



**DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S RELIGIOUS AND
SPIRITUAL CONTEMPLATION IN
THE BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA**

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ABSTRACT

After a long study of 35 years of various religions, Dr.Ambedkar concluded that only the Buddhism suited to his ideology. He had declared to denounce Hinduism at people in 1935 and embraced Buddhism in 1956. The period between these two years means a lot. He wanted a new religion, but not for spiritual salvation. His noble work BHD asserts the religion as Dr.Ambedkar thought. 'Buddha and His Dhamma' is the culmination of Dr. Ambedkar's writing .Buddhist world has accepted as 'The Bible'. But more or less it is treated as religious document and read in the same direction. It is the historical fact that Buddhism is not only a new philosophy but also it a reaction degraded Hinduism. Lifelong humiliations, painful experiences, and agonizing memories compelled him to think about Buddhism as new solace. The Buddha and His Dhamma ,a treatise on Buddha's life and Buddhism , was the last work of Indian statesman and Scholar Dr.B.R.Ambedkar .The book is treated as a holy text by Indian Buddhists and specially a way of living and thinking for Ambedkarites. For many of the literate it is the sole Buddhist text they own or have read .For the illiterates it is one they hear ,read aloud to them in village and city slums , bearing in their eyes the authority of sacred scriptures . It may not be the exaggeration to say that the present new generation among literate Ambedkarite families grow reading The Buddha and His Dhamma.

Key Words : *The Buddha and His Dhamma, religious , spiritual ,supernatural*

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INTRODUCTION

The religious and spiritual aspect of the book is an important part. Basically, the genre of the book falls in religion. Therefore, it makes readers curious to know Buddha's thoughts on religion and spirituality through Dr. Ambedkar's logical interpretation. It is surprising that we find extreme aversion and tremendous attraction towards religion. His approach towards religions is intellectual and socio-political. In *BHD*, he redefines religion and explains religion and spirituality differently. He is never charmed by the concept of God or any other supernatural element. Dr. Ambedkar's ideas on religion clearly reveal the liberal, intellectual influences of Nineteenth-century – Europe and the impact of Anglo-American political culture. The idea of God based religion is rejected by him. Perhaps it was one of the reasons why religions like Islam or Christianity which are based on divine theory, were not acceptable to him. While writing *BHD*, Dr. Ambedkar must have the issue of the hollowness of God and dominance of divine theory in his mind. The theory responsible for the untouchability of millions of Dalits was brutally attacked by Dr. Ambedkar. In Part-I of *BHD* he discusses the idea of Religion and Dhamma. It not only reveals the idea of Dhamma but also exposes the hypocrisy of the religion. He explains the difference between Dhamma and Religion in the same chapter.

Dr. Ambedkar's perspective :

Dr. Ambedkar's statement, "What instructs me amuses me." Shows his real intention of his writing. He has his own views of the nature and motive of the literature. He, in the preface of 'Who were Shudras?' says, "While it is true that a non-Brahmin scholar is free from the inhibitions of the Brahmin scholar, he is likely to go to the other extreme and treat the whole literature as a collection of fables and fictions fit to be thrown on the dung heap not worthy of serious study. This is not the spirit of an historian. He ought to be exact, sincere, and impartial free from passion, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment or affection; and faithful to the truth, which is the mother of history, the preserver of great actions, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past, the director of the future. In short he must have an open mind, and readiness to examine all evidence even though it be spurious."

Dr. Ambedkar's approach towards religion :

The religious thought reflected in *BHD* help readers to understand the Buddha and Buddhism in proper and systematic manner. Dr. Ambedkar is highly selective in this book and he knows where to hit. The ambiguity and myth of soul, God, rebirth, hypocrisy in the name of religion, the concept of mortification of Body for the sake of supreme knowledge come to an end in this book. He demolished various Brahminical baseless ideas and gave a great



setback to outdated Brahminism. He discarded the authority of the Vedas. He preached his Dhamma which had nothing to do with soul and God. (p.251) He promises no salvation or Moksha but assures that everyone can attain religious life following his eight fold path. He replaced God with man as the center of religion. The religious philosophy provides opportunity of investigation, inquiry and experience.

Dr. Ambedkar dared to raise many questions and tried to give answers aiming to provide a clear and consistent statement on the life and teaching of the Buddha. He sincerely and impartially tried to find out the truth and link the lost episode of history together. He took help of available literature of Vedic Age, Upanishads, religious books, scriptures, Buddhist Literature, Smritis, Puranas and studied various social changes. His arguments and logical interpretations about the main events in the life of the Buddha namely, Parivrajya, the four Aryan Truths, the doctrines of soul, of karma and rebirth and the Bhikkhu provides us new way of thinking about these events in a better logical manner. Dr. Ambedkar has tried to resolve contradictions about Buddha's life and teachings.

Dr. Ambedkar frankly, fearlessly and lucidly put the facts before the readers through his writings with his complete sincerity and devotion for the welfare of his people. He worked day and night, sought interviews, supplied information and even addressed thousands of meetings. He took every opportunity of contributing articles to foreign journals with the sole object of exposing the intolerable, humiliating and unbelievable sufferings under which the Depressed Classes had been groaning in India for ages. Due to his written work, the world came to know for the first time that the fate of untouchables in India was worse than that of the Negroes in America. Dr. Ambedkar's profound study, great industry and conquering intellect gave new dimensions to the Indian English Literature through his writing. Another solid outcome was the definite emergence of the Depressed Classes in the political picture of India and more important was the brilliant and moving exposition of their sufferings, intolerable conditions by him before the bar of world opinion.

The 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 sole object of finding the truth"

In the Book II, the rise and expansion of the Buddhism and mode of conversion have been described in detail. Initially, Buddha gave the first sermon to the five Parivrajakas at Sarnath. In essence, he expressed his belief in Majjhima Patipada (middle path). With regard to the activities of life, the main concern should be conquering of passions, avoiding any extremes. In essence, the Buddha's Dhamma is mainly concerned about the relations between man to



man and his life on the earth. It is not interested in the concepts of God & Soul, life after death as well as any rituals and ceremonies. Man is living in a sorrow, misery and poverty. The Suffering cause in this world must be removed and the Buddha's Dhamma tries to remove this suffering. (A critical analysis of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma* by Balasaheb Ramchandra Salve .P1)

In the Book- IV entitled "The Religion and Dhamma" Dr. Ambedkar continues the philosophical discussion started in the Book-III. Especially, the first two parts of the Book-IV are the examples of the deep philosophical understanding of Dr. Ambedkar. In this book, a clear distinction is made between the term religion and the Dhamma. Dr. Ambedkar's profound and deep thinking brings out the most valuable and important philosophical explorations in regard to the relation between morality, man and God. (ibid p.3)

A different approach :

The Buddha and His Dhamma is a different book because Dr. Ambedkar rejected conventional explanations of Buddhism as often contradictory and attempted to replace them with arguments based on humanism and science. Yet, although the Dhamma is intended as an explication of Buddha's teachings, it is Dr. 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 Ambedkar's own political message. Ambedkar thus speaks through Gautama and politicize the Buddha's philosophy as he theologizes his own political views. In a very real sense, the text represents Ambedkar's Dhamma as much as it does the Buddha's. (Contursi, Janet A. [1993] 'Political Theology : Text and Practice in a Dalit Panther Community', *Journal of Asian Studies*, May 52[2], p.323.) Some believe that Dr. Ambedkar wanted Protestant Buddhism and his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is its reflection.

The another important aspect of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is that there is no place for God in the Buddha's Dhamma. "Morality takes the place of God." "Morality is the essence of Dhamma. Without it there is no Dhamma." It does not require the sanction of God. It is not to please God that man has to be moral. It is for his own good that man has to love man. (Ambedkar Dr. B. R., *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, p 322)

Critics' Views :

Many critics criticized that *The Buddha and His Dhamma* represents Ambedkar's thought at the expense of Buddha's. (ibid 322) Dr. Ambedkar is also criticized for politicizing



Buddhist philosophy . But he said that his party men were more interested in politics than in religion but he was more interested in religion than in politics. (ibid 322)

Mahabodhi society criticized Dr.Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma* and concluded that he has reduced Buddha as just a social reformer at the cost of spirituality . The state itself reveals the intention of the society to reduce Buddha to spirituality. Dr.Ambedkar himself quotes Buddha, "Knowing that there was so much unhappiness in the world the Buddha realized that it was wrong for him to sit as a sanyasi [ascetic] with folded arms and allow things to remain as they were . Asceticism he found to be useless ,It was vain to attempt to escape from the world... what is necessary is to change the world and to make it better." (Ambedkar, B.R.1984.*The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Bombay : Siddharth Publication.p78.)

CONCLUSION :

The book is written for ordinary people but the book is not ordinary. It is an extraordinary work of literature by an extraordinary man. It is the result of Dr. Ambedkar's three decades of relentless struggle. It is the code of dignified life assumed to seventeen million Dalits in India. It is the gem of literature remained out of canon due to ignorance, the immaturity of so-called scholars. His literature is not for the amusement of well paid and well-fed people. But it is for half naked and half fed millions of people of India. This book is the charter of their liberation.

The most important part of Buddha's preaching is, "" But this, O Kalamas, is just what I have said. What I have said is " do not go merely by what you hear; do not go merely by what has been handed down from one to another; do not go merely by subtleties of reasoning; do not go by subtleties of logic; do not go by considerations based upon mere appearances; do not go merely by agreeable beliefs and views; do not go merely by the word of some ascetic or superior." These words are the essence and foundation of Buddhism. (p.277) This is what the Buddha preached and this what Dr.Ambedkar Practiced. What is the use of spirituality and metaphysical ,mysterious myths to the illiterate and half fed (often empty stomach) untouchables of India.

What would have been Buddha's own reaction on Dr. Ambedkar's "The Buddha and His Dhamma." ? . The Buddha would have said nothing, but smiled.



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