



# SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ETHICS OF B R AMBEDKAR IN MODERN INDIA: NEO BUDHISM

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## Abstract

All religions are based on ethics and morality. Some follows it properly some do not. Ambedkar's religious philosophy is based on ethical values of the individual and society. Ambedkar's religion is essential for the human social life. He thought to have a religion which could be applicable to all the countries and to all the races. Ambedkar stands by morality and ethics in the context of religion. The religion of Buddha is based on morality. The word *Dhamma*, as used by the Buddha, had nothing to do with ritual or observances. His view of religion was social and secular and morality was the base of it. Ambedkar regarded Budha's Dhamma as true religion.

Key Words: Ethics, Morality, Religion, Budhism, Dhamma

## Introduction

Ethics are the norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Ethics is not limited to specific acts and defined moral codes, but encompasses the whole of moral ideals and behaviours, a person's philosophy of life. Personal ethics signifies a moral code applicable to individuals, while social ethics means moral theory applied to groups. Social ethics can be synonymous with social and political philosophy; in as much as it is the foundation of a model or ideal society or state. Ethics and morals are respectively akin to theory and practice. Ethics denotes the theory of right and wrong actions, while morals indicate their practice within guidelines. So ethics is concerned with the conduct of human beings.

Religion, too, has been explained in various ways: and like Philosophy, it is difficult to define Religion. However, it may be describe as "Man's faith in a power beyond himself", or "a belief in an Everlasting God", who manages the affairs in the world, and gives reward or punishment to beings according to their

acts (Karmas). It is also said to be “fantastic reflection in people’s minds of external forces dominating over them in everyday life, a reflection in which earthly forces assume non-earthly forms” (A Dictionary of Philosophy, 1967). Dr. Ambedkar took, “Religion to mean the propounding of an ideal scheme of divine governance the aim and object of which is to make the social order in which men live a moral order” (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings & Speeches). Prof. Bettany has defined, “Religion broadly as a man’s attitude to produce on his conduct or on his relations to fellow-men” (G. T. Bettany: Encyclopedia of world Religions: 2). In brief, Religion, as assumed to be emanated from “divine authority’, has become a social force embedded in institutions of worship, prayers, rituals and ceremonies of sacred and infallible nature.

### **Socio- Religious Ethics of Ambedkar**

As W N Kuber (1979:76-83) mentions that according to Ambedkar religion is essential for the human social life. That’s why Ambedkar says, “Some people think that religion is not essential to society. I do not hold this view. I consider the foundations of religion to be essential to life and practices of society.” (Keer, D. 1965). Ambedkar has urged the need of religion. He said, “Religion is a part of one’s inheritance.” He mentioned in conference organised on the issue of the Youth of the Depressed Classes, “It pains me to see youth growing indifferent to religion. Religion is not opium as it is held by some. 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 do not want hypocrisy in the name of religion” (Keer, D; 1965). He further holds, “Religion must be judged by social standard, based on social ethics,” (Ambedkar, B. R. 1935). He thinks religion is linked with the social well-being of the people. Religion, social status and property are all sources of power and authority. He thought to have a religion in the sense of “spiritual principles” truly “universal,” which could be applicable to all the countries and to the all races (Ambedkar, B. R. 1935). He considered Hinduism as “a mass of sacrificial, social, political and sanitary rules and regulation; all mixed up”. He called it, a “law” or “legalized class-ethics” (Kuber W. N., 1979:76-83).

He treated religion as a source of social and spiritual unity. But reason and his religious conviction were circumscribed by social environment, the decaying and degenerate condition of his fellow brethren. His Religious attitudes were the manifestations of a political man always vigilant the civic rights of untouchable whose cause he exposed in his life. He remarked, “Religion and slavery are incompatible” (Keer, D. 1965).

Ambedkar has mentioned four characteristics of religion: Religion in the sense of morality must, therefore, remain the governing principle in every society; Religion it is to function must be in accord with religion which merely another name for sciences; its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity; unless a religion recognizes these three fundamental principles of social life, religion will be doomed; and religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty” (Ambedkar, B. R. 1943).

According to Ambedkar, religion has undergone four stages: in its original from religion was a matter of personal salvation of man’s soul; in its second stage it meant the maintenance of human brotherhood based on moral rules governing the conduct of human beings towards each other; in the third stage, men worshiped those personalities who satisfied the wants of their lives; and in its last stage it worshipped a person who performed miracles (Keer, D. 1965: 449). He defined religion as something that offered you prosperity or elevation first in this world and then salvation (Kuber W. N., 1979:76-83).

Further W. N. Kuber (1979:76-83) writes that according to Ambedkar, the ideas of hero-worship, deification, and neglect of duty have ruined Hindu society and were responsible for the degradation of our country. He instilled strong optimistic values in the minds of people and discarded the orthodox religious attitude; because he held that man is exonerated out and out from social responsibility by the traditional belief in incarnation. He accepted that the center of religion should not be between man and god, but between man and man. He raised the question: "What advantage can there be in believing god?" and he answered it in an emphatic way –belief in god gave rise to the belief in the efficacy of worship and prayer, and the efficacy of worship and prayer gave rise to the office of the priest and the priest was the evil genius who created all superstitions and there by destroyed the growth of right view. He remarked that by singing the songs of Rama people would not get a concession in rent from landlords (Ambedkar B R, 1943: 254-55).

Though Ambedkar regarded Hindutva as a joint product of touchholes and untouchables, he appealed the enlightened to initiate the means for ridding India of the evil of priest –craft. "The Hindu priestly classes stood in no way superior ethically, educationally or otherwise to the average member of the Parsi priesthood. "He (officiating Brahmin) practices the same of being a middleman between the unseen powers and the helpless man and makes a living by it" (Ambedkar BR, 1929 cited in W N Kuber, 1979). Ambedkar said: "Hindusim is a riddle of the contradictions between dignified thoughts and base behavior" (Muknayak, 1920). To him, Hindu religion was nothing but a multitude of commands and prohibitions (Ambedakar, B R, 1935: 72).

Ambedkar in a clear –cut way enumerated the evils of Hindu religion: (1) it tends to deprive moral life of freedom and spontaneity and to reduce it to a more or less anxious and servile conformity to externally imposed rules. (2) There is no loyalty to ideas; there is only conformity to commands. (3) The laws are iniquitous in that they are not the same for the one class as for another .The laws are prescribed to be the same for all generations. (4) The laws are not made by certain persons called prophets or law-givers. (5) This code has been invested with the character of finally and fixity. He concluded that this religion must be destroyed and there was nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion. He emphasized that people must be enabled to realize that what they are told was not religion, but that was really law and its abolition or amendment must be urged (Ambedakar, B R, 1935: 72 cited in W N Kuber, 1979).

Ambedkar were not against the very existence of Hinduism and Hindu leaders, but was against its wrong ideals and the tenacity with which the Hindu leaders adhered to them. According to him, Hinduism gave no support to social unity. "Hinduism and social union are incompatible. Hinduism-the traditional social structure – is the greatest obstacle to Hindu unity...Hinduism creates an eagerness to separate," (Ambedkar BR, 1945) on this social unity depended socialistic feeling, national integration, democratic ideal and spiritual fellowship. He accepted that Hinduism was once a "missionary religion" but caste has dragged Hinduism into a "religion of in equality." According to him, caste was incompatible with conversion. It was required to purge it of the doctrine of varna system. It was wrong to think that he wanted to destroy Hinduism. His main concern was to reform and reconstruct it. He said: "The Hindu society should be reorganized on two main principles: equality and the absence of casteism" (Keer D, 1965: 100). "Without such internal strength swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery" (Ambedkar B R, 1935). He regarded that Vedantic idealism was nothing but a Brahminical counterpoise to the liberalizing role of the Buddhist movement.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Philosophy of Religion, who himself was a philosopher, to examine the basic tenets of world Religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism, from the view –point of the prevailing social situation in India. For he saw Religion not as a means to spiritual salvation of individual soul, but as a 'social doctrine' for establishing the righteous relations between man and man.

When we talk of Philosophy of Religion, it is taken as a critical estimate of the existing Religions in general, and in particular to evaluate the teachings and doctrines of each Religion, whether it be Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, in relation to man and society, because, as I think, a Religion, ignoring the empirical needs of either man or of society, does not come up to the expectations of an intellectual like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Jatava, D R., 1992)

### **Socio- Religious Ethics and Neo-Budhism of Ambedkar**

What Ambedkar stands by morality and ethics in the context of religion Siddharth (2019) maintains that comparing Buddhism with Hinduism, Ambedkar writes, "Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Morality is a separate force which is sustained by social necessities and not by injunction of Hindu religion. The religion of Buddha is morality. It is imbedded in religion. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions, morality is to Buddhism". Ambedkar then differentiates between '*Dharma*' (Hinduism) and '*Dhamma*' (Buddhism). "The Vedic meaning of the word "*Dharma*" did not connote morality in any sense of the word. The *Dharma* as enunciated by the Brahmins meant nothing more than the performances of certain *karmas* or observances, i.e. *Yagans*, *Yagas* and sacrifices to Gods. The word *Dhamma*, as used by the Buddha, had nothing to do with ritual or observances. In place of Karma, Buddha substituted morality as the essence of *Dhamma*" (Siddharth, 2019).

W N Kuber (1979:80-81) in his book "Dr Ambedkar: A critical Study" mentions that religion, as Ambedkar conceived, was a rational one, a moral one and a spiritual one. It was secular and not extramundane. Ambedkar regarded Dhamma as religion. He (Ambedkar) observed, "Religion is personal... contrary to this, Dhamma is social." His view of religion was social and secular and morality was the key-note of it. In Dhamma there is no place for prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices. Morality is the essence of Dhamma; without it there is no Dhamma (Ambedkar, B R, 1957: 216).

W N Kuber (1979:80) further describes that Ambedkar's Dhamma as righteousness, right relations between man and man in all spheres of life. One man, if he is alone, does not need Dhamma. But society cannot do without Dhamma, i.e. right relations. So Dhamma as religion rejects belief in god, belief in soul, worship of god, curing of erring soul, propitiating god by prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices, etc. So it could be established that Ambedkar regarded Buddha's Dhamma as true religion, the purpose of which was to reconstruct the world by establishing right relations among human beings (Ambedkar BR, 1957). Thus the Buddhist way of life aimed at the moral regeneration and social emancipation of human beings and each man in the society has to strive for his own moral progress as well as that of other individuals. So it could be inferred that the Ambedkar's ethics and morality of Buddhist religion is based on the welfare, happiness, and wellbeing of the individuals as well as for the society as whole. Moral and religious life should be based on the social organisation and the conduct of in society. Focussing on the unity of individuals on social and political level Ambedkar endeavoured to transform life into an ideal one based on equality and liberty, love and sympathy. Ambedkar regarded only four preceptors: Shri Krishna,

Budha, Christ and Mohammed. Budha appealed to him most as he always preached that his disciples should not obey his commands but should follow the dictates of their conscience (Kuber W N, 1979: 81).

## Conclusions

Socio-religious ethics of Ambedkar regarding Neo Bushism is mainly based on the morality of the individual as well as of the society. Religion is the way to provide equality, fraternity, and justice to all and to create a just society. Religion is necessary for human being but not a hypocritical religion. Religion must be judged by social standard, based on social ethics. He thought to have a religion in the sense of “spiritual principles” truly “universal,” which could be applicable to all the countries and to the all races. He treated religion as a source of social and spiritual unity. He accepted that the center of religion should not be between man and god, but between man and man. Ambedkar were not against the very existence of Hinduism and Hindu leaders, but was against its wrong ideals and the tenacity with which the Hindu leaders adhered to them. According to him, Hinduism gave no support to social unity.

Ambedkar says that the religion of Buddha is morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions, morality is to Buddhism. The word *Dhamma*, as used by the Buddha, had nothing to do with ritual or observances. In place of Karma, Buddha substituted morality as the essence of *Dhamma*. Religion, as Ambedkar conceived, was rational, moral and spiritual. It was secular and not extramundane. His view of religion was social and secular and morality was the key-note of it. In Dhamma there is no place for prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices. Morality is the essence of Dhamma.

So in modern India if Ambedkar’s socio-ethics of religion could have been understood and followed by the people the shape of the country would have been different. There would have been space for everybody and discrimination at all levels would have been diminished and a holistic wellbeing of the society and nation would have been achieved.

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