

## **Role Of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar In Regaining The Universalistic Ethos Of Buddhism As The Basis Of Nationalism In India**

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In the modern sense of the term, the idea of 'nationhood' is rather recent origin. According to Paul Brass (1991) the concept of nationhood like that of nationalism, is seen not as 'given' but as a social and political construct. In India different socio-cultural and political forces are advancing designs of nationalism in various ways. The protagonists of Hindu Nationalism consciously accept that their society is divinely ordained, and they accept the Manu's preaching of sanctity of the Varna and its unquestionable acceptance for believers in Brahma-Vishnu-Maheshwara as supernatural power as spirit of creation of the universe, especially the Arya/ Vaidic Chaturvarna society in which at top of hierarchy stood the Brahmins and others below of them. Later on, it was called as Hindu society (a Persian name given by Muslims). The Bhagvad Geeta which is considered as a holy scripture of Hindu religion reiterated the creation of Chaturvarna order of society. Legendry of God-Krishna claimed to have created such hierarchical society as per their innate qualities. Believers in theory of incarnation from Brahma to Vishnu, from Vishnu to Rama or Krishna etc. to Yallamma/ Durgas are incapable of doubting of their power or denouncing them, proves that they are coward as well as submissive people. Whenever they show courageousness, it is not of intrinsic brave nature but out of fear or fanaticism, their hatred/ cruel nature is reflected. This is claimed by them to be their bravery. Such responses are reduced to duties by the priests as law givers as far as high caste Dwijas are concerned. The Hindu Scriptures talk of Duty (Dharma) in detail. For instance, first in the ranking order, the main duty of the Brahmins was to act as priests and teachers and receive gifts for it. The main duty of Kshatriyas was to protect the system and to maintain law and order, besides waging war and enjoy material life, being rulers of land and water. The Vaishyas were supposed to look after trade activities which are their main duties. For the Shudras, the specific main duty was of serving by way of all sorts of manual work for the three Varnas namely the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, and the Vaishyas. Under Apadharna (during the period of crisis) situation, the higher Varnas/ castes were allowed to change their occupational duties. But, in all circumstances and in all times, the only duty of Shudras was rendering services and this was not allowed to be changed at all. They must remain with their duties as humble servants.

The Hindus who believe in individual or social liberation theory, (Moksha theory) consciously or unconsciously subscribe to the company of blind followers of Manu to maintain the Chaturvarna organization of society as an ideal society visualized by Him (God). For liberation of soul from bondage, from lower to the higher or higher to the highest, the specific duties recommended for different castes to be followed strictly. This was applied to the higher castes only. By receiving the gifts, souls of the Brahmins get liberated or that the souls of Kshatriyas attain liberation because of their success in war (or dying in the battle). The Bhagavad Geeta (ii 37) is quite outspoken about the results of observing the specific duties of Kshatriyas. The Lord God (Krishna) tries to inspire Arjuna to take up arms with the simple illusive and realistic logic : "If you get killed in this war, you have heaven to enjoy, if you win the battle, you have the earth to enjoy." For higher castes, adhering to their duties, their souls yield high quality results in both lives. The observance of assigned specified duties is conducive to liberation. This is all for upper castes, what about Shudras? Is there any possibility of liberation for Shudras? Such possibility of soul liberation for Shudras never existed. The law givers (and scriptures) never liked Shudras to be freed, because they were supposed to remain under the bondage of slavery and serfdom as manual labourers. After all,. The only purpose for which the creator created them (Shudras) is to only serve the others namely the higher castes.

The Hindu Gods (Lords) and their law givers/ priests/ Gurus do not preach that either in their ideal society/ or in practical life, that the 'equity' principle exists. Notions like equality, justice, liberty and fraternity stand hostile and treat these notions as opposites to this scheme of notions. They have specified the specific class (higher castes) the Dejjias the twice born castes, first birth is occurred with their ascribed caste (Varna) status and the second birth considered after going through Upanayan (sacred thread wearing) ceremony for leading life aimed to ensuring their salvation. The majority of the society the toiling masses, the Shudras being debarred from Upanayan ceremony are not entitled to seek salvation. The question of freedom does not arise for Shudras, for the only purpose for which the Creator creates or created them is to serve the privileged Dwijias who constitute a minority among the Hindu population. This privileged minority – the higher castes, in name duty or Dharma, got social interests sanctioned by their sacred books and thereby established the right to enjoy the cultural, material and political benefits (culturally gaining superior positions, gifts (precious metals, gold, silver stones-gems/ diamonds, foodgrains, milk etc., animals, lands and gardens attached with servants. They act as rulers, law-makers, judges and custodians of social

system. The majority masses were the subjugated to their legislation in the society. Such strachified society existed and continue to retain it's essentials even today in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many sociologists, like Yogendra Singh found that the social and cultural structural changes have not yet occurred in India. Even our judiciary/ Supreme Court unable to look into assets of Hindu temples. For instance, the Padmanabhan Temple located in Kerala state.

Basically all religions in the world lay socio-cultural framework for life irrespective of any type of economy and polity. Barring exceptional cases, almost all members of their religion in one way or the other, practice intentionally or unintentionally certain religious rights which emerge from value systems. Especially in the context of events, like naming ceremony, death and marriage, either full or partial rites are invoked and performed. In certain cases, the dead bodies become issue of dispute over the manner of it's disposal. As the family members adhere to their religious rites, the disposal activity is accordingly undertaken. Death of person in any society invites religion. In the mega-cities/ metropolitan centres, may be due to scarcity of burial ground, new way of disposing of dead body through electrical cremation is found. But before and after cremation, certain religious-oriented rites are observed. Normally strong objection or criticism upon such events do not emerge, if emerged, very rare cases are noticed. The way the birth, marriage and death ceremonies are undertaken/ conducted by family members/ group members throw light upon the 'faith' that person possessed or some time, the 'faith' is imposed. Hence, in the practical life, the divisions and segregation noticed. Even after death, the same patterns continue to exist. In the Hindu society, in every town or village, we find segregated cremation ground or burial ground, except big cities, where cremation space seems to be common to all. These are the realities of life which speak of both segregated life and co-existence in limited sense.

The forces organised in the form o religion and political parties/ organizations in India are attempting to interpret Hinduism as basis of Indian nationalism. How there can be a such nationalism? Natioanlism based on Hinduism is nothing but religious fundamentalism which consists of in-built mechanism of segregation, discrimination, and inequality, worshipping of one set of Gods/ Goddesses Hinduism based nationalism does not indicate 'common socio-cultural characteristics', in terms of 'we feeling', 'belongingness', 'social cohisiveness' and one social bound. Broadly speaking, Hinduism was/ is considered as another form of parcialism which stands for discrimination, exploitation, inequality, domination and cultural hegemony. Such nationalism cannot sustain unity of the nation. Hinduism is the basic umbrella for caste system as operative system of Chaturvarna which is another name for Brahmanism. It is proved that only during Buddhist period, the real nationalism developed. Buddhism arose against Brahminism/ Hinduism. As a result of which, in the history of India, we found 'Vishal Barat' – Great India – from Kabul to Delhi and Nepal. It was the period of Ashoka – a Buddhist ruler, and emperor. In post-independent India, the India's identity in cultural sense, a multi-facet identity possesses mainly the dialectical forces, namely the forces representing value of equality Vs. the forces representing value of inequality (hierarchy). Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar belongs to revolutionary protagonists of equality and fraternity. Hence, the living philosophy in India is noticeable in the philosophy Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar manifested in different forms which are visible in the form of various people's movements and in the form of unanimously accepted national document, namely, the Constitution of India.

**Universal Buddhist Ethos : Love and Knowledge and Fraternity :**In the beginning, all religious have shown their proselitizing (conversing) nature through which they have either attracted other members or given some place in their religious life. Buddhism like other religions it is not a religion of making God/ Goddess of soul of miracles/ magic, of astrology and of sacrifice (animals sacrifice, torture etc.) as centre of life but it is a 'way of life' based on basic natural and human principles/ laws. It has both simple and high principles. It is a 'Dhamma – a perspective of morality.' Man is centre of Buddhism. However, Buddhism is for both man and other life world. Buddha preached the principle of Ahinsa and kindness/ compassion to be shown to living human beings and other living beings. In Buddhist ethics, there is concept of "Man as man". In Hindu, ethics there is no concept of 'Man as man', Wisdom (dhi), learning (Vidya) and cleanliness (Sauca) etc. are totally forbidden for the intrinsically polluted so-called Shudras condemned to ignorance and darkness (Deviprasad Chattopadhyay, 1976, pp. 623-24).Buddhism has arisen as an antithesis to Vedic religion (Varnashrama Dharma). Buddhism gave top place for reasoning (mind), followed by compassion and love as basis of character to grapple with Dukka-suffering in the human life. On these three canon, Buddha did preach his principles/ noble thoughts to people to combat against their suffering, slavery and bondage imposed by Brahmanism through it's Varnashrama Vedic Dharma rules and regulations.

Use of mind meant rational understanding/ comprehending of life and objective reality. Use of mind meant use of analytical ability and critical reasoning. Buddha gave full freedom for critical inquiry and test.

He never insisted to follow him blindly. Buddha insisted that man must be courageous to know the truth and tell “the truth as truth and untruth as untruth” by differentiating them and accordingly initiate his/ her actions which should be in consonance with the perspective of ‘Bahujan Hitaya Bahujan Sukhaya’. So, all the religions except Buddhism and Jainism (but not in the contemporary present form), through their Gods and Law-givers, never permit their followers for critical reasoning/ thinking. The priests order their followers (devoters) not to doubt but to keep belief in ‘divinely’ ordained phenomena and shape the life according to religious books.

Buddha attacked inequality which was/ is the essence of Chaturvarna system. Because it was / is based on the consideration of irrational and inhuman vested interests. He exposed false ideas theories of origin of human society from above heavenly world of Brahma and his body as birth place. He gave natural explanation of birth of mankind from mankind through earth; on its basic five elements. Buddha stood for equality principle among, men and women. In Hinduism, human beings are being unequal and carry by birth pure and impure quality. In it Shudra and women are considered as polluted forever. Buddha attacked the notional pollution and purity as an artificially conceived ideas to make the division among the people and to keep them in ignorance, so that they remain in subjugation under the hegemony of Brahminism/ Hinduism. As part of gifts to God Indra and so on the animals were used in Yadna. Killing animals was part of religious rite of sacrifice of Vedic religion for pleasing God Indra and so on. The Brahmanas performed these animal sacrifices and got the same as gifts via Yadna. Buddha attacked such practices and exposed their material interests realized through the false theory that the actor who sacrifices would benefit from God and gain Moksha. The Brahmins had also propagated the notion of punishment if sacrifices are not arranged and offered. Due to fear of such theory of punishment by Gods and Goddesses, the other Dwijas and peasantry obeyed the religious injunctions. In turn, it was priestly group which was benefitted at the cost of others. Such devastating criticism launched by scientific-oriented Buddhism against Brahminism, the Brahmins shifted to ‘Pista Pasu’ (corn flour cow animal) sacrifice in the Yadna for regaining the lost prestigious position. ‘Brahmins’ priestly status was degraded due to exposure of their cunning nature used for deceiving the general masses. Animal images were made out of corn flour and thereby continued to keep the basic notion of sacrifice in practice (Bapat 1950, P. 2). As a matter of fact, breaking coconut or cutting of lemon during religious and marriage ceremonies, the symbolic meaning is attached, that is, satisfying the unknown supernatural power which is rooted in the Vedic notion of ‘sacrificing ceremony’.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar embraced Buddhism. Alongwith him, lakhs of people joined Buddhism. As a matter of fact, the newly converted people of India were one time Buddhists. In modern times Brahminism (the Hinduism) is given up once again. Due to conversion, positive aspects of socio-cultural change among the converts has taken place. To a larger extent, they have freed themselves from the blind practices. They have given up Hindu religious rites which incur both psychological and material loss. The converts have been developing humane, scientific and rational outlook which are in consonance with the demand of Constitution of India as fundamental duty. They are not religiously fanatic citizen like other orthodox Hindus or Muslims. They have developed self-confidence in them. They have gained achievement-oriented abilities. They have given up slave-mentality which is found among those Hindus and some Dalits who do not bother for their “suppressed Identity”. Those who claim that they are Buddhists, have one identity very close to the notion of ‘oneness’ as essence of nationhood envisaged in the Constitution of India. By conversion their psychological inner world has charged. Hence, their traditional way of life is bound by change. All caste Hindus do not accept these changed persons as Buddhists, because, they have gone against Hindu norms and values. The Hindus themselves have changing pre-determined aspects of personality. Their personality character is shaped by Hindu religious factors largely originating from spectrum of caste inequality based on superiority– inferiority complex.

Hinduism tends to make Hindu mind timid/ cowardice. For escaping from the crises it creates conspiracy through evoking god/ goddess by advancing offerings in turn for manipulation, that is converting the bad into good or vice versa. The public spirit is killed by Chaturvarna system (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. I, pp. 54-56, GOM, 1979). Character building of person based on fraternity feeling, that is, Maitree - friendship of sharing reciprocal respect and honour to one another which cut across all types of restrictions and boundaries has begun under the leadership of Babasaheb Ambedkar and it is expanding day by day. Dr. Ambedkar gave greater importance to fraternity value in the life. According to him fraternity refers to the disposition of an individual to treat as object of resources, and love and desire to be in unity with fellow beings (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches, vol. 3, 1987). So, both political liberty and civil liberty (freedom) as tenets operate in the spectrum of fraternity. Buddhism, focuses its prime concern on character building on the spirit of fraternity.

By following the Panchasheela and Astangamarga, the character is shaped in such a way that would lead to yield bliss. Again, here also, Buddha wanted to tell the people to lead a life without harming others without heating, befooling and so on. The Vedic people, especially the priestly group and the warrior group were engaged in immoral practices. Immoral life produced by Brahmins and Kshatriyas who claimed themselves as custodian of Brahma's created social system (Chaturvarna) was under attacks of rational and humanistic criticism launched by Buddhism.

The issue of Buddhist identity as Buddhist identity from Hindu's point of view will remain as long as dialectics in terms of conflict between equality and inequality, or rationality and irrationality or humanism and inhumanism, in this life that continue to persist. In this cultural transformation, the Buddhist norms and values seem strong in sustaining the life because, they are part of democratic and socialist ethos, whereas, the Hindu's norms and values are essentially rooted in irrationality and inequality. Hence, the Hindu identity is bound with identity crisis. The Hindus are found in encountering their own in-built superiority-inferiority complex which make them to remain always in search of their caste identity inherited from socialization which begins from their family institution. Dr. Ambedkar fought against such identity crises found among the members of caste system which has roots in Hinduism. His fight was against the mental slavery reflected in both socio-cultural life and material life through Buddhism which is open to adhere to democratic, socialist and communist-oriented practical norms and values/ principles. He wanted to establish Prabhuddha Bharat, that is, an India with high morality, rationality and science which are part of India's own great incredible heritage. In other words, he struggled to establish link between the past and present modern world. His journals like, 'Prabhuddha Bharat', Mook Nayak, Bahiskrut Bharat, Janata contain his thoughts and the activities initiated to realise the same.

Besides, his classical master work Buddha and His Dhamma which is guide to modern Buddhism and Buddhist people all over the world. To take India on the path he visualised and he labouriously worked to incorporate some basic Buddhist thoughts/ values in the Constitution of India. Being architect of Constitution of India he saw to it that whole people of India accept the universal values of life advanced by Buddha. However, the French people fought for such values which are viewed as if Dr. Ambedkar borrowed from French Revolution which is not so. If some people of the world claim that their values of life are of their own, the historical facts remain as basis of them which cannot be denied. Dr. Ambedkar consciously proposed 22 oaths and administered them among the followers of Buddhism who converted on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1956. About five lakh people who gave up their Hindu occupational way of life and began to lead Buddhist secular occupational way of life. For doing away with confusing ideas or unscientific explanation of events that occurred in the life of Prince Siddharth, Dr. Ambedkar's Buddha and His Dhamma and 22 oaths are there as final indices or measuring tools for rational understanding. The great emphasis on 22 oaths is given by Dr. Ambedkar. These oaths negates the tenets of Hinduism in terms of creation of this world including human beings by God Brahma, his incarnation, (incarnation theory) theory of soul/ rebirth and theory of Moksha, hegemony of priest-Brahmin-cum-trinity-Brahma- Vishnu- Mahesh Gods and make the people rational, scientific, human and secular in their outlook. Such citizens with universalistic values as basis of their perspective of life, Dr. Ambedkar argued would become the pillars of strong nation and social democracy. It is worth to mention those 22 oaths/ vows, as under :

1) Not to recognize Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva) as gods. Not to worship them. 2) Not to recognize Ram and Krishna as gods, not to worship them. 3) Not to recognize and worship other Hindu gods and goddesses. 4) Not to believe in the theory of incarnation of god. 5) Not to believe that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu, and to consider this to be a false propaganda of madness. 6) Not to perform shradha and not to give pindadana. 7) Not to allow any religious rites to be performed by the Brahmin priests. 8) Not to do anything, which is detrimental to Buddhism. 9) To believe in the principle that all human beings are equal. 10) To endeavour to establish equality. 11) To follow the noble eightfold path. 12) To observe the ten paramitas. 13) To be compassionate to all living beings. 14) Not to steal 15) Not to commit adultery. 16) Not to lie. 17) Not to take liquor. 18) To strive to lead one's life according to the three principles of Buddhism, Sila, Karuna and Prajna. 19) To renounce his/her old religion, Hinduism which is detrimental for the prosperity of the humankind, this is based on inequality; and to accept Buddhism. 20) To firmly believe that only Buddhism is Saddhamma. 21) To believe that he/she is reborn. 22) To solemnly declare that he/she will hereafter lead a life according to the teachings of the Buddha.

22 oaths/ vows as eye, head and heart opener operate as mechanism of establishing link between theory and practice. This is the central task for all those who want that the liberty, equality and fraternity become part of breathing process. It is revolutionary, in the sense that the whole conception of life is put for

transparency consciously to be seen by others and as a mechanism of self-introspection. The whole mankind is brought under spectrum of Pradna-Sheela-Karuna by 22 oaths.

For sooner national integration or for any social/ political revolution, the destruction of crisis-ridden consciousness, seems to be pre-requisite or pre-condition to raise Indian nationhood. It is in this context that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's pivotal role in building nation on universalistic values, becomes inevitable to be followed for resolving the contradictions found in India. Otherwise, what Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said about USSR that absence of fraternity among the socialist states as well as among the peoples in Russia States would lead to disintegration, has come true during 1990s! On the basis of objective conditions that are operating in social, economic and political domain of people of India, indicate that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's stern warnings regarding removal of sharp contradictions in social and economic life, occupy great concern. **In this regard, Ambedkarian forces are defeated by hook or crook by upper castes whose loyalty is not India but their inherited vested interests that they want to be ruled by outsiders, not by their own fellow beings who are part of their blood and soil.** So, the nationhood feeling, naturally seems to be strong with those who have imbibed Buddhist universalistic values and they are known by ideological slogan, "Jai Bhim-Jai Bharat." Indeed, the followers of this slogan, identity themselves as 'Bahujan Samaj Bandhav' and associate themselves with power of elephant as to be the 'future custodian of sovereign India.' Here lies the genuine feeling of Indianness free from regional parochialism/ chauvanism casteism and IMF rule etc. This is the strength of India visualized by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. So, his role is always remembered as model and made as part of breath of India.

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