



## **Formative Years of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's *Buddha and His Dhamma***

**Dr. Umesh B. Bansod**

Associate Professor,  
Department of English  
J.M. Patel College, Bhandara [M.S.]  
Cell-9860156526 umeshbansod526@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

'The Buddha and His Dhamma' is a notable contribution to Buddhist as well as to English Literature by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The book is the culmination of his writings. It attracted world's appreciation and the criticism as well. But even then also the greatness of this historical literary document can not be denied. The difference between his other written works and 'The Buddha and His Dhamma' is clearly visible in this book. Profound study, great industry and conquering intellect, logical interpretation and superb presentation by Dr. Ambedkar have given new dimensions the gospel of Buddha.

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, Buddhist Literature, Smritis, Puranas and studied various social changes. His arguments and logical interpretations about the main events in the life of the Buddha namely, Parivraj, the four Aryan Truths, the doctrines of soul, of karma and rebirth and the Bhikkhu provides us 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. Inviting fury from all sides, Dr. Ambedkar dared a lot to reveal truth before the world. The present paper intends to throw some light on formative years of such a book of literary importance.

**Key words :** *The Buddha and his Dhamma, culmination, logic, literature*

### **Introduction :**

During his career of 30 years Dr. Ambedkar adorned diverse fields. Always a controversial figure, his speeches as well as many books and pamphlets on diverse subjects invariably provoked not only a great deal of thoughts but also a lot of heat and controversy. He was a great sage of knowledge. A journalist, Beverly Nicholas in 1944 had counted him amongst the six most learned men in India. He was the last doyen in the series of great intellectuals like Tilak, Ranade, Bhandarkar and Telang. 'Buddha and His Dhamma' is the



culmination of Dr. Ambedkar's writing .Buddhist world has accepted as "The Bible'. But more or less it is treated as religious document and read in the same direction. It has curtailed literary beauty of the book. Along with conversion, Dr. Ambedkar recited twenty-two vows. Through them the readers may discern the real reasons why this profound and powerful book has met with so much resistance by the established class.

### **The Buddha and His Dhamma : A Mission**

Dr. Ambedkar's mission was not confined to social, political and constitutional works only but he had a great task to purify adulterated traditional Buddhists literature. His close study of Indian Literature revealed him that so called great literature in India had propounded their theories in such a beautiful and poetic language as gives pleasure to the ear, but at the risk of exploitation of humanity. According to Principal K.C.Gautam , "Few traditional philosophers consider them great thinkers but in fact they have put" Meaningless and non-sense" maxims and theories regarding ,epistemology, cosmology, ontology and ethics according to the logical positivist school." This prompted Dr. Ambedkar for logical enquiry of real Buddhist literature.

### **The Genre of The Buddha and His Dhamma :**

*Buddha and His Dhamma* is the culmination of Dr. Ambedkar's writing. It is entirely different creation of Dr. Ambedkar. Is it an epic or Saga? Is it a Novel or Play? Or is it Biography of the Buddha? "Was *The Buddha and His Dhamma* published in exactly the same form that Ambedkar himself left it at the time of his death? And, had Ambedkar really been able to complete the work in accordance with his original intentions? With regard to the first question, it would appear that the published version of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* differs from Ambedkar's own version in at least one respect, that is, in not including the Preface which he wrote for it on 15 March 1956. This Preface, as we have already seen, did not appear in print until 1980, when Bhagwan Das, a well known Punjabi Buddhist litterateur, included it in his *Rare Prefaces Written by Dr.Ambedkar.*" ( Sangharakshita –Ambedkar and Buddhism, Windhorse Publication -1986 )

These all interesting questions tempt scholars of literature to probe into this matter. Had Dr.Ambedkar been able to complete the book with original intentions he had in mind as his health was deteriorating day by day? In a speech delivered at Dehu Road on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1955 Dr.Ambedkar had disclosed the fact before his audience that he was writing a book explaining the views of Buddhism in a simple language for the benefit of common man. In the same speech in 1955 he expected a year to complete the same book. It is evidential that the last chapter of 'The Buddha and His Dhamma' had been written by February 1956. He finalized his



preface by 15<sup>th</sup> March 1956. A literary work expected a year to complete, was written in just two months ? His falling health must have compelled him to finish as early as possible. He wanted to embrace Buddhism before his departure. He was also in a hurry to publish the book at the earliest without delay.

*On 5 May 1956 Dr.Ambedkar wrote to S.S. Rege, the librarian of Siddharth College, Bombay: 'There is one urgent matter which I want you to attend to and that is the publication of my book The Buddha and His Dhamma.... I am in a great hurry and I want the book to be published by September the latest.'*<sup>118</sup> *The winged chariot was hurrying near, and Ambedkar could hear it. Less than three weeks later, on 24 May, he announced that he would embrace Buddhism in October 1956 – in other words, a month after the expected publication of his book.*

#### **Few important facts :**

Nanak Chand Rattu's book *Last Few Years of Dr. Ambedkar* provides primary information about Dr. Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. In the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book Rattu writes despite the failing health Dr. Ambedkar planned to write and complete few books including *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Nanak Chand Rattu was Dr. Ambedkar's private Secretary till his last breath . This book brings out many day to day interesting and reliable events of the stormy life of Dr. Ambedkar. The importance of this book is that Nanak Chand Rattu is the important witness of making of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* . Many important writing work and typing work of the manuscripts of the book took place in the presence of Rattu. Therefore the book provides some of the reflections of process of the making of the book.

In the last phase of life Dr. Ambedkar had planned to write and publish few books including *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Rattu himself . He writes that Dr. Ambedkar knew fully well that no body would be able to complete these books and as such he was keen to get these published in his life-time . Rattu witnessed Dr.Ambedkar working post mid night on *The Buddha and His Dhamma* The type –script of the book was corrected, re-corrected, paged, re-paged, paragraphs numbered and renumbered .At times few lines or a para were cut away with the scissor and pasted at its proper places .At another time the whole chapter or a paragraph were recast. The pasting of loose slips also went on and then again retyping and the same process followed .After putting in very hard labour , four press copies were typed out on fine paper . Fifty copies of the book under the title *The Buddha and His Gospel !* were then printed for private circulation and opinion. (Last Few years of Dr.Ambedkar by Nanak Chand Rattu p.59 )



Rattu writes that on Thursday , March 15 , 1956 , Dr. Ambedkar wrote the preface in his hand .The 'Introduction' was dictated on the following day. ( Rattu P.60 ) Dr. Ambedkar faced financial problem in publishing the book. He asked Tata for financial help and Rs.3000 were sanctioned towards publication of the book. Dr. Ambedkar was in hurry to publish the book. The Printing of the book began under the supervision of S.S.Rege.on Sep.1956 ,two copies of the book were sent to Jawaharlal Nehru. Dr. Ambedkar spent near about five years over the book. The book was expiated to cost near about 20000 rupees. Dr. Ambedkar asked Government of India to purchase 500 copies of the book for the distribution among the various libraries in the country . But Nehru shown helplessness and send the case to Dr. Radhakrishnanan. Dr. Ambedkar wrote *The Buddha and His Dhamma* with hope , belief ,confidence and determination . But alas ! He could not see the book in his life time. Rattu mentions that all the four copies of the manuscripts disappeared all at once . Who did it and what was the motive behind this mischief is unknown . But government of Maharashtra gathered manuscripts through various sources and made it available to all. ( Rattu p.62-63)

### **The Buddha and His Dhamma : Formative Years**

*The work which has been described as Ambedkar's magnum opus was written during the years 1951 – 1956 and published by the People's Education Society in November 1957, almost a year after the great leader's death. In the preface he wrote for it in March 1956, but which did not appear in print until September 1980, Ambedkar traced the origin of the work to his article on 'The Buddha and the Future of His Religion'. In that article, he recalls, he had argued that the Buddha's religion was the only religion which a society awakened by science could accept and without which it would perish. He had also pointed out that in the modern world Buddhism was the only religion which it must have, if it was to save itself. But Buddhism made only a slow advance, and this was 'due to the fact that its literature is so vast that no one can read it [all] and it has no such thing as a Bible as the Christians have. On the publication of ['The Buddha and the Future of His Religion'] I received so many calls, written and oral, to write such a book. It is in response to these calls, that I have undertaken the task.'*<sup>116</sup> The writing of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was thus an attempt on Ambedkar's part to produce the Buddhist Bible which he had, in his 1951 article, pronounced 'quite necessary' if the ideal of spreading Buddhism was to be realized. Despite his use of the inappropriate term 'Bible', however, Ambedkar was far from regarding *The Buddha and His Dhamma* as possessing any special authority. As he wrote of the work in the (recently published) preface, 'How good it is I must leave it to readers to judge. As for myself, I claim no originality. I am only a compiler. All I hope is that the reader will like the presentation. I have made it simple and clear.'



(Sangharakshita –Ambedkar and Buddhism ,Windhorse Publication -1986 Bhagwan Das (ed.),  
*Rare Prefaces Written by Dr Ambedkar* (Jullundur 1980)p.28–9)

### **Hinyana, Mahayana or a Navayana ?**

*The Buddha and His Dhamma* ,a treatise on Buddha’s life and Buddhism , was the last work of Indian statesman and Scholar Dr.B.R.Ambedkar .The book is treated as a holy text by Indian Buddhists and specially a way of living and thinking for Ambedkarites. For many of the literate it is the sole Buddhist text they own or have read .For the illiterates it is one they hear ,read aloud to them in village and city slums , bearing in their eyes the authority of sacred scriptures . It may not be the exaggeration to say that the present new generation among literate Ambedkarite families grow reading *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Forwarding the same then chairman of People’s Education Society R.R.Bole writes ,“ The book is not only Dr.Ambedkar’s monumental work but also his memorial enshrining the noblest fruit of his massive intellect .This book has taken its shape after his much arduous study and research .” (Buddha and his Dhamma –forwarded –p15)

Dr.Ambedkar mentioned that it is one of the three books which will form a set of the proper understanding of Buddhism .The other books are : [i] Buddha and Karl Marx ; and [ii] Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India. ([http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar\\_buddha/00\\_pref\\_unpub.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_buddha/00_pref_unpub.html)). It was compiled on the basis of canonical and non-canonical literatures in the different languages such as Pali, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Japanese’s as well as some other Indian(Apabhransha) languages. The Texts belonging to different schools of Buddhism also were taken together and judiciously presented in a systematic manner. The texts belonging to Thervda, Sarvastivada and Mahayana schools of Buddhism were also referred to. (A critical analysis of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar’s *The Buddha and His Dhamma* by Balasaheb Ramchandra Salve .p1.)

*The Buddha and His Dhamma* is the essence of established Buddhist Text . Dr.Ambedkar’s views on Buddhism are neither Hinyan nor Mahayan (Two sects of Buddhism), in this book he shows a scientific understanding of Buddhism itself and reinterpreted the importance of Buddhism .



## Conclusion :

The discussion helps readers to understand important phases and obstacles in the way of formation of The Buddha and His Dhamma. The primary deliberation brings the efforts and penetrations taken by Dr.Ambedkar in writing the great book.

## Works Cited:

- Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb *Writings and Speeches-Vol.II*.The Education Department. Government of Maharashtra-Bombay, 1992.
- *B.R. Ambedkar-Buddha and His Dhamma: A critical Edition* .Edited introduced and annotated by Akash Singh Rathore and Vijay Verma. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011.
- *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar-A Biography of His Vision and Philosophy*. Edited by Virender Grover. Deep & Deep Publication, New Delhi, 1998.
- Fiske Adele and Christoph Emmrich: The Use of Buddhist Scriptures in B.R.Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*
- Naik, M.K. *Dimension of India English Literature*. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi-1984.
- Rathore, Aakash Sing & Ajay Verma B.R.Ambedkar –*the Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013.
- Rattu,Nanak Chand. *Last Few Years of Dr.Ambedkar*.Amrit Publishing House ,New Delhi,1997.