

**ALTERNATIVE MOVEMENT IN INDIA:
PHULE-NARAYANA GURU-AMBEDKAR'S PERSPECTIVE FOR
DALIT-BAHUJAN LIBERATION**

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Abstract

Indian civilization is the outcome of a confluence of various cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic traditions. Years of mutual fecundation, synthesis and challenge have led Indian civilization to be characterized by diversity of culture religion, language, race and caste groups.¹ Among them, caste system in basis for social discrimination which resulted in exploitation of Human rights of weaker sections in India, The swings of Human civilization necessarily touch two ends of the same continuum. On the one end, there are events of deprivation, exploitation and all kinds of indignant activities towards weaker sections. On the other, there are attempts to protect and restore humanity, human values, and other desired goals towards the just society. Traditional societies like India have been rocking by the tides of social disturbances which witnessed to human exploitation in the name of the religious and cultural sanctions. But such attempts have been encountered by social revolutionaries through their religious movements and it was begun with Buddha who greatly visualized the egalitarian society against exploitation in the name of the theory of Karma and Dharma. After Buddha, in medieval times, Bhakti movement emerged and became as liberal religious movement for weaker sections of the society but it remained as programme for absorption and retaining of weaker sections within the Hindu fold.

Keywords:-religious,Narayana Guru, casteism, Brahmins

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I

INTRODUCTION:

Indian civilization is the outcome of a confluence of various cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic traditions. Years of mutual fecundation, synthesis and challenge have led Indian civilization to be characterized by diversity of culture religion, language, race and caste groups.¹ Among them, caste system in basis for social discrimination which resulted in exploitation of Human rights of weaker sections in India, The swings of Human civilization necessarily touch two ends of the same continuum. On the one end, there are events of deprivation, exploitation and all kinds of indignant activities towards weaker sections. On the other, there are attempts to protect and restore humanity, human values, and other desired goals towards the just society. Traditional societies like India have been rocking by the tides of social disturbances which witnessed to human exploitation in the name of the religious and cultural sanctions. But such attempts have been encountered by social revolutionaries through their religious movements and it was begun with Buddha who greatly visualized the egalitarian society against exploitation in the name of the theory of Karma and Dharma. After Buddha, in medieval times, Bhakti movement emerged and became as liberal religious movement for weaker sections of the society but it remained as programme for absorption and retaining of weaker sections within the Hindu fold. In modern times, attempts were made by Mahatma Phule, Narayana Guru, Periar, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar against exploitation of Brahmin and dominant social forces. Among them, Satyasodhak Samaj of Mahatma Jyothirao Phule and Neo-Buddhism of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar played great role in restoration of human rights of weaker sections of India. In this context, I am aimed to discuss the alternative movements in the promotion of humanity and human values instead of existing religious practices, in other words, human rights of weaker sections in India.

The social discrimination is a cultural problem related Hindu religion and caste system; major social protest movements are cultural movements. None of them relate

social discrimination with the economic structure of the society. Also, the movements which deal with the problem of altering economic structure consider social discrimination a cultural problem. The anti- social discrimination movements may be classified into two categories; 1) Reformative movements 2) Alternative movements. The former tries to reform the caste system to solve the problem of social discrimination. The alternative movements attempt to create alternative cultural environments by conversion to some other religion.² MahamanavBudha to Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, King Ashoka, Guru Nanak, Guru Kabir, Guru Ravidass , Guru Namdev, Guru Sadna, Guru Sain and many other unknown revolutionaries and saints led movement against casteism and social discrimination and with the impact of a very long battles waged by the revolutionaries and social reformers in different parts of the country, MahatamaJyotiRao continued with the same mission. The main objectives of this were to liberate the Shudras and Ati-Sudras and to assert them from exploitation of the advanced castes like Brahmins.³

II

BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Islam, Christianity and Buddhism provide them with alternatives for emancipation. Conversion to Islam and Christianity in this country dates back to the 13th and 14th Centuries and has not been combined to weaker sections alone. After Buddha, Bhakti movement arose from the dissidence among the people to address the socio-cultural problems of Indian society. Ramanju, Ravidas, Ramananda, Kabir, Sankara, Vallavacharya, Chaitanya, Namdev, Tukaram, Jaidev, Dhanna, Bikka, Sadhna, and Sikh Gurus denounced caste system, social discrimination, social inequality and revolted against blind ritualism of the Brahmins. But later times, the distorted teachings of the so-called exponents who after the first series of leaders had passed away rapidly deviated from the true path of Bhakti and indulged in all the luxuries and rituals as Brahmins do. The Brahmins, in order to reinstate their glory and last power cleverly exploited the Bhakti cult as Brahmin Raksha for the development of the human history. Gradually, it was narrowed down to the revival of Brahminism and worked against the Weaker sections as anti-weaker sections policy. Later Weaker sections were politically exploited by the leaders like Shivaji to strengthen their positions for the time being to gain the power of the Nam-history.⁴

III

PHULE AND SATYA SHODHAK SAMAJ

Phule took his birth in backward caste of Indian social structure. Some incidents of brahminical arrogance changed the outlook of Jotirao. Once phule was scolded and insulted by a Brahmin for his audacity in joining a Brahmin marriage procession and realized that all these were happened in the name of religion of caste Hindus and determined to struggle against Brahminism that humiliated and exploited Sudra-Atisudras in the name of purity,

impurity and Smritis. To counter Brahminism, Phule viewed the unity among the Sudras and Ati-Sudras as indispensable.⁵ Phule had a vision of a fundamental change in the society. He believed that the toiling castes constitute the overwhelming majority and they should chalk out their own path, outside the Brahmin fold, to form a new society on the principles of equity or castelessness, rationality and justice.⁶ Phule locates the beginnings of brahminical tyranny in the usurpation by the Brahmins of a privileged position for themselves in the form of Budhev. This not only helped them justify a symmetrical application of justice in mundane matters, but also let them appropriate a position more exalted than that of a God.⁷ Phule attacked on Brahmanism were uncompromising. He realized that the reeds of the Brahmins power, supremacy and privileges lay in their Scriptures and Puranas; and these works and the caste system were created to exploit the lower classes. Phule also interpreted sacred religious literature and attacked the brahminical Scriptures and Puranas, revolted against priest craft and the caste system and set on a foot a social movement for the liberation of the Sudras and Ati-Sudras and women.⁸

Accordingly, Jotirao convened on September 24th, 1873 a meeting of all his admirers and disciples at Poona. Jotirao made an impressive speech and impressed upon his followers the necessity of a central institution for the guidance of the movement. After some discussion and other speeches they decided to organize the mission and to spread the message of the movement and it was named as Satya Shodhak Samaj- truth seeking society. The objectives of the Samaj were to redeem the Sudras and Ati-Sudras from the influence of brahminical scriptures under which the brahminic priests fleeced them to make them conscious of their human rights and to liberate them from mental and religious slavery.⁹

Membership of the Samaj was extended to all castes including Brahmins and Mahars and Mongs even Jews and Muslims were its members in its early stage. The subjects discussed were the necessity of temperance and compulsory education, encouragement of Swadeshi goods, dislodging the Brahmin priest from the position he held in the religious field, making arrangements for performing marriage at minimum expenses, and freeing men from the beliefs in astrology, ghosts and demons. The main attack was upon the caste system and idol-worship.¹⁰ Satya Shodhak Samaj, in its weekly meetings discussed the issues like social reform, widow remarriage, mass education, encouragement of Swadeshi goods and freeing people from superstitions and astrology and encouragement of simple marriage ceremony at minimum expense. Phule thought of producing community those who produce wealth for society and who are suffering in the name of the untouchability at the hands of the elite. Phule brought all laboring classes under an umbrella organization to wage a morality-driven and knowledge based struggle against brahminical falsehood. While rejecting the notions of high and low pure and polluted, inhuman, aggressive and

oppressive nature of the Brahmanism, Phule preached his idea of universal brotherhood and in the principles of human equality and dignity.¹¹ By wide spreading of education Phule wanted to lead society towards cultural revolution. For him, the acquisition of knowledge by the oppressed was emancipator and his pedagogy was informed by a clear understanding of knowledge and power. One aspect of his rationalism can be seen in the SatyaSodhakSamaj with its primary emphasis on truth seeking. It is most significant in this context as the truth seeking was seen as a quest guided by the individual's own reason, not by the dictates of any religious guru or authoritative text.¹²

IV

NARAYANA GURU AND SRI NARAYANA DHARMA PARIPALANA YOGAM

During the socio-cultural transition period, Narayana was born in Chempazhanthi, a village in Trivandrum District of Kerala in the year 1856-just one year before the first war of independence-in an Ezhava family which was considered as a lower caste. Right from his childhood days, he was interested in the genuine search for the ultimate Truth, and took cudgels against superstition which were very much prevalent among the Ezhavas and other downtrodden sections of the society due to social, economic and educational backwardness and deprivation. Narayana Guru's attitude towards the social customs and practices prevalent among the lower castes were equally trenchant. In opposing these practices he had two objectives; economic and social. The deep roots of wrong notion that sustained the evil customs for so many years in the society had to be destroyed by educating every member of the society. In his message to the society, he specially addressed the topics like religion that rejects superstition and evil rituals, Morality which deals with righteousness in thought and indeed, Education for knowledge and industry for prosperity.

In order to fulfill his ambitious immaculate led society. He established many Mutts, Ashrams, Educational Institutions and temples from where he disseminated his ideals to his followers all over. He built temples to enable the untouchables to worship as it was denied to them. But the real purpose of building the temples was to make them temples of knowledge, he and his followers went door to door to propagate the need for education, to convince and coax parents to send their wards to schools. A Gurukulam and a Sanskrit school also were started at Aruvippuram to give religious training to young men of the lower strata of society through lessons in scriptures. Swami made it clear that strict austerity should be maintained by avoiding expensive ornamental works in constructing temples. He also desired that besides sanctorum, temples should have spacious ventilated rooms for devotees to assemble for worship and to hold meetings. There should be gardens, library bathing facilities, schools and space to important industrial training to children. He also desired that temples should conduct or arrange for talks, lectures, discourses, stories and the like depiction the story of God.¹³

An application for registering the Aruvipuram Sri Narayana Dharma ParipalanaYogam (SNDP) was made in Trivandrum on 8th January, 1903 by P.Parameswaram and the license was granted by the Dewan in March, 1903. The main objective of the SNDP was 'to promote and to encourage religious and secular education and industrious habits among the Ezhava community.' The birth of SNDP is a milestone in the progress of Ezhavas. The humble temple association became a great social force. Though it was not caste based organization the whole communities of Ezhavas were united under its banner. Thereafter SNDP took up the formal education of people and struggle for social justice. The spiritual guidance of SreeNarayana Guru was always there. Eminent scholars and social workers like KumaranAsan, Dr. Palpu, T.K. Madhavan, SahodaranAyyappan, C. Krishnaman and M.Govindan lined up behind the Guru to lead SNDP, in the name of SreeNarayana Guru. On the advice of the Guru SNDP conducted regular lecture tours and enlightened the people on matters of religion, morals, health and industry. At the present there are nearly 150 educational institutions under SNDP.¹⁴

V

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR AND NEO-BUDDHISM

Likewise, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar born in lowest strata of Indian society and had faced social ostracism and contemptuous degrading treatment that very early in life made conscious of the unwarranted inequality imposed on weaker sections by the caste Hindus in the name of religion.¹⁵ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar thought that it was Hinduism itself which was responsible for the disorganization and demonization of the society, particularly for the deteriorating conditions of the untouchables. He observed the religion which discriminates between its followers is partial and the religion which treats core of adherents worse than dogs, and criminals and inflicts upon them in sufferable disabilities is no religion at all. Religion is not the appellation for such as unjust order.¹⁶ The most frequently quoted line from Ambedkar is 'in his (Buddhas) opinion, nothing was infallible and nothing could be final. Everything must be open to re-examination and re-consideration whenever grounds for re-examination and re-consideration arises and believe only in those doctrines, which you have scrutinized and of which you are totally convinced.'¹⁷ According to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Man cannot live by bread alone. He wants self-respect which is denied under Hinduism. They will get it the movement they get out of Hinduism and convert to other religions. Untouchables have discovered that conversion helps them as they will no longer be subjected to atrocities. Conversion to other religions, before, helps the untouchables to gain dignity and self-respect.¹⁸ While addressing the mass crowd at All-Bombay District Mahar Conference in May 30-31, 1956 headed by B.S. Venkatrao, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar questioned his people about their religious life.¹⁹ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar prescribed 22 vows to

his followers during the historic religious conversion to Buddhism on 15 October 1956 at DeekshaBhoomi, Nagpur. These vows could liberate converts from superstitions, wasteful and meaningless rituals, which have led to pauperisation of masses and enrichment of upper castes of Hindus. Many Dalits employ the term "Ambedkar(ite) Buddhism" to designate the Buddhist movement, which started with Ambedkar's conversion and many converted people called themselves as 'Nava-Bauddha' i.e., New Buddhists.²⁰

VI

CONCLUSION

A fundamental difference between the historical religions, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism consists in their attitudes to history. While the latter conceives of human history as the eternal recurrence of illusion, historical religions work out their destiny within those very processes, organized around the church, the visible body of the faithful the book and the incarnated savior. All human history takes its meaning from the struggle. Phule, Narayana Guru and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's main concern was to locate the struggle of the lower castes within history, to transform myth into history and establish a diachronic relation between present and past oppression and they struggled to bring out weaker sections from the evil clutches of Brahminism and promote minimum human dignity for Indian weaker sections through their alternative institutions.

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