



SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGION: A PERSPECTIVE OF DR. B.R AMBEDKAR

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ABSTRACT

The circumstances that led up to the 1956 Conversion event, the arguments that took place before it, and the different ways that scholars have discussed and studied the Indian Neo-Buddhist movement, can be considered to be an important event not just in the Indian Nation's biography but also in the biographies of individuals in India who declare themselves to be Buddhists today. The current study explores the concepts of Dr. Ambedkar on religion and Buddhism in particular, putting them against the context of significant debates on the nature and origins of sociology and anthropology, the definition of religion as a category, and the ramifications of the power-religion connection. Additionally, an effort is made to investigate the ramifications of Dr. Ambedkar's participation as consisting of and providing rise to a dual concentration, with the bigger initiative being the primary one of creating a "modern" religion that is in line with liberal democratic political theory and construction of religion, giving identity to Dalits.

Keywords: Religion, Dalits, India, B.R Ambedkar, Hinduism, Democracy, Buddhism

INTRODUCTION

QUESTIONING THE BRAHMANIC SOCIAL SYSTEM

There are so many questions raised by the conversion event and the subsequent Neo-Buddhism. The majority of Ambedkar's writings have been devoted to a rationalist critique of Hinduism and its social structures. Additionally, he used ideas of enlightenment and reason to analyse how religious systems affected social structure and political discourse from the perspective of normative modernity. Dr. Ambedkar's beliefs depend heavily on a sense of morality derived from liberal political theory, which for him manifested itself in conceptions of justice founded on the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In light of this, Dr. Ambedkar launched a criticism in which Hinduism, and especially Hindu religious traditions, were exposed as a hegemonic system that robbed a segment of the population of their humanity.

However, it must be understood that Hindus do not practise caste because they are cruel or irrational. Because they practise intense religion, they observe caste. People's observations on caste are valid. Their religion, which has fostered this idea of caste, is bad in my opinion. If this is the case, then it is clear that the adversary you must contend with is not those who practise caste but rather the Shastras, who imparted this caste-based religion to them. (Ambedkar, 1989).

He used his expertise in textual criticism of the Hindu texts, pointing out flaws and interpolations that had kept the varna system in operation and turning it into a comprehensive doctrine. His conversion to Buddhism needs to be understood in light of this criticism of Brahmanism. He adopted a humanist attitude by placing the human being at the centre of belief systems, citing faith in supernatural entities as the mechanism by which Brahmanic hegemony was achieved on a whole scale. He made a distinction between "religion of rules" and "religion of principles" and talked about the benefits and logical basis of the latter.

In one of his writings, Dr Ambedkar emphasises two distinctions between Buddhism and Hinduism. These arguments provide us with a glimpse into his critique of the Brahmanic order. He initially draws a difference on the topic of "morality." He would assert that Buddhism is morality itself. The Buddha's concept of the Dhamma is related to the highest level of morality. The Brahmans' doctrine of Dharma does not advocate morality but rather the fulfilment of certain karmas. He even goes so far as to try to show that the Hindu philosophical ideas that are singled out as exemplars of a moral order are really prescriptions for adhering to certain norms.

The idea he highlights is *nishkama* karma, also known as *anaskatiyoga*, which is credited to Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. He emphasizes that there are two categories of rituals practiced by Brahmans: *Nitya karmas* and *Naimitika karmas*. Daily rituals known as *Nitya karmas* were performed with no hope of reward. On occasion, *naimitika karmas* were conducted with a predetermined goal in mind. As a result, it is not based on morality but rather a collection of observances when Lord Krishna speaks of *Nishkama* karma. The focus is on the *Nitya karmas* that must be performed (Ambedkar, 1995).

The concepts of equality and inequality are the subjects of the second debate. He contends that the Buddha worked to dismantle it and impose a system of equality, but the Hindu social order is founded on the idea of graded inequality. According to Babasaheb, inequality is the social gospel of Hinduism. Buddha promoted equity. He let women become bhikkhunis and Shudras to join the bhikkhu sangha. Buddha refused to compromise on his resistance to the Chaturvarna ideology. His objection lessened the impact of the Vedic basis for Chaturvarna.

In response to the Buddha, Hinduism reaffirms its support of Chaturvarna in the Bhagawad Gita, where Lord Krishna claims that it is grounded in the concept of guna karma (on inborn qualities). This concept of the *gunas* is derived from Kapila's Sankhya philosophy. It discussed the *Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas gunas*. Prakriti becomes active when the balance between these *gunas* is upset and one *guna* takes precedence over the others. According to the Bhagawad Gita's expansion of this principle, a specific *guna* that is dominant

at the time of a person's birth will continue to be so throughout their lifespan. In light of the available evidence, this is not tenable. A person's nature is always changing since the relative positions of the *gunas* are constantly shifting. If the relative positions of the *gunas* are always changing, there can't be a permanent and stable way to put people into Varnas or a permanent and stable way to decide what they do for a living.

AMBEDKAR'S PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGION

Ambedkar's interpretation of religion may be found in the discussion of how religion and modernity interact. Pluralism is a hallmark of modernity. It entails a transition from fate to choice and is an alienating process, which may lead to longings for structure and purpose. Modernity generates a new environment where selecting wisely becomes necessary (Berger, 1980). Peter Berger outlines three distinct strategies for tackling the problem posed by pluralism. The first option is to stand by one's traditions and refuse to budge in the face of opposition. The second approach is to modernize traditional practices, and the third answer is to unearth and reclaim the experiences that are embodied in the traditions. These reactions are referred to by him as the deductive, the reductive, and the inductive replies respectively.

The so-called "reductive" method contains characteristics that are analogous to the building of Ambedkarite Buddhism. This strategy calls for the utilisation of a translation process that places a focus on the celebration of modernity as a kind of closure. It suggests a clear concept of modernity as an attitude of inquisitiveness, the elevation of science to a position of preeminence, and a dedication to humanism. As a result, modernism assumes the role of authority, serving as a yardstick against which tradition may be judged. The latter is no longer capable of being validated unless it is first rendered within the framework of current awareness. In today's view of the world, the supernatural, mythical, and other parts of religion that don't have a direct effect on daily life are not believable.

It is clear that Dr. Ambedkar's theories place more emphasis on the immanent features of religious belief as opposed to the transcendental dimensions of these beliefs. In a comprehensive approach, he draws attention to the Buddha's humanistic and earth-based tenets. His book, "*Buddha and the Future of His Religion*," starts out by drawing parallels between the main religious movements that have arisen throughout human history. In this activity, he singles out the Buddha as the individual with whom he has the closest link with any claims of the supernatural made by himself. In addition, the claims that have been made by the Buddha are rather limited in breadth and reach when compared to the claims that have been made by others. During this activity, the exercise shows how important the material world is in the Buddha's teachings.

Dr. Ambedkar is critical of the position of authority that many religious texts, particularly scriptures, have come to hold. It is the same as providing worth to what he refers to as "the dead wood of the past" when the scriptures are given an overriding authority, which means that they are given value. He portrays the Buddha as someone who presented his ideas in such a way that any of his followers were persuaded to follow them only if they found them to be founded on reason and experience. He believes that this was how

the Buddha taught his followers to follow his teachings. In addition, the follower is allowed the flexibility to change or discard any aspect of the teacher's teachings that no longer applies to their current set of circumstances. The fact that the teachings of Buddha may be altered in accordance with the changing times provides them with an advantage over others, since this kind of modification assures that the teachings of Buddha are suitable at all times (Ambedkar, 1995).

MAKING OF DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS

The event of conversion to Buddhism in 1956 and subsequent changes demonstrate a dual focus on Brahmanism and untouchable agency. This dual emphasis is expressed in beliefs that create an "identity religion"—connected to Dalit awareness and counter-ideology. This identity creation occurs via Dhamma, which is related to the religion of principles and not only for untouchables. As a religion for civil society, it comprises values that support sociality. This study discusses Neo-Buddhism (Ambedkarite Buddhism) from two perspectives, i.e., identity religion and religion for civil society.

Ambedkar steadfastly argued that the "ex-untouchables" had to change for the better on their own and couldn't rely on others to accomplish it for them. In his book "Who were the Untouchables?" he attempted to demonstrate that they were Kshatriyas who were subsequently subdued by the Brahmins. He said that the Nagas who formerly dominated Maharashtra's "ex-untouchables" were eventually usurped by the Brahmins and stripped of their authority. In order to suggest a future in which they may regain their lost dignity, he painted a picture of a period when the current "ex-untouchables" were influential members of society. This perspective is necessary to understand his conversion to Buddhism.

According to Ambedkar, the concept of gods degraded humans and gave religious "virtuosos" licence to take advantage of the general public in the guise of divine privileges. This led him to take the lead among his followers and convert to the Buddhist Dhamma rather than the Sangha. The Sangha was associated with a group of accomplished religious practitioners. Weber says of ancient Buddhism, "Only the wandering monks were full members of the religious society; everyone else was just a religious layman of less value: objects, not subjects of religiosity."

In human society, the class that controls the means of production creates an ideology—a body of beliefs that expresses its way of life and rules time. Although other classes have diverse interests and viewpoints, they often tend to adopt or at least adapt to the prevailing ideology before they become revolutionary (Siegel, 1986). Ideology is built in large part via the influence of religion. It has become the common formula for establishing the legitimacy of ruling class interests.

One of the first sociologists to discuss the strata-specificity of religious beliefs and meanings was undoubtedly Max Weber. He asserts: "For those who are fortunate, religion offers the theodicy of good fortune, since good prosperity... desires to be genuine riches" (Weber, 1985). An ideology that is opposed to the ideology of the dominating stratum emerges when the oppressed social groups become aware of their

oppression and establish themselves as a "class for themselves." The counter ideology raises questions about the reasons for oppression and hierarchy and gives suggestions for how people should act instead.

The establishment of what is known as "Dalit awareness" among India's untouchables precedes the creation of this opposition ideology. Dalit awareness has two points of emphasis. On the one hand, it represents a recognition of religiously approved tyranny and social disadvantages. On the other hand, it demonstrates the untouchables' contention that they are human beings on par with everyone else. It suggests a kind of resurrected spirit. This untouchable spirit develops its own philosophy for a different activity. The counter-ideology grows in the same area of life as their handicap, which has its roots in the religious world.

Religion may represent both the developing awareness of resistance on the part of oppressed communities as well as the external forces that can dominate human lives. The goals and aspirations of social agitators were expressed through traditional religious ideas that were modified to meet the needs and demands of the insurgent masses, despite the fact that religion's primary purpose was to sanctify oppressive institutions and because it dominated people's thinking about the world and society around them (Siegel, 1986).

According to Engels, the expression of actual anguish and the protest against real suffering are both present in religious grief. The development and maintenance of such a counter-ideology in the context of religion offers the affected communities a strong feeling of identity. As a result, religion becomes a setting for a different, liberating identity. The oppressed classes' "identification religion" is quite different from the religion practised by the ruling class. It starts by rejecting the ontological or reified character of religious concepts. In what follows, the previous ideas are newly interpreted, selectively appropriated, modified, or even completely rejected (Aloysius, 1998). It replaces the "ethical-instrumental" dimension with the "transcendental-experiential" dimension.

The notion of "civil religion" and Ambedkar's understanding of the Dhamma as it is presented in "The Buddha and His Dhamma" are quite similar. His emphasis is on socialism and humanism. Jean Jacques Rousseau proposed the concept of "religion civile." Others, including John Dewey and Robert Bellah, later used it in a variety of contexts. In "The Common Faith," one of his works, Dewey puts forth the concept of secular religion. According to him, modernity has freed religion from the constraints of institutionalised doctrine. He dared to extract the heart of reason from all religious beliefs, referring to it as the common religion of all humankind (Fuchs, 2001). His concept of such a nonreligious belief system was innovative and went beyond the notion of a "national religion." Such a religion is fundamentally based on the strength of ideas and principles.

The Dhamma, according to Ambedkar, is a set of basic social principles that transcend all religious boundaries. The Dhamma bridges the gap between morality and society, politics and religion. The problem with such a view of religion is how to win over the general populace's emotional support. Appealing to reason is one thing, but if you think of religion as a civil society activity that excludes the supernatural, the line between politics and religion becomes hazy. This conundrum is seen in Ambedkarite Buddhism, where

a segment of the Buddhist population associates the Dhamma with political activity. However, for some others, Ambedkar's "secularised" religion assumes references to "divinity" and the paranormal.

The Mahars of Maharashtra and the Jatavs of Agra, in particular, were untouchable people in India who responded favourably to Ambedkar's idea of the Dhamma as an emancipatory identity. It provided a fresh feeling of optimism and a path out of the untouchables' long-standing incapacity. In Independent India, it has made it possible for many groups to actively participate in political politics. On the other hand, civil society has not taken to his vision of the Dhamma as a social religion for a democratic society very well. First of all, the adoption of the Dhamma became mostly caste-specific. Clearly, Ambedkar spoke to the broader population when he advocated for the Dhamma as a societal religion, not simply for the untouchables. Such a Dhamma concept has not yet gained widespread acceptance. This is most likely due to Buddhism's very low prominence in contemporary India.

CONCLUSION

The conversion of Babasaheb Ambedkar and his supporters to Buddhism marked the beginning of a movement in Independent India to establish a new religion for the rapidly changing nation. This was a criticism of Brahmanism as well as the struggle of the oppressed peoples to reclaim their identity and lost agency. In order to do this, the pre-Buddhist concepts were intertwined with the ideals of liberal democracy to signal the fusion of tradition and modernity. According to Babasaheb, the Buddhist tradition is entirely consistent with the norms of contemporary civic life and scientific ideas. For many of the untouchable classes, this religion evolved into their "identity religion." Ambedkar's view of Buddhism also went beyond the idea of an "identity religion" to include the idea of a religion that is open to all groups and is involved in civic life.

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