



Religious Thought Of Dr. B.R Ambedkar

Sima Roy Department of Philosophy Acharya prafulla chandra college.

Abstract :

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a well known social reformer and a wise politician. He was born in a lower caste Hindu family, only because of this identity he endured unlimited humiliation throughout his life. Later in his life he worked against all odds or inequality which was prevailing in Hinduism. He found that the base of every kind of inequality in Hinduism was only the illusive understanding of the notion of Religion. He tried to establish morality is the only God nothing else. On this basis he constructed his own thought of Religion, where every human being is equal. Morality and equality are the strong pillars of his thought. In this paper I highlighted Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thoughts on Religion, which was a very unique way to save mankind. He was not only a religious person but a true follower of humanism.

Keywords : Religion, Hinduism, Caste, God, Morality, Buddhism, Humanism.

Introduction

Discussion :

Ambedkar was born in Maharashtra in a Hindu Mahar community. Mahar was an untouchable community in Hindu society. We all know that Hindu society has a caste system. In this system upper and lower caste there are also untouchable caste exist who are even untouchable by the lower caste but they are not excluded from the Hindu society. The people who belong in this section of Hindu society are obviously poor, illiterate, untouchable and also humiliated because of their birth identity. They are the oppressed and least facilitated part of the society. Ambedkar came from this poor untouchable community of Hindu society. So his experience as a member of the Mahar community in Hindu society and his expectation from his own Hindu religion was totally different. Luckily he got a chance for education but he was heartbroken when he saw nothing had changed even when he came back from overseas and had a degree from a reputed university. He realized that anyone can transform themselves from poor to rich or from illiterate to educated but neither their wealth nor their education can change their class identity in Hindu society. You may be wealthy and rich but if you belong to an untouchable community then anybody who belongs to the upper class in the Hindu society may humiliate you without any reason. Ambedkar returned to Baroda in 1920, as he promised to the king of Baroda that after returning India he would work for him. So he started working in an office in Baroda. Only because he was a person of untouchable community, everybody in his office used to misbehave with him. His drinking water was separated from others. Clerks used to throw important documents towards him because even the clerks of his office did not want to touch him. Those incidents severely insulted him and he resigned from his work and went back to London to resume his study. He observed that in Hindu society upper class people had a mindset that they are superior,

else are inferior, on the other hand lower class people, especially untouchable class, had also a mindset that they are inferior and else are superior. So neither upper class nor lower class believe that all human beings are equal . In this social context he began finding the true nature of a religion. He also tried to search for the core characteristics of a true religion. He started his journey from his own Hindu religion. At first he considered his own doubts about Hinduism and tried to reconstruct Hinduism . So anybody, especially the oppressed section of the society, could find a room for them . His main concern was religion must be for everyone or everyone must be equal in any religion. So for him equality, fraternity must be the base of any religion. He first tried to search whether Hinduism possesses all these above said qualities in it ? In his life he felt humiliated several times because of his birth identity which was dalit . He felt that Hindu Chaturvarna system was the main reason behind all the humiliation he got throughout his life as a representative of oppressed people in the society . The Chaturvarna system came from Bhagavad Gita. That's why nobody asked any question or objection regarding this, but Ambedkar tried to explain it in the proper and original way. In Bhagavad Gita 4th chapter and verse number 13 enlightened us about The Chaturvarna system .

Chatur- varnyam maya srishtam guna- karma - vibhagashah
Tasya kartaram api mam viddhyakartaram avyayam

If we translate this verse then it will be, Sreekrishna says , “The four categories of occupations were created by Me according to people's qualities and activities. Although I am the creator of this system , know Me to be the non-doer and eternal “.

We all know that humans are made by three gunas. They are Sattva , Rajas and Tamo. People who have the preponderance of sattva gunas are intelligent and predisposed towards teaching and worship. They are the Brahmin. Those are kshatriyas who have preponderance of rajo guna. They are inclined towards administration. The Vaishyas are those who process Rajo and tamas guna. They made business class. The last one is Shudra who possesses only tamas guna, they serve the other three classes. They are working class. One thing about this classification is that we should remember that this classification is only according to people's inner qualities. People can change their qualities, so this classification is also changeable. It is not according to their birth identity. If someone who was born in the working class but possesses rajas guna then he or she will be considered as kshatriya. Every person is unique because of their inner qualities. So if the inner qualities are changeable then the classification which is based on it is also changeable . Lord Shree krishna also says he is the creator of this classification ,all though he is not under this classification ,even someone who has true bhakti in his mind for Shree Krishna also not under this classification . He made this classification , so people can improve their inner self from animality to humanity or from raju guna to tamas guna , and at last they became as vaishnab or Krishna Bhakta who are not under this classification.

But it's very unfortunate that this changeable classification became unchangeable and the base of classification became peoples birth identity instead of humans' inner quality . The biggest problem of Hindu social system arises from there. The

inner qualities of anyone can be changed but how can they change their birth identity which is not even their hand. Largest inequality was born from there also. People from the upper class started enjoying facilities which sometimes they truly do not deserve. On the other hand some people who came from the lower class deserve all the facilities but society deprived them with cruelty, which made them severely depressed. In one sentence humanity was being annihilated from all spheres of Hindu social system. Ambedkar criticized this chaturvarna system. He argued that our inner qualities are always changeable that's why in the history of human civilization there are so many instances where people came from working class became leader of the nation. If the base of chaturvarna is only birth identity then we are unable to explain such incidents, because birth identity claims fixed guna in us. Chaturvarna came from samkhya philosophy. This philosophy explains three gunas and the formation of the world. Samkhya philosophy clearly says that all three gunas are changeable. "Rajas, naturally active, which is disturbed first, excite the other two and each one of the gunas tries to dominate the other two" p. Then how is it possible that the birth identity is the base of chaturvarna? Is it not illogical? Ambedkar raised his voice. Ambedkar also added there are some practical problems to carry on this varna system from generation to generation. To carry on this varna system any class needs to maintain strictly its men and women ratio, otherwise marriages will happen outside of a particular class. To solve all these problems some brutal customs were also added to the Hindu caste system. One of them was Sati Pratha others were child marriage and polygamy among Hindu men. To maintain the ratio of men and women in a particular class in Hindu society, Sati Pratha and sometimes polygamy among men became popular and from then on objectifying women also started. Marriages to any other classes are strictly prohibited and women had to follow more strict rules to maintain the purity of the class. So from chaturvarna one more inequality arose.

In Bhagavad Gita from verse no 13 we also get to know that Shree Krishna is the God who holds Supreme Power. He creates everything. He is the Supreme cause and else is the effect. Cause and effect are not similar. Cause is larger than the effect. There is a difference between God and his disciples, they are not equal. Shree Krishna is neither a common man nor a representative of the common man. He has supreme power, from the day of his emergence in Mathura to throughout his presence in every place. Through his different kinds of activity He proved that He was not a common person. Everybody shows respect towards him and accepts that He is different from them, they are not equal. What he utters are all true, we do not ask any questions against his speeches or teachings. So in Hinduism inequality is natural. God is not equal with his disciples, upper class peoples are not equal with the lower class, and even women are not equal with men. Shree Krishna says he created everything but he is non-doer and eternal. So in Hinduism God is eternal but man or his disciples is mortal. God loves those who are able to know that reality of God, and with the power of bhakti and unconditional love towards God who cross all his limitations and achieve the true knowledge of God. God loves his disciples as father loves his children but neither God and his disciples nor father and his children are equal. But according to Ambedkar where there is inequality there is only injustice. If any religion does not cultivate equality then we do not call it as a religion, because religion does not possess inequality. On the other hand in this regard if we consider Advaita vedanta, then we will see almost similar thoughts. From Bhagavad Gita we understand that Shree Krishna is the creator and has supreme power but in Advaita vedanta Brahma is not cause of anything in the same way Shree Krishna in Bhagavad Gita, because if

we say so Brahman will be limited by its created world. So in Advaita vedanta nothing came from Brahman but everything is Brahman. Samkara declares that “ Brahman alone is real, the world is false, the individual is Brahman nothing else” .Atma is one and without a second, but it appears to be many to individual selves due to the limiting adjuncts. Brahman is the substratum of the individual selves. To support this view swami Saradananda says, “ why should I look upon my brother as myself and not try to secure the greatest amount of good for myself alone, even at the sacrifice of life, no plausible answer is given. The answer which the Vedant gives to this question is that you and I are not separate from the universe . It is by mistake we think ourselves to be distinct and unconnect entities, independent of one another.” Our love , sympathy, kindness, and doing good to others all indicate that we are one.

Although in reality whatever we observe in Hindu social system is totally reversed from the above said concept . There is no oneness between the upper caste and the lower caste people but a merciless illogical caste system prevailed in every layer of the society . Upper caste people do not show any shade of kindness towards lower castes . Swami Saradananda says “ consciously or unconsciously people try to express that they are one with everyone”, but in Hindu society upper caste people only show their superiority through their action ,speech . Although Hinduism inspires people to work according to their inner qualities, Hindu social systems almost deny it. Thus in Hinduism we have a social system which is not conscious about the basic needs of the suppressed class of the society and this social system shows its interest only to protect its varna system. Ambedkar realizes In Hindu religion God is worshiped but human beings are neglected .So this is not a true religion and it is totally a failure to protect humanity, which is the original characteristic of any religion. According to Ambedkar true religion must be free to all and of course everybody must be equal in it . The main purpose of religion is only to make better, prosper, peaceful human civilization . Equality , fraternity should be the pillars of any religion. In Hinduism God is very distinct from the common man or his disciples. Disciples may be loved by the God but they never ever ask any questions or discuss any confusion regarding the knowledge which they received from the God. God is Almighty, he has supreme power, showing non belief towards this supreme power is sin. If someone does this then he will be punished in this very life or after this life. Hinduism stresses on only rituals and customs. They thought religion means to follow certain rules to perform puja. If they worshiped God through following certain rules then will secure happiness , peace for not only this very life but beyond this life too. Hinduism believes in rebirth, so they think their good karma (following some rituals) will be the reason for their next good life. Hinduism also stresses on our next life rather than this present life and its problems.

On the other hand in Ambedkar's thought religion emerged in a very distinct way. He raised his voice against all superstitions in Hindu religion and asked very simple, humble , logical questions. He showed a new path to discover ourselves, a new version of religion. Where people can live not only happily but respectfully. He said God must be someone with whom we can express all our confusion which is in my mind even if they are regarding His teaching too. We do not worship Him because we may get punished, we should worship Him because we accept all his logical teachings without any fear. Religion should be more attentive towards our day-to-day life and our basic problems of livelihood. We don't know anything

about our next life, what we know about our present life and its problems. The main aim of religion is to focus on our present life, and try to make it better than anything. Religion must be a good instance of humanity. In a religious society everyone should be respected equally. People should show kindness to each other. They should know how to behave. They should not hurt anyone by their actions and even their speeches. So non-violence is one of the important characteristics of true religion. So, religion is not distinct from us, it is not all about some rituals which we perform and forget but religion is all about our behavior, our conduct and our outlook towards our fellow beings. That's why according to Ambedkar religion is all about morality or in other words morality is religion. Morality means our voluntary action. We should be responsible for our voluntary actions. In Hindu social system upper caste people used to humiliate lower caste people without any reason and they were not even ashamed because of this kind of voluntary actions which were immoral in nature. Ambedkar criticized this, according to him immorality and religious practice do not exist together. If you are a religious person then you should be kind and if your voluntary actions hurt others then you may be rich or famous but immoral, so you are not a religious person. Hinduism was never encouraged to be immoral but people translate chaturvarna in a different way, which allows people to be immoral. Ambedkar observed where there was immorality there was also injustice. Throughout his life he only fought for suppressed class and demanded equal opportunity for them. He felt that the way people practice Hinduism it is not possible to create equal room for everyone, because the caste system is the strongest pillar of Hinduism and this caste system and equality for everyone did not exist side by side. So he tried to search for a new religion where every person will be equal with each other. They can live without any inferior feelings, where morality is only religion and morality is only God. Later he found Buddhism is the only religion where he will get what he wants. So without any confusion he and his almost 400 followers in Nagpur converted themselves to Buddhism. It is very relevant to ask why Buddhism? What are those unique characteristics which he found in Buddhism but could not find in Hinduism? Now I am going to search the answers of these questions through which we will get to a new meaning of religion. Gautama Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. His previous name was Siddhartha, who was born in a noble royal family in Nepal. He had everything in his life although he was deeply sad to see the numerous sufferings of human beings in their very life. So he made the goal of his life to discover a new way through which human beings can live a life without suffering. According to Gautama people can achieve moksha in our present life, which makes him distinct from other branches of Indian philosophy, because they all believe that we can achieve moksha after this life as a result of our good deeds, which we did throughout our life. On the other hand Gautama holds a completely distinct view in this regard. He only stressed on the countless misery of human beings and tried to diminish those sufferings. At last he discovered the Astangik marg or eight fold path as a solution. He never claimed himself as God with super power, He only described how Astangik marg or eightfold path can reduce suffering of a common man in this very life. So his dhamma is different from the conventional concept of religion. Ambedkar also tried to build a new society to reduce the misery of the lower class. According to him religion should be the reason for happiness and prosperity for every one instead of the reason for numerous humiliation and depression for the lower class of the society. God should not be someone with some magical super power but our protector should be someone who is very down to earth and sensitive regarding our sorrows, who is a common man with uncommon perception regarding to reduce our sufferings only, who

never consider himself infallible but always make a room for further arguments, research and rethink about his teachings. In Buddhism there is no space for conventional God but there is of course a true leader, a guide ,a philosopher whose only endeavor is to reduce human beings misery,and to build a moral relation between man and man instead of God and man. So we can say Gautama's Buddhism dhamma is human being centric instead of God centric. If we closely observe, we will see Gautama's dhamma is quite similar to Ambedkar's concept of religion. That's why Ambedkar had chosen Buddhism. Now we should focus on the difference between dhamma and religion , because we can see in Hinduism we have the concept of religion and in Buddhism we have the concept of dhamma. To develop a clear and vivid concept of the religious thought of Ambedkar we should know why he rejects religion and accepts dhamma. Ambedkar discussed the basic difference between religion and dhamma in his book "The Buddha and his Dhamma ". According to him there is a huge difference between Religion and Dhamma , both notions are different from each other. So their domains of concern are also different. The notion of Religion is very undefined , people exactly do not know what religion really is. No doubt the term "religion" is ambiguous. Ambedkar says religion is personal. So everyone performs religious rituals according to their faith and concept of God. That's why there is no uniformity in Religion. Religion is not mandatory, people perform it because of their passion and love towards the almighty. Belief, love, passion all are very important in any Religion and all those things are subjective not objective. In any religion human beings want to connect with God through their prayer, love and worship. They thought this heavenly connection will erase all sufferings from their life. They are not worried or bothered about the connection between man and man. On the other hand, the notion of Dhamma is totally different from this. The term Dhamma was coined by Buddha. Ambedkar explained Dhamma according to Buddha. Buddha explained Dhamma as social rather than personal. For him Dhamma is not worshiping God, even in buddhism there is no established powerful God . In Buddhism morality is God and rules of conduct are Dhamma. The main characteristic of Buddhism is humanism. Buddha was concerned about human suffering , so throughout his life he tried to diminish this suffering , and this was the only goal of his life. Buddha says you can come out from the sufferings of your life because of your own good deeds through following Astangik marg . This Astangik marg is nothing but some moral actions. So in Buddhism if you follow the path of morality then you will be free from all miseries . Everyone is equal here , Astangik marg is for everyone and with this sense of equality you also be able to make the society better for everyone. Like Buddha , Ambedkar was also concerned about human beings' suffering, so he tried to find a religion where the definition of God was only morality and rules of conduct, nothing else . Then he found Buddhism .There is a clear difference between the concept of Religion and the concept of Dhamma . Ambedkar wanted to replace the concept of Religion with the concept of Dhamma. Ambedkar was not a critic of Hinduism but he only wanted some logical and natural revolution in Hinduism. He tried to reconstruct Hinduism in a very different way, so anyone who belongs to this particular religion can lead a respectful life but he was being misunderstood badly. He tried to find an answer to this very simple question that if human beings are neglected then how could it be possible that God is worshiped ? No one gave him satisfactory answers, no one showed him the way of freedom from the humiliation , neither system nor Religion. So naturally he was very disappointed with the immutable nature of Hinduism; on the other hand in Buddhism he found a room for him and all the disappointed people of Hindu society . Later he and thousands of his disciples converted themselves to

Buddhism. Now we have a clear idea of Ambedkar's thoughts on Religion. His thoughts on Religion are still relevant and it will be in future. He only wanted a Religion or a society under which everybody will live without the threat of disrespect, that's why he also wanted to replace the concept of God with the concept of morality. Only if we have the true sense of morality, we will treat others in the same way we used to treat ourselves. Nowadays we see world peace is blown by the threat of war. Small and weak countries exist with the fear of war and on the other hand powerful countries are busy displaying their power unnecessarily. So in this scenario to protect world peace the sense of morality is needed throughout the world. People from powerful countries should treat others in the same way they used to treat themselves. Only then wars will end.

Conclusion

According to Ambedkar religion means humanism. He always gave importance to humanism over traditional concept of religion. At first he tried to reconstruct Hinduism and established his version of religion in the traditional structure of Hinduism, which obviously did not happen in his life time. His logic was being opposed from several corner of the society with illogic. He was depressed but strongly refused to accept the traditional non-ethical concept of Hinduism. He bravely announced "I was born as a Hindu but won't die as a Hindu." So with this thought he left Hinduism and embraced Buddhism whole heartedly. Thousands of his disciples also followed the same path. He expected that in near future millions of lower caste Hindu would convert themselves to Buddhism, but after his death we saw all his expectations go in vain. So some valid questions arise in this regard like why his assumption went wrong? Is his concept of Religion not logical at all? Why are millions of people still stuck in Hinduism when it has a caste system? The possible answer of the last question is maybe Hinduism was being reformed and rebuilt by some noble persons. Although Hinduism still has a caste system but we do not see its cruel face against which Ambedkar rebelled, what we see today is a comparatively mild version of caste system in Hinduism. People still prefer Hinduism because it is quite easy to pray to God or to confess in front of Him but it is quite difficult to accept morality is only God or God is within us not in somewhere else, God is reflected throughout our behaviour. So it is quite hard to criticize our own behaviour or our own activity. It is easy to follow someone blindly but it is hard to stand as a leader. Ambedkar's concept of religion is not illogical, but logical. It gave someone's destiny in his own hand, it encouraged people to act as a leader not a follower. It demands intelligence, not a blind obedience. So at last I can say Ambedkar's concept of religion is ahead of time. Unfortunately he was not accepted properly in the past, but we should try to realize his concept of religion with a neutral mind otherwise we are not able to save mankind. Ambedkar began his journey to save the lower class people of Hinduism, but he ended up saving all mankind. He was the representative of the entire human race. We should understand this more than anything.

Reference:

1. Ambedkar B.R., The Buddha and his Dhamma, MAVEN BOOKS.
2. Telumbde Anand, B.R. Ambedkar INDIA AND COMMUNISM, Leftword.

3. Sarkar Badal , AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF "JUST SOCIETY" ,Readers Service.
4. Sanyal Jagadiswar , Guide to Indian Philosophy , Sribhumi .
5. Ganguly Ramanuj Ambedkar ekti samajtatwik paryalochona ,Pearson .
6. Editor Chakraborty Nirmalya Narayan , Binsha Satabdite Bharatiya Darshan Charcha,
Poschimbanga Rajya Pustak Parsad
7. Compiled by Moon Vasant , DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES,
Volume No.: 1, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation , Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment,
Govt. of

India.
8. Ambedkar B.R., The Annihilation of Caste ,Sudhir prakashan.
9. Ambedkar B.R., Who were the sudra ,MJP Publisher.
- 10.Editor Ghosh Debabrata , Samaj Biplabi Ambedkar Jiban O Sadhana , Parul
11. Saradananda Swami , THE VEDANTA ,Its Theory and Practice,Udbodhan office .
12. Nikhilananda Swami ,THE BHAGAVAD GITA , Finger Print .