



DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR AND RELIGION

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Abstract

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a great scholar in his time. Although he was born in Hindu family, but his caste Mahar was untouchable in Hindu religion. At that time untouchables were deprived and depressed and had no tradition of study. But Ambedkar enough fortunate to pursue his academic study. From the very early had period of his life, Ambedkar made a vow to remove the stigma of untouchable. He participated in social activities to struggle for the rights and benefits of the low castes and the untouchables. Ambedkar's efforts to improve the conditions of the untouchable and remove untouchability did not bring a satisfactory consequence. He began to realize that the problem of the untouchable could not resolved by social, economical or even political means but it must be resolved by religion method, and he adopted Buddhism. This present paper will focus on critical views of Dr. Ambedkar on different religions.

Keywords: Untouchable, Religion, Untouchability, Equality, Depressed Buddhism.



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Introduction:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a great scholar in his time. His parents were belonging to Mahar, one of the untouchable communities in India; therefore, Ambedkar was an untouchable innately according of Hindu tradition. Since he was a scholar, he had studied comparative religions. This helped Ambedkar to have a clear vision of religions. Here we will discuss his views on different religions.

Ambedkar's view of Hinduism:

One of basic reasons Ambedkar decided to leave Hinduism is because this religion has no sympathy, equality and liberty, which are considered as factors to uplift an individual. Ibut above all, Hinduism advocates the caste system. Caste system divided people in society into four castes including Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Not only that, the Hinduism further produced another class of people called the untouchable who were out caste. Therefore, according to Ambedkar, the caste system contains its nature of inequality. There is no equality, liberty and fraternity in Hindu religion and society. In an interview in

1937 with reporters, Ambedkar said that "he burn a copy of the *Manusmriti* because he viewed it as a symbol of injustice."²

Can the caste system under which he and his people have been crushed across centuries be abandoned? It is impossible. That is, because the caste system depends on religious sanctity, the divine authority of the Shastras. Therefore, as long as the depressed classes and the untouchable maintain in Hinduism, they cannot acquire their full manhood. This is the reason Ambedkar abandoned his ancestor's religion. He said that, "It is the inequality in the Hinduism that compels me to quit Hinduism."³ In one article of the paper (Fortnightly paper *MookNayak*, established by Ambedkar in 1920), Ambedkar wrote that Hindu society similar to the tower of inequality without a door to go out. One has born in the tower and would die in that tower without a way to escape.⁴

Ambedkar's view of Sikhism:

Dr. Ambedkar seemed to have a good sentiment with Sikhism because Sikhism was a religion which originated from India. He also announced that he might opt for Sikhism because he felt, that he should "have some responsibility for the future of the Hindu culture and civilization."⁵ In April 1936, he attended the Sikh Mission conference at Amritsar. He further sent his son and his nephew to a Sikh temple to research on Sikhism. On September 18, 1936, he sent a group of thirteen men of his followers to the Sikh Mission at Amritsar to study the Sikhism to prepare for conversion.⁶

Later on, there were some disagreement between Ambedkar and the Sikh leaders. In addition, he realized that Sikhism is not much different from Hinduism on account of caste discrimination. He was informed that the Sikh Dalits subjected to atrocities, created by the hands of the Jats⁷ (a kind of ruler in Punjab). Therefore, he finally did not embrace Sikhism.

Ambedkar's View of Christianity:

Dr. Ambedkar admired of the Christian Gospels greatly. He was aware of the prophet's call for justice, and mercy for the disinherited and of the influence of Christian social teachings in western societies however, when he conveyed the reality, he observed converts did not live up to the Gospel. He said that:

"When I read the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and certain passages of St. Paul's epistles, I feel that I and my people must all be Christians, for in them I find a perfect antidote to the person, Hinduism has injected into our souls and a dynamic strong enough to lift us out of our present degraded position, but when I took at the Church, produced by Christian

Mission in the districts around Bombay, I have quite a different feeling. Many members of my own caste have become Christians and most of them do not command Christianity to the remainder of us. Some have gone to boarding schools and have enjoyed high privilege. We think of them as finished products of your missionary efforts and what sort of people are they? They are selfish and self-centered. They don't care a snap of their finger, what become of their former caste associates so long, as they and their families, or they and the little group who have become Christians, get ahead. Indeed, their chief concern with reference to their old caste associates, is to hide the fact that they was ever in the same community. I don't want to add to the number of such Christians."⁸

In his speech to Indian Christians at Sholapur on December 31, 1937, he said that the Indian Christians never fought for social justice. Therefore, becoming Christians could not bring any economic and political gain for the untouchable. In addition, there was the caste discrimination in the Indian Christians. The Christians in south India, for instance, observed caste in Churches. Therefore, they never tackled the matter of caste. The untouchable would remain untouchable even they become Christians. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar did not convert to Christianity.

Ambedkar's View of Islam:

As the case of Christianity, Ambedkar firstly admired the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an preaching equality, love, fraternity and humanity. But later he realized that "The Muslim society in India is afflicted by the same social evils as afflict the Hindu society. Indeed, the Muslims have all the social evils of the Hindus and more. That something more is the compulsory system of Purdah for Muslim women".⁹ Therefore, Ambedkar did not have a favorable opinion in Islam. According to him, Muslims not only supported he caste system but also observed untouchable. In 1947, when the problem of the partition of India broke out, the untouchable in Pakistan were forced to convert to Islam.

Yes, In spite of the egalitarian spirit of the untouchable and oppression of women in Islam. With all these considerations regarding to Islam, Dr. Ambedkar could not embrace such a religion.

Ambedkar's View of a True Religion:

Ambedkar believed that religion is necessary for human society. He consider the foundation of religion to be essential to the life and practices of a society. However, Ambedkar considered that it is necessary to distinguish the differences among religions. The

so-called 'all religions teach the same thing and equally good,' according to Ambedkar is wrong view. He argued that though all religions pursue the good, each one views of the good is different. Their religion views that brotherhood is good, other considers caste and untouchable is good; there religion advocates violence while another advocate's non-violence; and so on. He observed, "There cannot be a thesis more false than the thesis that all religions are true..... Nothing can be a greater error than this."¹⁰

If religion is necessary for people, the true religion is more necessary. Ambedkar gave criterion to identify a true religion. According to him, the religion that take Gods as the object to worship are not true religions. It is because such religions create nothing but superstitions like soul, worship, prayer, rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies. These performances, Ambedkar viewed that, had nothing to do with morality...in place of God, there is no morality." he explained that in God worship religions, though people seem to perform morality, morality is not their nature, but it is "casual and occasional."

They do not commit the evils because they fear the punishment of their Gods. Otherwise, they perform the good because they want to please the Gods or to get something from Gods, or God asks them to so. Therefore, he considered that the religions that depend on Gods are not the true religions.

Ambedkar's View of Buddhism:

- i) **There is no God in Buddhism:** In the part of Ambedkar's view of a true religion, we have seen that Ambedkar considered that the religion that worship God are not the true religions. He observed that almost religions now a days are sort of religion of God, except the religion of the Buddha, only the religion of Buddha does not the religion of God. *In the Buddha and the Future of His Religion* Dr. Ambedkar clearly distinguished the difference between the Buddha and other religious founders in various dimensions.
- ii) **There is no caste system in Buddhism:** Ambedkar embraced Buddhism because he considered Buddhism as a casteless religion. He observed that, "the division of the society into four Varna's (castes) created great inequality. He considered Buddhism opposed inequality, authority and division of society into various classes which Brahmanism had introduced in India. The ethic of morality, equality and universal brotherhood is an eternal truth taught by the Buddha. In the Buddhist Order, people see the presence of all sorts of classes, men and women.

iii) **Buddhism satisfies the Criteria of a True Religion:** After enunciating the criteria of a true religion Ambedkar further considered that Buddhism is a sort of such true religion. In *The Buddha and the Future of His Religion*, he wrote that: "So far I know, the only religion which fulfilled all the criteria of a True Religion is Buddhism. In other words, Buddhism is the only religion, which the world can have."

Because of above reasons, Ambedkar considered Buddhism as the true religion, therefore, he converted to no other religions but Buddhism.

Conclusion:

Above, we have examined the view of Ambedkar towards the existing religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam. One thing we see that though religions have different theories and practices, they use the religions of God or Gods and observe caste system and untouchability, this is the main reason Ambedkar did not opt them to convert. Right after, Ambedkar declared that he would leave Hinduism, the leaders of other religions invited him to embrace their faiths. However, he did not choose any of these religion but finally Buddhism, a True Religion.

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