

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's the Buddha and His Dhamma : Deviation from the Traditional Story

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Abstract

The Buddha and His Dhamma is one of the most important books ever written by Dr. Ambedkar. In this book he not only glorified the life of Buddha but also raised many questions and traditional problems and tried to answer them most logically and historically. The first problem raised in this book is related to the main event in the life of Buddha, namely, Parivraja. Why did the Buddha take Parivraja? The conventional reply is that Siddhartha took parivraja because he happened to see a dead person, a sick person and an old person. This answer is absurd on the face of it. The Buddha took Parivraja at the age of 29. If he took Parivraja as a result of these three sights, how is it he did not see these three sights earlier? Dr. Ambedkar also answered these questions in a most logical and historical manner. There are other problems related to four Aryan Truths, the doctrine of the soul, of Karma and rebirth and also about the Bhikkhu. This book helps the readers to understand the life of Buddha in a proper manner.

KEYWORDS : Parivraja , dhamma , prologue

Preface :

Dr. Ambedkar dared to raise many questions and tried to give answers aiming to provide a clear and consistent statement on the life and teaching of the Buddha. He sincerely and impartially tried to find out the truth and link the lost episode of history together. He took help of available literature of Vedic Age, Upanishads, religious books, scriptures, Buddhists Literature, Smrutis, Puranas and studied various social changes. His arguments and logical interpretations about the main events in the life of the Buddha namely, Parivraja, the four Aryan Truths, the doctrines of the soul, of karma and rebirth and the Bhikkhu provides us a new way of thinking about these events in a better logical, manner. Dr. Ambedkar has tried to resolve contradictions about Buddha's life and teachings.

Prologue : the Entry Gate

The important part of The Buddha and His Dhamma is its prologue also. Dr. Ambedkar quoted from Hastings' "Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics" Vol.X, p669. The quotation makes many things clear. The prologue reads that men themselves are forced from time to time to reconsider current and inherited beliefs and ideas. The purpose was to gain some harmony between the present and past experience. It also has the aim to reach a position which shall satisfy the demands of feeling and reflex on and give confidence for facing the future. It treats that religion as a subject of critical and scientific inquiry has attracted increasing attention. It has approved the rapid progress of scientific knowledge and thought. It has invited the deeper intellectual interest in the subject. religion It has also underlined the widespread tendencies in all parts of the world

to reform or reconstruct religion. It has even paved a way to replace religion with somebody of thought which is more rational and scientific or less superstitious. It accepts that social, political and international events in past are influenced by religion.¹ It emphasizes the need to reassess religion in terms of recent scientific, intellectual and social progress.²

After reading the prologue it feels that the entire passage reflects Dr.Ambedkar's way of thinking. It seems as if the same was written for Dr. Ambedkar. It is also the key to unlock many controversies and deviations in the book. The prologue is complementary and supplementary to Dr.Ambedkar's ideology. It clears the intention of the writer as well as it the roadmap of the book. It is may displease the orthodox Buddhists and well as Hindus as it attacks both. But what else can they expect from a man of superb logic, scientific temperament, and rationality like Dr.Ambedkar?

Investigating Facts :

Dr.Ambedkar undoubtedly was the true follower of the Buddha. Buddha told Ananda, his disciple, in Mahaparinibban Sutta that his religion was based on reasons and experience and he advised his followers not to accept his teaching blindly without reference to reason and experience.³ If following this message Dr.Ambedkar reviews adulterated Buddhism what is wrong in it? He identified some cases which represent Brahminical reinterpretations. He concludes, "One has, therefore, to be very careful in accepting what is said in Buddhist canonical literature as being the word of the Buddha". He himself set the criteria to determine the authenticity.

On 30 November 1956 Dr.Ambedkar spoke at the Banaras Hindu University and returned to Delhi. He was asked by an admirer why the status of Buddha from different countries had different features. He replied that there was no picture or statue of Buddha till 600 years after the Mahaparinirvana of Buddha. Buddha attended Mahaparinirvana in 483 B.C. The first council held at Rajgriha under the presidentship of the most senior monk Mahakashyap. The purpose of the council was to preserve the teachings of Buddha in their truth and purity without change or modification. It also aimed to achieve unity in that order. Dr.Ambedkar makes it clear to readers that the first disadvantage was that there was no written script at that time and the second reason was a tendency among some monks to be lax towards the rule of order. Vinay Pitak by Upali and Dhamma by Anand were repeated and thus it was orally preserved by the monks. The first effort to write Buddha's teaching was 100 years after the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha. This important period of 100 years is the reason for Dr. Ambedkar to deviate from traditional stories related to Buddha. He concentrated on this period and found many things must have been included or misreported during this period. He accounts for errors in the transmission of the Buddha's doctrine by oral tradition. The chief audience of the Buddha's sermons was composed of Bhikkhus, who reported to the people at large 'what the Buddha had said.' In reporting the Buddha it has often been found that he has been

¹ Ebook of *Buddha and His Dhamma* by Dr.Ambedkar p.20

² The Use of Buddhist Scriptures in B.R.Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma* by Adele Fiske and Christoph Emmrich p97.

³ Ambedkar's views on Buddhism Applicability to the Contemporary Society by K.Bala Ramkrishna p41[IJR]

misreported .’some cases were brought to the Buddha’s attention while he was still alive.⁴He felt need to test discourse to see whether the Buddhist canon is not adulterated with Brahminism, one has to test them and he tested them. Dr. Ambedkar clears that as the Buddha is nothing if not rational or logical, other things being equal may be taken to be the word of Buddha. The second test is that the Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion which was not profitable for man’s welfare.⁵Therefore, according to Dr. Ambedkar, anything attributed to the Buddha which did not relate to man’s welfare cannot be accepted as the word of the Buddha. Bearing these tests in mind before deciding what the view of the Buddha was, Dr. Ambedkar wrote this version “The Buddha and His Dhamma.”⁶

The following extract clears the fact and needs to rediscover Buddha:

There is a wonderful logical self discussion by Dr.Ambedkar The Buddha and His Dhamma between 350 to 351 pages. He explains that most of the preachings of the Buddha was heard by Bhikus and art of writing was not yet developed. The only option left to them was to memorise. Some made it as their profession and they were called Bhankas. It is also found at many places that the Buddha is misreported even during his life time. The cases of karma and rebirth is well known. Dr.Ambedkar further argues that it was very easy for these to incorporate the Brahmanic tenets into the Buddhist Religion. There for he offers a test of logic and rationality .He strongly believes that the Buddha never entered into any discussion which was profitable for man’s welfare. He urges to understand Buddha’s conclusive and tentative views.

Whatever the orthodox doctors of Dhamma may say , Dr.Ambedkar’s The Buddha and His Dhamma , taken as a whole epitomizes his philosophy of life , a philosophy he lived by , a socio-ethical philosophy for the good of mankind ,for after all, his own people, the “Untouchables” could not live isolated from the rest of the people . At the same, like Moses of the Old Testament, Babasaheb had to resurrect his people from the thralldom of Hinduism, hoping that one day all Indians would be persuaded by the teachings of the Buddha to change their ways, and accept the principles of Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Like the Buddha, he showed the way, the Buddha’s way.

Conclusion :

The close reading of The Buddha and His Dhamma teaches readers that knowing truth is important ,but at the same time one should know what is false too. The paper is an effort to clear the obstacles in the readers way. The book removes the layers of confusion and ambiguities . It brings out the Buddha from the divinity and places him among the human beings . The various logical interpretations ,clarifications make the work more reliable ,scientific and fit for the modern readers .

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⁶ E-book of *Buddha and His Dhamma* by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar .Uploaded by Siddhartha Chabukswar p.7-8

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