A study of Educational status and Issues of Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists students of Maharashtra at elementary level

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Introduction
The present study is conducted in Buldhana district of Maharashtra state. Therefore, it is important to know about Maharashtra and especially about Buldhana.

Maharashtra is a state in the western region of India and is the nation’s third largest state by area and is also the world’s second-most populous sub-national entity. It has over 110 million inhabitants and its capital, Mumbai, has a population of approximately 18 million. Nagpur serves as second capital as well as winter capital of the state. Maharashtra’s business opportunities along with its potential to offer a higher standard of living attract migrants from all over India.

Spread over 118,809 sq. mi (307,710 km²), it is bordered by the Arabian Sea to the west and the Indian states of Karnataka, Telangana, Goa, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and the Union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Maharashtra is the second most urbanised state in India, after Tamil Nadu, with large cities besides the capital Mumbai such as Pune, Nagpur, Nashik and Aurangabad.

Regions, divisions and districts
Maharashtra came into existence on May 1, 1960 (also known as Maharashtra Day), initially with 26 districts. Ten new districts have been created since then, and currently the number of districts in the state are 36. These districts are grouped into six administrative divisions.

Regions
Geographically, historically, and according to political sentiments, Maharashtra has five main regions:
1. Vidarbha - (Nagpur and Amravati divisions) - (Old Berar Region)
2. Marathwada - (Aurangabad Division)
3. Khandesh and Northern Maharashtra Region - (Nashik Division)
4. Pune - (Pune Division) - West Maharashtra Region
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5. Konkan - (Konkan Division)
6. Nashik - (Nashik Division)

Maharashtra consists of six administrative divisions as follows:
1. Amravati
2. Aurangabad
3. Konkan
4. Nagpur
5. Nashik
6. Pune

**Districts**
1. Ahmednagar,
2. Jalgaon
3. Pune
4. Akola
5. Jalna
6. Raigad
7. Amravati
8. Kolhapur
9. Ratnagiri
10. Aurangabad
11. Latur
12. Sangli
13. Beed
14. Mumbai City
15. Satara
16. Bhandara
17. Mumbai Sub-urban
18. Sindhudurg
19. Buldhana
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20. Nagpur  
21. Solapur  
22. Chandrapur  
23. Nanded  
24. Thane  
25. Dhule  
26. Nandurbar  
27. Wardha  
28. Gadchiroli  
29. Nashik  
30. Washim  
31. Gondia  
32. Osmanabad  
33. Yavatmal  
34. Hingoli  
35. Parbhani  
36. Palghar

Religion-wise Population

Hinduism is majority religion in the state of Maharashtra with 79.83 % followers. Islam is second most popular religion in state of Maharashtra with approximately 11.54 % following it. In Maharashtra state, Buddhism is followed by 5.81 %, Christianity 0.96 %, Jainism by 1.25 %, and Sikhism by 0.20 %. Around 0.16 % stated ‘Other Religion’; approximately 0.25 % stated ‘No Particular Religion’.

Table 1.1: Religion-wise Population of Maharashtra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>89,703,057</td>
<td>79.83 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>12,971,152</td>
<td>11.54 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>6,531,200</td>
<td>5.81 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>1,400,349</td>
<td>1.25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1,080,073</td>
<td>0.96 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>286,290</td>
<td>0.25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>223,247</td>
<td>0.20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>178,965</td>
<td>0.16 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the present study is undertaken in Buldhana district, it is important to know about it.

**Buldhana**

Buldhana is the district headquarters and a Municipal Council in the Buldhana District of Amravati division in the Indian State of Maharashtra. It is situated at the westernmost border of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra and is 500 km from the state capital, Mumbai. It is bounded by Madhya Pradesh on the north, Akola, Washim, and Amravati districts on the east, Jalna district on the south, and Jalgaon and Aurangabad districts on the west. It is also known as the gateway of Vidharbha.

According to official Census 2011, Buldana had population of 2,586,258 of which male and female were 1,337,560 and 1,248,698 respectively. In 2001 census, Buldana had a population of 2,232,480 of which males were 1,147,403 and remaining 1,085,077 were females. Buldana District population constituted 2.30 percent of total Maharashtra population. In 2001 census, this figure for Buldana District was at 2.30 percent of Maharashtra population.

There was change of 15.85 percent in the population compared to population as per 2001. In the previous census of India 2001, Buldana District recorded increase of 18.35 percent to its population compared to 1991.

**Literacy Rate**

Average literacy rate of Buldana in 2011 were 83.40 compared to 75.78 of 2001. If things are looked out at gender wise, male and female literacy were 90.54 and 75.84 respectively. For 2001 census, same figures stood at 86.93 and 64.07 in Buldana District. Total literate in Buldana District were 1,879,874 of which male and female were 1,048,892 and 830,982 respectively. In 2001, Buldana District had 1,433,889 in its district.
Table 1.2: Religion-wise population of Buldhana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1,845,424</td>
<td>71.35 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>354,236</td>
<td>13.70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3,531</td>
<td>0.14 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>1,668</td>
<td>0.06 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>364,229</td>
<td>14.08 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>12,242</td>
<td>0.47 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>0.02 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>4,406</td>
<td>0.17 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Present Context
The Dalit Buddhist movement (dubbed as Navayana by certain Ambedkarite)\(^1\) is a 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) century Buddhist revival movement in India. It received its most substantial impetus from B. R. Ambedkar’s call for the conversion of Dalits to Buddhism, in 1956, to escape a caste-based society that considered them to be the lowest in the hierarchy.\(^2\) Ambedkar saw Buddhism as a means to end the caste system in India.

Re-emergence of Buddhism in India
Buddhism was once dominant through much of India; it had, however, declined in India due to a number of reasons. The Buddhist revival began in India in 1891, when the Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala founded the Maha Bodhi Society.\(^3\) The Maha Bodhi Society mainly attracted upper-caste people.\(^4\)

B. R. Ambedkar
At the Yeola conference in 1935, prominent Indian leader and first law minister B. R. Ambedkar declared that he would not die a Hindu, saying that it perpetuates caste injustices. Ambedkar was approached by various leaders of different denominations and faiths. Meetings were held to discuss the question of Dalits and the pros and cons

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of conversion.\(^5\) On 22 May 1936, an “All Religious Conference” was held at Lucknow. It was attended by prominent Dalit leaders including Jagjivan Ram, though Ambedkar could not attend it. At the conference, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, and Buddhist representatives presented the tenets of their respective religions in an effort to win over Dalits.\(^6\)

Buddhist monk Lokanatha visited Ambedkar’s residence at Dadar on 10 June 1936 and tried to persuade him to embrace Buddhism. Later in an interview to the press, Lokanatha said that Ambedkar was impressed with Buddhism and that his own ambition was to convert all Dalits to Buddhism.\(^7\) In 1937, Lokanatha published a pamphlet *Buddhism Will Make You Free*, dedicated to the “Depressed Classes” of India from his press in Ceylon.

In early 1940s, Ambedkar visited Acharya Ishwardatt Medharthi’s Buddhpuri School in Kanpur. Medharthi had earlier been initiated into Buddhism by Lokanatha, and by the mid-1940s, he had close contacts with Ambedkar. For a short while, Ambedkar also took Pali classes from Medharthi in Delhi.\(^8\)

**Ambedkar’s conversion**

After publishing a series of books and articles arguing that Buddhism was the only way for the Untouchables to gain equality, Ambedkar publicly converted on 14 October 1956, at Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur. He took the three refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk, Bhadant U Chandramani, in the traditional manner, and in his turn administered them to the 600,000 of his followers who were present. The conversion ceremony was attended by Medharathi, his main disciple Bhoj Dev Mudit, and Mahastvir Bodhanand’s Sri Lankan successor, Bhante Pragyanand.\(^9\) Ambedkar asked Dalits not to get entangled in the existing branches of Buddhism, and called his

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\(^6\) Ibid


\(^9\) Ibid
version Navayana or ‘Neo-Buddhism’. Ambedkar would die less than two months later, just after finishing his definitive work on Buddhism.

Many Dalits employ the term “Ambedkar(ite) Buddhism” to designate the Buddhist movement, which started with Ambedkar’s conversion. Many converted people call themselves “Bauddha” i.e. Buddhists.

After receiving ordination, Ambedkar gave Dhamma diksha to his followers. The ceremony included 22 vows given to all new converts after Three Jewels and Five Precepts. On 14 October 1956 at Nagpur, Ambedkar performed another mass religious conversion ceremony at Chandrapur.

The Buddhist movement was somewhat hindered by Dr. Ambedkar’s death so shortly after his conversion. It did not receive the immediate mass support from the Untouchable population that Ambedkar had hoped for. Division and lack of direction among the leaders of the Ambedkarite movement have been an additional impediment.

According to the 2001 census, there are currently 7.95 million Buddhists in India, at least 5.83 million of whom are Buddhists in Maharashtra. This makes Buddhism the fifth-largest religion in India and 6% of the population of Maharashtra, but less than 1% of the overall population of India.

**Why Ambedkar quit Hindu religion?**

Due to following reasons, Ambedkar quit Hinduism-

1. **Strong roots of Untouchability:** Dr. Ambedkar was born an untouchable and faced caste discrimination throughout his life. The roots of the untouchability were so deep that it was not possible to bring reforms in the Hindu religion being in the religion itself.

2. **Presence of irrational rituals and beliefs:** Hinduism is full of irrational rituals and beliefs. Even today, these rituals and beliefs of people are still alive. Ex: Cow is a holy animal while buffalo is not. We human beings even don’t spare animals while discriminating. Another example is of inter-caste marriages that are still

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10 Ibid
12 “Nagpur is where Dr BR Ambedkar accepted Buddhism on October 14, 1956, along with several followers”. DNA. 8 October 2015. Retrieved 20 October 2015.
very rare. Even educated people are not able of take stand due to the frequent problems of honour killings.

3. **Years of Humiliation**: Being the leader of the untouchables it was the responsibility of Dr. Ambedkar to enlighten the people of his community to get rid of all the trials and tribulations those they were facing being in the Hindu community.

4. **Equality**: Dr. Ambedkar wanted to bring his people at the level of other Indians or non-untouchables in all the terms whether economically, politically or socially. Social reason was the most prevalent among all. His philosophy of an egalitarian society also highly reflects in the Indian constitution.

**Why Dr. Ambedkar chose Buddhism over other Religions?**

1. **Presence of Casteism in other Religions**: All the religions of the world had casteism at that time be it Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or Christian. If in Hindu religion there were lower castes then Sikh religion was no different. As Sikh society is a derived society from Hindu religion that is why even after adopting Sikh religion, upper caste Sikhs never gave lower Sikhs equal status. It can be easily observed in the villages where upper caste Sikhs and lower caste Sikhs lives in separate colonies. Even they had to choose their own guru Guru Ravidas. Lower caste Sikhs were also lived their lives like lower caste Hindus. Talking about Muslim religion, lower caste discrimination was also prevalent here. Apart from that, Shiite and Sunni hatred was also very prominent. In Christianity, history witnessed numerous bloodshed between Catholics and Protestants. Discrimination was everywhere despite all the religious scriptures were preaching the same thing in same way or other. Importantly, Christian and Muslim religions were not Indian and Dr. Ambedkar wanted to adopt Indian religion.

2. **Why Buddhism**: Buddhism was very old religion and purely an Indian religion. It had lost its roots in India. Very few monks and monasteries were left in India at that time. Dr. Ambedkar studied about the life of Siddharth Gautam Buddha and arrived at a conclusion that it is the only religion in the world where there is no discrimination. Though over the years Buddhism too had distorted a lot but Dr. Ambedkar studied it in its purest of pure forms. He read all the scriptures of Buddha and then wrote a book Buddha and his Dhamma. He generated a huge respect for the life of Buddha and his devotion to the people. He determined to
convert into Buddhism and convinced his people to do the same to get their lost dignity, which Hinduism could never get them for centuries. Finally at Nagpur lakhs of people were converted to Buddhism and adopted Buddha’s Dhamma. Ambedkar believed that the untouchables occupied a “weak and lowly status” only because they were a part of the Hindu society. When attempts to gain equal status and “ordinary rights as human beings” within the Hindu society started failing, Ambedkar thought it was essential to embrace a religion which will give “equal status, equal rights and fair treatment” to untouchables. He clearly said to his supporters “select only that religion in which you will get equal status, equal opportunity and equal treatment…”

Introduction of the present work

Indian schooling is suffering from different kinds of exclusions. Education as a system, in spite of concerned efforts, is far from becoming inclusive. One of the excluded categories of people is religious and linguistic minorities. Buddhist / Neo-Buddhist Community comes under the category of religious minority. Originally, these peoples belong to Hindu religion having different castes. As per constitution, they come under Scheduled Castes category. In 1956, when Dr. B R Ambedkar adopted Buddhism, thousands of Scheduled Castes peoples, especially belonging to Mahar caste, joined him and embraced Buddhism. Since then they are known as Neo-Buddhists. However, those who were following Buddhism before 1956 are known as Buddhist. Now the issue is the peoples belongs to Mahar Castes of Maharashtra are Buddhists or neo-Buddhists by practice but come under Scheduled caste. Being Scheduled Castes, they get benefits of reservation in education and jobs provided by constitution of India and being neo-Buddhists, they will get benefits of minority. How to address this issue is a big question. It’s observed that on paper most of them are still in Scheduled Castes. If they are following and practicing Buddhism, they must adopt it on paper also. However, there may be some hurdles, which may restricting them by doing this. There may be lack of awareness about the provisions they may get being in minority.

As discussed earlier, Ambedkar adopted Buddhism to get equal treatment and opportunities in every walk of life which were absent in Hinduism. It will be

14 http://www.ambedkar.org/Babasaheb/Why.htm
interesting to know how much he succeed in his vision. Keeping this in view, the present study undertaken to investigate the educational status and issues of Buddhists or neo-Buddhists of Maharashtra.

Objectives of the Study
i) To study the enrolment status of Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists students at elementary level
ii) To study the achievement levels among Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists students at elementary level
iii) To study the retention rate among Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists students at elementary level
iv) To study the issues in their educational mobility

Outcomes and benefits of the study
Present study mainly focussed on the enrolment, retention and achievement of Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists students studying at elementary level. The study tried to extract the issues in their upward educational mobility. The outcomes and benefits of the study are explained in coming sections.

Methodology and tools
Five days workshop was organized to develop and finalize the tools for the study. Following tools were developed in the workshop-
1. Standard wise Achievement for standard V, VI and VII
2. Enrolment Ratio
3. Attendance and Retention Rate
4. विद्यार्थी प्रश्नािली
5. शिक्षक प्रश्नािली
6. अभिभावक प्रश्नािली

Sample
Present study is basically a survey study. The study is conducted in Buldhana district of Maharashtra. Buldhana consists of thirteen tehsils. Out of these thirteen tehsils, study is conducted in ten tehsils. Eight schools from each tehsil chosen as the sample of the study. Thus, total 80 schools comprised the sample. The information related to enrolment, retention and achievement of Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists students have collected from these selected schools. Similar information of other students also
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collected to compare with Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists students. Information also collected from students, teachers and parents to know the issues in the upward mobility of these students. Data collection process took six months. Sample of the present study is explained in the flow chart shown below:
Enrolment of all students at upper primary stage

Table 1.3: Religion-wise enrolment in standard V

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Baudha</th>
<th>Jain</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1643 (74.99)</td>
<td>456 (20.81)</td>
<td>1 (0.06)</td>
<td>91 (4.15)</td>
<td>2191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the religion-wise enrolment of all students in standard V. These numbers are almost matching with the numbers shown in table 1.2. The major religion of Maharashtra as well as Buldhana is Hinduism, second Muslim, and third Buddhism. The same is reflected in above table also. The encouraging observation is that the percentage of Buddhists students (20.81) is much higher than their population (14.08) in Buldhana. At the same time, the discouraging sign is the percentage of Muslim students (4.15) is much less than their total population (13.70) in the district.

Table 1.4: Religion-wise enrolment in standard VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Baudha</th>
<th>Jain</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1798 (76.90)</td>
<td>451 (19.29)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>89 (3.81)</td>
<td>2338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the religion-wise enrolment of all students in standard VI. These numbers are almost matching with the numbers shown in table 1.2. The major religion of Maharashtra as well as Buldhana is Hinduism, second Muslim, and third Buddhism. The same is reflected in above table also. The encouraging observation is that the percentage of Buddhists students (19.29) is much higher than their population (14.08) in Buldhana. At the same time, the discouraging sign is the percentage of Muslim students (3.81) is much less than their total population (13.70) in the district.

Table 1.5: Religion-wise enrolment in standard VII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Baudha</th>
<th>Jain</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1627 (77.02)</td>
<td>406 (19.23)</td>
<td>2 (0.09)</td>
<td>75 (3.55)</td>
<td>1 (0.04)</td>
<td>2111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the religion-wise enrolment of all students in standard VII. These numbers are almost matching with the numbers shown in table 1.2. The major religion of Maharashtra as well as Buldhana is Hinduism, second Muslim, and third Buddhism. The same is reflected in above table also. The encouraging observation is that the percentage of Buddhists students (19.23) is much higher than their population.
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(14.08) in Buldhana. At the same time, the discouraging sign is the percentage of Muslim students (3.55) is much less than their total population (13.70) in the district.

Table 1.6: Buddhists students in standard V

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Baudha</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baudha</td>
<td>411 (90.13)</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahar</td>
<td>45 (9.87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the total number of Buddhists students studying in fifth standard. It is observed that out of 456 Buddhists students 90.13% written Baudha as religion as well as caste. However, 9.87% students written Budhha as a religion but Mahar as a caste. In fact, there is no caste in Buddhism, however, for educational and other benefits, parents might have written caste as Mahar. Mahar is one of the castes of Hindu religion and comes under Scheduled Castes category.

Table 1.7: Buddhists students in standard VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Baudha</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baudha</td>
<td>392 (86.92)</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahar</td>
<td>59 (13.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the total number of Buddhists students studying in sixth standard. It is observed that out of 451 Buddhists students 86.92% written Baudha as religion as well as caste. However, 13.02% students written Budhha as a religion but Mahar as a caste.

Table 1.8: Buddhists students in standard VII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Baudha</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baudha</td>
<td>340 (83.74)</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahar</td>
<td>66 (16.26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the total number of Buddhists students studying in seventh standard. It is observed that out of 406 Buddhists students 83.74% written Baudha as religion as well as caste. However, 16.26% students written Budhha as a religion but Mahar as a caste.

Thus, the number of Mahar caste students seems to be increased from fifth standard to seventh standard. However, looking with other perspective, it is good sign. Day by
day, with increased awareness, the number of Mahar caste students started decreasing and parents started writing Baudha as a caste. As mentioned earlier, Buddhism has no caste; therefore, writing Baudha as a caste must have some reasons. We may get the answer in coming analysis.

**Students average achievement at upper primary stage**

Table 1.9: Average Achievement of Standards V, VI and VII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Class V</th>
<th>Class VI</th>
<th>Class VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>75.14</td>
<td>75.86</td>
<td>76.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Buddhists</td>
<td>75.36</td>
<td>76.12</td>
<td>75.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>75.49</td>
<td>76.30</td>
<td>75.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from above table that the average achievement of Buddhists students is less than in fifth and sixth standard, however, greater than in seventh standard as compare to non-Buddhists and Hindu students. However, the achievement is less or more but there is not much difference. Its again encouraging sign. We may ascribe its credit to mainly Buddhism and then governmental policies. Buddhism, as it is based on principles, must have elevated the positive esteem of the people belongs to the depressed class since ages. Further, the governmental policies and interventions must have contributed positively to get into the arena of education.

**Enrolment at upper primary stage**

Table 1.10: Enrolment Ratio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Standard V</th>
<th>Standard VI</th>
<th>Standard VII</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88 (8.36)</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>647 (61.44)</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>205 (19.47)</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>113 (10.73)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>1053</td>
<td>954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>243 (23.07)</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>208 (19.75)</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows, standard-wise, gender-wise and category-wise enrolment of students at upper primary stage. The overall enrolment of General is 8.61%, OBC-
58.77%, SCs-21.04% and STs-11.15%, which is almost matching even with national population of the respective categories.

**Attendance pattern at upper primary stage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Standard V</th>
<th>Standard VI</th>
<th>Standard VII</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>92.48</td>
<td>93.46</td>
<td>95.69</td>
<td>93.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Buddhist</td>
<td>91.35</td>
<td>94.05</td>
<td>95.98</td>
<td>93.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>91.86</td>
<td>94.48</td>
<td>96.28</td>
<td>94.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91.90</td>
<td>94.00</td>
<td>95.98</td>
<td>93.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average attendance of all students at upper primary stage is presented in above table. The average attendance is 93.96% and the average attendance of other religious categories is nearby to this average attendance.

**Awareness of Buddhists students towards Buddhism**

A questionnaire was developed and administered to know the awareness of Buddhists students towards Buddhism. It was administered on 854 Buddhists students and all were aware that they are Buddhist. Buddhism is mentioned as their religion in the school records. However, out of 854 students, 830 (97.19%) students were not at all knowing the meaning of Buddhism and only 24 (2.81%) students responded that they know the meaning of Buddhism. Their responses can be put as follows-

- Following Gautam Buddha after getting inspiration from his thoughts,
- Those who believes in Gautam Buddha
- Those who follows the principles of Gautam Buddha and Babasaheb Ambedkar
- Those who prays Gautam Buddha
- It is religion
- Buddhists, neo-Buddhists and Mahars are come under Buddhism
- The meaning of Buddha is intelligent

In the response of who was Gautam Buddha, 126 (14.75%) students responded that he is a god, 31 (3.67%) - political leader and social reformer and 697 (81.62%) - founder of a religion and social reformer. In fact, the correct choice is founder of a religion and social reformer and most of the students picked this choice.
In the response of who was Dr B R Ambedkar, 57 (6.67%) students responded that he is a god, 79 (9.25%) - political leader and social reformer, 714 (83.61%) - social reformer and 4 (0.47%) students were don’t know who he was. In fact, the correct choice is political leader and social reformer. However, majority of the students considered him as a social reformer only. This choice of students is also not wrong. Ambedkar was considered by many as a social reformer only but at the same time, he was political leader also.

**Awareness of Teachers towards Buddhism**

A questionnaire was developed and administered to know the awareness of teachers towards Buddhism and other related issues. It was administered on 394 teachers belong to all categories. Out of 394 teachers, 24 (6.10) teachers belong to Buddhism. Caste wise 16 teachers are Baudha and 8 teachers are Mahar. All the teachers had wide range of experience ranging from 2 to 35 years. All were aware that the Buddhists students are studying in their respective schools. In the response of one question, they admitted that they knew the difference between Buddhist and neo-Buddhist. However, the interesting finding is 164 (41.62%) teachers responded that there is no difference between Buddhist and neo-Buddhist. Moreover, 230 (58.38%) teachers were not clear about the difference. Thus, it can be concluded that all the teachers do not at all know the difference between Buddhist and neo-Buddhist. However, there is clear-cut difference between Buddhist and neo-Buddhist. Those who are following Buddhism even before 1956 are Buddhists and those who are following Buddhism after conversion to it from Hinduism by Ambedkar in 1956 are neo-Buddhists. After deep study of Buddhism, Ambedkar proposed Neo-Buddhism and it is the purest form of Buddhism.

All teachers consider the Mahar caste student as Buddhist. They were aware of affirmative action existing for Mahar students. They admitted that the affirmative action is solely responsible for the development of the Mahar community. Scheduled Castes consist of many castes and Mahar is one of them. Therefore, teachers are aware that the affirmative action is for Scheduled Castes and not to only Mahar community. They strongly hold that the affirmative action should continue. They admitted that they pay extra attention on students of Mahar community by arranging extra classes. They are aware that the Mahar community people follow Buddhism and that is why teachers write Buddhism as their religion while admission in the school of Mahar community
students. Teachers encourage the followers of Buddhism to write their religion as Buddhism in the school to get benefit of governmental schemes. They are also aware that the Buddhism comes under the minority communities and scholarships are available for these communities for educational purposes.

**Awareness of Parents towards Buddhism**

A questionnaire was also developed and administered to know the awareness of parents belonging to Buddhism towards Buddhism, education of their wards, available facilities and educational issues. It was administered on 395 parents belong to Buddhism. Out of 395 parents, 358 (90.40%) are labourer, 27 (6.82%) farmers and seldom as advocate, anganwadi karykarta, driver, Sarpanch and other profession. Their monthly income is ranging from Rs. 2000 to 25000. Out of 395, 311 (78.73%) parents reported their caste as Baudha and 84 (21.27%) reported Mahar.

Parents were aware that in which standard their children were studying. At the time of admission, everyone mentioned Buddhism as the religion of his or her children. However, in the case of caste, 311 (78.73%) written Baudha and 84 (21.27%) written Mahar. This is exactly the same as they reported while reporting their own caste. The teachers asked their religion and caste at the time of admission of their child, which is a normal routine. When asked by teachers about caste, parents told the same caste as mentioned before.

However, the most shocking answer of all the parents is that none of them knew the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. This observation is really surprising and stunning. Even after such a long period of sixty years, they did not know the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. Another shocking result is that they did not know about the special treatment or provisions available for Scheduled Castes. This ignorance may be ascribed to their socio-economic and educational status.

On the contrary, when they were asked to whom the credit goes for the benefits get to SCs, STs and OBCs, the unanimous answer of all the parents was Dr B R Ambedkar. At the one hand, they were not aware of the provisions for downtrodden classes and at the other; they were giving credit to Ambedkar for the same. They were giving credit to Ambedkar because they knew that he relentlessly worked for the upliftment of SCs and STs.
Most of the parents i.e., 348 (88.10%) admitted that their ward is poor and 47 (11.90%) medium in studies. None considered their ward an intelligent. They admitted that teachers pay full attention towards their wards and still think that their child is backward in education than other children. They ascribed the backwardness of their child in education to the illiteracy at the home. Nobody is there at home to pay attention towards the child’s study.

All parents knew that Buddhism comes under minority communities. Maximum parents i.e., 368 (93.16%) admitted that their children get educational benefits of government plans for students of SCs / STs, however, 27 (6.84%) refused the same. It clearly shows their ignorance about government policies and schemes. Those who said yes have mentioned following schemes-

- Free books
- Scholarships
- Free education
- Mid-day meal
- Minority scholarships
- Free uniforms

All parents knew about Dr B R Ambedkar, like, he accepted Buddhism; he worked for all peoples, etc. They follow Buddhism in their daily life that is why they wrote Buddhism as the religion of their wards in the school. All knew about minority and educational schemes related to minorities. Being in minority, there will not be any effect on the educational facilities available to students belong to Buddhism.

They were unable to provide all the facilities as others do. They give following major constraints or problems for the schooling of their wards-

- Social backwardness and lack of learning environment
- Poor economic conditions
- Child / children themselves not focus on studies
- Parents are not in a position to pay attention towards their children’s education

The best part of the study is that not a single parent reported casteism as an obstacle in their ward’s education.
Conclusion
There are number of good findings emerged out from this study. The enrolment ratio, attendance of the Buddhists students and their achievement found to be considerably good. However, most of the parents are labourers and not much educated, therefore could not pay much attention towards their ward’s study. They follow Buddhism in their home and conscious to record their wards religion as Buddhism in the school records. Teachers are also sensible for the same. They could not provide better facilities for their wards due to poor economic status and therefore they are happy about the facilities they are getting to their wards education.

Even after knowing, the benefits of minorities 21.27% parents have written their wards caste as Mahar. Which is something surprising. If they aware of the philosophy behind conversion to Buddhism and knowing the available provisions for Buddhists being in minority, they should write only Baudha as their religion. Buddhism does not have any caste. Therefore, caste column should be left blank. However, the study could not find the reason behind writing the Mahar as a caste in the school records. The reason may rooted in the deep and age-old effect of Hinduism on peoples psyche.