

Socio - Religious Reform Movements of Ambedkar and Buddhism

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Abstract: This article is a study of Ambedkar's Neo-Buddhism and its movement after his death. It started because of injustice, inequality and liberality or against "Untouchables" that had been periodically exercised by the high castes of India. The work of B. R. Ambedkar has spurred scholars and experts to rethink traditional assessments of both the secularization process and the relationship between religious and secular domains. Two generations ago, Ambedkar evoked conversion to Navayana Buddhism as an alternative to hierarchically ordered caste-based society. Through his landmark essay *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, he questioned studies on Dalit communities that saw them as trying to define their inner life solely as either a negative or mirror image of the standards set by caste-based norms. In the effort to retrieve the autonomy of the Dalit subject, Ambedkar brought to the forefront of his work that conversion was not simply opposition to the power structure of caste society but also meant to overthrow the false ideals that had historically distorted and degraded the Dalit self. The paper addresses some of the methodological questions in political philosophy and historiography that arise in Ambedkar's thought regarding the analytical categories related to conversion. It begins with a provocation in its juxtaposition of categories from two different discourses: "subalternity" as a relational position in conceptualizing power and "post-secularism" as persistence or resurgence of religious beliefs or practices in the present. It also critically examines Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhist ethics as an intervention in the analysis of subalternity, showing that the religious ideology of dharma structures the caste order based on discrimination and exclusion. The paper also explains why the move from Hinduism to Buddhist ethics by Ambedkar can, I argue, be constitutive of a post-secular ethic. Emotion and knowledge are not separate in Ambedkar's social epistemology, but they draw heavily on the social transformation and importance of religion in people's inner lives, which went along with conversion.

Keywords: Ambedkar, Buddhism, subaltern, post-secularism, Dalit, conversion, caste.

I. Introduction

The 'caste prejudice', is a great problem of India the entire Social system, and so early times too. This was called 'catuvanna': Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. But Ambedkar was born out of Caste. In accordance, the Indian social system, out of Caste never gets any privileges, from the State. So, Ambedkar and his community had been betrayed, deprived and neglected, from any kind of privileges from the State. This was the problem of Ambedkar and his community and seeking liberation such as mode of social system, such as, through parliamentary change, constitutional change, but these kinds of model was nothing, at the last, he choice the Buddhist liberative model which is helped him to change his religious Identity and Ambedkar successful. It was called "Neo-Buddhism". It was emerged as a dynamic Buddhist movement, particularly for the "Depressed Classes" or "Backward Classes" or "Untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar wanted Untouchables to be recognized as 'minority' such as: Muslims and Sikhs, but Gandhi had refused it.¹ Indian historically the religious background of the Buddhism in India has been the concept of more than 2500 years old. The founder was the Prince Siddhattha Gautama, who became a Buddha. Ambedkar's Buddhist movement was the rejection 'Three Truths of the 'Four Noble Truths', he accepted the 'Noble Eightfold Path' which is the last truth of the 'Four Truths'.² The Caste problem was very chronic disease for the whole societies in India, and the historic person Ambedkar who is from the lowest strata of the Hindu society. He was intellectual persons to bring a social change in India, to break down the caste system and to establish fully democratic of basic human rights principles. When he understood without religion changing his communities never get any freedom, so he was to take refuge the Buddha and Dhamma but not Sangha. It is the modern version of the Neo-Buddhist movement.

The Life and the Social Philosophy of Ambedkar: Dr. Ambedkar is a prominent figure in the history of Indian. His philosophy and teaching were based on the development his community from the injustice of socio-economic and political rights in India. He was born on 14 April 1891 and died in December 6, 1956. His father was a Subedar Major in the government military service, and it was a high Rank in the military service in India. So Ambedkar got all the opportunities from the state Government through his father, such as to go schools, who was from the

outcaste community? He passed matriculation in 1907 and B.A. in 1912 with English, Politics, Economics and Persian and M.A 1915, his topic "Ancient Indian Commerce". He finished PhD degree, with "A Historic and Analytical Study"³ In June 1916. He finished the D.Sc, his thesis was problem of a Rupee"⁴, at the age of 32. Ambedkar's social ideology is three fundamental things: 1) liberty or freedom, 2) equality, 3) fraternity. First of all, he had to fight with the Hindus to gain political power and human rights in India. Ambedkar openly declared to the public, I was born as a Hindu, but I would not die as a Hindu". Basically Ambedkar was looking at the outcastes never got any privileges, opportunities from the State, but instead they were oppressed, tortured, being slaved for the high castes people. Dr. Ambedkar's social ideology arose with the root of his social philosophy was not about in politics but "in religion concerned, because, to get facilitate the social revolution in India". The social ideology could give freedom and equality. Dr. Ambedkar's social ideology was mainly concerned on how Untouchables would get similar status under Indian caste system. He understood his community would not get liberty, equality, and fraternity from the Hindu social system without to reject the Hinduism. He wanted a suitable religion to convert which was Neo-Buddhism. The Constitution Assembly of Independent India appointed a Drafting Committee with Dr. Ambedkar as its Chairman to draft the Constitution of India. In February 1948, Dr. Ambedkar abolished untouchability in all forms. The mass conversion of Dalit class to Buddhism would call a historic of social revolution of India. Basically, the origin of the Indian social system the Vedic Aryans knew no caste system and they divided themselves for different occupations. Those who took to learning were called Brahmins, those who undertook governance were classified as Kshatriyas, those who resorted to trade were termed Vaishyas, and those who served the foregoing classes was known as Sudras. The Untouchables form the lowest strata of Hindu society and were condemned as Untouchables by the caste Hindus through centuries. There were huge discriminations between higher caste Hindus and outcastes Hindus: Prohibited eats, Marrying with other castes members, separate glasses, seating arrangements for Dalits in village tea stalls, and in restaurants, Segregation seating and food in village functions and festivals, prohibited: entering into village temples, holding umbrellas in front of dominant caste members, entering dominant caste homes, riding a bicycle inside the village, using common village path, separate burial grounds, resources (wells, ponds, temples.), hoisting the national flag during Independence or Republic days, etc.

Buddhism does not accept the social discrimination rather it emphasizes the unity among societies for harmony and prosperity of the suffering humanity. The Buddha says: "Go monks, for the happiness of the world, teach the Dhamma good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end, but do not go two of you on the same way." This shows that the Buddha has laid much emphasis on the members of society and their welfare. Therefore, the old Buddhist monasteries became spiritual and culture learning centers.

His perception on Buddhism was dynamic approach more socialization in order to put Buddhism. For example; he criticized the Order of the Sangha, because they are prohibited to engage in social activities rather staying in the monastic boundary. He insisted the monks should help the societies without any barrier from the movement. The Neo-Buddhists and others depressed class have turned on to the development: "constantly has increased the Buddha's path"²¹, because of it is a code of morality to Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."

The Impacts of the Neo-Buddhists Movement in India

It is historical perspectives, his social philosophy and religious movement was to abolish Indian caste system. Actually, Buddhism would not harm the tradition and culture and history of India but to bring the greatest benefit for the country by embracing Buddhism which has been a part and parcel of Bharatiya culture." The Neo-Buddhist movement came into existence to achieve recognizable status than other religions, "by their converts to Buddhism" such as "Socially, political, religious and cultural". Ambedkar Buddhist movement has been reformed and progressive ways in the society by taking five precepts. To be creating peace, for all human being with faithfully holding the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and human liberation." Ambedkar had delivered to the lay people the important teaching of the Buddha with regard to the body, speech and mind for cultivating skillful mental and to be faith of the Buddha image, his birth, enlightenment and parinibbana, every full-moon day of May in every year. Neo-Buddhist movement wasn't a Theravada or Mahayana Buddhism, but, Neo-Buddhism is a modern revival by Ambedkar. According to fundamental rights of human, the Education is one of them. So everybody have right to learn in the government or private educational institutions. He knew that education is important to breakdown and fundamentally change the social system. According to 1971 census "the neo-Buddhists have progress in education and their literacy become equal of the Brahmins and all other castes in India." Ambedkar was a keen student of economics. He wrote three scholarly books on economics: (1) Administration and Finance of the East India Company, (2) The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India, and (3) The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution. Ambedkar concentrated three major things 1) Land reforms, 2) Currency problems, and 3) Problems of finance. The economic progress of the Mahars was one of the main concerns of Ambedkar, because without economics prosperity a person cannot sustain level in the society. So, the economic development should have the opportunity from the Government in the trades and the businesses. Social dimension of Ambedkar Buddhist movement was to change in social status. Ambedkar Buddhist movement

has brought some development in the societies of India, particularly in the lowest strata of the people. Dr. Ambedkar said: I have based my philosophy on Buddhist teachings. The main parts of my philosophy are freedom and equality.

He had submitted a draft for the future constitution for the independent India. It was later as “States and Minorities” For the aim of his mission was to arouse in men and women for right relations. Example “the Neo-Buddhists have achieved better social condition in India by undertaking Buddhist Morality.” As Ambedkar’s main objective was to reform the entire Indian social system, Neo Buddhists got social status, so the answer is ‘yes’. The political rights to all people are provided the basic human rights principles: such as place to live, food for survival of life, cloths, medication, and education. The term of democracy is the human knowledge and understanding which can provide human equally. For example: “the concept of democracy is economic efficiency,” the social equality in Buddhism.

II. Conclusion

The Neo-Buddhist movement of India was called Dr. Ambedkar Buddhist movement. The Buddhists monk from Arakan and Ceylon, Anagarika Dharmapala in India Bodh Gaya and later on by Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar was the last one who is a reformist under the social context of Buddhism. Knowledge and education are the backbone of the nation. Oppress, depress, torture, deprive and neglect is not the human integration toward other humans.

He also raised the gender issues among men and women and gave equal status and freedom. Freedom of living in a sustainable and sufficient ways of life, getting all men and women better education, economics development, medication, lands rights, exercise of religious freedom, women’s freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of political rights. The latest Ambedkar’s liberative model can be called as Buddhist liberative model, because he found the three basic things there, such as, equality, liberty and fraternity.

The Buddha had never pointed out, that persons are Buddhists, and these persons are Hindus and so on, because he had no intention to divide the people into different designations, This was very clear that after religious identity change. The untouchables converted to Buddhism’ they got Buddhist identity, so, they got equality, freedom and fraternity as like other religious communities in India.

Ambedkarite’s Buddhist movement is such as in the religious dimension, in the educational dimension, in the economical dimension, in the social dimension and in the political dimension. As he was a Hindu by birth but he did not hesitate to convert to Buddhism. Already Ambattha, Sonadanta, Upali have converted and to be entered the Order of the Sangha.

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