



DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S *THE BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA*: A POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE

DR. UMESH B. BANSOD

Associate Professor

Department of English

J. M. Patel College, Bhandara

[MS] INDIA

ABSTRACT

The paper highlights Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's great endeavor to present a fresh discourse on the Buddha's life and teachings for the people of the post colonized period who entered into a never existed (partially existed in its limited nature) democratic system in India. The discourse was published when the concept of colonialism was not even discussed. But the work is an ideal model rather a blueprint for the writers of the post-colonial India. The book not only brings infant democratic Indian out of colonial mindset but also line up the values strengthening Indian democracy. In the vagueness of the term colonialism, Buddha and His Dhamma hails India's own ancient legacy of democracy. At the same time the writer dares to disapprove many notions contrary to the Buddha's teaching. Dr. Ambedkar excludes myths and miracles and points out many manipulations not suitable for the modern democratic India and paves a blue print of ideal literature for the modern writers.

Key words: *Buddha and His Dhamma, Post-Colonial, Colonialism,*

INTRODUCTION

The Buddha and His Dhamma is the culmination of Dr. Ambedkar's literary journey. It is a post colonial discourse on Buddha's life and Buddhism. It is his last work. The discourse is the fine balance between religion and rationalism. The book shows that religion also can be presented in the rationalized manner reflecting Indian constitutional values, scientific temperament and superb logic. Millions of Ambedkarites adores the discourse as a holy text. It will not be the exaggeration to note here that the post colonial generation among the literate Ambedkarite families grow reading this book. Forwarding the same then chairman of

DR. UMESH B. BANSOD

1 Page



People's Education Society R.R.Bole writes ,“ The book is not only Dr.Ambedkar's monumental work but also his memorial enshrining the noblest fruit of his massive intellect. This book has taken its shape after his much arduous study and research .” (Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Forwarded, p.15) Dr.Ambedkar mentioned that it is one of the three books which will form a set of the proper understanding of Buddhism .The other books are: [i] Buddha and Karl Marx; and [ii] Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India. It was compiled on the basis of canonical and non-canonical literatures in the different languages such as Pali, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Japanese's as well as some other Indian(Apabhransha) languages. The Texts belonging to different schools of Buddhism also were taken together and judiciously presented in a systematic manner. The texts belonging to Theravada, Sarvastivada and Mahayana schools of Buddhism were also referred to.(Salve, A Critical analysis of Dr.Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma p.1*) *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is the essence of established Buddhist Text. Dr. Ambedkar's views on Buddhism are neither Hinyan nor Mahayana (*Two Sects of Buddhism*) , in this book he shows a scientific understanding of Buddhism itself and reinterpreted the importance of Buddhism.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Biography:

The Indian Writer and the architect of Indian Constitution, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar born in Mahu, India in 1891. He had remarkable Scholastic career. Politically active, in August 1947 he became the first Law Minister of free India. What was even more on August 29, 1947, the Constituent Assembly appointed a Drafting Committee with Ambedkar as its Chairman. He successfully expressed his anguish of his people who suffered not only due to slavery colonialism but also atrocities and slavery imposed by own countrymen in the name of religion and caste. Inviting fury of caste Hindus, he dared to write and speak for the millions of speechless people. He defended his country on every occasion, at the same time lashed the religious hypocrisy in India.

Buddha and His Dhamma Formative years:

Nanak Chand Rattu's book *Last Few Years of Dr. Ambedkar* provides primary information about Dr. Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. In the 9th chapter of the book Rattu writes despite the failing health Dr. Ambedkar planned to write and complete few books including *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Nanak Chand Rattu was Dr. Ambedkar's private Secretary till his last breath. Much of important writing work and typing work of the manuscripts of the book took place in the presence of Rattu. Therefore the book provides some of the reflections of process of the making of the book.



Post-midnight cumbersome work on *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was witnessed by Rattu. He observed Babasaheb correcting the type-script ,re-correcting pages, re-paging them, numbering and re-numbering pages. At times few lines or a Para were cut away with the scissor and pasted at its proper places .At another time the whole chapter or a paragraph were recast. The pasting of loose slips also went on and then again retyping and the same process followed. After putting in very hard labour, four press copies were typed out on fine paper. Fifty copies of the book under the title *The Buddha and His Gospel!* were then printed for private circulation and opinion. (Rattu, *Last Few Years of Dr.Ambedkar*,p.59)

Rattu writes that on Thursday, March 15, 1956, Dr. Ambedkar wrote the preface in his hand .The 'Introduction' was dictated on the following day.(Rattu,p.60) Dr. Ambedkar faced financial problem in publishing the book. He asked Tata for financial help and Rs.3000 were sanctioned towards publication of the book. Dr. Ambedkar had the urgency to publish the book to meet its proposed aim. And the work of printing the book started under the supervision of S.S. Rege. On Sep.1956, two copies of the book were sent to Jawaharlal Nehru. Dr. Ambedkar spent near about five years over the book. The book was expiated to cost near about 20000 rupees in those days. Dr. Ambedkar asked Government of India to purchase 500 copies of the book for the distribution among the various libraries in the country. But Nehru shown helplessness and send the case to Dr. Radhakrishnan. Dr. Ambedkar wrote *The Buddha and His Dhamma* with hope, belief, confidence and determination. But alas! He could not see the book in his life time. Rattu mentions that all the four copies of the manuscripts disappeared all at once. Who did it and what was the motive behind this mischief is unknown. But government of Maharashtra gathered manuscripts through various sources and made it available to all. (Rattu, p.62-64)

The magnum opus work by Dr.Ambedkar was written during the years 1951-1956. It was published by the People's Education Society in November 1957 , almost a year after the great leader's death. The preface written by Dr.Ambedkar in March 1956 did not appear in print until September 1980, he traced the origin of the work to his article on 'The Buddha and the Future of His Religion'. In that Dr. Ambedkar had reiterated the scientific foundation of the Buddha's religion and he argued that it was the only religion which awakened the society by science and kept logic, scientific temperament alive. He advocated that the modern world must have religion and that would be only Buddhism for its survival. The widespread literature of Buddhism made it difficult for the people to read it as it was not the case with the Bible or Christians.

Dr. Ambedkar wrote, On the publication of ['The Buddha and the Future of His Religion'] "I received so many calls, written and oral, to write such a book. It is in response to these calls, that I have undertaken the task."



The writing of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was thus an attempt on Ambedkar's part to produce the Buddhist Bible which he had, in his 1951 article, pronounced 'quite necessary' if the ideal of spreading Buddhism was to be realized. Despite his use of the inappropriate term 'Bible', however, Ambedkar was far from regarding *The Buddha and His Dhamma* as possessing any special authority. As he wrote of the work in the (recently published) preface, 'How good it is I must leave it to readers to judge. As for myself, I claim no originality. I am only a compiler. All I hope is that the reader will like the presentation. I have made it simple and clear.' (Das Bhagwan, *Sangharakshita-Ambedkar and Buddhism*, p.28-29)

Influence of Post Colonialism:

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar witnessed pre and post colonial time in India and therefore could assessed influence of both the periods. Prolific writers like Dr.Ambedkar talks not only about political and social slavery but mental slavery as well. Constitutional measures and remedies provided by the law can remove political and social slavery but what of the mental slavery? *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is an effort to mobilize displaced and misplaced of people of India. Political, social and cultural crises of several centuries also raised the question of self identity of these people. Dr.Ambedkar in contrast to all other scholars of Buddhist literature who gave more importance to the religious, philosophical aspects, Dr. Ambedkar emphatically put forward its socio-political importance. His approach to Buddhism is social and ethical rather than philosophical and metaphysical (mystical).

The books is often dismissed as being merely a political treatise in theological garb , or wholly unorthodox text inconsequential to quality scholarship on 'true Buddhism , or even worse , as hardly more than the liberation theology of parvenu Untouchable. (Rathor Akash Singh *The Buddha and His Dhamma : A Critical Edition*) It is Ambedkar's political voice that pervades the text and establishes its historical importance .Dr.Ambedkar develops his interpretation of religion by taking the reader through the life of the Buddha and selecting those events in Gautama's life that most effectively communicate Dr. Ambedkar's own political message. Dr.Ambedkar thus speaks through Gautama and politicizes the Buddha's philosophy as he theologizes his own political views. (Rathore , p.X)

The post colonial phase witnessed the religious of millions of Hindu untouchable's migration towards Buddhism. Influence of Colonial culture, post colonial religious migration, cultural exchange these all issues are directly or indirectly addressed and remedies are provided in the light of Buddhist philosophy. Dr. Ambedkar examined different Indian and Western texts in literature, religious documents, Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads and much more and did the dissection to refute imaginative claims regarding Buddha's life.



Dr.Ambedkar started the book targeting the misconception people have in their minds about Buddhism. He refused the traditional story of Buddha's renunciation; He omitted many stories of miracles, reconstructed the missing episodes and reordered the knowledge of Buddhism. They, who find difficulty understanding Buddhism, must read *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. The discourse revealed its power and succeeded in becoming *The Bible* for the millions of Buddhists in India and abroad. At the same time the discourse also affected the interests of many in India who enchained the Buddha with miracles and supernatural imaginary stories and tried to spread propaganda proving the Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This encounter produced new knowledge and new thinking. Producing fake literature and dumping it for several centuries unless people start believing it to be a reality one day, has remained the modus operandi of rulers and so called upper castes. When Westerners tried to override the Orientals, it can be understood. But when majority in the country does it with own countrymen, it is beyond understanding. A trained Barrister like Dr.Ambedkar laced with superb logic could not digest and reflected in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

CONCLUSION:

While the collective body of the writers in India was busy in producing fictions forcing India back into medieval ages Dr.Ambedkar headed the responsibly to counter them all individually. While producing any literary work, post colonial writers must go through *Buddha and His Dhamma* and should learn what kind of literature needs to be produced in the country like India. Dr.Ambedkar urged for reformation of Hindu religion for several years when found no response, embraced Buddhism and presented reformation of Buddhism. Rejected imaginary divinity and explored humanity, refuted extremism and maintained secularism, demolished myths, supernaturalism and firmly anchored cause and effect theory, trusted the need of religion but not blind faith and devotion. He did not allow his rationality to be overpowered by faith. He illustrated how literature can be subordinated democratic values and the Indian Constitution. If the same logic is applied for the entire literature produced in India after post colonial era, the truth will come out. Dr.Ambedkar very well realized that this is not the time of mythologizing but to scrutinizing and testing practicability of the noble principles. It's a time to confirm whether literature either prose or poetry, may it be religious or social or political, is supplementary to Indian constitution. There is a need to verify whether the literature produced in India is worthy to be celebrated or deserves to be thrown on the heap of cow dung.

REFERENCES:

DR. UMESH B. BANSOD

5 Page



- Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb *Writings and Speeches-Vol.11*. The Education Department. Government of Maharashtra-Bombay, 1992.
- *B.R. Ambedkar-Buddha and His Dhamma: A critical Edition* .Edited introduced and annotated by Akash Singh Rathore and Vijay Verma. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011.
- *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar-A Biography of His Vision and Philosophy*. Edited by Virender Grover. Deep & Deep Publication, New Delhi, 1998.
- Das, Bhagwan, *Sangharakshita-Ambedkar and Buddhism* ,Wind Horse Publication, 1986.
- Fiske Adele and Christoph Emmrich: *The Use of Buddhist Scriptures in B.R.Ambedkar's The Buddha and His Dhamma*
- Naik, M.K. *Dimension of India English Literature*. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi-1984.
- Rathore, Aakash Sing & Ajay Verma *B.R.Ambedkar –the Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013.
- Rattu, Nanak Chand. *Last Few Years of Dr.Ambedkar*. Amrit Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997.

E-Sources :

<https://sites.google.com/site/dhammapraharcom/articals/the-buddha-his-dhamma>

Bansod ,Umesh “How does *Buddha and His Dhamma* Differ from other Biographies on Buddha” Pune Research Journal Vol-3 Issue-6 , Dec.2017 UGC Approved Journal
<http://puneresearch.com/media/data/issues/5a3009e8ee621.pdf>

Sangharakshita , *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, 2006.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=e-b2EzNRxQIC>

Bansod ,Umesh “Literary Analysis of *Buddha and His Dhamma*” Pune Research Journal Vol-4 Issue-3 , Oct-2017 Indexed, peer Reviewed ,Refereed Journal
<http://puneresearch.com/media/data/issues/5b1ebe564f3ee.pdf>

Sangharakshita , *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, 2006.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=XyOFX7yqJb4C>

Sangharakshita , *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I* , Windhorse Publication- 2016.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=to5QDwAAQBAJ>

DR. UMESH B. BANSOD

6 Page



Bansod ,Umesh “Dr.B.R.Ambedkar’s Narrative Style in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*: a Brief Survey” Pune Research Journal Vol-3 Issue-5 , Oct-2017 Indexed, peer Reviewed, Refereed Journal.

<http://puneresearch.com/media/data/issues/5a60daab59aaa.pdf>

Contursi A.Janet ,*Political Theology : Text and Practice in a Dalit Panther Community* ,JSTOR,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2059650>

Express Feature Service ,In a New Light , June 14, 2009 4:34:19 am

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/in-a-new-light/>

Zelliot ,Eleanor *Unpublished Preface*, 1956

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_buddha/00_pref_unpub.html