



## THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S *THE BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA*

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### ABSTRACT

*Buddha and His Dhamma* is an objective and scientific historical text on Buddhism. While speaking about the books, Dr. Ambedkar himself pointed, "books to be examined and tested by the accepted rules of evidence without recognizing any distinction between the sacred and the profane and with the sole object of finding the truth" The format of his book reveals Dr. Ambedkar's aim – to create a 'Bible' for his people. While writing this book, the purpose of Dr. Ambedkar was not only to discuss the philosophy of Buddhist religion in a scholarly manner but also to bring out the social implications of the Buddha's teaching more fully and clearly than anybody else before him.

**Keywords :** *Buddha and His Dhamma, Thematic structure,*

### INTRODUCTION

*Buddha and His Dhamma* is the entirely different creation of Dr. Ambedkar. He has shown an entirely different façade of his writing style, temperament, and approach while handling the saga of Gautama Buddha. But at the same time, a well-disciplined writer and logically equipped lawyer in him is conscious while entering into various inquiries related to Buddha's life and teaching. He clears his intentions of the book in the introduction itself. *BHD* is one of the most important books ever written by Dr. Ambedkar. In this book he not only glorified the life of Buddha but also raised many questions and traditional problems and tried to answer them most logically and historically.

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Dr. Ambedkar claims the only originality in the order of presentation of the topics. He has tried to introduce simplicity and clarity. He admits that there are certain matters in Buddhism that give a headache to the students of Buddhism. *BHD* is a collection of anthologies and as a disciplined scholar, Dr. Ambedkar acknowledges it. The book was written with the intention to provide a handbook of Buddhism. The style of the book resembles with Bible though in prose.

Form and structure are inseparable principles of design. The content as well as the form and structure of the book is very important. Dr. Ambedkar has not used mechanic form but organic form which evolved from within the developing work. Whenever Dr. Ambedkar enters into intellectual discussion the pattern changes.

The most important aspect of *Buddha and His Dhamma* is its structure. The author uses Linear and non-linear narrative technique as per his requirement and convenience. The number of episodes are given in the book which are sometimes connected and sometimes disconnected with the regular narration. In all episodes Dr. Ambedkar shows his presence. Perhaps it is the need of work. It serves his motif of writing. The story is narrated by Dr. Ambedkar from different angles. Journey of Personal life of Buddha is expanded to universal. There are many aspects related to Buddha's life which are unknown to readers. The application of logic is an important thing. It helps to understand realistic life of the Buddha.

The story is narrated with the help of linear as well as non-linear narrative technique. The technique of flash-forwardness is used at many places. Flash forward Also called prolepsis, a scene that temporarily jumps the narrative forward in time. Flash forwards often represent events expected, projected, or imagined to occur in the future. They may also reveal significant parts of the story that have not yet occurred, but soon will in greater detail. The predicated birth of the Buddha, prophecy about his future, the pre-prediction of Buddha's Parinibban and many such occasions are there in representing flash forwards.

### Plot & Structure :

Plot is the plan, design, scheme or pattern of events in a play or work of fiction; and, further, the organization of incident and character in such as to induce curiosity and suspense in the spectator or reader. In the space/ time continuum of plot the continual questions operates in three tenses: Why did that happen? Why is this happening? What is going to happen next – and why?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory p.676



Aristotelian idea of plot as the soul of a play is well knitted by Dr. Ambedkar in *Buddha and His Dhamma*. The plot is episodic but the events are in proper and necessary sequence. The plot is complex and there is peripeteia and anagnorisis also. A more homely approach than Aristotle's is that of E.M. Forster. In *Aspects of the Novel* [1927] he provided a simple but very serviceable description of plot: 'We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality....it suspends the time sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow.'<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly there is gradual development in the story. The plot follows traditional rules of novel i.e. action, climax, falling action, denouement. (This is a simplified version of an idea that dates back to Aristotle).

The author has tried follow the traditional rules of novel writing. He has not used multiple time frames. All important episodes of the Buddha's life have been used here. In this case Dr. Ambedkar is highly selective. He represents rebel in India but he abides by the conventional rules of novel writing. He presents events within time frame but presents episodes at various places in the book. The characters emerges naturally. The plot is based on a large background. It is many dimensions. But the narrative technique succeeded in linking all episodes in a systematic manner.

Every chapter is divided into sentences with numbers. The style of writing the sentences or dialogues number wise shows influence of Bible on Dr. Ambedkar. It makes it clear that he has tried to model the Bible for *Buddha and His Dhamma*. It is natural that the expectations of readers must have been high and it is suitable also to Dr. Ambedkar's personality. So there must have been pressure to produce quality literature of an international repute as well as a literary work for all common masses. It must have been another challenge before Dr. Ambedkar to produce such work. A literary work for mass as well as for a class. But though there are resemblances between *The Buddha and His Dhamma* and *The Gospel of Buddha* there are also differences. On the whole, the material contained in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is more systematically organized, and Ambedkar's Explanatory Additions are not only much more numerous than Carus's but more substantial in character. The biggest difference between the two anthologies, however, consists in the fact that they were intended for two very different audiences. Whereas Carus compiled *The Gospel of Buddha* mainly, though not exclusively, for the benefit of relatively affluent and well-educated Americans and Europeans Ambedkar compiled *The Buddha and His Dhamma* mainly, though not exclusively, for the benefit of desperately poor ex-untouchable Indian Buddhists, many of whom were illiterate and would need to have his words orally explained to them in their own

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid p.676-677



vernacular. Moreover, though in his Preface Carus speaks of Christianity in appreciative rather than in critical terms The Gospel of Buddha was in fact meant for those who were disillusioned with Christianity, or who did not consider themselves Christians in the orthodox sense. The Buddha and His Dhamma, on the other hand, was meant for those who were disillusioned with Hinduism, or who were even in active revolt against it, and the terms in which Ambedkar speaks of Hinduism are definitely critical rather than appreciative. What is perhaps more important still, whereas Carus presents data of the Buddha's life in the light of what he terms its religio-philosophical importance Ambedkar presents them in the light of what may be termed its socio-political importance. Ambedkar's approach to Buddhism thus is social and ethical rather than philosophical and mystical, as even a short account of The Buddha and His Dhamma will be sufficient to reveal. Before embarking on such an account, however, we shall have to try and clear up some of the doubts by which the work became surrounded at the time of its original appearance, nearly a year after Ambedkar's death, and which for some of his followers surround it still. The writer has used his narrative style to convert apparently pessimistic literature and philosophy into optimism.

## CONCLUSION :

The above discussion provides a new vision to readers and research scholars to think and re-think on *Buddha and His Dhamma* in a very new and fresh manner. The book should not be taken as mere a religious book. It also shows the awesome knowledge of the illustrated writer like Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar. Use of organic form ,uses Linear and non-linear narrative technique as per his requirement, frequent and conscious change of writing pattern, use of Flash forward technique, use of many literary devices by the writer makes the book a true literary document. The scholars needs to have a close look at *Buddha and His Dhamma* with multi-dimensional perspectives.

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