaikwad (Pune University)

- 22.) Dr. Gopal Guru (JNU)
- 23.) Dr. Anjali Kurane (Pune University)
- 24.) Dr. Owen Lynch (New York University)
- 25.) Frank Munger (New York Law School)
- 26.) Dr. Palshikar (Pune University)
- 27.) Dr. Gail Omvedt (Independent Scholar)
- 28.) Dr. Christopher Queen (Harvard Divinity School)
- 29.) Dr. Sharmila Rege (Pune University)
- 30.) Dr. Salunkhe (Retired scholar/Buddhist)
- 31.) Dr. Gary Tartakov (Iowa State University)
- 32.) Dr. Eleanor Zelliot (Carelton College)
- 33.) Chadra Bhan Prasad (Independent Scholar and Journalist for *The Pioneer*)
- 34.) Kathy Sreedhar (UUA/Holdeen India Project)
- 35.) Various Ambedkarite families in Dapodi, Pune's largest slum.
- 36.) Various Friends of TBMSG's Manuski Center in Pune who participated in a Dialogue Workshop on Caste at the Manuski Center, July 2-3, 2008.

## APPENDIX F: MANGESH'S TRANSCRIBED NARRATIVE NUMBER ONE

Note: At the end of each transcribe line, Labov's six-part structure: Abstract [A], Orientation [O], Complicating Action [CA], Evaluation [E], Resolution [R], and Coda [C] has been added as a means to make visible the formation of the narrative structure. In addition, lower-case [p] has been added when small pauses were transcribed and Capital [P] inserted in places where a longer pause was detected.

- (1) He was opposed to any ideal system which was based on any scripture. [A]
- (2) [p] so he said that democracy has to be based on the individuals [A]
- (3) [p] that there should be equal respect in the society for all beings. [O]
- (4) And he gave a formula sort of thing [CA]
- (5) [p] He said that 'One man, one value' is the most important. [A]
- (6) Instead of we have a system where we have one man one vote, but more than that what is important is one man one value. [O]
- (7) And he promoted that form of system, from early on. [O]
- (8) And he had to fight very hard with the established elite Indians. [CA]
- (9) For example Gandhi who was adopted in the form of governance based on the Hindu scripture, kind of a very utopian and ideal form of society, which was based on the Hindu scriptures...[O]
- (10) [P] like Rama Raja, the kingdom of Rama [p] and that frightened the minorities in India, for example the Muslims. [E]
- (11) And... ahh... [p] like in that... ahh... particular concept of an ideal society there was a kind of... ahh... strong support for the caste system...[O]
- (12) [P] and another thing he noted is that there has to be a system, that there has to be a kind of... ahh...ahh... a method to secularize the society, [O]
- (13) because the religious concept when they dominate the human mind they do not let to the...[E]
- (14) [P] like many a times [E]
- (15) [p] like what that happens in India is that people will have a deep belief system which they will not be ready to test in the light of the scientific methods...[E]
- (16) [P] So for example if there is... ahh... say for example a Test Tube Baby [O]
- (17) some innovation happening in the Western world [A]
- (18) Hindu maximalists, the Fundamentalist tradition, they will try to say that that particular innovation or discovery was already there [p] you know [p] with us... [E]
- (19) but if you poke further and ask for the method they will not have any...[E]
- (20) So it is like trying to take the scientific language in order to prove what is not there. [E]
- (21) So this kind of superstitious ideas [p] like at one point of time some Hindu Fundamentalists they will claim that the caste system is the best form of organizing the society [p] it is the *best* form [p] some people has to be lower, some people has to be... [CA]

- (22) [P] and they will then try to support this system in terms of the food chain [p] the big fish ate the small fish [p] kind of a very very crude form of social Darwinism... [CA]
- (23) [p] A very crude form of social Darwinism. [CA]
- (24) So we try to challenge those ideas, the 'so-called' religious ideas [R]
- (25) [p] which like kind of fit into the system and try to enslave the human mind. [E]
- (26) And Dr. Ambedkar was very keen on promoting the scientific culture in India...[O]
- (27) [p] like what's the intellectual side of that [p] like how we can challenge the concepts that are detrimental to the growth of the human personality. [CA]
- (28) ...which are detrimental to growth of human society. [E]
- (29) That is one of his strategies and he started a political party in order to really... ahh... [p] ensure the similar political rights for the people who were classed as the 'untouchables.' [C]

## APPENDIX G: MANGESH'S TRANSCRIBED NARRATIVE NUMBER TWO

Note: At the end of each transcribe line, Labov's six-part structure: Abstract [A], Orientation [O], Complicating Action [CA], Evaluation [E], Resolution [R], and Coda [C] has been added as a means to make visible the formation of the narrative structure. In addition, lower-case [p] has been added when small pauses were transcribed and Capital [P] inserted in places where a longer pause was detected.

- (1) ...But the glass is not completely full [A]...
- (2) Very less has happened... kind of say one fifth of the glass is full, or something like that [E]...
- (3) But it is not a tremendous change has happened...[E]
- (4) And every day there will be some kind of violent incidents happening in India at... [CA]
- (5) Even as I am talking here there might be some form of injustice happening in India...[p] in some Indian village... [CA]
- (6) [P]...recently in September 2... 29<sup>th</sup> there was a massacre. [O]
- (7) 4 members of the 5 member family were lynched. [O, E]
- (8) They were killed in the full public view by the caste Hindus. [O]
- (9) And the mother and daughter... [p] they were raped in the full public view. [O]
- (10) They were not only raped but they were treated like the animals. [E]
- (11) It is the worst...[p]... if we...[p]... if we think about it that's kind of a demonizing the whole human personality. [E]
- (12) So these kinds of incidents are not rare... they are happening everywhere in different forms. [E].
- (13) And ahh... that... ahh this caste system like...[p] it tears apart the social fabric... [R]
- (14) It doesn't let the people live with respect and dignity.... [E, C]

## APPENDIX H: FISH-BOWL DIALOGUE NARRATIVES (JULY 3, 2008)

Note: These narratives represent some of the most salient and touching narratives taken from the fish-bowl exercise that the researcher facilitated on July 3, 2008. Though they are numbered consecutively for ease of reference they did not occur in straight succession, but rather they are three separate segments from the many narratives shared during an hour and a half fish-bowl dialogue workshop. As with other narratives analyzed, at the end of each transcribed line, Labov's six-part structure: Abstract [A], Orientation [O], Complicating Action [CA], Evaluation [E], Resolution [R], and Coda [C] has been added as a means to make visible the formation of the narrative structure. In addition, lower-case [p] has been added when small pauses were transcribed and Capital [P] inserted in places where a longer pause were detected. Finally, in certain places additional words are either placed in [brackets] or if speech was inaudible due to background noise on recordings an [inaudible] has been inserted for clarity of reading.

### Anurag's Belief in the Importance of Being Assertive

- (1) Looking forward from what [Mangesh quoted from Ambedkar] I think being assertive is a very very important tool. [O, E]
- (2) When I joined my penning [i.e. studies in University] we were about 15 professionals [A]
- (3) ...[p] so there was a discussion going on about reservation and this and that – and...ahh...my professors were sitting together [O]
- (4) So then I said that I come form a scheduled caste category and everybody was so visibly stunned [CA]
- (5) ...and as you said...ahh...I was not at all disturbed by what I said in that gathering – that I am a scheduled caste [E]
- (6) But it is the other people who were disturbed by the very thought that I had...I had... been so assertive in arguing that I am a scheduled caste [E]
- (7) ...and as long as three, four months later people came and told me that this was the first time in our lives that we found someone who can tell openly in a gathering of about 15 odd people that he came from a scheduled caste. [E]
- (8) What we have come across is generally people hiding that they are from a scheduled caste [E]
- (9) And this was the first time...[p] and people are telling me after four, five months of what I said... [O]
- (10) ...so they are still stunned by[p]...by [p]... my telling was bothering them and not me actually [E, C].

## Pradeep's Anger Over Lack of Intellectual Honesty

- (11) Yes, I would like to share one same thing, but differently [A].
- (12) Some days before in Pune University there was an advertisement of one discussion going on that ...ahh...there should be a separate... [p] ahh... hostel for scheduled caste students at Pune University [O].
- (13) ...and...ahh...it was a discussion under the chairmanship of vice-chairman of Pune, Dr. Narendra Jadhav [O, CA]
- (14) and he was involved...[p] ahh...he was in support that ...ahh...ahh...to be...ahh...found...ahh...separate hostel for scheduled caste students [O]
- (15) and I was shocked that...ahh... why he is thinking like that? [E]
- (16) ahh... instead of [thinking that way] he should...ahh...he should have think that scheduled caste students should...should be stay with another students...[p] [E]
- (17) ...ahh so many other hostels are there [O]
- (18) Ahh...I couldn't understand that Narendra Jadhav is also dalit, from a scheduled caste, and he wrote many books that...ahh... he is very famous [CA]
- (19) [p]...He has one very famous book that "I and My Father" and he has written this about [how] he came to this stage [CA]
- (20) and he knows that... how caste system works... and how caste system degrades or how caste system takes backward people of ...ahh...downtrodden of people of the lowest state of this social system... [CA]
- (21) and...ahh...I have one question with... ahh...professor of...ahh... Pune University and I asked him "Why you people are thinking like that?" [E]
- (22) "This Indian caste system...[p] you [are] establishing new type of caste system within Pune University, which is...you call...[p] this is the Oxford of...[p]... India... [Others in the fishbowl: The East]... the Oxford of the East... or the Oxford of India... [E]
- (23) and he has no answer at that time [E]
- (24) This is the quite different thing than Brahmin wanted to try this person to bring...[p]..ahh... upward [Anurag: "Right!"]... here is the scheduled caste person who is...ahh...who is ... vice-chancellor, but he is in support of form separate hostel for scheduled caste people... to keep away or keep beside them... [E, C]
- (25) ...and if you see...ahh [p]...I have good experience in Bihar and Maharashtra also that every scheduled caste hostels with students being... ahh... scheduled castes living in that hostel, they are neglectable [neglected]. [E]
- (26) If you can... If you see that information college, which is very famous college in History at Pune, and there is a hostel for scheduled castes, a different hostel, and it is nearby garbage... there is garbage everywhere... [E, C]

Haresh's Resentment of the Insidious Caste System - A Communal Perspective

- (27) I have a similar experience of... ahh... when I was at Gujarat for post-earthquake. [A]
- (28) A situation... I drew a survey... ahh... a kind of a taking around of damages... ahh... need assessment of the effected families. [O]
- (29) And when we were in... moving around to villages often... ahh... at the end of every ahh... ahh... dialogue we were asking "Have we covered everyone?" [O, CA]
- (30) And they were saying "Yes, Yes, you have covered the complete village, now you can go to another place." [CA]
- (31) [p] ahh... after... ahh.. maybe after ten or twelve villages we realized that... I realized that there are some people standing outside... and... ahh... they were not taking... ahh... part, but they were just watching [CA].
- (32) So... ahh... I approached them and asked "Why don't you want to be involved [inaudible]... to issue your complaint?" [CA]
- (33) And they said "no, no they will not allow us" [CA]
- (34) Then I went back to the same people and asked "Why not they coming and issue their complaints?" [CA]
- (35) "No, no they are not they are not part of the village" – that was the first stage [CA]
- (36) OK - "are they not residing in the same village?" [CA]
- (37) "Yes they are but outskirts of the village, so we don't consider them as part of the village." [CA]
- (38) And... ahh... OK – "But who are they?" [CA]
- (39) "No, no they are not part of the village... we don't know." [CA]
- (40) And that was very open kind of reaction form this side - they are not part of the village so it not necessary for you to go to them or ask them. You have completed, or covered, all the village" [E]
- (41) Then... ahh..., the necessary steps were taken to record this in the computer [O]
- (42) So... but the point is that such can you know they are part of the village so you can go to the next village... [p] and they were suggesting us and... ahh... in fact guiding us which part we should go and who... and they were organizing meetings already [for the next village]... and some people will be coming and we will tell you where to go and not to go... [E, CA]
- (43) So this was realized afterwards, but we missed many villages... at least at the beginning [C].
- (44) So you are not part of the village... you, you're not part of the country, you are not part of the culture, you are not part of the civilization. You are just out-caste, out-nationed, out-civilized. You are just there for serving, serving, and serving. [E]
- (45) So this is the main message they always develop. [E, C]

## APPENDIX I: HARESH'S TRANSCRIBED NARRATIVE NUMBER ONE

Note: This narrative represents 3 minutes and 50 seconds of transcription from a much longer formal interview with this research participant. At the end of each transcribe line, Labov's six-part structure: Abstract [A], Orientation [O], Complicating Action [CA], Evaluation [E], Resolution [R], and Coda [C] has been added as a means to make visible the formation of the narrative structure. In addition, lower-case [p] has been added when small pauses were transcribed and Capital [P] inserted in places where a longer pause was detected.

- (1) Then after my completion of Master's program...[p] ahh... [A]
- (2) I went to Gujarat... umh [p]...ahh...[O]
- (3) ...and...[p] ahh... it was post earthquake situation in Gujarat [A]
- (4) and I worked at Bost district. [O]
- (5) It was where the center of the earthquake was and I was working with women center group in five tankas of the district. [O]
- (6) There [p]...ahh... I was always asked about my caste [CA]
- (7) [P]...Umh...hmm... What is your caste? - First for finding out about accommodation... [p] they were asking about are you a dalit or are you a Muslim... [CA]
- (8) Umh [p]... and if you are then we don't have any facility for you. [E]

Interviewer: So did you tell the truth?

- (9) Yes. I did.

Interviewer: Then how did you find...?

- (10) ..Ahh... it was very...[p]...they were very curious, they would say "no, no we don't have any beds for you... and they were saying that uhhh... [p]...no...ahhh...ahhh...they were saying ...ahh [p] some people said that...[p] openly that they do not have beds for Muslims and dalits... [CA]
- (11) ...[p] and some said that no no they have place available, but there is some difficulty... explaining what is not available or electricity is not...[p] ahh... the surety is not about the electricity. [CA]
- (12) So they were putting me at some trouble, but I was very firm that you want to put me or have me, then this is my identity." [E]
- (13) [p]...umh..hmm... not I have constructed the identity, but it has been given.[E]
- (14) ..yea...so I just communicated that what I have done. [O]
- (15) Because I have never thought that now my family [p]... yes we want to be called that...yea...[E]
- (16) [p]...so that gave me the confidence to communicate also. [E]

- (17) ...ahh...I would like to ... I would like to just... able...narrate a shortly about my friend's experience. [O, or better yet, RE-Orientation]
- (18) He was working on a project to survey the impact of earthquake [A]
- (19) How much the life change had been taken to the village people that was his main job to identify, so that some scheme or project would be planned...[p] [O]
- (20) ...so he was basically doing need assessment for the people who were effected by the earthquake [O]
- (21) He went to one of the Dharba family – Dharba is the Kshatriya...[p] umhh..and umh... he was asking about the question... how was your damage? [CA]
- (22) ...and ahh [p]... how much they have lost during the earthquake?.. [p] [O]
- (23) Then the Dharba, the head man of the house, was giving information [O]
- (24) While he was giving the information, he asked... ahh [p]...the surveyor...umh... hmm... “Ok, what is your caste?... [p]... what is your name?...[CA]
- (25) Then he said his name [CA]

Interviewer: So he said “what's your name?”

- (26) Ahh.. yea... and then he got his caste [CA]
- (27) Then what he did [p]... he got up from the place and kicked with his leg to the stool where the person... of...[p]...friend [p]..., the surveyor, was sitting... [CA]
- (28) [p]...both incidents happened at a little...[p]...ahh...the place was a little raised from the ground. [O]
- (29) So the surveyor he was thrown on the ground [CA]
- (30) And this was...[p]...he came while crying in the evening [E]...
- (31) And this had happened... [C]
- (32) And it was really a shock... [E]

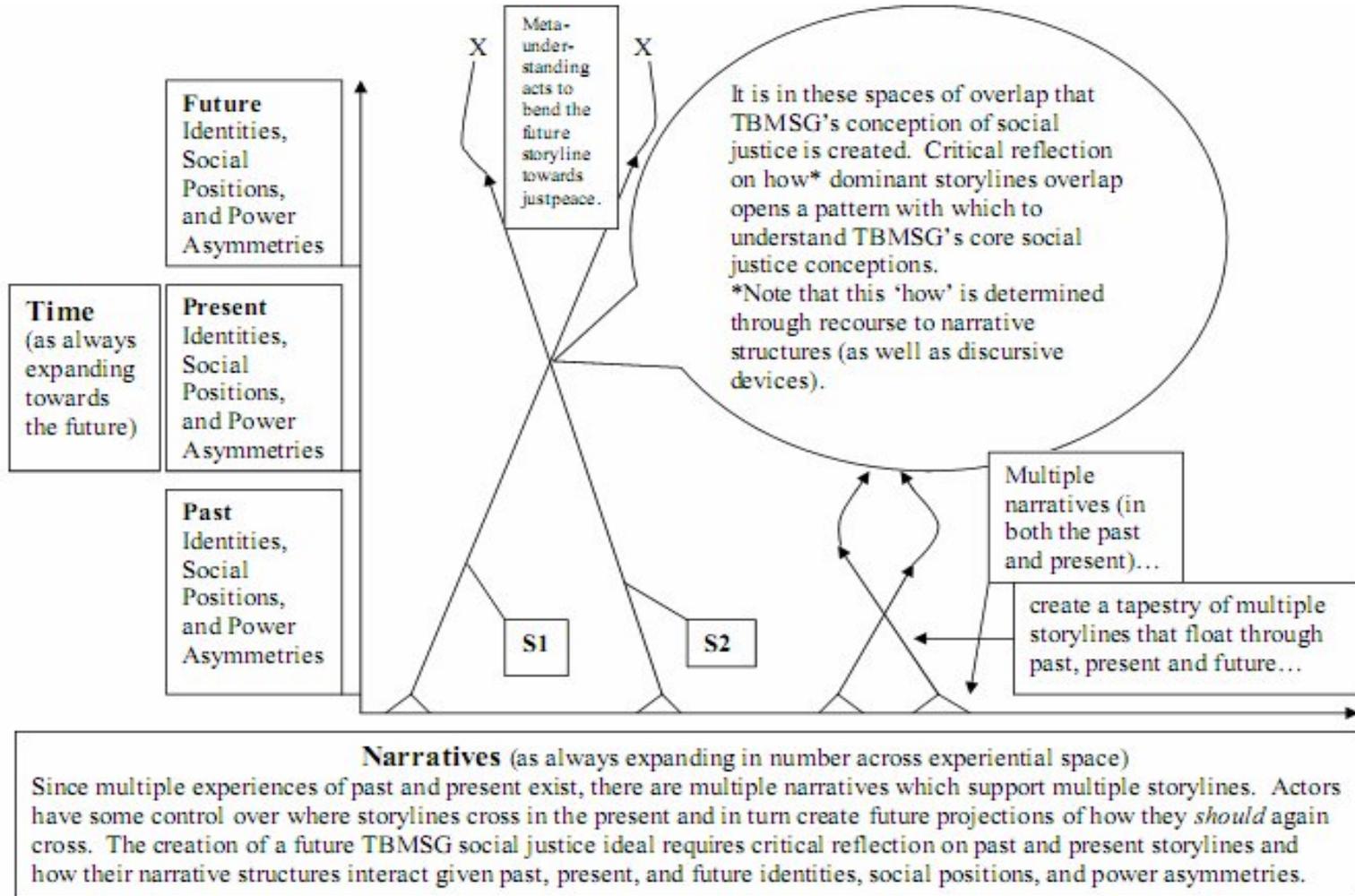
## APPENDIX J: HARESH'S TRANSCRIBED NARRATIVE NUMBER TWO

Note: This narrative represents 1 minute and 42 seconds of the same formal interview transcribed in Appendix I. The narrative follows my re-direct of the interviewee to “the psychological trauma of his friend’s story.” At the end of each transcribed line, Labov’s six-part structure: Abstract [A], Orientation [O], Complicating Action [CA], Evaluation [E], Resolution [R], and Coda [C] has been added as a means to make visible the formation of the narrative structure. In addition, lower-case [p] has been added when small pauses were transcribed and Capital [P] inserted in places where a longer pause was detected.

- (1) It was a time when he was broken completely [A]
- (2) ...and [p]...ahh... Even though he was more aware about the caste issue...  
and...ahh in India that this...[p]ahh... was happening on the basis of caste [O]
- (3) it was very difficult for him to bare only because...[p]... what he was thinking I  
was there to...ahh... so that some need assessment of the family will be met [E]
- (4) ...umh...And from that need assessment... the basis of using that data...  
Umh...hmm... Ahh, he was trying to help to the victim of the earthquake [CA]
- (5) Ahh... But even though the...[p] everything was ruined by this natural calamity  
the caste mentality of the person was not allowing him to think like a human  
being [E]
- (6) And he was as very interested, the victim of the earthquake... [p]... was very  
interested and curious to know about the caste of the person who was trying to  
help [CA]
- (7) [P]... So this contradiction – he was repeatedly saying the earthquake, even the  
earthquake or natural calamity is not able to clear or clean the mind... [E]
- (8) Umh..umh.. so this is what is the real grief [E]
- (9) He was really upset and shared with [me]... [C]

APPENDIX K: MODEL OF TBMSG'S NARRATIVE CREATION OF A SOCIAL JUSTICE IDEAL

420



S1 = Storyline of injustice/creation of a victim identity. S2 = Storyline of conversion/creation of a Buddhist identity.

APPENDIX L: CASTE DIALOGUE PARTICIPANT'S PACKET

**DIALOGUE TRAINING: MANUAL AND PROGRAM**



**July 2 and 3, 2008**

**Manuski Center  
Pune, Maharashtra**

**In Preparation for Inter- and Intra-Caste Dialogue and  
Sharing**

**Dialogue Workshop on Caste:**

**What does a caste-less and socially just community look like?**

**An Interactive Dialogue to Foster Understanding, Trust, and Community  
Reflection on the realities of Caste and Social Justice**

**Trainer/Facilitator:**

**Jeremy A. Rinker**

**Ph.D. Candidate and Adjunct Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
George Mason University**

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or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information  
storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from Sandra Cheldelin and  
Jeremy Rinker.

Dear Participants,

Thank you very much for participating in what I hope will be an enlightening and useful training workshop and dialogue. Before we begin I want to outline what I envision us doing over the next day and a half in hopes of being as transparent as possible about my own intent and research goals.

After defining dialogue and thinking about it in relation to various communication processes and dialogue models, I will facilitate a discussion based on Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative approach to “asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.”<sup>578</sup> Finally, after facilitating discussion based on this AI approach we will, as a group, develop and participate in a dialogue process based on a number of available models for generating dialogue.

While my intent is primarily educational, it is also action research driven. Action research is qualitative research that is intended to lead to change as well as new understanding and insights on the part of the researcher and participant. My hope is that, through the dialogue and learning in this workshop, participant can begin to reflect on their own, and others, meanings of social justice. Since I may use some of what I learn here as data for my research, the next two pages are two identical copies of an informed consent document. This document is a research requirement for my University. Though this document was written for use with people I would interview one-one-one, I am attaching it here and requesting that you read it, sign and date it. I ask this of you as a formality only and sincerely hope that it will not affect your willingness to participate and share in the safe space that we will together create. If you say something during the course of our dialogue that you DO NOT want me to use in my research simply let me know (either in person during or after our time together, by phone, mail, or e-mail – jrinker1@gmu.edu). I will not use any information that any participant does not desire me to use. Also if you have any questions about my research please feel free to ask at any time. I look forward to enlightening and lively discussion and developing the skills necessary to engage in reflective and respectful dialogue with others of all castes, social backgrounds, and cultural or regional perspectives.

Jeremy Rinker  
June 2008

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<sup>578</sup> Cooperrider (2000)

***Please Sign!***

## **CONSENT FORM**

**RESEARCH TITLE: Justpeace Prospects for Peace-building and Worldview Tolerance: A South Asian Movement's Social Construction of Justice**

### **RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

The reason for this research is to explore the narratives of justice that exist within the TBMSG. The hope is that your ideas will help determine the ways these justice narratives can be used in local peace-building situations. If you agree to participate, you will be asked a few interview questions. This interview will take about one hour. If necessary you may be asked, at a later date, to take part in a second or third round of interviews to clarify points made in the first interview.

### **RISKS**

Nothing bad will happen to you if you take part in this study. However, some people may feel a little bit nervous talking about remembering emotional past experience and/or reliving bad encounters with other castes. If at any time you feel that your work, social position, or livelihood in the local community is threatened please let the researcher know and he will stop the interview. Only you can determine these risks, therefore, please take a moment to think of any potential consequences that could come from answering questions about your caste and personal experience. If you think there are some potential risks please let us know.

### **BENEFITS**

There are no rewards or money paid for being in this study. But the things I find out may help others to further research in the area of social justice and peace-building and/or further the cause championed by Babsaheb Ambedkar and the TBMSG.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your name will not be asked on the short list of questions that are asked. I will be taping our talk together, but I will be keeping that tape in a very safe place. Everything that we all say on the tape will be written out on paper. But your name and where you live will be changed so that no one will know who you are. I may use some of your words when I write my report, but I will never tell anyone your name. If you desire copies of the final research it will be provided.

### **PARTICIPATION**

You don't have to talk to me if you don't want to. If you change your mind after we start talking and want to stop that is OK. I will not get mad and nothing will happen to you.

### **CONTACT**

This research is being conducted by Jeremy Rinker, a doctoral student at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR). I may be reached by phone at +001(703) 212-9267 or by mail at 3923 Vermont Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 for questions or to report a research-related problem. You can also call my teacher, Dr. Daniel Rothbart, a Professor at George Mason University, at this phone number +001 (703) 993-4474 or by mail at 3330 Washington Blvd., Suite 620, Arlington, VA 22201, for any reason.

The George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections knows all about my research and said that it was OK for me to do it. You can call them at +001 (703) 993-4121 if you have any questions about being a part of this research. Their mailing address is HSRB, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, MS 4C6, Fairfax, VA 22030, USA.

**CONSENT**

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name & Signature

Signature of interpreter (if necessary)\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

***Keep for your records!***

## **CONSENT FORM**

**RESEARCH TITLE: Justpeace Prospects for Peace-building and Worldview Tolerance: A South Asian Movement's Social Construction of Justice**

### **RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

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**CONSENT**

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name & Signature

Signature of interpreter (if necessary)\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

## Workshop's Tentative Schedule of Events

### **Day 1: Dialogue & Appreciative Inquiry: Discovery & Dreaming the Caste-less Society**

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 10:00 - 10:30 - | Brief Introduction/Meditation (led by Manuski Center Staff) followed by a brief Meditation on Justice to begin thinking about the many meanings of justice (led by Mr. Rinker). |
| 10:30 - 11:30 - | Basics of Dialogue/Introduction to Four Models of Dialogue Process  |
| 11:30 - 12:30 - | Description/Explanation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)  |
| 12:30 – 1:30 -  | Lunch Break   |
| 1:30 - 3:30 -   | AI facilitation on caste and social justice;<br>Group-discussion/consensus on choosing the best model to facilitate a dialogue on caste and social justice tomorrow.            |
| 3:30 – 5:00 -   | Determine Model(s) for tomorrow's Dialogue/Preparation.   |

### **Day 2: Making the Ideal Real: Designing & Delivering Our Vision of Social Justice**

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 10:00 - 10:30 - | Meditation and Re-focus on objectives/questions  |
| 10:30 - 11:00 - | Finalize Preparation and Questions   |
| 11:00 – 1:00 -  | Facilitated Dialogue on Caste and the Caste-less society (using one of 4 models presented yesterday) |
| 1:00 - 1:30 -   | Workshop evaluation (written and oral)   |
| 1:30 - 2:30 -   | Lunch and Wrap-up discussions  |

NOTE: I envision this workshop modeling participatory democracy - in other words participants will be briefed in dialogue, AI theory and processes and then have a great deal of freedom to choose how they want the remainder of the dialogue(s) to happen. Therefore, day-2 may look different than it appears here.

## **DIALOGUE: WHAT IS IT?**

From the Center for Living Democracy:

A dialogue is a forum that draws participants from as many parts of the community as possible to exchange information face-to-face, share personal stories and experiences, honestly express perspectives and emotions, affirm values, clarify viewpoints, and develop solutions to community concerns.

The aim of dialogue is to engage in a shared inquiry into others' thinking, seeking not to persuade another of the "correctness" of one's own position, but to correctly understand the values and beliefs that inform another worldview. Thus dialogue does not force people to adopt common ground where there may be none, nor to labor toward any pre-ordained conclusion. Instead, dialogue invites discovery and development of common values and allows participants to express their own priorities, with the expectation that mutual understanding will enhance relationships and foster collective action.

From Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline Field book*:

Dialogue can initially be defined as a sustained collective inquiry into everyday experience and what we take for granted. The goal of dialogue is to open new ground by establishing a "container" or "field" of inquiry: a setting where people can become more aware of the context around their experience, and the processes of thought and feeling that created that experience.

From The Dialogue Project (<http://www.thedialogueproject.org/dialogue.htm>)

Dialogue is a balance of advocacy and inquiry. Advocacy is reasoning with supportive data. Inquiry is suspension of reason and exposing your mental models and heart, giving the other person a "window to your reasoning" and to your humanity.

## **FACILITATION: WHAT IS IT?**

Simply, it is a process in which a designated person guides the group in discussion of important issues.

Note: The discussion may or may not lead to group decisions or agreement. For our purposes, we are exploring a topic where there are many potentially right answers. However, we hope that some important ideas will emerge from our collective exploration.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DIALOGUES

**Planning the Dialogue**  
**Create a Safe Space**  
**Make sure all Voices are Heard.**  
**Encourage Active Listening.**  
**Get Diverse Perspectives.**  
**Everyone listens for patterns,**  
**deeper questions,**  
**and insights.**

For the purposes of our dialogues, here are some guiding principles:

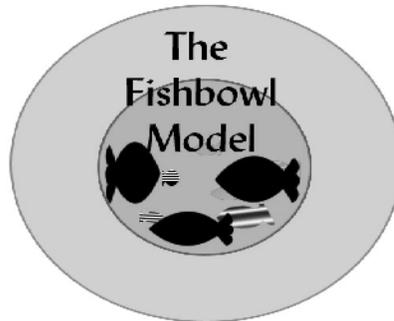
### SAFE SPACE IS ESSENTIAL

1. There are no enemies at the table. Because we are seeking understanding, we need as many diverse voices as possible to expand our own thinking. Because we want to create something new, we need perspectives different from our own.
2. Non-blaming environments work best: Focus on *what* might be right instead of *who* is right.
3. Ground rules provide safe space. I will present them to the entire group. In general:
  - Listen carefully and respectfully
  - Speak from personal experience
  - 1 person at a time with no interruptions
  - Embrace *dialogue* and not *debate* (see bottom of page 13)

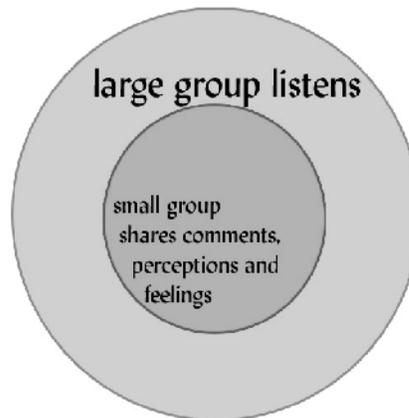
## DIALOGUE MODELS: HOW DO THEY WORK?

There are many dialogue models. I have selected four that are useful for community dialogues. On day two we will, as a group, develop a dialogue around one of these models. These are briefly outlined below:

### I. The Fishbowl



The fishbowl gets its name because a small group is formed in the middle of the room while the remaining participants watch and listen to what the group is saying. It is a particularly effective model for discussing sensitive issues as it allows those outside the fishbowl to collect their thoughts and consider the conversation that is going on inside the bowl.

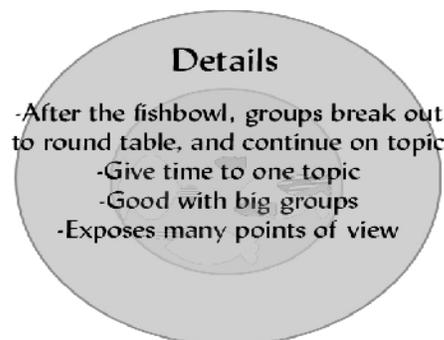


#### Set up for Fishbowl:

1. Place a small circle of chairs (6-10) in the middle of the room
2. Ask for volunteers to come forth to begin the discussion on the topic. These volunteers may be representatives of the various groups at the dialogue or people willing to initiate a discussion of a sensitive topic.
3. A closed fishbowl does not allow members into the inner circle; the open fishbowl has one or two extra chairs for members outside to join the group if they are so inclined.

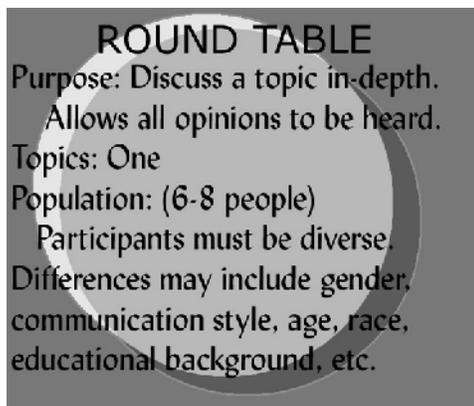


4. The facilitator initiates a sensitive question. Examples:
  - Where were you on 9.11.01?
  - Can you tell us a story about when you felt unsafe in your community?
  - What has been your experience of feeling “targeted” or “picked on”?
5. After the group discusses the topic for an allotted time (about ½ hour for an average dialogue), participants are asked to join the larger group and complete the dialogue in a roundtable discussion with groups of about eight per table.



## II. The Roundtable

The most common model used in community dialogues is the Round Table. It gets its name because a small group of people (6 to 8) sit around a table—so that everyone can see each other's eyes—to discuss a topic. There is a facilitator at each table. Because the group is there for a common purpose, it is important that the group be as heterogeneous as possible in order to get multiple perspectives on the same topic. It is the differences of experiences and knowledge that help inform the discussion.



### **Set up for Roundtable:**

1. Place as many roundtables in the same room as necessary to fit about 8 members per table.
2. Have a facilitator at each table to guide the conversation. The facilitators should have agreed upon topics, questions, issues that they want to discuss.
3. Have the facilitators report out at the end of the dialogue important aspects of the conversation. This might include themes that emerged, insights that occurred, turning points in the conversation, and actions people are willing to take.

As in other models, the facilitator plays a special role. The Roundtable allows more time than most models to fully explore a topic with the same participants at the table. It is critical, then, that the facilitator creates and maintains safe space for all participants to be included.



It helps to have two or three provocative questions to ask the participants to guide the discussion. The questions should build on the discussion.

Examples:

1. What have been your experiences in community—both good and not so good—that stand out for you?
2. Hearing each other's stories, can you envision a community that would be ideal for us? What would be some of the characteristics?
3. What would we be willing to commit to do to help create that community?

### III. The World Café



The World Café model has its genesis in coffee shops, cafes, pubs and kitchens of the world. It is not a new concept. For centuries, across cultures, people have gathered from all over to talk over issues, share, and learn from each other.

The Café is a metaphor. The facilitator is to recreate the relaxed, intimate atmosphere of coffee houses, cafes and kitchens using comfortable seating, colorful visual aids, music

and small tables. There is often a playful and festive appearance—crayons, markers, play dough—on tables with flowers.

The goal: to highlight the importance of the “seed conversations: that take place at individual tables, and how these seeds travel from table to table as people come into contact with each other. The web of conversation helps to share and evolve the knowledge coming from the dialogue.

### **Set up for World Café:**

1. Begin with tables of 6 or 8 participants and a facilitator.
2. After the discussion of the first question, half of the participants at each table move to another table.
3. After the discussion of the second question, the remaining three or four from the table move to another table. Thus, the facilitator has about 12 to 16 different people at the table over the course of the dialogue.
4. The dialogue concludes by bringing the Café together as a whole to share insights and discoveries from conversations which took place at the various tables. Facilitators report to the larger group some of the most meaningful insights, ideas or events that emerged from their table.



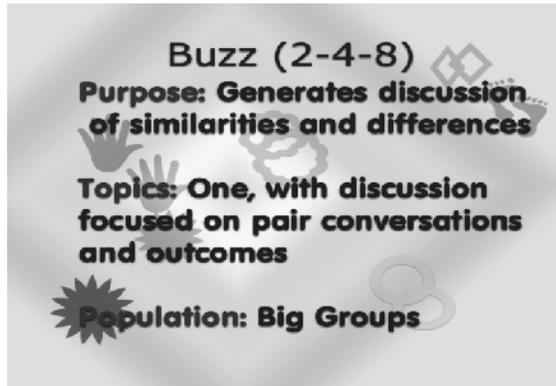
world café   
Facilitator Requirements  
**Ask café participants  
to consider:  
What has happened?  
If there was a single voice  
what would it say?**

### **Why use this model?**

It is very flexible. It can have different topics assigned and discussed at each table. Participants can select the topic they want to discuss. Or all tables of participants can discuss the same topic. Usually there is a report out at the end to the larger group. It is more chaotic, however, in its logistics.

#### IV. The BUZZ (2-4-8)

The final model, the BUZZ, gets its name because of the “noise” that gets generated in the room. It is immediate and sustaining. It is also intimate as everyone in the room is talking. It is very powerful with large groups discussing common issues or concerns.



| <b>Debate</b>   | <b>vs.</b> | <b>Dialogue<sup>579</sup></b>   |
|---|------------|---|
| - Competition: 1 right, 1 wrong                       |            | - Cooperation: common understanding   |
| - Threats, attacks, interruptions                     |            | - Safety, ground rules, respectful exchange   |
| - Winning: win-lose                                   |            | - Finding common ground: win-win  |
| - Try to convert the other                            |            | - Try to be understood  |
| - Listen for weakness                                 |            | - Listen to understand, gain insight  |
| - Defend assumptions as truth                         |            | - Reveal assumptions for reevaluation   |
| - Search for glaring differences                      |            | - Search for basic agreements   |
| - Calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs |            | - Calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs in order to reflect on others' beliefs |
| - Defends one's own position as best solution         |            | - Opens the possibilities of reaching a better solution                                 |

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<sup>579</sup> Adapted from the Study Circles Handbook.

## What is Appreciative Inquiry (AI)?

The Term “appreciative” comes from the idea that when something increases in value it appreciates. “Inquiry” is to seek to understand through asking questions. Therefore, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is method of “strengthening a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.”<sup>580</sup>

### What Problems Are You Having?

~

### What Is Working Around Here?

The two questions underline the difference between traditional ‘change management’ and appreciative inquiry (AI was designed for organizational development workshops).

| Traditional Change Theory  | Appreciative Inquiry  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Looks for problems;</li> <li>- Does a diagnosis;</li> <li>- Creates options;</li> <li>- Finds a solution (often an action plan);</li> <li>- Groups are seen as problem to be solved;</li> <li>- Primary focus: What is wrong? Broken? How can I/we fix this?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aims to explore &amp; discover;</li> <li>- Quests for new possibilities;</li> <li>- Focuses on being in a state of ‘unknowing’ or ‘wonder’;</li> <li>- Fosters an openness to change</li> <li>- Groups are a mystery to be embraced;</li> <li>- Cannot have all the answers when we are engaged in inquiry!</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>PROBLEM:</b> If we look for problems, we find them! (Focus here is on Problem-setting)</p>   | <p><b>SOLUTION:</b> If we focus on what works, then we become focused on potential (future) not problems (past).</p>  |

AI approach is not easy! People’s tendency is to focus on the negative and try to learn from it.

Example: Caste (or racial) equity – we can search for examples and evidence of where it exists OR we can search our stories and examples of moments when both parties in the relationship felt fully valued and very productive together!

**Assumptions** play an important role in change (Assumptions are the set of beliefs shared by a group that causes the group to think & act in certain ways).

- They are usually not visible to or verbalized by members
- Must be made visible & discussed before anyone can be sure of the group beliefs

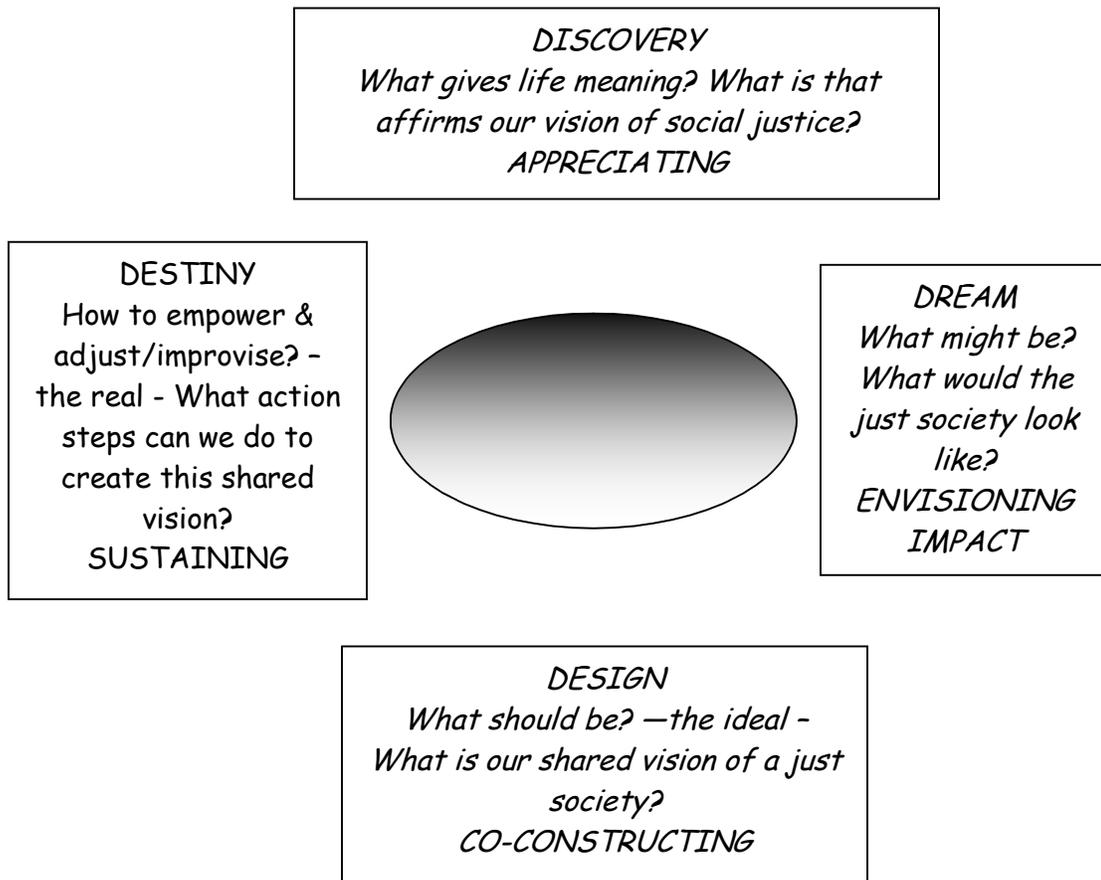
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<sup>580</sup> Watkins and Mohr (2001), 14.

## Some Assumptions Of AI

- In every society, community, organization or group, something works;
- What we focus on becomes our reality;
- Reality is created in the moment; there are multiple realities;
- The act of asking questions of a group influences the group in some way;
- People have more confidence & comfort to journey to the future (unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (known);
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is BEST about the past (not what we hate or see as problems);
- It is important to value differences;

### The Process of AI: 4 stages (4-Ds)



## Glossary of Dialogue Workshop Terms

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Active Listening</b>  | Listening to what another person is saying and reflecting back to them what you heard in a way that allows them to know that you are really listening. |
| <b>Body Language</b>     | Being aware of the positive and negative non-verbal body language of yourself and others.  |
| <b>Questioning</b>       | Asking open-ended questions that encourages others to talk further and close-ended questions when you are seeking specific information.                |
| <b>Restating Content</b> | Restating the content or substance that you heard back to others.  |
| <b>I/We-You Language</b> | Using personal rather than accusatory language.  |
| <b>Reframing</b>         | Taking negative language and trying to place it in a more positive and validating tone.  |
| <b>Empathy</b>           | Understanding what the participant is saying and how he or she is feeling (different than Sympathy –feeling sorry for).                                |
| <b>Summarizing</b>       | Summarizing the content and feelings expressed by others to make sure you have understood what she or he said.   |

Adapted from Alliance for Conflict Transformation *Facilitated Dialogue Training*

Other Useful Websites for follow-up:

[www.act.org](http://www.act.org)

[www.intractability.org](http://www.intractability.org)

[www.gmu.edu/department/icar](http://www.gmu.edu/department/icar)

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Jeremy Rinker has a Master of Arts degree in Asian Religion from the University of Hawaii and has taught both comparative religion and conflict seminars while studying at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Jeremy currently works part-time as a Grants and Program Officer at the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice and plans to begin a Visiting Professor position in the Fall semester of 2009 at DePauw University. In addition to extensive teaching experience, Jeremy was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kazakhstan between '95-'97, has worked with various international humanitarian and development Non-Governmental Organizations including the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and CitiHope International (CHI). Jeremy has also worked and volunteered in the field of restorative justice and community conferencing. Jeremy is married with a 2 and ½ year old son named Kylor.

Initial findings from this research have been presented at various professional conferences and Jeremy is currently developing print ready manuscripts for publication in peer reviewed journals.