

NAVYANA: THE RESURRECTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND RATIONALITY

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Man has a tendency to reconsider his belief of what he has inherited and what he has experienced in his life, so as to reach a position which shall satisfy the demands of his feeling and reflexion and give him confidence for facing the future. If at all there is a disjuncture between his belief and experiences, he tends to have been shaken up and is compelled to question his fundamental ideas. He gets inclined towards reconstruction of the religion and replaces it by his thoughts which are rational and scientific and less based on superstition. This change comprises of reasons, processes and consequences, and their complex interplay as well. It not only affects an individual socially, but also politically, culturally, psychologically and spiritually. It touches his various structural aspects of life. This change can be ascribed to (a) the rapid progress of scientific knowledge (b) the increase in intellectual interest in the subject; (c) the widespread tendencies to replace or reconstruct religion by more 'rational' and 'scientific' approach and (d) the effect of social, political, and international events which both had and had been influenced by the religion.

From Weber to Marx to European sociologist religion has not ever vanished from the scene rather it has changed. Here comes the role of navyana which interweaves modernity with its emphasis on rationalism and social justice which stands against the spirit of traditional religion. It resurrects the Relationship between Faith and Rationality. Derived from the latin word "religio", religion can be discussed as a belief system that establishes a philosophical base of an individual. It is a set of variously organized beliefs about the relationship between the natural and supernatural aspects of reality, and about the role of humans in the yarn of this relationship. It is very difficult to define religion. In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the psychologist William James defined religion as the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. By the term "divine" James meant any object that is godlike, whether it is a concrete deity or not to which the individual feels impelled to respond with solemnity and gravity. Similarly, for the theologian Paul Tillich, faith is the state of being ultimately concerned, which is itself religion. Religion is the substance, the ground, and the depth of man's spiritual life. Friedrich Schleiermacher in the late 18th century defined religion as *das schlechthinige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*, commonly translated as a feeling of absolute dependence. His contemporary Hegel disagreed thoroughly, defining religion as the Divine Spirit becoming conscious of himself through the finite spirit. It involves different aspects of an individual not only at a personal level but also at the social level.

The world religion, "according to Dr. Ambedkar, is an unidentified word with no fixed meaning and this is because religion has passed through many stages. The concept of each stage was called religious thought. The concept at one stage has not had the same connotation which it had in the preceding stage. Its meaning is likely to differ in the succeeding stage. The concept of religion was never fixed but it has varied from time to time. As primitive man could not explain most of the phenomena such as lightning, rain and floods, any weird performance done to control these phenomena was called magic and religion therefore came to be identified with magic. Then came the second stage in the evolution of religion and in this stage, religion came to be identified with beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, prayers and sacrifices. The Vedas are a collection of Mantras which are invocations to Indra, Varuna, Agni, Soma and others. They are prayers with rituals for help and gift and for acceptance of offerings. Some sages have also speculated philosophically on the origin of the world and on the being that created it with belief and faith as a pivot. But, this concept of belief that there existed some power which caused this phenomenon was amidst the primitive man who could not understand it. Magic therefore lost its place at this stage and this power which was originally malevolent was felt to be benevolent and this led to beliefs, rites, ceremonies and sacrifices which became necessary both to venerate a benevolent power and also to propitiate an angry power. Later that power was called God or Creator. The third stage believed that it is this God who created this world

and also man. This was followed by the belief that man has a soul and the soul is eternal and is answerable to God for man's action in the world. This in short was the evolution concept of religion.

Ambedkar opined that the religious conceptions in India were so diverse that they covered every aspect of life. It varied from life to death. The beliefs and the rituals were all connected to the religion essentially. "Commenting on the significance and consequence of religions Ambedkar observed that "in most human societies, religion is a weft which crosses the warp of history, but in India the religion formed the weft and warp of the Hindu mind. Their entire life is regulated by religion and social system."ⁱ It was built on the principle of graded inequality. It divided people on the basis of caste which was predetermined in advance by birth.

This is probably the reason that "whenever the ethical or moral value of activities or conditions is questioned, the value of religion is involved; and all deep-stirring experiences invariably compel a reconsideration of the most fundamental ideas, whether they are explicitly religious or not. Ultimately there arise problems of justice, human destiny, God, and the universe ; and these in turn involve problems of the relation between 'religious ' and other ideas, the validity of ordinary knowledge, and practicable conceptions of 'experience' and 'reality.'"ⁱⁱ

UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION -AMBEDKAR'S PERSPECTIVE

Ambedkar understood the meaning of religion through debating over experiences and belief of his father's life experiences. His father was a very religious man. He was a Kabirpanthi. He read the books of his Panth. Once Ambedkar asked his father that why he insisted him upon reading the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which recounted the greatness of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and repeatedly chanted the stories of the degradation of the Shudras and the Untouchables? To which his father replied that since they belonged to the Untouchables, they were likely to develop an inferiority complex. Thus, the value of the Mahabharata and Ramayana lied in removing this inferiority complex. He cited examples of Drona and Karna. He said that they were small men, but rose to great heights. Similarly, Valmiki was Koli, but he became the author of the Ramayana. He said that it was for removing the inferiority complex that he used to ask Ambedkar to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana. This reply dissatisfied him. He found Bhishma and Drone as hypocrites and Krishna a fraud. He confronts Gandhi with an ideology that I will not Die as a Hindu.

He rejects the superstructure of Hinduism which is built on superstition and pure/impure classification of the birth. He opined that the Hindu religion is being forced on the people by the Brahmins and the higher caste to be followed since the Vedic times. It is built on irrationality and is more political in nature. Ambedkar's extensive readings on the Indian history and the Buddhist texts envisioned him. He reflects on what ought to be the base of the belief system. Essays like Who were the Shudras?, the Untouchables and Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India helped him turn towards Buddhism and described it as a liberation theology more than a spiritual source. He illustrated Buddhism as *Navyana*, a new vehicle for a new journey towards emancipation and a new identity. He, through second *Dhammachakra Pravartan*¹ in 1956, reformed Buddhism and applied it for the larger politics of the society.

Ambedkar's monumental work '*Buddha and his Dhamma*' discovers and interprets Buddha as a political philosopher. This is the work that sets out to tell a coherent and systematic theory of Buddha's life and his teachings and lays the foundation for the neo-Buddhism. It clears out many misconceptions about Buddha's life and practice of Buddhism. Moreover, Ambedkar describes Buddhism as a liberation theology more than spiritual source and his Buddhism is illustrated as *Navyana*, a new vehicle for a new journey towards emancipation and a new identity. Buddha's Dhamma was based on the doctrines which are rationally possible. It is based on the values of knowledge and evil of ignorance. It stresses on the value of man and sets a principle of good and just life. It has the healing capacity to set one free from fear, superstition, hatred, and inferiority complex.

¹ Dhammachakra pravartan means tuning forwards the cycle of *Dhamma* which was stagnant for years.

Ambedkar in this work has tried to reflect both the connection and dis-connection between religion and politics of Buddhism. In this context Ramesh Kamble in his article “*Contextualizing Ambekarian Conversion*” tries to critically examine the unfolding of Buddhist identity in the light of “*Buddha and His Dhamma*”. Kamble exposes, in his work Ambedkar saw Buddhism as not only centering and privileging principles of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity, but presented Buddha as a sharp critique of Brahmanic system of ‘*chaturvarnya*’, which was antithetical to Buddha’s conception of righteous moral order. But largely Ambedkar’s complete reading exposes the constituents, processes, objects of his counter hegemonic struggle. And conversion was one of the most important tools for the struggle in which religious, spiritual and political aspects had to be transformed.

In reformulating the Buddhist tradition, Ambedkar objected to the prevalence of dukha and linked it to the social economic exploitation. Thus, comes up the objective of life to be a liberated individual. Here, as per Ambedkar religion plays an important role in the matter of society and education. It enhances personal purity and social strength. It contributes for the common good. Thus, Ambedkar considered religion essential for man and society. He considered religion as an integral part of social life and legacy. “He has called religion a human state of mind which fulfils our social necessities. Religion is a kind of moral conduct which establishes human relations between man and man.”ⁱⁱⁱ Ambedkar considered it important for social life and legacy. He opined that welfare must be the objective of all the religion. He considered religion as so vital that it could not be separated from life. It strengthened the inner self and aimed at the common good. He opined, “Man can’t live on bread only, he has mind and it too should get diet.”^{iv} Religion teaches right conduct and holy approach.

Valmiki in Ramayana wrote, ‘*dharmdarya prabhavati dharmat prabhavate sukham! Dharmen labhate sarva dharma, sarmidang jagat!!*’^v This means that dharma provides means. It is only through dharma that happiness can be attained and hence dharma forms the essence of everything in the world. Mahabharat clearly mentions that “*dharmo hi hato hanta na sanshya*”^{vi} this implies that dharma forms the root of humanity. Patience, forgiveness, control on senses, intellect, knowledge, truth, calm, strength are the ten elements of dharma. “*Yen yenachared Dharma Tasmeh Garha na Vidhete*.”^{vii} It strongly says that in all circumstances dharma prevails.

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi opined that religion is important in all walks of life. It covers humanity, society and politics. He while describing religion opined that religion is the basis of everything. “True morality and true religion is interwoven with each other. Religion occupies the same place in matter of morality which water occupies for growing seedlings in soil.”^{viii} It brings man closer to the creator. For Gandhi dharma vested in true morality. However, Gandhi unlike Ambedkar associated religion with the celestial life. “Ambedkar rather said that associating it with celestial life might not ensure human interest as he was aware of the materialistic approach and behaviour of the people at large. Therefore, he said that material facilities can’t become the means of solving problems and evils of human beings.”^{ix}

Dhamma

Ambedkar’s concept of *Dhamma* was different from the concepts of *Dharma* and *Religion*. He made a very novel interpretation of Dhamma. It (Dhamma) is a principle of living a good and just life. It is one which sets one free from fear, superstition, hatred, and inferiority complex and so on and so forth. It makes one strong from within to deal with any situation without bending before any *power*. At the same time, *Dhamma* cannot be old or new. It is always fresh, lively, energetic, and full of hopes and aspirations, devoid of any depression and frustration, no sense of loss, feeling of enrichment, sense of relativity, feeling of love, affection and sex, closeness to nature, concern for self and others. It must generate inquisitiveness and longing for knowledge. It should inject deep desire for fighting ignorance and foolishness, not susceptible to petty ideas and many more things which bring goodness and welfare to human being. It is like an ever burning light which helps you locate your destination in this world. It shapes your desire for meaningful and positive results and consequences.

Dhamma brings dreams to life and desires for the universe. At end, one feels contented but always upgrading and modifying, relevant, contemporary, futuristic, vibrant with overwhelming with ideas and actions, no sense of

deprivation and fatigue and many more things which brings happiness to self and others. His concept of *Dhamma* raises the human being above religion and Dharma. It breaks the barrier of caste, creed, sex, region, religion, language and even geographical boundaries. It integrates humanity in one and establishes a relationship with flora and fauna in this universe. It promises to uphold the dignity of human being and accept the utility and relevance of everything. It centres on the human being and the universe.

Dr. Ambedkar saw religion not as a means to spiritual salvation of individual souls, but as a social doctrine for establishing righteous relations between one human and the other. His philosophy of religion does not mean either theology or religion. Theology studies the nature, attributes and functions of God; religion deals with things divine. Theology and religion may be linked together; but they are not philosophies. 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 is Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, in relation to humans and society, because, a religion, ignoring the empirical needs of either man or of society, does not meet the expectations of an intellectual like Dr. Ambedkar.

Ambedkar used the term “religion” in 2 ways. Like the early sociologists like Marx, he opined that Buddhism is not a religion that contained God or divine forces as a central theme. It never encouraged faith. However, Emile Durkheim gave a broader perspective to religion by attaching the term “sacred” in religion and providing religion a binding force for social relationships. Like Durkheim, Ambedkar argued that without sacredness no common rules of mortality will exist. He thus, concluded that fraternity and humanity is impossible without morality and this can only be achieved through *Dhamma*.

CONCLUSION

Today, apart from the role at the larger level, Buddhism has more to offer to India. It not only provides inspiration for the struggle of the downtrodden, it helps in the regaining of the self-identity. In Semitic religions, the ground of morality was provided by the notion of supreme God who would sit in judgement upon the soul. But the Navyana Buddhism centred around Karma of the individual. It marks the transition from samsara (the world of births and deaths, governed by the laws of kamma) and nibbana, the transcendental state of freedom. The contradiction between the framework of karma/rebirth and the principle of anatta is been well captured by Theravada Buddhist. It shows that Buddhism without the karma/rebirth frame is legitimate. Owing to the rationalistic nature of the Buddha’s political philosophy, Kancha Illaiah calls the Buddha “a materialist of the ancient period” but not “in a strict Marxist sense”.^x He sees this development as a process in which humans evolve and start percolating in the material dependency. It is preceded by another process. “the focus on this kind of causality, as central to Buddhism, might be seen in a text often called the ‘formula of the *Dhamma*’, and that is found engraved on stupas and clay tablets all over India...”^{xi} Thus, it can be rightly said that the Navyana Buddhism certainly act as a powerful force for reconstructing society in a new and changing millennium.

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