
Research Papers



Hope and Self-Esteem Correlates of Religious Conversion

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Abstract

The social system in India had a unique feature of caste. The lower caste people were experiencing severe humiliation and discrimination from the upper caste. Dr. Ambedkar had challenged the hegemony of the upper caste. In 1956, Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhist religion along with his followers. This social change gave new identity to the people suffering from brutal treatment from the upper caste. However, some followers continued both Hindu and Buddhist religion practices and some continue to practice only Buddhist religion. The present paper tries to explore the association of hope and self-esteem among them and also investigates if there is any difference between these groups. Results indicated that there is a significant difference between the groups.

Key words: Hope, Self-esteem, Religious conversion.

The oppressed social structure in pre and post independent India based on caste system was oppressing the untouchable. Several years of oppression dragged the untouchables in the depth of hopelessness about the future and self. Further, this imposed identity of being an untouchable damaged their self-concept. No hope to come out of this misery was apparent. The messiah of the untouchables Babasaheb Ambedkar struggled a lot to change Hindu perceptions but in vain. On 14 October 1956, Babasaheb Ambedkar ceremoniously converted to Buddhism along with his lacks of followers. Rejection of Hinduism and acceptance of Buddhism gave new identity to the untouchables. Henceforth, untouchables started practicing Buddhism. Some continued their faith in worshipping Hinduism. Some are still practicing both. The psychological change that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was expecting was to generate hope among the oppressed. Further, this will create enthusiasm resulting in healthy self-concept. Next, reservation policy created opportunities for participation in the

educational system and world of work further giving optimism and sense of personal control that are protective factors for psychological and physical health (Glable & Hadit, 2005). Present paper intends to investigate the psychological correlates of religious conversion after fifty years. It was decided to lens through positive psychology perspective because, it is a field concerned with well-being and optimal functioning of an individual. And, it deals with the scientific study of positive experiences, positive individual traits and the institution that facilitate development of an individual (Duckworth et al, 2005). This also appears to be in the lines of goals for conversion by Dr. Ambedkar. The focus is on the religious practices and their relationship with the psychological factors like Hope and Self-esteem. It was hypothesized that, there will be no difference between both the groups i.e. individuals practicing strictly Buddhism and individuals practicing Buddhism and Hinduism on the psychological measures like hope and self-esteem.

Method:

Sample: The sample consisted of the adult male and females from scheduled castes, who were formerly known as Mahar-caste of Hindu religion. Participants were randomly selected and basically were from the urban setup. After explaining the study consent was sort from the participants. In all 107 adults (35 females and 72 males) agreed to participate in the study. The mean age was 31 years and standard deviation was 12 for the entire sample.

Tools:

Adult Hope Scale: The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) is a 12-item Likert-type scale. This scale measures the two dimensions of hope known as agency and pathway. However, the scale also provides a single score for the entire hope scale. The response can be given on eight point scale which ranges from definitely false to definitely true.

The Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale: Rosenberg Self- Esteem Scale (1965) includes 10-statements assessing the degree to which respondents are satisfied with their lives and feel good about themselves. Five of these statements are worded negatively and remaining items are worded positively. The scale provides an established measure of global self-esteem. Items of the scale are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Results and Discussion:

The mean age of the sample was 31 years and standard deviation was 12. There were 35 females and 72 males who participated in the study. The correlation analysis indicated a significant correlation in positive direction ($r = .42, p < .01, N = 107$). This finding indicates that increase in hope will lead to increase in self-esteem (table 1). It can be understood that the experience of religious conversion had generated hope with the new identity for the entire sample in the study, irrespective of their religious practices.

Table 1 Pearson's correlation between the hope and self-esteem

	Self-esteem
HOPE	.42**

Note. ** = $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

However, it is important to find out that do the two groups differ on the basis of their religious practices. For this purpose the entire sample was divided into two groups on the basis of a short interview which explores their religious practices. The first group consisted of the participants who practices only Buddhist religion and second group consisted of the participants who practices both Buddhist and Hindu religion. Interestingly, it was found that the group who practices only Buddhist religion was found to significantly differing from the group who practices both, Buddhist and Hindu religion on the factors like

hope and self-esteem (table 2). It was found that the participants who practice only Buddhist religion were more hopeful and had high level of self-esteem as compare to the group which practices both, Buddhist and Hindu religion.

Table 2 Difference between the group on the basis of religious practices

	GROUP	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-test
HOPE	1	52	55.23	7.446	2.40**
	2	55	51.65	7.947	
Self-esteem	1	52	31.10	4.216	2.10*
	2	55	29.18	5.157	

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

group 1=practicing both religion; group 2= practicing only Buddhist religion

In conclusion, the research states that the change of identity of the people who were experiencing severe humiliation and discrimination had and are changing their psychological make-up. This change can be attributed to the religious conversion of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in 1956. The findings of the present research could explain the process of new identity from positive psychological perspective on the basis of positive individual traits like hope an self-esteem.

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