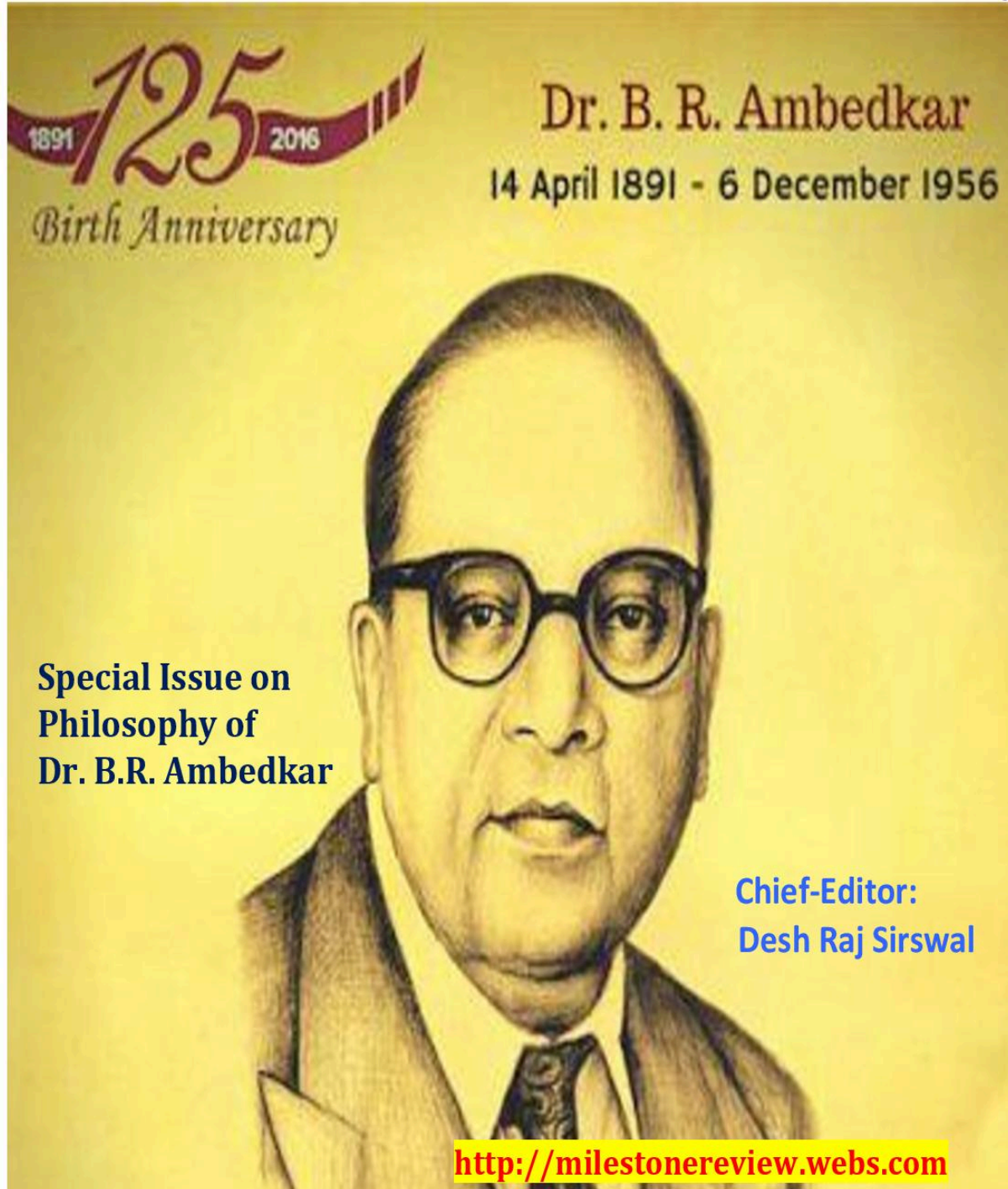


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# ***Milestone Education Review***

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Philosophy of  
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

**Chief-Editor:  
Desh Raj Sirswal**

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## **Milestone Education Review (2278-2168)**

*Milestone Education Review* (The Journal of Ideas on Educational & Social Transformation) is an online peer-reviewed bi-annual journal of Milestone Education Society (Regd.) Pehowa (Kurukshehra). For us education refers to any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual. The role of education must be as an instrument of social change and social transformation. Social transformation refers to large scale of social change as in cultural reforms and transformations. The first occurs with the individual, the second with the social system. This journal offers an opportunity to all academicians including educationist, social-scientists, philosophers and social activities to share their views. Each issue contains about 100 pages.

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## THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL VALUES IN SHAPING HUMANITY (A STUDY OF DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR'S RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS)

Desh Raj Sirswal

### Abstract

Values are an important part of human existence, his society and human relations. All social, economic, political, and religious problems are in one sense is reflection of this special abstraction of human knowledge. We are living in a globalized village and thinking much about values rather than practice of it. If we define religion and spirituality we can say that religion is a set of beliefs and rituals that claim to get a person in a right relationship with God, and spirituality is a focus on spiritual things and the spiritual world instead of physical/earthly things. If we think rationally we can find the major evils related to religion existing in present society are due to lack of proper understanding of religion and spirituality. If we really know our own religions and values associated with it, we can create a beautiful world, full of love and respect for each and every human being. The proper knowledge and practice of any religion's values can make an integrated man. In the book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Dr. Ambedkar elucidated the significance and importance of *Dhamma* in human life. The *Dhamma* maintained purity of life, which meant abstains from lustful, evil practices. The *Dhamma* is a perfection of life and giving up craving. *Dhamma's* righteousness means right relation of man to man in all sphere of life. The basic idea underlying religion is to create an atmosphere for the spiritual development of the individual. He said that knowing the proper ways and means is more important than knowing the ideal. The major objective of this paper is to study the religious philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and to

study how he established that religious and spiritual values enables religious people in particular and humanity at large to solve contemporary problems.

**Key Words:** Values, Religion, Spirituality, *Dhamma*, Buddhism

### **On Values, Religion and Spirituality**

Human values are an important part of our day to day life. Human values are closely integrated with human life. No human life is possible without values. Yes every living human being lives by certain values. It is only the proportion and combination of negative and positive values, which separates a noble human being from a not so noble human being. When we think of our values, we think of what is important to us in our lives (e.g., security, independence, wisdom, success, kindness, pleasure). Each of us holds numerous values with varying degrees of importance. A particular value may be very important to one person, but unimportant to another.:

Values are beliefs. But they are beliefs tied inextricably to emotion, not objective, cold ideas.

Values are a motivational construct. They refer to the desirable goals people strive to attain.

Values transcend specific actions and situations. They are abstract goals. The abstract nature of values distinguishes them from concepts like norms and attitudes, which usually refer to specific actions, objects, or situations.

Values guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. That is, values serve as standards or criteria.

Values are ordered by importance relative to one another. People's values form an ordered system of value priorities that characterize them as individuals. This hierarchical feature of values also distinguishes them from norms and attitudes.<sup>1</sup>

Values will be different due to some important factors. People's age, education, gender, and other characteristics largely determine the life circumstances to which they are exposed. These include their socialization and learning experiences, the social roles they play, the expectations and sanctions they encounter, and the abilities they develop. Thus, differences in background characteristics represent differences in the life circumstances that affect value priorities.<sup>2</sup> So, different people have different values.

When we come to spirituality, we find that "The concepts of spirituality and religion overlap, and are often used interchangeably. However, many psychological professionals assert that the two concepts are distinct and separate (Blando, 2006). According to Walsh (1998) religion is defined as an, "organized belief system that includes shared and institutionalized moral values, beliefs about God, and involvement in religious community," and spirituality is defined as, "an internal set of values- a sense of meaning, inner wholeness, and connection with others" (p. 72). Spirituality is focused on connection with others and contains three main components: connection to someone or something beyond oneself, sense of compassion for others, and desire to contribute to the good of others (Blando, 2006). Consistent with these definitions, religion can be understood in terms of a social-level experience and spirituality as an individual-level experience. Because these two concepts are related and often overlapping."<sup>3</sup>

Some important differentiation will be as , "Individuals may be spiritual not religious, religious not spiritual, religious and spiritual, or neither spiritual nor religious. Often times the spiritual not religious individual is seeking meaning, connection with others, and completeness. The religious not spiritual person typically participates in religious institutions, holds theistic

beliefs, and institutionalized moral values. The spiritual and religious person holds characteristics of both while the neither spiritual nor religious person holds few if any of these characteristics (Blando, 2006).<sup>4</sup>

### **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Hinduism and Buddhism**

According to Dr. Ambedkar “inequality is the sole of Hinduism” and “Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors. The iron law of caste, the heartless law of karma and the senseless law of status by birth are veritable instruments of torture which Hinduism has forged against the Untouchables.”<sup>5</sup> “In his view the very core of Hinduism was *Varnashrama Dharma* i.e. religion based on caste and stages in life viz. (1) celibacy, (2) married life, (3) retreat to forest and (4) complete retirement from worldly life. So far as the Ashrams were concerned there was perhaps nothing wrong about them; but the concept of caste was completely opposed to the democratic principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.”<sup>6</sup>

In his speech to the Constituent Assembly during the final debate before the adoption of the Constitution, Ambedkar commented, “On the 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1956, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one-man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one-man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our democracy in peril.”<sup>7</sup> Thus we can say that “Dr. Ambedkar was thus quite right in thinking that Hinduism in practice would be an obsolete to healthy social developments and political democracy in this country. This was then another reason why

he thought of Buddhism which he rightly considers was very modern in its way of thinking and would be an answer to the social disparities created by Hinduism.”<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar’s decision to convert in Buddhism is a rational decision and it is not an emotional turn, “I prefer Buddhism because it gives three principles in combination which no other religion does. Buddhism teaches *Prajna* (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), *Karuna* (love), and *Samata* (equality). This is what man wants for a good and happy life.” If we carefully read the life story and the teachings of the Buddha we cannot fail to be impressed by his essentially rational and non-speculative approach to the problems of human life. He was evidently dissatisfied with the solution that Hinduism offered of these problems.<sup>9</sup> (145-46) Both in his method of approach to such problems and their solutions the Buddha was a rationalist and a realist to the core.<sup>10</sup>

Such being the approach of the Buddha to human problems it is no wonder that a rational and critical mind like that of Dr. Ambedkar which was naturally moving away from Hinduism or for that matter from any dogmatic religion, should be attracted towards Buddhism. For him all dogmatic religions contain a body of propositions about reality, which are inconsistent with the discoveries, and truth of modern science; and in so far as this is the case, these propositions must be rejected and with them the dogmatic religions also of which they form an integral part. Buddhism in his view- and I may say quite rightly- was the only religion which realized that religion does not and ought not to depend for its validity on any such dogmas or metaphysical propositions about the nature of reality.<sup>11</sup>

“Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant



needs watering. Both will otherwise wither and die.” A moral community is formed out of shared religious identification because religion serves as a social force. “Those who deny the importance of religion.” Write Ambedkar., “fail to realize how great potency and sanction that lies behind a religious ideal as compound (sic) with that of purely secular ideal.” Secular law, Ambedkar declared in a 1954 All India Radio Broadcast, may be broken by anyone, while religion must be respected by all.” (9) Anne M. Blackburn, Religion, Kinship and Buddhism: Ambedkar’s Vision of a Moral Community, The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Volume 16, No.01, 1993. While come to Dr. Ambedkar’s ideas on religion, we found a very rational dialogue from Dr. Ambedkar regarding religion’s components:

Religion is an influence or force suffused through the life of each individual moulding his character, determining his actions and reactions, his likes and dislikes.

Religion is for man and not man for religion.

Religions 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 food for the well being of the people.

Man cannot live by bread alone. He has a mind, which needs food for thought. Religions instill hope in man and drive him to activity.

Religion is the sense of morality must remain the governing principle in every society.

Religion 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.

Dr. Ambedkar made a relation between religion and morality by these statements:

Morality comes in only wherein man comes in relation to man.

Morality comes in into religion as a side wind to maintain peace and order.

Every religion preaches morality but morality is not the root of religion. It is a wagon attached to it. It is attached and detached, as the occasion requires. The action of religion is therefore, casual and occasional.

Ambedkar found the means to develop essential social and moral conscience of the society for establishing democratic society in Buddhism. He holds that the essence of Buddhism consists not in the removal of suffering- which is only negative and incidental, but in the attainment of perfection, which is positive and fundamental – i.e. establishing a democratic society. He declared his mission to make India as *Prabuddha Bharat*, an Enlightened India. .. A Buddhist is an identity of an individual who is liberated from the bondage of dogma, an interrogator of the sources of oppression, a self consciously liberal and secular in worldview. Dr. Ambedkar calls for a change in the personality of a Buddhist based on the ideals of *Pradgna*, *Sila* and *Karuna*- Competence, Character and Compassion, which he himself has embodied. He exhorts that Morality is not passive; it is pro active. To defend democracy, in its true sense, becomes the moral duty of every Buddhist.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Dhamma Vs Religion***

In distinguishing between “*Dhamma*” and “religion” Ambedkar argues that for traditional religion, morality was secondary, and derivative; to Buddhists, *Dhamma* was morality, though it was a sacred morality, necessary to bind society together. This basic insight provided a framework for the book,

Ambedkar's manual of Buddhism which included a collection of stories of the Buddha, his disciples and his teachings drawn from the major Pali scripts.<sup>13</sup> and According to Dr. Ambedkar, "There is a great difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. Buddhism means casteless society based on equal rights. Hinduism on the other hand is primarily based on caste system; a system which encourages aloofness, inequality and exploitation." He also made another difference that, "Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism lays on emphasis on the attainment of heaven. Nor it is necessary. To be happy in the present life, one should practice the ethics of morality, non-violence (*ahimsa*), equality and universal brotherhood. This is an eternal truth taught by the Buddha." In his own words, "*Dhamma* consists of *Prajna* and *Karuna*. *Prajna* understands. The Buddha made *Prajna* one of the two corner-stone of His *Dhamma* because he did not wish to leave any room for superstition. *Karuna* is love. Because, without it society can neither live nor grow, that is why the Buddha made it the second corner-stone of His *Dhamma*. A unique amalgam of *Prajna* and *Karuna* is the *Dhamma* of the Buddha." He draw the characteristics of *Dhamma* as given below:

Morality is *Dhamma* and *Dhamma* is Morality.

In *Dhamma* morality takes the place of God although there is no God in *Dhamma*.

In *Dhamma* there is no place of prayers, pilgrimages, rituals ceremonies or sacrifices.

Morality is the essence of *Dhamma*. Without it, there is no *Dhamma*.

Morality in *Dhamma* arises from the direct necessity of man to love man. It does not require sanction of God.

It is not to please God that man has to be moral. It is for his own great good that man has to love man.

The purpose of Religion is to explain the origin of the world. The

purpose of *Dhamma* is to reconstruct the world.

Dr. Ambedkar seeks *Dhamma* as a social order. He differentiated Religion and *Dhamma* by the following lines:

Religion, it is said, is personal and one must keep it to oneself. One must not let it play its part in public life. Contrary to this, *Dhamma* is social. It is fundamentally and essentially so.

*Dhamma* is righteousness, which means right relations between man and man in all spheres of life.

One man if he is alone does not need *Dhamma*. But when there are two men living in relation to each other they must find a place for *Dhamma* whether they like it or not. Neither can escape it. In other words, Society cannot do without *Dhamma*.

In his book *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, Ambedkar makes very strong assertions that Buddhism alone can solve the problem of social and natural suffering. Dr. Ambedkar has pointed out that Buddha's *Dhamma* was fundamentally different from that of Religion. *Dhamma* is righteousness, which means right relation between man and man in all spheres of life.<sup>14</sup> An analysis of Ambedkar's thoughts on religion can be seen here, "The purpose of religion is to explain the world. While interpreting Buddha's *Dhamma* Ambedkar viewed that it is different from the Vedic or the Brahminic philosophy of Dharma. Dr. Ambedkar has explained Buddha's *Dhamma* as *SadDhamma* because it breaks down barriers between man and man; it teaches that 'worth' and not 'birth' is the measure of man; and *Dhamma* to be *SadDhamma* must promote equality between man and man. Towards the end of his life Dr. Ambedkar also defended Buddhism against the Marxism. In his work "Buddha or Karl Marx", he regarded the Marxian philosophy as

far behind Buddha. Like Buddha and Marx, he also did not accept that God created the Universe. Religion is necessary for the poor. Religion is necessary for the depressed people. The poor man survives on hope. For Ambedkar, man could not live by bread alone; he had mind which needed food for thought; and religion instilled hope in man and always drove him to activity. He emphasized that mankind needed a religion of humanity, and that he discovered in Buddha's Dhamma."<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Ambedkar sees a concern for human welfare (defined generally with reference to non-violence and social equality) as a central teaching of Buddhism and associates such welfare with rationality. For instance, Ambedkar explains his principles for distinguishing between Buddhist *Dhamma* and dangerous Brahmnical views, "Anything therefore which is rational and logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of the Buddha...The Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion which was not profitable for man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the word of the Buddha."<sup>16</sup>

### **Philosophy of Life by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

Dr. Ambedkar draws an outline of philosophy of life to be followed by every individual. He said, "Every one should have a philosophy of life, for every one must have a standard by which to measure his conduct. And philosophy is nothing but standard by which to measure. My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: Liberty, equality and fraternity. Let no one; however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha." There are some other ideas, which shows the spiritualistic outlook of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:

Man is mortal. Every one is to die some day or other. But one must resolve to lay down one's life in enriching the noble ideals of self-respect and in bettering human life.

Man must eat to live and he should live and work for the well being of the society.

Dragging on life some-how or to live like a crow for a thousand years is not the only way and worthy way in this world. Life can be ennobled by sacrificing it for a lasting good such as the cause of truth, a vow, honour or country.

Better to die in the prime of youth for a great cause than to live like an oak and do nothing.

Nothing valuable in this world is achieved except by great efforts.

A man must be motivated by the dynamics of a social purpose and must act as the scourge and the scavenger of the society.'

There is world of difference between one who is learned and who is intellectual. The former is class-conscious and is alive to the interest of his class. The later is emancipated being who is free to act without being swayed by class considerations.

Believe in self-help which is the best help

Educate, agitate and organize; have faith in your strength.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, "The Buddha preached his Dhamma among people belonging to all the sections of the society. Buddha did not arrogate to himself the power to save people. Buddhism is the only religion based upon ethical principles and teaches how to work for the good and well being of the common man. Moreover, Buddhism is a religion of compassion, tolerance, love, sympathy, peace, universal brotherhood and philanthropy. Undeniably, the Buddha was a through equalitarian. To conclude, Dr.

Ambedkar expressed his view that Buddhism was a religion which can serve not only this country but the whole world.”<sup>17</sup>

We can say that Dr. Ambedkar’s ideas, writings and outlook could well be characterized as belonging to that trend of thought called Social Humanism. He developed a socio-ethical philosophy and steadfastly stood for human dignity and freedom, socio-economic justice, material prosperity and spiritual discipline. He has a special importance of religious and spiritual values in his life and lived accordingly.

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