



## Center for Development Practice

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### **Beyond Protective Discoloration: Ambedkar on Conversion (19 November, 2014)**

**Abstract:** The thesis I want to argue in this paper is the following: The distinctive contribution that B. R. Ambedkar made to the question of conversion, which hitherto had been dominantly presented as a politico-theological question, was to clarify it with a new tool of thought. This tool was a complexly articulated theory of names found in the essay “Away from the Hindus”. Ambedkar wrote this essay in the wake of the resolution passed in the 1936 Mahar Conference in Bombay that the Mahar’s henceforth were abandoning Hinduism and were open to converting to some other religion. I would like to argue that only upon a sufficient appreciation of this theory of names, in all its semiotic, paradigmatic and existential richness, will we be able to grasp the implications of this theory for the historical terrain upon which they worked their effects. Only then can we undertake the further more perilous, and surely more urgent, task of moving from Ambedkar on conversion to Ambedkar’s conversion.

### **Ambedkar’s Words: Elements of a Sentence-To-Come (21 November, 2014)**

**Abstract:** Like several others of his generation, B.R.Ambedkar spoke and wrote in more than one language. In one of his greatly influential ‘conceptual slogans’, Ambedkar used the Marathi word “manuski” (the principle of humanity) along with the French Revolution words “liberty”, “equality” and “fraternity”. From within the English language Ambedkar extracted precise words that served two associative functions: First, he targeted these words for a specific set of addressees determined by the pragmatic, even polemical exigencies of a ‘public’ situation. Second, these very pin-pointed situations of discourse, on some specific, if enigmatic, turns of history, transformed to ‘concepts’ which were suddenly and universally transmissible as such. The contention of the paper will be that Ambedkar’s real interest was to create emancipatory sentences for the future, future sentence-bodies which today could be called “dalit” while serving the discourse-function and the event-function of language and history. In this sense his interest was political, not philological.

For the purpose of this presentation, which is part of a larger glossary of Ambedkar’s terms, I will investigate the conceptual set: imitation- innovation- excommunication from “Castes in India” (1916); and similarity-common-communication from “Annihilation of Caste” (1935-36).

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**Date(s): 19 & 21 November, 2014; Venue: CR- 12, Time: 3 pm**