

Role of BR Ambedkar in Promoting Buddhism Religion

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Abstract

Dr. Ambedkar's moral order in his ideal society places an emphasis on people taking personal responsibility for their acts and obligations to the community. Because a person's activities have consequences for other people as well as for themselves, it's impossible to behave just for one's own benefit. As a result, it is up to man to ensure his personal happiness and the material and spiritual advancement of society as a whole. Ambedkar has a moral, social, and nonreligious stance on religion. After initially publicly announcing in 1935 at Yeola that he was leaving Hinduism for another faith, Dr. Ambedkar needed over twenty-one years to actually undergo the conversion, which took place on 14th October, 1956, in Nagpur. During this time, he studied the world's main faiths in depth and compared them to one another. There was no method of religion he hadn't tried first. However, he eventually converted to Buddhism. In order to understand Dr. Ambedkar's life goal and the circumstances surrounding his conversion to Buddhism, it is necessary to understand the origins of that decision. For the sake of this article, an attempt is made to investigate this background.

Keywords: Buddhism, Hindu society, Buddhist, Buddha, Dhamma.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar stood out as an extraordinary personality in the history of contemporary India. His life began on April 14, 1891, and ended on December 6, 1956. Ambedkar wrote the Indian constitution and fought tirelessly to improve the lives of India's untouchables by challenging the institution of caste, which had strong roots in Hindu society. He battled tirelessly against the untouchables' status as a social outcast in Hindu society. As a member of the untouchable Mahar caste of Maharashtra, he was afforded opportunities for schooling that no one else his age had had.

He owes much to the teachings and examples of people like Kabir, Jotiba Phule, and Buddha. Dr. Ambedkar was from a family that practised the religion of the Kabir Panthi. Kabir opposed social stratification based on religion and caste in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. The message of selfless devotion to the One and Only God was what he proclaimed. Ambedkar devoted most of his life to helping the "untouchables" and "depressed classes" of India. Among his many concerns, this was one of the most important. Ambedkar sought to better their socioeconomic and social conditions while also perfecting them as individuals. This is why he put greater emphasis on social than political democracy. He was not shy in attacking Gandhi and other Congress leaders for being too lenient in their aid to the untouchables. They were simply referred to by the Hindu term "Harijan" by these leaders, who claimed that the spread of political democracy and knowledge in India would improve the lot of the country's poor regardless of their individual efforts. The focus of this analysis is on how Ambedkar and his followers converted to Buddhism and how he worked to better the lives of the so-called "untouchables."

One of the religions that has lasted for over two thousand five hundred years despite drastic changes is Buddhism.

Buddhism has had a renaissance and rapid growth across south and southeast Asia during the past century. Numerous political figures, most notably B R Ambedkar, have updated and recast its central principles (1891-1956). While his goal was to provide the dalit movement with moral guidance, the resulting Buddhist faith

became infused with nationalist connections and political goals that gave the religion a firm footing in various social organisations across India. A whole generation of scholars, activists, and politicians have been inspired by the Buddha and His Dhamma (henceforth BD), as well as by Ambedkar's many papers and books. Ambedkar announced his intention to convert to a religion that did not endorse caste hierarchy but would provide the framework for a society based upon principles of non-discrimination, equality, and respect in 1935, after realising that Hinduism had failed to eradicate the caste system and the stigma of untouchability. Ambedkar's fame has been on the rise again in recent years, and this is likely due to the fact that certain of his ideas appear to have not only endured but have gained fresh significance as a result of the passage of time. His statement of the necessity to provide religion with a new doctrinal framework that "shall be in consonance with liberty, equality, and fraternity, in short, with democracy" is only one example. Because of this, there was a "total transformation of life's priorities. A fresh body is necessary for a new life to enter.

II. CONCEPT OF BUDDHISM RELIGION, ACCORDING TO DR. AMBEDKAR

Reconstructing the world is the goal of Buddha's teachings, or Dhamma. All aspects of one's being must flourish, as well as the community as a whole. It doesn't presume a soul that communicates with God, or that soul's existence. Because of this, Ambedkar is able to distil the major teachings of Buddhism into their essence as they relate to the social condition of man. This in no way implies that, as a Buddhist, he discounts human reason. His allusions to the human condition are grounded not only in the framework of beliefs pertaining to the soul and God, but also in the context of Morality and Nature, incorporating components that are both secular and realistic.

Buddhism's view of humanity is thoroughly human-centered rather than divinely inspired. When seen from a theocentric perspective, it is very different from the views of man held by Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. The Hindu conception of man centres on the oneness of Brahma and the uniqueness of the soul. No one can conceive of the Islamic notion apart from Allah's grace and immateriality. Christianity views man as a creation, fashioned in God's image, whereas Islam views man as a glimmer of Light or an emanation from the effluence of God's head. A sinner from the beginning, his only hope for salvation is in Christ, in believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But the Buddhist view may function without a God or an immortal soul. The Buddha's view on the soul is known as "An-atta," which means "no soul." One man, who lacks a soul that lives on forever. This is one way in which Buddhism stands apart from other theistic faiths.

Religion, according to Dr. Ambedkar, is founded on "speculation" due to its focus on the soul. Because the soul is mysterious and invisible. It is the mind, he continues, not the soul, and the mind is very different from the soul. It is not advantageous to believe in a soul since doing so leads to "superstition" and "priesthood." This is because it "not only grants the priesthood ultimate authority over man from birth to death, but also creates a priesthood and is the basis of all superstition."

III. WHAT MAKES BUDDHIST WAY OF LIFE

The Noble Eight-Fold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path is the fourth (magga) of the Four Noble Truths. It is also known as the Middle Way or the Threefold Way. Buddhism offers a way out of this world of suffering. The eight tenets constitute more of a road map than a set of instructions for ending one's suffering and attaining enlightenment. The Noble Eightfold Path can also be referred to as the Threefold Way, which emphasises the importance of ethics, meditation, and wisdom in a Buddhist's daily life. The Buddhist Eightfold Path can be seen as an extension of the Threefold Way. In the next life, a person will be whatever they behaved as in the previous seven. Good deeds (the Noble Eightfold Path) lead to the acquisition of kammis, which in turn benefits one's life. Bad actions (those that stray from the Noble Eightfold Path) lead to unfavourable outcomes.

Buddha-nature

A Bodhisattva is a Buddhist figure in the Mahayana school who guides disciples toward enlightenment and Buddhahood (dukkha). According to Mahayana teachings, anybody can attain Buddhahood. According to Mahayana Buddhists, everyone and everything possesses Buddha nature. There's a growing seed in each one of them. All sentient beings are endowed with Buddha-nature, giving them the possibility for enlightenment in the same manner the Buddha did. One must commit one's entire life to the Buddha's teachings, or The Dhamma and The Sangha, in order to reach enlightenment and become a Buddha.

IV. THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY OF INDIA: EFFORTS OF DR. AMBEDKAR

On May 4, 1955, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar registered the Buddhist Society of India with the Registrar of Companies in Mumbai. During the event on May 8, 1955, at Nare Park in Bombay, he formally announced the formation of this society for the dissemination of Buddhism. Following are examples of the society's stated goals and objectives:

- To aid in the dissemination of Buddhism across India.
- To build universities and institutions teaching both religion and science.
- To set up shelters for the homeless, medical clinics, and shelters for displaced people.
- To encourage research on religions across the world.
- To print books about Buddhism and distribute pamphlets and brochures explaining the faith to the general audience.
- Assemble Buddhists in India for cooperative projects and friendly get-togethers.

Numerous groups were founded during India's social reformation movement's history in an effort to alter Hindu society's religious and cultural foundations. There was the Brahma Samaj, formed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the Satyashodhak Samaj, created by Mahatma Phuley, and the Buddhist Society of India, founded by Dr. Ambedkar, among others. It is well known that the Chaturvarnya System of Hinduism never acknowledged the inherent humanity of its untouchable members. Since Dr. Ambedkar's social standing as an untouchable was rejected by Hinduism, he had no choice but to renounce Hinduism and seek out alternative options for the uplift of this social class. In light of these considerations, Dr. Ambedkar founded this group. Untouchables' total growth as human beings was stunted for hundreds of years by the uneven social stratification of Chaturvarnya, and this is why Hinduism is built on repudiation of democratic norms. Undemocratic and brutal Hindu practices persisted even after the contemporary Indian socio-religious reformation effort. Untouchability, Devdasi, Sati, Dowry, female infanticide, etc., are all still commonly followed practices within the Hindu community even now. As part of his fight for social democracy in India during the civil rights era, Dr. Ambedkar formed the Buddhist Society of India, which is now widely recognized as a leading force in the country's progressive social reform movement and in fortifying its democratic ideals.

V. FORMATION OF AMBEDKAR'S BUDDHISM IN THE LIGHT OF CLASSICAL BUDDHISM

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an ex-Untouchable and a key figure in the creation of India's constitution, is often regarded as the country's most influential thinker of the 20th century. The impact of his works and views on social and political issues has grown since they were originally published. The Buddha and His Dhamma, Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism, was finished shortly before his death in 1956 and is still considered a sacred text by many of his followers. The fifteen authors of *Reconstructing the World: B. R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*—far too many to name individually in a review of only 800 words—make a significant contribution by

synthesising, contextualising, and explaining Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism, thereby deconstructing some of the many misrepresentations and misunderstandings of his ideas.

Significance of Buddha in the life of Ambedkar

“Buddha stood for social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. He taught equality, equality not between man and man only but between man and woman.” Ambedkar

Ambedkar's exposure to Buddhism, however, goes back far further in history. Beginning in 1908, he was given a copy of Buddha Charita- Life of Buddha' in Marathi by K.A.Keluskar, an assistant teacher at Wilson High School who was a frequent visitor to Ambedkar's home and who also gave him access to his extensive library. At the age of 16, he had the opportunity to attend a lecture on Buddha by the same professor he had had in college. These had a significant impact, and he was left thinking in terms of comparisons. His 1932 home, which he constructed himself, included a white statue of the Buddha in the foyer. He established a school of higher learning in Bombay in 1946 and gave it the name "Siddhartha College" two years later. It was evident that he was drawn to Buddhism when, in 1950, he arranged for the publishing of The Essence of Buddhism, a book authored by Professor P.Lakshmi Narasu. Ambedkar's life was profoundly impacted by Buddha and his teachings. He was moved by Buddha's words from Buddha Charita: "Like birds collecting on a tree in the evening, and then going their separate ways in the morning, the unity of all creatures necessarily end in separation." Therefore, he chose to give it a new name rather than continue using the old terminology while making contemporary references. To avoid any suggestion that it was his religion or that he was an incarnation, he referred to it as Dhamma, also known today as Navayana.

Road to Conversion

By declaring in 1935 that he would not be cremated as a Hindu, Ambedkar had already begun to distance himself from Hinduism. He had been present in the Sikh Missionary Conference back in 1936. (Ambedkar had considered converting to Sikhism for a while.) Annihilation of Caste was written and published by Ambedkar in 1936; it was his presidential address to the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal Conference that never happened. Ambedkar ended his written presentation by reiterating his decision to abandon Hinduism. Ambedkar gave a talk titled "Rationalism in India—Revolution and Counter-Revolution" at Madras in 1944. The thought of this central subject had stuck with him. This idea was articulated in his address to the Buddhist Association in 1951, and it was to be the foundation of a book titled Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India, but the book was never written. Ambedkar published his preference for Buddhism in the May 1950 issue of the Mahabodhi Society Journal in an article titled "Buddha and the Future of his Religion." It was on this day in 1951 that Ambedkar began penning The Buddha and His Dhamma. His death in 1956 delayed its publication until 1957. The Riddle in Hinduism, which he began writing in the third week of December 1954, was also released posthumously.

On the same day, 24 May 1956, Ambedkar proclaimed publicly on Buddha Jayanti that he will convert to Buddhism in October of that year. On October 14, 1956, the actual conversion took place in Nagpur. Along with his wife and hundreds of his followers, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism. By rejecting my ancient religion that stood for inequity and tyranny, I am reborn today," Ambedkar said after his conversion. To suggest that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu is false and malicious, and I do not subscribe to the doctrine of reincarnation. No Hindu deity currently has my undying devotion. To put it plainly, I will not be engaging in Shraddha. The Eightfold Path laid down by the Buddha is the one I want to pursue without deviation. I shall live my life according to the Buddhist tenets of "knowledge," "straight path," and "compassion," since Buddhism is the only religion I trust.

On November 15th, 1956, Ambedkar travelled to Kathmandu to participate in the World Buddhist Conference. He spoke on the topic of "Buddha and Marx" during a lecture. in under two months after he became a Buddhist. As previously said, Ambedkar passed away on December 6, 1956, at his Delhi home.

Reasons for Conversion to Buddhism

From a theological and philosophical perspective, Ambedkar's departure from Hinduism stands out as a watershed moment in his life. Towards the conclusion of his life, he turned away from Hinduism and instead adopted Buddhism. Why did he make that choice, exactly? His works, such as *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, *Annihilation of Caste*, *Philosophy of Hinduism*, *Riddles in Hinduism*, etc., provide an in-depth response to this subject. However, his writings, talks, and interviews both before and after he became a Buddhist shed insight on the issue.

This is shown by Ambedkar's comment from the 1935 Yeola Conference that was cited above. Ambedkar said the untouchables had a "weak and degraded standing" in Hindu culture because of their race. Ambedkar believed it was crucial to adopt a religion which would guarantee "same status, equal rights, and fair treatment" to untouchables when attempts to acquire these inside Hindu culture began failing. He tells his followers to "choose just that faith in which you will obtain equal rank, equal opportunity, and equal treatment..." Ambedkar, after doing a thorough study of the world's faiths, evidently settled on Buddhism as the most superior option.

It's clear that Ambedkar thought Buddhism was the most reasonable religion, or at least the most rational religion compared to Hinduism. His major problem with Hinduism was the theory of Chaturvarnya, which he saw as legitimising untouchability and other forms of social inequity. When compared to Chaturvarnya, Buddhism's emphasis on equality makes it an obvious opponent. He thinks it's great that Buddhism puts an emphasis on morality despite its rejection of God and the soul. He claims that the three tenets of Buddhism—prajna (understanding as opposed to superstition and supernaturalism), karuna (love), and samata (equality)—are all that is necessary for a "good and joyful existence" for all sentient beings.

Buddha and Dhamma

Ambedkar aims to differentiate between religion and dhamma in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. He claims that the term "religion" has several different meanings depending on context. This is true because different eras brought about different understandings of religion. Religion was formerly thought to be identical to mystical practises. During the second phase, religious practise became synonymous with things like dogma, rites, ceremonies, supplication, and oblation. God and the human spirit were central to religion in the last phase. The current definition of religion, according to Ambedkar, is "believe in God, belief in soul, worship of God, cure of the erring soul, propitiating God by prayers, rites, sacrifices, etc." Dhamma, as used by the Buddha, is distinct from religion, in Ambedkar's view. It's commonly thought that one's religious beliefs are private and should be kept that way. It must be prevented from having any sort of public impact. Socializing goes against this dhamma. Dhamma refers to the ideal of proper conduct in all areas of human interaction. Being single eliminates the necessity for dhamma.

When two people are cohabiting, however, dhamma must be incorporated into their lives whether they like it or not. In other words, according to Ambedkar, dhamma is essential to the survival of society. One of these three options must be selected by society. It is possible for a society to forego using dhamma as a governing principle. This signals a collective decision in favour of anarchy. Second, the police, or dictatorship, may be the preferred form of governance in a given community. Third, when people don't follow the dhamma, society might pick the magistrate and dhamma as a form of governance. The loss of freedom is a hallmark of both authoritarianism and anarchy. Only if we adopt the third option will freedom endure. Ambedkar draws the conclusion that libertarians must be open to dhamma. Buddha taught that dhamma is made up of prajna (understanding) and karuna (compassion) (love). Thus, according to Ambedkar, the Buddha's notion of dhamma is distinct from the definition of religion.

Even Ambedkar, in his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, talks about the varna-vyavastha system. Ambedkar argues that, according to the brahminical ideology, access to education should not be universalized. Those of the male Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaisya castes were the only ones who were allowed to learn. Women and Shudras (both sexes) were strictly forbidden from learning anything, including how to read and write. Ambedkar

argues that the Buddha incited a rebellion against this barbaric Brahmin worldview. He argued that both men and women should have equal access to educational opportunities. Ambedkar argues that for Dhamma to be Saddhamma, it must break down the boundaries that separate people from one another. The Brahmins believe that the Vedas define the perfect society, and since the Vedas are without flaw, everyone must adhere to this standard. Chaturvarnya is the name given to the Vedic ideal of social organisation. The Vedas stipulate three requirements for such a community. Each of the four castes—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra—must be represented. The notion of differentiated inequality must govern the interactions between these strata. That is to say, in terms of social standing, legal protections, and other benefits, each of these categories is intended to be distinct from the others. Those with the highest status were the Brahmins, those with middle status were the Kshatriyas, those with lower status were the Vaishyas, and those with the lowest status were the Shudras. The third distinguishing characteristic of Chaturvarnya was the need that people of different social strata work at certain jobs. The Brahmin's role in society was that of a scholar, teacher, and priest. Kshatriyas were trained from birth to be warriors. Vaishyas engaged in commerce as their primary means of livelihood. The Shudra caste was responsible for doing menial tasks for the upper castes. No one from one social stratum may enter the territory of another. Ambedkar claims that inequality is the driving force behind this philosophy.

Ambedkar on women enlightenment

When compared to men, women in ancient Hindu culture held a high social rank and were respected equally inside the household. The public held them with the highest esteem and adulation in virtually all fields. In the mediaeval ages, however, they fell from favour and were reduced to nothing more than a commodity used to satisfy wants and obligations. They weren't even allowed to keep their fundamental human rights, let alone their own unique identities. Achieving empowerment, a term with many dimensions and subtle nuances, seems like a distant dream to them. They were disarmed of their most potent tool for retaining their unique identities. The time of the Vedic people was one of disgrace for them. She is treated in Hindu scriptures as if she were an animal or a tool to be used to satisfy the needs of others.

Thus, he began various movements for the advancement of Indian women and sought to serve as a potent source of motivation for the development of a feminist political agenda that tackles the problem of class, caste, and gender in the current sociopolitical setup, which maintains conservative and reactionary values in many respects, particularly with regard to gender relations. Ambedkar's works and speeches illuminate the principles India should cultivate and the ways in which doing so will bring its social and political institutions into the contemporary era. The restrictive, caste-based, and rigidly hierarchical social order was seen by Ambedkar as having a disproportionately negative effect on women.

His career was marked by successful arguing for the rights of women and the oppressed of Schedule-caste and Schedule-tribes. In his talks and publications, he often addresses the plight of Indian women in generic terms, rather than focusing on Dalit women in particular. While serving as the first law minister of Independent India, he spoke out about the situation of Indian women in the Bombay Legislative Council, the Viceroy's Assembly, and the Parliament.

VI. CONCLUSION

To no avail, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar laboriously tried to bring about this annihilation from inside the fold. After witnessing the indifference of the Hindu elite and the slumber of the Hindu populace, he resolved to reawaken the indigenous powerful force of Buddhism, the keen proven weapon to destroy Brahmanism and its offspring, Chaturvarnya, Castes, and Untouchability. And in due time, he was able to bring authentic Buddhism back to India. What Ambedkar left behind as a political, social, and religious reformer had a significant impact on contemporary India. His ideas and thoughts are respected by people of all political persuasions in the postmodern era. His efforts have impacted many areas of life, including the way the government of India approaches social and economic policy, education, and affirmative action through financial and legal incentives. So, while we may be celebrating Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar's anniversary with much fanfare, the best way

we can honour him is by treating everyone equally regardless of their caste, creed, or socioeconomic status, and by making real his dream of reviving Buddhism in its place of origin.

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