

# The Problem of Identity in Navayana Buddhism

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## Abstract

Neo Buddhist, regarding its separate religious identity is in self suspicion. They consider Dr. Ambedkar's religious conversion as their base, of Buddhist belief. But after sixty years, of religious conversion neo Buddhist was not able to create a Separate identity which is distinguishes from mainstream Hinduism. This is the high time for neo Buddhist to re-investigate and re-study the core philosophy Of Dr. Ambedakar's neo Buddhism, so that neo Buddhist can create a separate identity for them.

**Keywords:** Problem of identity, Navyana, Neo Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar, Ethical philosophy, Dhamma Conversion, etc

Identity formation is a complex process. It calls for the sharing of a common culture on the one hand and harps on separateness from others. As Stuart Hall argues "far from the still small point of small truth inside us. Identity actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions which others give us. Without others there is no self there is no self recognition, identity is a process of struggle for recognition from the other.

For nearly 800 years in India, Buddhism was hidden in dark clouds and in spite of this during the time of conversion by Dr. Ambedkar there were enough material causes scattered around. For Neo-Buddhist such material was provided by the Mahavir Swami, Dhammapal, Chandramani Mahasthavir, Bhaddhant Bodhanand, Rahul Sankrityayan etc. Six Buddhist council was held in Burma (1954), in which Dr. Ambedkar participated and he was inspired by this council to such extend that led him to decide for mass conversion at Nagpur in 14<sup>th</sup> October 1956.

Dr. Ambedkar's inspiration and example paved the way, for the number of peoples in our country to convert Buddhism. The people converted through the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar are known as Neo-Buddhist.

Dr. Ambedkar has advised to follow 22 vows of neo-Buddhist. These Vows' includes that the neo-Buddhist should not follow or accept the concept of God, Soul, Goddess, Rebirth etc. they should follow the way of science, reason & progressive thoughts. But the contemporary problem is that, the neo-Buddhists are very confused about their religious, sociological and philosophical identity.

Dr. Ambedkar in his concepts related to religious philosophy underlines that whatever the philosophy is, if it is beyond real or actual human problems it becomes unusual for the society. In his ideology there is no space and value for the philosophy like that, he was realistic and behavioural thinker. His basis of philosophy and religion he had scientific-philosophical are realist facts of life and society. As much as he gave realist interpretation of religious point of view too. So he presented the concept of 'Sadhamma' at the place of 'Dhamma' which seems to be one of his philosophies and he searches strong and positive basis of that 'dhamma' in the harsh facts of life.

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There is an emphasis on wisdom, compassion and friendliness. This is the central point of his philosophy. He attained those values from 'Buddha'. It can be said that Buddha had invented golden humanitarian philosophy among are the philosophies of the world. Ambedkar in form of human-socialist philosopher is successor of Buddha, of modern period.

Dr. Ambedkar separates religious philosophy from sect because according to him sect propounds the way of having faith in God, faith in soul, worship of God, improvement of soul, method of prayer to make God happy, that is why sect is a personal affair. Religion is a social affair. In neo-Buddhist philosophy wisdom and 'compassion' are two basic elements of 'dhamma' in the place of God and Soul. On one hand one element is to destruct the myths and beliefs and second element is for working social life meaningful.

Dr. Ambedkar who was called modern Bodhisatava, it is a duty of Bodhisatava to reinterpret the 'dhamma' according to the changing needs of time. Although is teachings are true and "ever lasting", but still it is essential to reinterpret things time to time according to developing spiritual and social consciousness of human society. Dr. Ambedkar performed this duty by his unique and incredible way by creating Holy Scripture 'The Buddha and his dhamma'.

In this scripture Dr. Ambedkar has tried to present the features of Buddhist meanings of socially known words like Re-birth, Karma, and Salvation etc. Anyone may disagree with the 'meanings' given by him but this effort of Dr. Ambedkar will be appreciated in each aspect.

By explaining the importance of this scripture Rahul Sankratayan underlined that after taking dhamma-knowledge with his disciplines in number of lakhs in Nagpur, Boddhisattava Dr. Ambedkar had re-established 'dhamma' in India in such a way that can't be challenged by anyone. In interest of dhamma and Buddhist society, that knowledge land of Nagpur was very prominent; Dr. Ambedkar did more important work by creating this scripture in his series of holy writings.

Dr. Ambedkar re-interpreted his scripture 'Buddha and his dhamma' according to the scientific laws and norms. He believes that, only such religion can develop the humanity, which can move together by having the coordination with science. So, Dr. Ambedkar reinterpreted some Suttas taught by Buddha, by scientific way so that neo-Buddhists can develop themselves socio-economically and religious-philosophically having the co-relation with science with out indulging in the hypocrisy of 'soul-supreme soul', 'fate-god' etc. this scripture is known as 'Bible of Neo-Buddhists in present times.

Akash Singh Rathor and Ajay Verma in their recent work-

*B.R. Ambedkar: The Buddha and his Dhamma a critical edition.*

They Deals with Ambedkar's conceptualization of Buddhism and possibilities it offered for liberation and upliftment of Dalit and neo-Buddhists.

Dr. K. David Pandyan got published in book form namely "*Dr. Ambedkar and the dynamics of Neo-Buddhism-2009*". This book is written mainly on Neo-Buddhas in which a special caste of Maharashtra called 'Mahar' has been selected as content of its surveys and interviews and later on the basis of questions asked from the people of this community, book has been interpreted by social point of view. K.David Pandayan by the medium of surveys and interviews along with literary studies asked the questions related to social condition and their identity related problems in which by calling neo-Buddhist converted by Dr. Ambedkar 'Navyana' he said that 'navyana' itself is a name or prefix given by Dr. Ambedkar.

Whereas Prof. C.D. Naik wrote in his own creation "Buddha's words and Ambedkar thoughts" that Dr. Ambedkar always wanted the system of a civil society based on peace, non-violence and mutual-brotherhood. Dr. Ambedkar never supported any violent activity by any means. On the basis of this, he criticized Marxism. He said that this principle of Marxism which advocates your right should be achieved by using force is not appropriate because nothing can be achieved by this except violence and conflicts. It can be taken as an example if we look at present situations of the country.

Dr. Pandayan, in his book has discussed the concerned social issues in a balanced (legal) way. He has also written that Dr. Ambedkar provided the bases of intellectualism and scientific method to neo-buddhist, by creating the neo-buddha giving it the concept of religion based on liberty, equality and social justice.

According to Prof. Upadhaya there are certain customs between spiritually and society, towards them are should have our focus one of those is suffering and to know all its causes and second have a way (middle path) in which there should be no any space for pain and luxury.

In modern reference when we find the solution of social problems on the basis of there basic teachings of Buddha then we can group the social, religious and philosophical relevance of Buddhist movement of Dr. Ambedkar.

After the conversion of Dr. Ambedkar, Rahul Sankritayan wrote an article "*Nav Dixit Bauddha*". In his article Rahul Sankritayan laid a new foundation in such a innovative way which can't be challenged by anyone.

Again in his article Rahul Sankritayan wrote that in neo-Buddhist, regarding neo prefix he said that alongwith neo-

Buddhist, neo prefix will get over by the changing times because neo-Buddhist want to be called themselves by only the name of 'Buddhists' instead of neo-Buddhists. They believe that either we people are not establishing a new religious custom or not creating a new Yana. Hence, we should be identified only by the name of Buddhists rather than neo-Buddhists. Rahul Sankritayan had this guess in his articles at very early stage. Whereas, some modern thinker called neo-Buddhists, to Buddhists converted by Ambedkar. The thinkers like Dr. Pandayan have this argument that neo-Buddhists title itself has been given by Dr. Ambedkar where as we don't find as such in basic speeches of Ambedkar.

Finally we can say that the neo-Buddhists are very confused about their socio-religious identity. Some dalits consider themselves as Buddhist, but problem is that they are not completely separated from Hinduism. So there is a need to reconsider Ambedkar's newly formed neo-Buddhist identity, to inter linked with identification and their redefinition in socio- religious and philosophical terms. This will pave the way to the neo-Buddhist philosophy to provide neo-identity.

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