

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar And Mass Conversion To Buddhism

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Abstract

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a renowned national leader who made an extraordinary contribution to the creation of India's constitution. Dr. Ambedkar was religious, but he despised hypocrisy in the name of religion. When we read about his beliefs regarding caste and religion, we discovered that he believes that the major goal of religion is to uplift individuals and maintain equality and fellowship among people. Religion, to him, was morality, and it should influence each individual's characters, behaviors, reactions, loves and dislikes. He witnessed the bitterness of the Hindu caste system and denounced it. Ambedkar has consistently held the opinion that Hindus observe Caste not because they are inhuman or foolish. Hindus are quite religious, thus they follow caste. People's observations on caste are valid. His opinion is that their religion, which has fostered this Caste-based mindset, is to blame. If this is true, then it is clear that the adversary you must battle is not those who practice caste but rather the Shastras that instruct them in doing so. He rejected Hinduism in favor of Buddhism as a religious answer to the untouchables' issues. Dr. Ambedkar opposed Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity in favor of Buddhism for two reasons. For starters, Buddhism has Indian roots, and it is a religion of ethics, morals, and study, with no place for the caste system. Dr. Ambedkar established 22 vows for anyone seeking to convert to Buddhism. Dr. Ambedkar accepted Buddhism with his supporters numbering more than five lakhs on October 14, 1956. He brought about a significant revolution in the lives of India's oppressed, suppressed, and depressed classes.

Key words: Untouchable, Caste system, Religion, Buddhism, Hinduism.

Introduction

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was a great national leader who made an outstanding contribution towards the making of Indian constitution. He was an educationist, a philosopher, an author and a great social reformer as well. In this paper I have focused into his ideas about religion and his religious conversion to Buddhism. He preferred Buddhism instead of any other religion. There are many reasons behind his preference.

Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 in Mhow, a town close to Indore (Madhya Pradesh). His native village was Konkan (Maharashtra). Ambedkar's real name was Ambavadekar. He changed it to Ambedkar

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in 1900, when his Brahmin school teacher impressed by his intellectual and personal qualities, decided to give him his own name that is Ambedkar. He belongs to an untouchable family. For this reason he had been faced so many difficulties. He was exposed to the vagaries of life as an Untouchable. He suffered a life defining humiliation that he was never to forget. He was a religious person. He had accepted the spirituality and the cultural values of India. He once said "What good things I have in me or whatever have been the benefits of my education to society, I owe them to the religious feelings in me. I want religion but I don't want hypocrisy in the name of religion."

When we read about his beliefs regarding caste and religion, we discovered that he believes that the major goal of religion is to uplift individuals and maintain equality and fellowship among people. His ideas about religion can be described by the following point.

1. Religion must be some matter of principles; it cannot be a matter of rules. Whenever it becomes rule it kills the subjectivity of individuals and it destroys the essence of religious act.
2. The function of true religion is to uplift the individual. The main purpose of religion is to grow fellow-feeling, equality and liberty among the people.
3. Religion is the sense of morality must remain the governing principle in every society.
4. Man cannot live by bread alone. He has mind which needs food for thought. Religion cultivates hope in man and drives him to activity.
5. Religion should be like science so that it works according to reason.
6. Moral code of religion must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity.
7. Religion is for man not man for religion.
8. Religion must be judged by social standards based on social ethics. No other standard would have any meaning if religion is held to be a necessary good for the well being of the people.

Ambedkar was the most controversial person in the public life of India. Ambedkar criticized Hinduism, its injustice, autocracy and hypocrisy. For this reason Ambedkar renounced Hinduism and adopt Buddhism. He said that population of India is an admixture of Aryans, Dravidians, Mongolians and sythians and ethnically all people are heterogeneous. The supreme position of endogamy over exogamy is the main cause of formation of caste groups. Ambedkar goes in to the root of caste system in his paper 'Castes in India: Mechanism, Genesis and Development' presented to the Anthropological seminar of Golden Weizer in 1916 at the Columbia University, New York. He himself said in the 'Annihilation of Castes' They (Hindus) hate me. To them I am a snake in their garden. According to Ambedkar Manu is the lawgiver of

the Hindu social organization and he introduced the class system or Varna system based on division of labor. Ambedkar calls Manu dictator and cruel because he upheld and philosophized caste system.

Ambedkar choose religious solution for demolish caste system.

From the childhood Ambedkar suffer Humiliation, harassment, and inhuman treatment from the upper caste Hindus. Even after his return from USA and England with many degrees and even after having being appointed a high ranking officer in Baroda Durbar he was insulted by upper caste peon and draftaries in his office who rolled up the carpets before him because they had fear to be polluted by an untouchable and threw the files at his table from a distance.

Ambedkar's journey was started from satyagraha of Mahad, held on December 1927. In this conference he said to his followers that there demand is equal rights in society. On 1935, a conference of untouchables was held at Yeolo in Maharastra where he declared his decision to convert. Ten months later on May 31, 1936 Ambedkar organize a conference of Mahar community in Bombay Presidency. In this conference two major decisions were taken first to renounce Hinduism and second not to follow Hindu customs and observe Hindu festivals. Gandhiji address Ambedkar as a high spirited leader but he didn't agreed with the way Ambedkar had adopted. According to Gandhiji Caste Problem is a social issue and it should be treated through social changes like the changes of mind set of the people. But Ambedkar take this issue as political point of view.

Ambedkar has consistently held the opinion that Hindus observe Caste not because they are inhuman or foolish. Hindus are quite religious, thus they follow caste. People's observations on caste are valid. His opinion is that their religion, which has fostered this Caste-based mindset, is to blame. If this is true, then it is clear that the adversary you must battle is not those who practice caste but rather the Shastras that instruct them in doing so.

Ambedkar select Buddhism for conversion.

Ambedkar had choice between Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism. Initially he favored Sikhism, but later decided against it. Ultimately Ambedkar declared his decision to convert Buddhism on May 2, 1950 at New Delhi. He said to his followers to embrace Buddhism on the sacred day of the triple anniversary of the Buddha. On 14th November 1956, the day of Vijaya Dasami, Ambedkar renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism and the next day 15th October 1956 his followers more than five lakhs in number embraced Buddhism. It was a great historic day in the history of mankind that more than five lakhs people embraced a religion at a time.

Ambedkar decided to embrace Buddhism for two reasons that is Buddhism has its roots in India and Buddhism is the religion of Ethics and Morality. In Buddhism there is no place for caste system, rituals, superstitions and belief in super naturalism. Buddhism is compatible with science so modern world of science may accept Buddhism as the only faith to answer various problems of the day. It was based on ethics and Buddha acted as a guide and not as God whereas Krishna said that he was the God of Gods, Christ said he was God's Son and Mohammad Pagamber said he was the last messenger of God. Except the Buddha all founders of religions claimed for themselves the role of Mokshadata (savior) and claimed infallibility for themselves, while Buddha was satisfied with the role of Margadata (Guide). Buddha propounds a most revolutionary meaning of the word 'Dharma'. Dharma to Brahmins was Yagnas and sacrifices to God in place of karma; the Buddha substituted morality as the essence of Dharma. The social gospel the Hinduism was inequality where as Buddhism was for equality.

In keeping with the atheist tradition Dr. Ambedkar laid down the famous 22 vows as a part of conversion of a lay aspirant to Buddhism.

1. I shall not recognize Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as gods, nor shall I worship them.
2. I shall not recognize Rama and Krishna as gods, nor shall I worship them.
3. I shall not recognize Gouri and Ganapati as gods, nor shall I worship them.
4. I do not believe in the theory of incarnation of god.
5. I do not consider Buddha as the incarnation of Vishnu.
6. I shall not perform Shraddha or pindadana.
7. I shall not do anything which is detrimental to Buddhism.
8. I shall not perform any religious rites through the agency of Brahmin.
9. I believe that all human beings are Equal.
10. I shall endeavor to establish equality
11. I shall follow the eight fold path of Buddha.
12. I shall observe the ten paramitas (observances) of the Buddha.
13. I shall be compassionate to all living beings and I shall nurture them with care.
14. I shall not steal.
15. I shall not lie.
16. I shall not commit adultery.
17. I shall not drink liquor.

18. I shall lead my life striving to cultivate a harmonious blend of the three basic principles of Buddha (Enlightenment, Precepts and Compassion)
19. I thereby reject my old religion, Hinduism, which is detrimental to the prosperity of the human kind and which discriminates between man and man and which treats me as inferior.
20. I fully believe that Buddhism is Saddhamma.
21. By my embracing Buddhism I am being reborn.
22. I hereby pledge to conduct myself hereafter in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha.

On the 14th October 1956, twenty on years after the declaration made at Yeola, on the memorable day of the 14th October 1935, Ambedkar formally embraced Buddhism renouncing the religion to which his forefathers nominally belonged. Just after embracing Buddhism Baba sahib said 'I feel as if I have come out of hell'. The conversion in his eyes was a new birth for him. 'The untouchables are no longer to feel ashamed of their past. They have become inheritors of a rich tradition, glorious culture and a noble past.'

The government recognized the potential for a revolt right away, and in an effort to dissuade the enthusiastic untouchables, it issued orders stating that, should they choose a religion other than Sikhism, the concessions and privileges granted to them under the constitutions would be revoked. The government's actions and the resistance of the high caste landowners in the villages delayed but did not stop the conversion process. Following the Buddha's own enlightenment, Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was the major assault on Hinduism. Ambedkar's conversion campaign sparked a wave of awakening among the untouchables, which Hindus combated by establishing a reign of terror everywhere they could. One unique aspect of the conversion's effects is that immediately following the conversion, Buddha statues came to represent the untouchables.

At the time of conversion more than 5,99,000 men, women and children belonging to different castes, speaking different languages, hailing from different regions of India, clad in white shirts, pajamas, dhotis and sarees declared their religious independence and embraced Buddhism in response to the call given by their leader and savior, Baba sahib Ambedkar.

This was followed by mass conversion in different parts of India. Thousands of families of untouchables who had been waiting for a call since the declaration made at Yeola in 1935 also took the final decision and become Buddhists. On the 14th and 15th of October 1956,

Babasaheb Ambedkar was converting people to Buddhism when he threw idols, images, stones, and portraits of Hindi deities into the rivers and decorated cornices with images of the Buddha and the framed "Twenty-two oaths."

Ambedkar's death was discovered on the morning of December 6th, two months after the significant conversion ceremony. Following his passing, there was an outpouring of sorrow comparable in size to the mobilization of hope that had emerged with the Dhammadiksha. People from all over the world conveyed their condolences, and Dalits mourned as if their own father had passed away in Maharashtra and throughout India.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is the great name of modern history of India. He exercised his mind and intellect to establish an Indian society on the foundation of liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar who suffered bitter humiliation became the first Minister of Law in free India and shaped the constitution of India.

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