



THE IDEAL OF A UNIVERSAL RELIGION IN THE VIEWS OF BASAVANNA AND DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR

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ABSTRACT: The well-known Socio-religious reformer of 12th cent. AD from Karnataka, Basavanna and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar were great intellectuals. Through their magnificent literature and work, they spread their unique ideal throughout the country. In his young age, Basavanna rejected the rigid Vaidika Dharma and initiated the Lingayat socio-religious movement, through his concept of ideal religion is becoming a reality. In the same way, from the beginning Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was against the Vaidika religion's inequality and later he joined the Buddhism and found his ideal religion in Buddhist philosophy. They have visualized an ideal universal religion. In that effort, both were succeeded up to a sure level. The present article is an elaboration of the similarities and concept of their ideal religion and it will also focus on how they succeeded in building a society without any cast and creed discriminations.

Keywords: Religion, Society, Lingayata, Buddhism, Varnashrama, untouchability, Vaidiaka, monotheism.

INTRODUCTION

Equally, one of the very well-known quotes says – “great minds think alike”, we can find in the perspective of societal reforms, the two greatest thinkers of India, Basavanna and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has the collective philosophy. They have 800 years of time difference, still their thoughts towards religion and society demonstrates the uniqueness in their ideology. Both of them have believed that the heritage of a religion and a society are rooted not in the best layer of the society but in the lower layer of the society. Basavanna and Ambedkar have visualized an ideal universal religion. In that effort, both were succeeded up to a sure level. They proclaimed that a man becomes great not by his birth, but only by his character. All the members of the society should do labor, that may be intellectual or manual. To make a pure faith, they prohibited untouchability and upheld the theory of equivalence. They have comprehended that, the Varnashrama system or the caste classification is the primary source of all evilness in the society.

Both Basavanna and Ambedkar were great intellectuals. Through their magnificent literature they spread their unique ideal throughout the country. In his young age, Basavanna rejected the rigid Vaidika Dharma and initiated the Lingayat socio-religious movement, through his concept of ideal religion is becoming a reality. In the same way, from the beginning Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was against the vaidika religion's inequality and later he joined the Buddhism and found his ideal religion in Buddhist philosophy.

The most significant incident in Ambedkar's life was his renunciation of Hinduism. He renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism towards the end of his life. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has considered converting into Sikhism first¹. But later he decided against that and started to study Buddhism. On the occasion of dedicating a new Bauddha Vihara in Pune he made an announcement about writing a book on Buddhism and also about his conversion to Buddhism². He founded Buddhist Society of India in 1955³. On 14th October 1956 in Nagpur he converted in to Buddhism along with his wife and 5 lacks followers⁴. On 6th of December, 1956, after completing his magnificent work “Buddha and his Dhamma” he passed away in Delhi⁵.

Some of the major ideas regarding religion of the Basavanna and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar are –

I. EQUALITY

In Indian history, two great revolutions – Buddhist & Lingayat socio-religious movements have happened to eradicate caste system from our society. The system of Varnashrama is one of the extreme drawbacks of Indian society. The most significant feature of Indian social structure is its caste system based on berth. This system divides people on their heredity and decides ‘The pure and impure’ status of them. This so called ‘Varna’ system was more theoretical than practice. Hence there was a huge number of people from particular castes tainted with impurity.

Basavanna and Ambedkar were objected this varna system very vigorously and in order to eliminate casteism they have started several reforms in society. They were opposing social iniquities and the domination of an intellectual aristocracy. They forwarded with the objectives of establishing a well-organized society containing the idea of a common Divinity, a common religious status, a common code of behavior and a common social status. Basavanna objects casteism;

**There is one earth to hold
God's temple and the pariah colony,
One water for the closet and the bath,
One sect for those who know themselves;
One need for those who are realized,
By means of the six fold mystic way,
One height of those who know Thee, Lord
Kudala Sangama!⁶**

Dr. Ambedkar had great love for his fellow beings, as a pursuer of the path of "Bahujana Hitaya, Bahujana Sukhaya". He tried to eliminate untouchability and castism with full vigor and zeal. To achieve these goals both Ambedkar and Basavanna have fought very bravely against the fierce opposition. Even they died in the attainment of their ultimate goal. This is true that, they were not completely succeeded in elimination of casteism from Indian society, however their work is very much appreciable.

According to Basavanna & Ambedkar every human being is equal and divine. Basavanna initiated 'linga Diksha' to everyone in society. He told whoever takes the linga diksha will become Lingayat and he has every religious right. This diksha was offered to everyone, without any caste or creed discriminations including women. In a same way Dr. B.R. Ambedkar became a pathfinder through showing the Buddhist Navayana to crores of socially suppressed people. He preached the equality of all mankind by breaking down the barriers of caste.

II. MONOTHEISM

Another major step forward taken by the Basavanna and Ambedkar with the object of forming a well-organized society was the initiation of the idea of common divinity, a common ritual for all, a common code of conduct, and a common path of spirituality. In a nutshell, they brought into vogue a single type of religious culture amongst the society. From the ancient times to modern days, India is famous for its polytheism or worship of several gods. Especially the Sanatana dharma is well-known for this multi God-goddess concept⁷. In falling times of Buddhism, the tantric Buddhist sect 'Vajrayana' also encouraged the polytheism. Several petty gods and goddesses⁸ were worshipped by common people. The Basavanna and Ambedkar, both have equally condemned this practice and advocated monotheism. Basavanna objects:

**"How Shall I, Sir, compare to Him
The wax-filled gods that melt and shrink
At sight of fire?
How shall I, Sir, compare to Him
The gods you sell
In an emergency?
How shall I, Sir, compare to Him
The gods you bury in the ground
When fear assaults?
Lord Kudala Sangama, who is one
With self-rapt reality,
Alone is God!!"⁹**

Basavanna started a new way of worshipping through 'Ishtalinga'. In this way there is no need of a middle man in between the God and devotee. He upheld the philosophy of "human body is the abode of God" and rejected the temple culture. Basavanna illuminates

**"Those who have money build
Temples to Lord Shiva, what can I build
A poor man, Lord, am I
My body is the shrine,
Its pillars are my legs,
The golden pinnacle, is my head
Lord Kudala Sangama
There is destruction for what stands
But not for that which moves!"**

To Basavanna God is one, he himself transcends the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara. He is the almighty and we must be devoted to him only, like a loyal wife who loves her husband only. Hence, he advocates the worship of one God in the form of Ishtalinga. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar advocated to proceed in a path, which believes only the "Shunya or Nirvana" is true. The man should pray or follow the one and only the Buddha and he is the Nirvana. Thus, the devotee will get single pointed belief and that faith may mature to its completeness and ultimately unite with the absolute. The ethical philosophy of both Basavanna and Ambedkar is based on monotheism.

III. ETHICAL RELIGION

The Basavanna and Ambedkar were presented a pristine way of philosophy to Indian culture and heritage. Their philosophy is unique in every aspect and offered divine experiences with a very simple ritual practices for laymen. In his article “Buddha and the Future of his Religion” published in 1950 in the *Mahabodhi Society Journal*, Ambedkar has expressed his ideas on religion that, “The society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either, the society is sure to go to pieces. Religion, if it is to survive, must be in consonance with reason, which is another name for science. It is not enough for religion to consist of moral code, but its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity and Religion must not sanctify or make a virtue out of poverty.”

Both of them have wished that religion must pull down all social barriers between human beings. The base of the society should be the morality. They vigorously opposed superstitious and blind beliefs, which were deep rooted in the society. Today also they have strong hold on Indian culture. But Basavanna and Ambedkar tried to root out these evil beliefs from Indian psyche. It is true that they have not completely succeeded in that, however they have achieved some extent. Basavanna completely opposes superstitious about dates and time. He says, “Today is better than tomorrow”¹⁰ -

**“Don’t say that day, this day, another day!
To one who bows to Shiva, today
Must ever be the day!
To one who bows to Hara
Today is ever be the day!
To one remembering ceaselessly
Our Kudala Sangama today
Must ever be the day!!”¹¹**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Basavanna simply rejects the concept of heaven and hell. According to Basavanna, “To speak the truth is the heaven and to speak the untruth is the hell”¹². The uniqueness of Sharana movement is, it is not only a religious crusade, but also an economic, social and literary movement. Basavanna was a prime minister of Kalyana state. Obviously, he deliberated his economic views with fellow men. He treats wealth as a demonic power, which can destroy goodness in human being. So, the proper management of wealth is the key for prosperous society. So Basavanna introduced two distinctive conceptions of Kayaka and Dasoha. ‘Work’ is the simple literary meaning of Kayaka, however Basavanna expounded it in another way. In this life everyone should work, everyone has to undertake some profession for livelihood. That profession should do with dedication, honesty and sincerity.

Sharana’s states that, “work is worship” and they declare that, “if one is busy with Kayaka, he can forget seeing his Guru or even he can forget worship of Linga too”. The money which was earned by K¹yaka doesn’t entirely belong to a particular individual. One should spend some part of it to Dasoha. It means ‘offering’. One should earn his own livelihood and also spent for feeding poor men and to Jangamas (Sannyasins or saints of Virashaivism) in society. Even the Jangamas were not exempted from Kayaka and they didn’t be considered as parasites. Basavanna explained, “Though a Jangama, ultimate salvation can be only through performance of work”. The money which earned by “Sathya-Shuddha-Kayaka” (Honorably and dedicatedly done work) is only eligible for Dasoha. Basavanna’s this system implicates a well-knit system of both production and distribution and it also avoids the accretion of wealth in few individuals in society.

The Sharana’s conception of occupations is completely an innovative and sacred one. It is not only essential for well-being in this worldly life but also equally so for ultimate liberation. This socialite view of Basavanna is completely based on spiritualism. According to Kayaka theory every profession is equal and it has nothing to do with caste whatsoever. In Kalyna from Prime minister to tanner, tailor, treasure, barber cobbler was had equal status. Sharanas also remarkably condemns bribe and corruption.

CONCLUSION

Ambedkar points out one ultimate truth, that most religions are described as revelations. Except the Buddha’s religion. Buddha never claimed that he was a prophet of God. He renounced any such portrayal. All prophets have assured salvation and told their followers that, their religion is the only path for that. Buddha is the one and only teacher who did not make any such promise¹³. Interestingly we can find amazing similarities between the Buddha and Basavanna in this contest. They both preached that, one should find his own salvation himself. They both have given ample importance to individual thinking and freedom. They didn’t claimed divinity for themselves or for their teachings¹⁴. Ambedkar did not believe in the God and soul. According to him, Buddha rejected the doctrine that God created human beings. He renounced the fatalistic view of life, and the view that a God has preordained events in the life of humans and the world. Ambedkar explains that the law of *Karma*, as spoken by Buddha simply meant, “reap as you sow”. In the same way, Basavanna strongly supports the karma theory, because it will bring morality in society.

In his “Philosophy of Religion”, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar enlightens through his ideology regarding religion and society. According to him “Religion is 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”. In his *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar has revealed several dissimilarities between religion and *dhamma*. The word “religion” is an uncertain word with numerous meanings. This is so because religion has passed through many ages and the conception of religion, too, has changed accordingly. At early stage, religion was identified with magic. In the second stage, religion came to be identified with beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, prayers and sacrifices. In the third stage, God and soul entered religion. At present, says Ambedkar, religion means “belief in God, belief in soul, worship of God, curing of the erring soul, propitiating God by prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices, etc.” According to him, *dhamma* contrasts profoundly from what is called religion. 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. *Dhamma* is virtue, which means right relations between human beings. If a person is living alone, he or she does not need *dhamma*. However, when there are two persons living in relation to each other, they must find a place for *dhamma*, whether they like it or not.

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- ⁴ Pritchett, Frances. "In the 1950s".
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- ⁶ . Basaveshwara Vachana Samputa, (Ed) M.M. Kalaburgi, Govt. of Karnataka, Vol – 1
- ⁷ . We can also find some monotheistic views in some vedic texts - "Ekam sat, vipraã bahudha vadanti" etc.
- ⁸ . The Yaksha and Yakshi puja were very famous all over India at that time.
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- ¹² . Basaveshwara Vachana Samputa, (Ed) M.M. Kalaburgi, Govt. of Karnataka, Vol – 1
- ¹³ We can also remember Buddha's famous preaching in this contest – "Atta Divo Bhava" (Became a torch bearer for yourself)
- ¹⁴ Basavanna Says – "Nanobbane Bhakta, Ulidavarella Jangama linga Kandayya" (I am the one and only devotee, all others are Jangamas or Gods)

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