

DYNAMICS OF BUDDHIST IDENTITY IN THE LIGHT OF DR.BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR'S *THE BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA*.

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Even after 75 years of Independence, Dalits in India have to face common discrimination and cruel treatment from upper caste. It is to be noted that the caste system and a social identity based on caste are prevalent only in India and not in any part of the globe. Indian society is full of caste discrimination, a fact which many studies point out. In spite of several anti-caste discrimination laws and provisions, violation of these norms is a regular feature. Violence against Dalits is manifested in all kinds of inhuman atrocities, rapes and murders. Hence, caste discrimination is also considered as the root cause of violence against Dalits and it acts as hidden apartheid in India.

To understand the root cause of the social problem, one has to go into the 3000-year old social institution, that is, the caste system. The priests and law-makers used to be at the highest point of the social pyramid prepared of four classes, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras. The untouchables or *shudra* were those who did not fit into this system of organization, either by birth or by the nature of their work. The caste system was perpetuated by cultural practices and religious belief in the law of *karma*, that the lower castes are there by virtue of them being punished for sins in a previous life. The Brahmins used to have a vested interest in getting the caste system perpetuated and they could influence laws or religion. *Shudras*, on the other hand, gained little support from the other backward classes as they themselves were the victims of discrimination.

Lord Buddha started his social movement on the pillars of love, compassion *maitri*, karuna, character, liberty, equality, fraternity brotherhood and social. Justice. Therefore Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar considered Buddha as the first social reformer. Buddha's teaching and ideas could be reflected in his Writings and Speeches. The facets of Buddhism reveal that it is the composite philosophy governing man's existence and his association with other in the society. It emphasizes individual liberty and preaches equality, non-violence and compassion. Morality is the foundation of Buddhism. It is a staunch supporter of democracy, and and justice. Therefore, Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar embraced Buddhism. According to Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar, Buddhism is the only religious doctrine, which provided the right to social equality in the past and in independent India brings social democracy. In view point of Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar. He comments:

“Positively, my Social Philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Let no one; however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French-Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my Master, the Buddha. In his Philosophy, liberty and equality, and a place: but he added that unlimited liberty destroyed equality, and absolute equality left had a place only as a safeguard against the breaches of liberty or equality; but He did not believe that law can be a guarantee for breaches of liberty or equality. He gave the highest place to fraternity as the only real safeguard against the denial of liberty or equality of fraternity which was another name for brotherhood or humanity, which was again another name for religion”¹

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that Buddhism in India and its manifestation in the form of social justice, women empowerment and eradication of *varnabhed* comes from the great impact of well

perceived philosophy of Buddhism. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who was Buddhist himself but because he understood the Buddhism in its true sense as envisioned by Buddha. Therefore for Ambedkar, rebuilding of the identity of the broken people and through that restructuring Indian society on a moral basis becomes a life mission. Ambedkar's criticism of the caste social order is inseparable from his criticism of Hindu religion.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's approach to Buddhism is social, philosophical and moral rather than and spiritual, as even a short account from ' *The Buddha and His Dhamma* ' will be enough to reveal. Dr. Ambedkar desired to explain the teachings of Buddha by making the categorization made by Buddha himself, namely the categorization of Dhamma into the three categories Dhamma, Not-Dhamma (Adhamma), and Saddhamma. According to Ambedkarian perspective the concept of Dhamma in Buddhism refers: To maintain purity of life is Dhamma; to-up craving is Dhamma; to believe the all compounded-things are impermanent is Dhamma; to believe the all compounded-things are impermanent is Dhamma, and to believe that Karma is to be an instrument of morality, it is Dhamma." The morality discovers truth, peaceful and harmonious society through human values. Dr. Ambedkar writes with reference to Buddha's Dhamma and his significant role in human life. After attaining enlightenment Buddha, He observes:

"realized that what is necessary is not to escape from the world. What is necessary is to change the world and to make it better".²

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar highlighted the essence of Dhamma in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* '. The true Dhamma consists in spreading education, Pradnya to all people without discrimination. True Dhamma teaches Maitri supported by Shila, right conduct. Character is the only potent nobility. The objective of Dhamma is to remove all social evils, caste and gradations. The aim of Dhamma is to establish caste less and democratic Society. Karma means Action. This word Kamma or Karma appears same in content. But the word Kamma connotes different theories in the Philosophy of Buddha and in the Brahminical Philosophy and they are not one and the same but different. In the Karma Theory in Brahminic philosophy there is soul. In Buddhist philosophy, Karma theory there is no soul. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar illustrates:

He (Buddha) began by saying that his path had nothing to do with God and Soul. His Dhamma had nothing to do with life after death. Nor has his Dhamma any concern with rituals and ceremonies. That is the centre of his Dhamma is man and the relationship of man to man in his life on earth"³

The concept of Hindu Karma indicates traditional also. Karma is born of passions. It will act through body, speech and mind. One should act according to conscious mind or understanding. All work is to be done with a spirit of sacrifices and non attachment for the sake of attaining *Nirvana*. "Happy in this world is Non-attachment". The work done in a spirit of sacrifice is higher than the work done with selfish aims. While life remains, action is inevitable. Dr. Ambedkar argues that The Buddha believed in the Nibbana. But he did not promise to give salvation. He was *Marga Datta* and not *Moksha-Datta* (the giver of salvation). He advised '*Atta Deepa Bhava* '. The Buddha did not claim any Divinity for Himself or for His Dhamma. It was discovered by man for man.

In Buddhism, Karma is considered not as a matter of seeking revenge but of practicing metta or loving kindness. The fruit of action may be good or bad. Good begets good. Evil begets evil. This is the law of kamma. Kamma is neither fate nor destiny imposed. Inheritance and circumstances determines our life. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar says that the Hinduism is a religion, which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has it is not an integral part of it. He argues that the morality is not embedded in Hindu religion; it is a separate force which is sustained by social necessities and not by the Injection of Hindu religion. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar argued that Brahminical social order is based on immorality. It is against justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. It is a collection of closed units that enclose themselves

leaving no room for relationship and social interaction. The Indian society is a system that degrades and alienates human labour and labourers. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar observes:

The theory of Chaturvarna was repugnant to Buddha... for the organization of society set up by Brahminism in the name of Chaturvarna did not appear natural to him (Buddha). Its class composition appears compulsory and arbitrary to Buddha... he (Buddha) preferred an open and free society.⁴

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar puts forward the argument that the hegemony of Hinduism can be challenged only by another religion that ideologically opposes Hinduism. Untouchables can enjoy better economical and visibility only by embracing another religion. Therefore he spent 21 years for studying the comparative philosophical doctrines of different religions and gave deep thought to interpret Buddhism in his own genius way. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar argues that religion in India are hierarchal placed with Hinduism on top. This hierarchies, he explains, is the reason why religious conversion is resisted in India. He also indicates that caste system is preserved based in Hinduism and hence Hinduism opposes conversion. While assessing the religious view of Ambedkar Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar talks about the very hierarchial structure of Hinduism that legitimizes caste hegemony and untouchability. He argues:

Infallibility of the Vedas; Moksha or Salvation of the Soul; Efficacy of rights, ceremonies and sacrifices as means of obtaining Moksha; Chaturvarna as the ideal for social organization; Ishwara as the creator of the universe; Atmana or the soul; Samsara i.e. transmigration of the soul; and Karma i.e. the determination of man's position in present day life by deeds done by him in his past life.⁵

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar considers the pyramid of Hinduism as something built upon Dalits. He also considered this pyramid as oppressive structure that will collapse only if the untouchable move away from its foundation. We might argue that the most important accomplishment of Dr. Ambedkar had been to produce *The Buddha and His Dhamma* as a guide to his followers and all people of the world on the path of practicing Buddha Dhamma as a way of happy life. The Dhamma Chakra was set revolution by Dr. Ambedkar and it was the greatest religious revolution which India had witnessed in modern times. If one critically analyses *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, One can say that Dr. Ambedkar has thought through, analyzed and adapted for use the basic Buddhist doctrines : *The Four Noble Truths* (the four Aryan truths) and the *Paticca Samuppada* and *Noble Eightfold Path*. The analysis and propagation of these essences of Buddhism are from the foundation for a Buddhist cultural identity in this India. It covers the entire vision and mission of Buddha .Hence making efforts to strengthen Buddhist culture and Buddhist identity in India

In the age of Globalization today the demand is in great need of Buddhist way of life for universal peace and prosperity .There is a great chaos and crisis within the nations, between nations and nations. At any moment of time it will blast to the extent of large-scale devastation and enmity that can never be wiped out and reconstructed for unity. Lord Buddha was the greatest teacher ever born in this world solving all doubts, capable of solving conflicts of the humanity to establish universal peace and harmony. Better late than never be to adopt this universal Brotherhood and put it into practice all his teachings that connect humanity together.

END NOTES:

1. Dr. Ambedkar's speech, broadcast by All India Radio on October 3, 1954.
2. B.R. Ambedkar, Prologue in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Vol.11 (*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1992.)P-112.

3. B.R.Ambedkar, Prologue in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Vol.11 (Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1992.)P-121.
4. B.R.Ambedkar, Prologue in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Vol.11 (Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1992.)P-90.
5. B.R.Ambedkar, Prologue in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Vol.11 (Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1992.)P-90-91.