**Buddhism and Dalit Migrants: Interrogating Everyday forms of Counter-hegemonic Assertion**

**Author**

**Ajeet Kumar Pankaj**[[1]](#footnote-2)

Religion and its various practices are essential aspects of culture and often used as a means of assertion and resistance against dominant notion of religion. Recent literature on migration studies has begun to study various aspect of culture and significant of religion but still there are some aspects of religion, which could not be addressed.

Drawing upon original ethnographic research among, Dalit migrants in Mumbai, this paper examine significance of Buddhism and it’s various practices in everyday form of socio-cultural assertion among Dalit Migrants. The theoretical lens for this paper is Gramsci’s concept of ‘Cultural Hegemony and counter-Hegemony’. Based on the author engagement in the field, this paper highlights that the socio-cultural assertion of Dalit migrants in the city is not merely caused by identity politics but is linked to the city as a space of liberation from caste which provide them favorable condition to engage with various symbolic cultural practices in form of religious practices. The changing religious practices of Dalit migrants by adopting Buddhism are not merely influencing their life at destination (city) but also at source (village).

This paper aims to examine changing religious practices from Hinduism to Buddhism among Dalit migrants and its influence in their everyday life at source and destination. Further, this paper explores their issues and challenges in process of adopting Buddhism and its practices; and their negotiation strategy to overcome from those issues. In addition to that, this paper also tries to understand the significance of ‘attire and decoration’ in various occasion and life events of Dalit migrants and how this ‘attire and decoration’ is symbolizing everyday form of counter-hegemonic assertion.

**Key words:** Dalits, Migration, Buddhism, Caste, and Hegemonic-assertion.

**Introduction**

Two incidents are very significant and relevant with this topic and would be meaningful to cite them in beginning. In 1930 during Kalaram temple movement, after failing to secure basic rights and equal status for Dalits, on the eve of the Yeola Conference Dr. Ambedkar announced that “Although I was born as a Hindu, I solemnlyassure you that I will not die as a Hindu” (Huynh, 2013, pp. 273–274). His announcement and massage conveyed a sense of fight against inequality, which lies in Hinduism. As Hinduism is based on the principle of inequality by the Laws of Manu, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar started looking for solving inequality through religion. He emphasized Buddha’s massage of religion that “The center of religion lay in the relation between man and man, not between man and God. The purpose of religion is to teach man how he should behave towards other men so that all may be happy”(Dhanajaya Keer, 2016). On October 3, 1954 he urged that “My personal philosophy is to reject Hindu philosophy of Bhagavad-gita which is based on a cruel perversion of Sankhya philosophy of Kapila, the caste and graded inequality. I have derived my philosophy from religion of the Buddha in liberty, equality, and fraternity, not from political science” (As cited in Huynh, 2013, pp. 273–274).

Much more recently, on 30 April, 2018, the national news paper of India covered a story that more than 300 Dalit family has converted themselves in Buddhism and rejected Hinduism because of caste discrimination and atrocities. The both incidents have occurred at different point of time but they share the common reason to associate each other in opposition to the injustice and dominant culture. Dalits in contemporary India using Buddhism as a means to fight against caste inequality and assert against discrimination, which largely inspired by mass conversion laid by Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar.

Buddhism is being known as one of the religion, which is based on the idea of ‘equality, liberty, and fraternity’ and it gained wide popularity among Dalits after Babsaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar held mass conversion during 1956 just before his *mahaparinirvan*. The conversion of Babasaheb was one of move to challenge caste discrimination and emancipation. He did not merely converted as an abstract individual nor as Dalit individual, but as a leader of oppressed (Skaria, 2015, p. 451). Since the notion of caste itself lies in the religious ritual that was Hinduism. Its ideology is rank based on purity and untouchability, and often also called ‘religion of rules’ therefore Ambedkar thought to changes the religion of rules with true religion, the religion of principle, which the basis for civic government (Timothy Fitzgerald, 2007:136). Ambedkar refer these principle as ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ for him these principles were principle of religion, and he also highlighted that “true religion is the foundation of society” (ibid:136). However, Ambedkar was aware that these principles were foundation of American and French revolution and latter found it in Buddhism and identifies these values as an alternative Hindu ritual and latter endorsed it in Buddhism. A range of scholarship has refer Buddhism as a religion of ‘equality, liberty, and fraternity’ and also a means for emancipation for Dalits (Citation). Buddhism has been popular religion for conversion and ritual practices among Dalits of Maharashtra and it is obvious because the conversion of Babasaheb into Buddhism happened in Maharashtra only but other part of Dalits were also endorsing Buddhism at limited extent.

Dalits of Uttar Pradesh were also converted into Buddhism but it could not become popular neither and nor tool for emancipation as compare to Maharashtra. Religion is significant part of culture and Buddism has often used as a tool for Dalits in their cultural assertion. S. Singh & Singh (2017), noted in his study that “increasing cultural consciousness and assertion of cultural difference have become prominent tools for those facing discrimination to assert their rights to fair treatment, if not equality” (p.376). And it has been seen that Dalits are the most vulnerable social groups who are historically subjugated and experience prolong discrimination and social exclusion (Kumar, 2014, p. 38; ). A range of studies about caste and Dalit assertion claims that Dalits produces new cultural identity and cultural assertion in form of making monument of their own hero heroin, celebrating the Ambedkar Jayanti, and writing history of socio-political, cultural subjugation and discrimination in their own way in forms of oral history. Such deconstruction of popular history is often key tool of empowerment and mobilization and it could be also seen as cultural assertion (see Narayan, 2006: 40; S. Singh, 2016, p. 357).

Converting to Buddhism and the rejecting Hindu religion significantly recognizes among Dalits who are living in cities (A.Contursi, 1989, pp. 447–448). However, such phenomena is more common in the cities of Maharashtra and interestingly it is also influencing Dalit migrants who came to Mumbai for their livelihood. Ram(2004), has asserted in his study that Dalits used completely detachment from Hindusim and confining themselves into their own ancient religion which is Ad-Dharm[[2]](#endnote-2) in order to restore the dignity and freedom (p.330). Religion and religious conversion has been a predominant tool for Dalits to assert against the caste discrimination, counter the existing form of religion, and culture dominancy. Dalit migrants are making their own cultural space in city by practicing different forms of cultural practices in their everyday life and challenging the practices of Hinduism.Nonetheless, religion is another important aspect of cultural space in city in form of religious conversion or practice of Buddhism. It is in this specific context, this paper explore the undercurrents of structures of changing cultural dimensions and emerging socio-cultural transformation in Mumbai. However, paper is not examining the exact notion and practices of Buddhism by Dalit migrants rather the practices of Buddhism as per their own and community knowledge, therefore the paper is limited only to ‘cultural assertion through Buddhism’. The dominant caste groups can seen and interpret emerging cultural assertion among Dalit migrants as challenges to their long established ‘cultural hegemony’ in form of Hinduism and various practices of Hinduism. This paper also tries to understand role of ‘Buddhism’ and its different practices in emancipation and counter hegemonic assertion of Dalit migrants to challenge the dominant culture.

**Aims and Methodology**

The article aims to examine everyday forms of counter hegemonic assertion among Dalit migrants in Mumbai. Dalits are an ex-untouchable caste of India and the term ‘Dalit’ has emerged as an asserted identity by untouchable with the emergence of Dalit Panther movement during 1970(Kumar, 2005, p. 516). A Dalit migrant in this article refers to the Migrants of Uttar Pradesh who belong from Dalit community and currently living in Mumbai. The observation and analysis are based on direct engagement of author in the field. As part of Ph.D filed work author engaged in filed to collect data for his ongoing research titled ‘Dalit Migrants in the City: A Study in Mumbai’. Author used ethnography as an approach to capture the existing narrative about everyday forms of cultural assertion from the field. Ethnography is an approach of qualitative methodology emerged from anthropology, it tend to study of beliefs, social interactions and behaviors of small societies, involving the participation and observation over a period of time and interpretation of collected data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011 as cited in (Naidoo, 2011, p. 1). According to Zane Ritchie, Jane Lewis, Carol Mcnaughton Nicolas, (2013), “Ethnography involves understanding the social world or culture – the shared behaviors, beliefs and values – of particular groups, typically via immersion in their community” (p.13). In similar line, author engaged in filed from 2015 to 2017 and participated in various occasion observed by Dalit migrants. The in-depth narrative interviews were undertaken and observation were made during data collection in a Mandala-a slum of M. East ward of Mumbai. During fieldwork engagement, author documented narrative of Dalit Migrants in order to apprehend process and forms of socio-cultural assertion laid by Dalit migrants. Reflecting on experiences of fieldwork, this article highlights that city as space has played significant role in terms of imparting sense of liberation from caste and also providing space to Dalit migrants to emancipate.

The data for this article were triangulated from the following sources: (1) field observation and documentation (2) in-depth interview of Dalit migrants and local Dalits in studied area (3) informal discussion with key-informants of the Mandala, Mumbai (4) and analysis of secondary literature like reports from local news paper, government policy briefs, article and books related to caste, discrimination, migration, Dalits, politics, city, culture and emancipation of cultural identity.

Author used participant observation in order to understand various unfolded narrative of Dalit migrants about their emancipation in city through various mode of cultural practices. “Participant observation is a research method most closely associated with ethnographic methodology…the central intent of this method is to generate data through observation and listening to people in their own settings, and to discover their social meaning and interpretation of their own activities (Gray, 2004, p. 241)”.

**Issues and Challenges in Adopting Buddhism: Negotiating ‘Social Justice’**

Almost two year ago, I met Lalji, a Dalit migrants in Mumbai. He lives in a slum of Mankhurd with his wife and one daughter. He earns his livelihood by running an auto. He is the president of BauddhaVihar’ and also engage in local politics. He came to Mumbai before 1993 and engaged in various occupations for his livelihood. Over a period of time, he become an auto driver and started developing relationship with native Dalits of Mumbai. In due course, he got introduced with ‘Buddhism’ and held a formal conversion in 1999 but when he went back to his village; he had to experience many taunts passed by his relatives. But since he had little knowledge about Buddhism and its rationality, he tried to convince them by logic to converting in Buddhism. However, its all-together different notion that he has to face oppose of his relative for conversion in Buddhism but he also confess that ‘relative do not have much knowledge and exposer about Buddhism’ that is the reason they are opposing. LalJi claims that because of social hierarchy and discriminatory practices of Hinduism, he converted his family in Buddhism and also believe Buddhism have a notion of ‘equality’. His decision to embrace Buddhism and reject Hinduism, inspired by Ambedkar’s embrace of Buddhism that religion conversion for Dalits is one of the most serious attempt to find new meaning and relevant cultural strategy to empower (Michael, 2006:127). Since LalJi had converted in Buddhism in 1999, here is another case study that has recently not converted but started practicing Buddhism and planning to convert.

Sabhajit, a 39-year old Dalit migrant came to Mumbai in 1998. He is peddler and run fruit shop in Mankhurd to earn his livelihood. Since few years, he is engage with a group of Dalit migrants in his locality who are socially and politically very active. They worktogether to create awareness about caste discrimination, violence, politics, and Buddhism. The group is engaged to organize various events related to BabasahebBhimarao Ambedkar, Buddha, and other Dalit ideologue like Mahatma JyotibaPhule. Sabhajit is one of the active members of this group and working with them to sensitize fellow Dalit migrants. Two year back, he was introduced to Buddhism and its philosophical foundation ‘equality, liberty, and fraternity’ and onwards that time he started rejecting Hinduism. He does not celebrate any Hindu festival, do not go for Puja, and do not conduct any Hindu ritual in his home and family. He has not converted formally in Buddhism but he started practicing Buddhism and its rituals. Recently in April 2018, he fixed marriage of his sister in his village. When marriage was being fixed, he requested to groom’s family that all the rituals and procession of marriage would be done through ‘Buddhism’. When he requested to the groom’s family for marriage ceremony through Buddhist ritual, everyone was stunt, because usually bride family does not pose any condition for marriage in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Initially groom family was not agree for his request, but he convince them and inform them that ‘if we are following Hinduism, we are making strong the notion of caste and its discriminatory practices’ and also informed them that Hinduism is full of superstitious and also have foundation of ‘hierarchy’ in society. With initial disagreement, groom’s family could agree to but his own family was opposing. He have four brother and only one sister, and decision about her marriage he can not take all decision alone. The women of his family were opposing his proposal of Buddhist ritual for marriage ceremony as he narrated that “hamarimalkin ne kahaki agar Buddhist ritual sehoga to rajjagajjanahihogashadi me, bhutudasshadilagega [my wife told that if marriage ceremony will be done through Buddhist rituals there will not be grand procession of marriage and marriage ceremony will be very dull and silent]”. He preached his entire family about basic understanding of Buddhism that includes BabsahebAmbedkar’s firm believe in Buddhism, its notion of just society, and rejection of ‘superstitious believe’ and could able to convince his family. It was not only his family to whom he had to convince his neighbors also. He had to experience lot of comments and taunts about his decision of following Buddhist ritual in marriage that includes suspicion of his decision and fear from Hindu goddess and also a fear of if they will not follow Hindu ritual in marriage, there will be something wrong in marriage. However, somehow Sabhajit was succeeded to in marriage ceremony through Buddhist ritual. He also has a plan to convert formally in Buddhism next year on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti.

It was also observed during fieldwork that in city Dalit migrants have accessibility of Bauddhacharya but in their village it is very hard to find them and it influence their decision to follow Buddhism in and sometime convert formally. The relationship of Dalit migrants with local Dalits in Mumbai provided an opportunity for them to understand Buddhism and its practices, which resulted in form of religious conversion of Dalit migrants from Hinduism to Buddhism. Those who could not convert formally in Buddhism, they started the practices of Buddhism and rejected the various practices of Hinduism including celebration of various festivals like Deepawali and Durga Puja etc.

**Buddhism and Changing Religious Practices: Breaking the ‘Hegemony’ at ‘Source and Destination’**

Converting from Hinduism to Buddhism is quite common phenomena among Dalits of Maharashtra Mumbai to attack Brahmanism and form a resistance power against caste discrimination. Since Ambedkar embraced Buddhism to revolt against Brahmanism and used it as a form of resistance by reinterpreting it to establish a socially just and egalitarian society (Paik, 2011, p. 230), which might be one reason for Dalits of Mumbai to embrace Buddhism. Dalits of Maharashtra admired Ambedkar and accepted his principle of secularism and egalitarianism. They rejected the religious orthodoxy by converting themselves in Buddhism (A.Contursi, 1989, p. 448). In present study, Dalit migrants were not much influenced by Buddhism as a religion at their source (Uttar Pradesh) but when they come to Mumbai, they exposed with Buddhism and its different practices. It is the city as a space and influence of local Dalits, which providing them favorable condition to embrace Buddhism if not formal conversion then several practices of Buddhism like wearing white clothes at several important occasion[[3]](#endnote-3). This observation made an agreement with argument of Burra (1996), where he claim that Buddhism had not made significant impact upon rural Dalits, whereas Dalits in urban closely associate themselves with norms, practices of Buddhism and an identify themselves as Buddhist (as in Gupta, 2005, p. 418). Dalit as an identity also help Dalits migrants to aware about Buddhism and its different practices, which gradually resulted in conversion. As a respondent namely Ramshreaya narrated:

When I came to Mumbai I did not know anything about Buddhism but when I started my everyday conversations with Dalit of Maharashtra, I came to know about Buddhism. *‘jabbhi ham log chay pine ke time chaurahepe un logo (local Dalit) se milate the tabhi ye sab bate hotithiaurunhi sab se jankarimilaki Buddhism ham logo keliyesahihai, jisme koi bhedbhavnahihotahaiaurbabasaheb ne bhieseapnayathaauruske bad maiapne pure parivarkesath Buddhism koapnaliya’* [whenever I used to meet local Dalits for tea at tea stall we they used to discuss about Buddhism and I get to know that this religion do not have any kind of discrimination and even Babsaheb also embraced it, and then I converted to Buddhism with my entire family]. From onwards we following ideology of Babasaheb and Budhism… I find Buddhism far better than Hinduism. …I could convert and get expose about Buddhism because of environment of Mumbai, where most of local Dalits are Buddhist. In villages, I could not know anything and Mumbai provides and opportunity to get expose with diverse culture, caste, living standard…It is the influence of local Dalits who had influenced me to work for my community….

Buddhism as religion is not merely linked to the spirituality but also a means to struggle and emancipation for Dalit migrants. It motivates them to continue their struggle from prolonged injustice and exclusion. Bhatewara & Bradley (2013., p. 200), has argued that religion conversion is a first steps for Dalits to struggle for freedom; and Buddhism as religion has played significant role in changing life of Dalit. As above respondents admire Ambedkar a lot while embracing Buddhism and Buddhist practices in everyday life, hence Ambedkar could be consider a medium for Dalits to introduce them about Buddhism and influence them to convert in Buddhism to experience a sense of self-esteem. Even Ambedkar aimed to foster a sense of self-esteem and freedom among Dalits, who were oppressed and socio-economically backward (Zelliot, 1992, as cited in Bhatewara & Bradley 2013., p. 198). Embracing Buddhism and its practices is not merely influential at destination of Dalit migrants but also at source, where they has taken an initiative to practice Buddhism in marriage, nomenclature, birthday celebration, and celebration of festivals as well. As another respondents Naresh has narrated:

…Last year June, I fixed marriage of my daughter and requested my relatives that the marriage ceremony has to be done as per the norms and rituals of Buddhism…‘*lekin jab baratpahuchi tab vhapesaravidhividhanhindudharamkakiyagayatha, uskodekhte hi meramathathankamai bola ki agar shadihogi to bsBaudhdharam se hogi, ham en devidevtavokonahimantehai. Uske bad bahut der takmaanmannaualhuaaur rat me karib 20-25 kilometer dur se Bauddhacharyakobulayagayaaurunkedekhrekh me shadiBaudhdharmkeritirivaj se sampannahuyi. uske bad ladkikeghar vale bhiapnehinduritirivaj se dubaravivahkiye. Ye sab kartekartesubah ho gyalekinmai add gayathakivivahhoga to bsbauddhdharm se hi hoga’*[But when we reached to the bride house, we saw that all the arrangement was done as per the norms of Hinud, after seeing that I totally lost my mind and I said that if marriage has to be done, then it should be done as per norms of Buddhism, and we do not believe in hinud gods. Since it was too late, therefore it tool long time to arrange Bauddhacharya for marriage, we has to travel around 20-25 Km to call him. After that marriage ceremony was done as per Buadhism norms and rituals, followed by family member of bride repeated the marriage ceremony as per Bauddhist norms. Doing these all took lot of time and by the early morning we could able to finish all the rituals since I strongly asserted that marriage should be done under Bauddhist norms and rituals]...

After seeing the above narrative of respondents one can see how Dalit migrants are projecting Buddhism at their source and their degree of assertiveness to follow Buddhism at the time of marriage. It convey strong massage of rejection of Hinduism by Dalit migrants but somewhere they are also accommodative and allowing their relatives to follow ritual of marriage. The above narrative is highlighting that they are trying to convey a strong massage that they are strong follower of Buddhism and they are using it as a tool to emancipate.

Apart from embracing Buddhism and practices of Buddhist culture, Dalit migrants are also trying to build a counter narrative against cultural hegemony on the name of Hindu festivals like Deepawali, holi etc. Gramsci argued that revolutionary transformation of society is not possible by merely seizing state power but it also requires radical cultural changes. As (Crehan, 2013., p. 106), writes “Cultural change is necessary because the realities of power bring into being specific cultures of subalternity with their associated common sense; subalterns come to see the hierarchies of the world they inhabit as inevitable and inescapable”. Subordinate groups need to adopt radical cultural change to develop their own view of culture and social power; where they can challenge the dominant view of society commonly associated with everyday forms of cultural practices. In Gramscian view, culture has been recognized as focal point of social power in society and it is being continued with persuasion of ‘cultural hegemony’. Therefore, everyday popular form of culture, religious practices and religious institutions are reflections of hegemony, which lies in ritual, beliefs, and festivals of society. Dalit migrants are making an attempt to break this hegemony by deconstructing and redefining the mythology, which are projected in form of various Hindu festivals. The following narrative of a respondent namely Viredndra could be considered as an attempt of developing counter hegemony by deconstructing mythology and developing a counter narrative on same. He articulates that:

…Since last few year we do not celebrate Deepawali because its festival of Hindu and now we are trying to leave the practices of Hinduism.... *‘deepawalikijagah ham logo ne apne se eknayautsavDeepdan[[4]](#endnote-4)surukiya, jise ham logo deepdankahatehai, jismeki ham sab log BudhaVihar me deep jalaye’. Mandala me Buddhism koapnanekaprayaschalrahahai, jismekibahutsare log haijo Buddhism me convert to nhihuyehailekin Buddhism ketaurtarikokoapnarahehai’…* [We started celebrating a new festivals called Deepdan, where we light-up candle in Buddha Vihar in stead of celebrating Deepawali. There is lot of efforts are going to spread the Buddhism in Mandala, even there are people who have not converted themselves in Buddhism formally but they are trying to embrace its practices in their everyday life]....

However, there is no available script, which can authenticate to above claim of practice of *Deepdan* but it could be seen as an attempt to orate and re-write the history by marginalized in form of counter hegemony. This argument made an agreement of argument by Badri Narayan (2008, p. 172), where he noted that narrative and history invented by Dalits constitute an alternative history and language and such process of Dalit assertiveness can be understood as an attempt to acquire social respect. It is being observed that Dalit migrants do not merely practice Buddhism but they also symbolize Buddhism and Ambedkar by putting their image in their houses. The image of Buddha and Ambedkar is being put on the wall of house of Dalit migrants in Mumbai. Images of Ambedkar, Buddha, Kanshiram and Ms. Mayawati in form of poster or calendars are mainly found in the houses of Dalit migrants. As one goes in Hindu houses sees small wooden temple of Hindu goddess, in similar way Dalit migrants have small wooden temple in their house with lord Buddha’s statues, which reflect their spiritual believes are lies in lord Buddha and their process of disassociation from Hinduism. Narayan (2006, p. 71), has also noted in his study that calendars or posters of Dalit heroes and lord Budha mainly found in the houses of Dalits who live in city or small town. These visual representations of images and symbols help Dalits to form a sense of caste pride and glory within Dalits (Narayan, 2006, p. 71).

Changing religious practices of Dalit migrants could be seen as an attempt to deconstruct everything which they ‘inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed from past’ (Gramsci, 1999, p. 661). They convert their religion from Hinduism to Buddhism and initiate Buddhist cultural practices to challenge cultural practices of Hinduism in lifestyle, beliefs and rituals. It was one of the advance stages of counter hegemony when one of 40 year old Dalit migrants change his name in January 2018 because his name was associated with Hindu god. It has taken a lead to transform the rituals practices concerning nomenclature and challenging the dominant form of rituals. He called a Baudhacharya to follow the proper rituals of Buddhism to change his name. However, this was one such incident but one could see level of assertiveness among Dalit migrants to challenge dominant culture. Design of marriage card is another such example of resistance of Dalit migrants against the dominant culture, where the content of invitation card and color is blue with images of Buddha and Ambedkar in stead of Hindu God Ganesha(Gaurav J. Pathania, 2016, p. 270). Such practices are common among Dalit migrants. Many of Dalit migrants have fixed marriage of their daughters, son, and sisters and they had made plan that the all the ritual ceremony of marriage will be done in Buddhist rituals.

**Decoration and Attire: Symbolization of Everyday Counter-hegemonic Assertion**

There are a range of study, which has studied migration to capture economic reason and flow of migration (Haan, 2000; Priya Deshingkar and Daniel Start, 2003). These literatures has focused on the livelihood and economic aspects of migration and overlooked social and cultural aspect of migration. However, recently Sunam(2014), had tried to examine social and cultural resistance and assertion of Dalit migrants in international labour migration (p,3033). Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan (2003), works are one of the significant works in study of cultural aspects of migration and how Dalit and tribal migrants are using ‘body politics’ as a means of counter hegemonic assertion. I draw notion of ‘body politics’ from Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan (2003, p. 193)and ‘counter-hegemony’ of Gramsci to understand counter hegemonic assertion of Dalit migrants. Body politics demonstrate two crucial element; “the search for alternative forms of employment that enable them to reject their historical position of servitude to caste groups; and second, the desire for forms of consumption that would have previously only been affordable or possible for caste groups and which, therefore, signify social transgression”Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan (2003, p. 193). Whereas Gramsci’s idea of counter hegemonic is as Reed (2012, p. 563), “Counter- hegemony refers to, to be more precise, a process that challenges the normative view that capital- ism is the only viable politico-economic arrangement available to humanity. It unfolds through moral and intellectual leadership design to gain the consent of the masses. And it stands as an alternative to the moral and intellectual leadership that reinforces capitalism”. Putting it in more precise and simple, it is the process to challenge the status quo and normative arrangement of political and economic relation in society that aims to human liberation ultimately.

Drawing from fieldwork observation, it was noted that decoration which Dalit migrants was quite unique in nature because of its colors. In northern Indian marriages, people decorate their entire house with colorful lighting, gate, big tent, and stage for marriage ceremony. Usually the color of these decoration are red, green, and saffron, but in case of the Dalit migrant’s marriage ceremony all the light and decoration was in two color only; blue and white, because it reflect ‘peace’ in Buddhism and marriages were processed through Buddhist ritual. The gate of the marriage decoration had big picture of BabsahebBhimaro Ambedkar and lord Buddha as in people use Ganesa and Laxmi pic in Hindu marriage ceremony. Instead of the portray of Hindu goddess, dalit migrants were using Ambedkae and lord Buddha’s pic to decorate and use in welcome gate. More interestingly, the colour of light was in blue, green, and white. Even I could not find a single light, which is red or saffron, and they had put these colors of light purposefully to indicate Buddhist culture. Entire premise of house were decorated with panchshil and blue flag. The stage for marriage was decorated with a banner of twenty-twoprinciples given by Babsaheb Ambedkar to the follower of Buddhism. The stage was surrounded by panchshil and blue flag, and also had small portray of Babsaheb Ambedkar and lord Buddha. Groom and Bride garlanded to Babasaheb Ambedkar and lord Buddha to start marriage ceremony and followed by slogans were raised in the praise of Babsaheb Ambedkar and lord Buddha. As Pandit processes rituals, in Hindu, marriages in similar way Dalit migrants had called Bauddhacharya to process the ritual for marriage and interestingly Bauddhacharya was from Dalit community. The dressing pattern of the family and relative in marriage ceremony, were in blue and white. It was really difficult to find out people with red and saffron colour of dress. Every decorating material of the marriage were in blue, green, and white colour. Even the balloon was in blue and green, which were used for decoration. While looking the attire and decoration in the marriage ceremony of Dalit migrant’s family, one could clearly identify it as a counter hegemonic assertion of Dalit migrants.

**Conclusion**

The everyday practice of culture by Dalit migrants in Mumbai demonstrates a new epistemic understanding of the existing form of cultural hegemony particularly in scared places, celebration of various events, and religion. The changing cultural practices among Dalit migrants should not be seen as merely cultural change but also a form of counter narrative against dominant form of cultural practices persuaded by upper caste. The notion of counter hegemony developed by Gramsci offer nuance understanding of emerging form of counter hegemony among Dalit migrants to challenge the dominant notion of identity, culture and rituals. Cultural identity is one of the significant aspects for any social groups, which determine by historical awareness of people about their identity and culture.

In the word of Sikka (2012), “…where groups have faced subjugation, exclusion or discrimination, it needs to be recognized that theway people position themselves in relation to cultural options are understandably, and quite legitimately, affected by their awareness of historical relations, especially those involving inequalities of power, between the various communities among whom they find themselves (p. 44)”. City as space has also contributed significantly in assertion of Dalit migrants, where their caste identity has helped them to exchange the knowledge about Buddhism, different sacred

Very interestingly, many Dalit migrants made claim that they experience much liberation from caste in city than village. This finding validate the appeal of Dr. Ambedkar to Dalits that They should move to cities in order to escape from caste; ‘so long they would not leave the villages and settle into the cities, there will not be any change in their lives’ (as cited in Cháirez-garza, 2014, p. 46). Liberation claimed by Dalit migrants is liberation from persisting discrimination and subjugation by upper caste, and by developing counter hegemony, Dalit migrants assert and re-write their culture or way of life by their own. By adopting Buddhism and using Dalit ideologue as means of assertion, Dalit migrants are trying to develop a notion of counter hegemony to challenge the dominant way of life and culture. To conclude, it must be clarify that this paper intend to idealize that Dalit migrants are setting up their own icons, symbols, construction of myths using the Buddhism and Ambedkar as ideological tool to counter their opponent upper caste Hindu. Hence initiation of such process by Dalit migrants could be considered as process of counter hegemony to challenge the dominant ideology, belief, life style and culture (Gaurav J. Pathania, 2016, p. 270).

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus Manipur. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ad-Darm is a religious sect knows as Ravidasiya and it is confined mostly to Punjab and Hariyana. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Fieldwork notes on 29th March 2019, first interaction with a Dalit migrant of Mandala, who embraced Buddhism in Mumbai. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. A form of festival started by Buddhist Dalits since few years to counter Deepawali, which is Hindu festival. In Deepdan they light up the candle and worship to Buddha.

   4. The pseudo name has been used instead the name of respondents in order to maintain confidentiality.

   **References**

   A.Contursi, J. (1989). Militant Hindus and Buddhist Dalits : Hegemony and Resistance in an Indian Slum. *American Ethnologist*, 441–457.

   Badri Narayan. (2008). Demarginalisation and History: Dalit Re-inventtion of the Past. *South Asia Research*, *28*(2), 169–184.

   Bhatewara, Z., & Bradley, T. (n.d.). Buddhist Engagements with Social Justice :, 69–76.

   Cháirez-garza, J. F. (2014). Touching space : Ambedkar on the spatial features of untouchability. *Contemporary South Asia*, *22*(1), 35–50.

   Crehan, K. (2013). Living subalternity: Antonio Gramsci’s concept of common sense. In C. Zene, *The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and B.R. Ambedkar* (pp. 103-115). New York.

   Gaurav J. Pathania. (2016). Food Politics and Counter Hegemonic Assertion in Indian University campuses. *South Asia Research*, *36*(2), 261–277.

   Gramsci, A. (1999). *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey, Ed.), *ElecBook* (Vol. 73). London: ElecBook.

   Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing Research in the Real World*. London: Sage Publications.

   Gupta, D. (2005). Caste and Politics : Identity Over System. *The Annual Review of Anthropology Is*, *21*, 409–427.

   Gooptu, Nandini. (2001). *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India*.Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

   Henry, R., & Schilthuis, A. (2012). Hegemony and counterhegemony. In George Ritzer (Ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization* (First Edit, pp. 1–4). New Delhi: Blackwell.

   Jaoul, N. (2006). Learning the use of Symbolic Means:Dalits, Ambedkar statues and the state in Uttar Pradesh. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *40*(2), 175–207.

   Junghare, I. Y. (2015). LANGUAGE , CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION : INDIA. In *International Conference Redifining Community in Intercultural Context* (pp. 21–23). Brasow.

   Kumar, V. (2005). Situating Dalits in Indian Sociology. *Sociological Bulletin* , Vol . 54 , No . 3 , Special Issue on South Asia : The State of Sociology: Issues of Relevance and Rigour. September - December 20, *54*(3). 514-532.

   Kumar, V. (2014). Inequality in India: Caste and Hindu Social Order. *Transcience*, *5*(1), 36–52.

   Kumbhojkar, S. (2012). Contesting Power, Contesting Memories:The History of the Koregaon Memorial. *Economic & Political Weekly*, *xlviI*(42), 103–107.

   Ledwith, M. (2006). *Community Development: A Critical Approach .* Jaipur: Rawat Publication .

   Naidoo, L. (2011). Ethnography : An Introduction to Definition and Method. In *An Ethnography of Global Landscapes and Corridors* (pp. 1–9).

   Narayan, B. (2004). Inventing caste history : Dalit mobilisation and Nationalist Past.*Contribution to Indian Sociology,*38(1&2), 193-220.

   Narayan, B. (2006). *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and.* New Delhi. Sage Publication.

   Paik, S. (2011). Mahar – Dalit – Buddhist : The history. *Contribution of Indian Sociology*, *45*(02), 2017–241.

   Ram, R. (2004). Untouchability, Dalit consciousness, and the Ad Dharm movement in Punjab. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *38*(3), 323–349.

   Ram, R. (2011). Guru Ravidas: Prophet of Dalit Liberation. *Voice of Dalit*, *4*(1), 29–47.

   Reed, J. (2012). Theorist of Subaltern Subjectivity : Antonio Gramsci , Popular Beliefs , Political Passion , and Reciprocal Learning. *Critical Sociology*, *39*(4), 561–591.

   Sikka, S. (2012). Untouchable cultures : memory , power and the construction of Dalit selfhood. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, *19*(1), 43–60.

   Singh, J. (1998). Ambedkarisation and Assertion of Dalit Identity: Socio-Cultural Protest in Meerut District of Western Uttar Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *33*(40), 2611–2618.

   Singh, J. P. (1984). Distance Pattern of Rural to Urban to Urban Migration in India. Genus, *40*(1/2), 119–129.

   Singh, J. P. (1992). Migration in India : A Review. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, *1*(1), 168–192.

   Singh, S. (2016). Dalits in Punjab: Cultural Assertion and Heritage.*South Asia Research*, *36*(3), 356–376.

   Singh, S., & Singh, J. (2017). Deras , Dalit Assertion and Resistance : A Case Study of Dera Baba Bhure Shah Sappanwala. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*. 9(2), 148-158.

   Sunam, R. (2014). Marginalised Dalits in International Labour Migration : Reconfiguring Economic and Social Relations in Nepal. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *40*(12), 2030–2048. http://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.948393

   T.J. Jackson Lears. (1985). The Concept of Cultural Hegemony : Problems and Possibilities. *The American Historical Review*, *90*(3), 567–593.

   Teltumbde, A. (2013). Ambedkarites against Ambedkar. *Economic & Political Weekly*, *48*(19), 10–11.

   Teltumbde, A. (2018). Bhima–Koregaon:Myth, Metaphor and Meta-mission. *Economic & Political Weekly*, *III*(5), 10–11.

   Zane Ritchie, Jane Lewis, Carol Mcnaughton Nicolas, and R. O. (2013). A Qualitative Guide for Social Science Students. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

   Zelliot, E. (2011). Pilgrimage in the Structure of the Ambedkar Movement. *Voice of Dalit*, *4*(1), 1–6. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)